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String around my finger  
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# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

Series: First Words and  
Lasting Impressions

Talk #1: "String Around My Finger"

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## “String Around My Finger”

The first Words that pass between two people can be, often, the most important words in thier lives. To the persons involved, these words, whether spoken or heard, whispered or shouted, attended by trivia or magnificence, will impart a meaning that is vivid and lasting. The words may frame an instant or a lifetime; they can evoke the confidence of love or the confusion of hate; they might effect a new way of life or sustain an old one. Whatever the result, whether the words bridge continents or divide cultures, link hearts or separate intimates, the impact of the words will endure for the persons involved.

Any words of Christ must loom large in our life but how important must be the First Words that Christ spoke to us! If we select just the seven first statements of His that are recorded, we find ourselves with a plan of life that can absorb all our days. Here are the words that echoed out of Heaven down to earth; words mined for men through eternity, delivered to men in time; words that point, always, a divine purpose.

Christ's first moment was an answer to the search all men make for God. Christ's First Word was an answer to the question all men ask of God -- "Why?"

Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph to celebrate the Pasch. After the feast He remained in the city. His parents, unaware of His absence, began the return journey to Nazareth. At the end of the first day of travel, they discovered their loss. "And they returned into Jerusalem seeking Him. And it came to pass, that, after three days, they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers. And His mother said to Him:

"Son, why have you done this to us? Thy Father and I have sought You sorrowing."

Here was the first "Why?" asked of Christ. Asked, oddly enough, by the one person who had the deepest faith in Him -- Mary, His Mother. Mary's query was a natural one for a distressed mother to ask but it can be considered also as the echo of all mankind's questioning of God in all ages. Christ's First Word was the answer to Mary's first "Why?" and

His reply remains forever the answer to the whole world that searched into the motives of God.

Jesus said to Mary: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

Only the inspiration of God could enable the Evangelist to comprehend the story of human history in this brief incident. In weak faith or growing doubt, in fear, in pain, in anger, in revolt, the generations of the children of men have been troubled to ask: "Why has Thou done this to us?" Job and Elias and David and Solomon; the Prophets, the Priests, the people of antiquity; the people of Christ's time, of our time, of time past, present (and I'm sure, future) have a burden of complaint, a popular refrain that never grows old:

"Why have you done this to us?"

In the Old Testament we see that a very patient God always gave an answer. In new words and old ways His response met the questioners to remind them and their world that God never acts without a purpose. Deliverance and plague, clouds by day and fire by night, wonders and woes gave the Hebrews their answer. It was fixed in their books but not in their hearts that "He made the little and the

great and has equal care of them." This was the Book of Wisdom to the Jews but too often they forgot to be wise. So, they repeated their doubts of God in idolatries and defections until God could say to His prophet: "I have spread forth My hand all the day to an unbelieving people who walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts." (Is.65,2)

Then as if to give one final enduring answer to all men of the forgetful past and the possible forgetful future; Christ comes to speak God's eternal reason as He speaks His First Word. He appears not only as a Redeemer but also as a Reminder that God never acts without a purpose. To Mary and through Mary the enduring impression is wrought that Divine Intelligence has a purpose and He, Christ, is carrying it out; infinite Knowledge has a plan and He, Christ, is working to effect it; unlimited Wisdom has a Providence and He, Christ, is striving to teach it. A First Word "that will not pass away" tells us that the seeming strangeness of men's loves is not a blindness on the part of God; not a stupidity, a loss of perspective, a joke or an attitude of carelessness. But in love and consideration, in directness and definiteness, Christ tells the world:

"I must be about My Father's business."

Christ has not remained in the temple to torment Joseph and Mary with His absence. He had not tried to avoid them or dupe them or punish them. The work that He was on was God's. "For this was I born," He might have cried to them. . . "For this I came into the World." Men need to be saved. Christ was here for that purpose and He was impatient until the work could begin: "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized and I am straightened until it be accomplished."

All His life could have been detailed at that moment but it would not have added up to a sum any greater than the answer He gave Mary. His purpose was in His name, Jesus, which meant "Saviour of His people from their sins." The Father had sent Him and the business of the Father is the return of souls to the Kingdom of Heaven -- souls separated by ignorance or foolishness or sin. Christ is the Saviour of all and it is in Christ and through Christ and by Christ that all must be saved. His moments in Nazareth and Galilee, along the shores of the lakes, in the porticoes of the temple, or on the Cross . . . these were not isolated minutes in a mission, they

were motions in a single action . . . the salvation of mankind!

Significantly, the Christ who gave this answer was twelve years old, the age at which a Jewish boy assumed the duties of manhood. The clear purpose of Christ to indicate His duty by this First Word is seen in the repetitions of it throughout His life. The words and signs that He used might have phrased it differently, but each repetition was the same answer to another "Why?"

"Why hast Thou done this to us?"

"Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

To be named "Saviour" was not enough. He must show it in parable and prophecy and death. The choice of Apostles, the separation and sorrow of His Mother, the rebukes to the Scribes, the healing of the lepers, the tears over His city were all activities for His Father. Christ could boast these things were so, "that the world may know that I love the Father and do as the Father commanded."

He was tireless in His repetitions of having a single purpose -- Salvation of Souls. If asked to teach His Apostles how to pray, He answered: "When you pray, say, 'Our Father . . . . . Thy



Kingdom come." His constant reminders of His part in the Will of God to save all men have become common quotations: "I have come that you may have life . . . the Son of Man has come to give His life as a ransom for many . . . I lay down My life for My sheep."

Christ's answer is the only answer to "Why?" -- "I must be about My Father's business." And the business of God is Salvation and the purpose of Christ is union. And the business and the purpose are not done with. Christ was careful to indicate this because He was certain the "Whys?" would go on. For no time, however, would He change His answer to permit it to be changed. "Other sheep I have . . . them also must you bring." "As the Father sent Me, I also send you." "He who hears you, hears Me. . . ." Thus, salvation did not stop with the Cross or Christ's death or glorious Resurrection. Salvation goes on as long as there are men to be saved. The work of Christ goes on -- and through the Christian, the Worker Christ continues the Father's business.

Divine Intelligence has a purpose and Christ carries it out; Infinite Knowledge has a plan and Christ yet works to effect it; Unlimited Wisdom has a Providence

and Christ, yet, strives to teach it.

The things that happen to us . . . the sorrows, the pains . . . the rebukes . . . the torture and agony of a world . . . the cry in our heart at poverty and filth. . . at frustration and blind folly . . . at human wreckage and chaos . . . these are not to be taken as God's plan . . . these are not God's ultimate purpose for us.

The plan of God, the purpose of Christ is our salvation. God's plan and God's purpose and God's providence are none of the evils we have detailed. God's intelligence doesn't cause evil . . . but God's care provides against it.

Life in a Christian world is thus seen to be more than a matter of getting and piling and storing of H-bombs. It is not a problem of giving or being given in marriage; not the achieving of fortune or famousness or constant fun. In a Christian world, there are no such things as businesses . . . there is one business . . . God, the Father's . . . that all men be saved!

To forget this is to forego everything because to forget this is to lose the first lesson of Christianity. To forget this is to forego the one answer to the "Whys?" of the world . . . to the towering "Whys?" of time:

"Why? . . . Why? . . . Why?"

"Why hast thou done this to us?"

"Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

We are being saved by what God does to us. Now, at this moment, whatever the condition of your life -- joy, sorrow, discouragement -- whatever the circumstances of your present days and past years, God has meant your salvation. This may not be simple to grasp or easy to accept but, nevertheless, you have an answer to all the why's you may ask -- Christ being about His Father's business works in you and on you to bring you closer to heaven, your final and enduring home.

Learn the habit of recalling this First Word of Christ whenever you are tempted to murmur, to complain or rebel, whenever you tend to forget the will of God working in your life. Make it a reminder -- a kind of string around your finger -- an awakener to a most important fact: Christ works always to save you; He is always in all ways about His Father's business.

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