

ST IGNATIUS LOYOLA, SOLDIER OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

*I have fought the good fight,  
I have kept the faith;—and now  
there is laid up for me a crown of justice  
which the Lord, Just Judge,  
will give to me on that day;  
not only to me, but to all  
who love His coming. (II Tim. 4, 7-8).*

THESE are the words of the Apostle St Paul, penned nearly nineteen hundred years ago; words which would fall admirably from the lips of a St Ignatius; were it not that the Saint, in his lovable humility, would be the last to think that such words could apply to himself.

Yet they do speak of him. For the words of the Apostle are the words of Scripture; and the words of Scripture are the words of God; and the words of God have a timeless character, and so a value at all times. Thus it is that without undue violence we can read these words of St Ignatius who went to God on July 31st four hundred years ago. It is this going to God, and then more especially the wonder of a lasting and living and growing work for God that we commemorate in this its four hundredth year.

*I have fought the good fight,  
I have kept the faith.*

St Paul wrote this in the evening of his life, when a sure instinct told him that he would soon go to God. He looked back over his life, that life which no longer appeared now as an even course or pattern, but rather as something *broken* by the intervention of God who struck him down on the road to Damascus and reversed the whole trend of his inward being.

Now if we look back over the life of St Ignatius we see that this too was 'broken' by an intervention of God: we could even say, Blessed cannon-ball that shattered his leg at Pamplona!

We are told that St Paul, after his great experience, withdrew

<sup>1</sup> Sermon preached for the fourth centenary of the death of St Ignatius at the Church of St Aloysius, Oxford.

to the 'desert of Arabia', perhaps to some more lonely part of the Syrian steppe-land, or eastern Jordan of today. But if he withdrew, it was to be with God, to be taught of God.

So too St Ignatius, after his conversion, withdrew, by that broken rocky way from the glory of Montserrat, to the solitude of Manresa where he was to wrestle alone and long with God and start upon that wisdom which is from above.

St Paul was without presence, seemingly short-sighted, harassed by physical infirmity. St Ignatius too seems to have been small, even by Mediterranean standards; and he was lame ever after the affray at Pamplona.

St Paul founded churches, built up, organized, spread the faith of Christ over the then known world of Greece and Rome. St Ignatius founded the Company of Jesus, built up, organized, spread something which, in his lifetime alone, went from a handful of companions at Montmartre to nine Provinces of the Society, extending from the Old World to the New.

St Paul left a body of letters which came to be normative of the Church's life and conduct. St Ignatius left the Exercises, which (speaking as one less wise) are not so much a book as a method of bringing souls to God, applicable in any age as in any clime.

St Paul and St Ignatius are at one in being great lovers of Christ. Each could say:

*I live, not I, Christ lives in me,*

*for me to live is Christ, to die sheer gain.*

It is in this last respect that St Ignatius most of all resembles St Paul.

So far, I have, in word, tried to suggest that there is something of a similar pattern, working itself out under God, in the lives of the Apostle and of St Ignatius of Loyola. Mirrored in these lives is something of the mysterious working of the mind of God.

There are chosen souls who are to grow quietly in the even tenour of their lives as in the grace of God.

There are chosen souls called by God to break with a world twisted out of its true pattern. In such a world they are to shine as lights and to bring countless children to the admirable light of God's kingdom. But to do this they have first to be themselves converted from one state to another. There must, in the pattern of their lives, be a break of some sort.

St Ignatius was one of this latter group of saints. And he 'fought

the good fight'. Not a good fight, any sort of foray or escapade; all that was left with youthful romanticism and ardours. His fight now was to be *the* fight or that spiritual warfare which is incumbent upon any and every follower of Christ. He was to be a *Miles Christi* or soldier of Christ who should, first, don the whole armour of God, and then be girded with truth, have a breastplate of justice, be shod with 'the readiness of the gospel of peace', taking the shield of faith as also the helmet of salvation and that Sword of the spirit 'which is the word of God'. (Ephesians 6, 10-17). Thus by a series of military figures of speech does the Apostle teach us of spiritual realities, of that necessary equipment of all who would love God above all things and strive to live as if they so loved.

Still, the habit does not make the monk, and arms and armour alone are not enough to make a soldier. Even more important than equipment is the inward quality of strength and courage, of self-discipline and resolution. That strength or fortitude which befits the soldier of Christ may in part be naturally present, latent or inherited, and can in part be developed by human wanting and willing; in part too, strength is God-given, a grace for which we pray earnestly, since fortitude, besides being a virtue of itself, also adds a certain 'edge' or tone to all our willed and rightly-ordered living. Over and above natural and God-given strength is the gift of the Holy Ghost termed Fortitude, which sets up a disposition within us so that we respond bravely to the call of the Holy Ghost in times of special crisis and trial, for our Adversary the Devil, never ceases 'to go about seeking whom he may devour'.

And then the true soldier of Christ stands for unmitigated, full-strength Catholicism. His faith and loyalty will cut through prejudices, habits of thought, social and other assumptions. A certain zeal for the truth of God and the House of God will sweep away the last relics of human respect, of concessions to the spirit of the age and fashions of thought. It is perhaps for that reason that St Ignatius, like St Dominic before him, is not a 'popular' saint in the sense that St Francis is popular; and naturally enough he cannot be popular among luke-warm Catholics, or lapsed brethren, or the weak in faith.

If ever any man 'kept the faith' it was St Ignatius. Faith, whole and unflinching was the mark of this saint raised up by God in calamitous times. For this was the age of Luther and others, when

thousands were drawn aside to follow self-appointed teachers and 'another Gospel'. St Ignatius, like another St Paul, was to cleave to that which was handed down from our Lord himself: 'for I myself have received from the Lord, what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus . . . took bread. . . .' (I Cor. II, 23).

'There is laid up for me a crown of justice'. In these words we discern the quiet confidence or trust of one who loved God as did St Paul and then St Ignatius. For there is an intensity of love which brings in its train serenity and joy of a kind which no man can take from us. This is the true ground or basis of the supernatural hope of great lovers of Christ. St Ignatius was one such great lover of Christ; and not only a lover of Christ, but one who induced love of Christ and furthered and fostered it in others. St Ignatius' own cherished way of doing this was by means of the Spiritual Exercises into which he put so much of himself. He toiled, wrote and re-wrote these 'Exercises' as they are called, wherein those of other spiritual traditions can recognize much that is near and dear to them. To one Dominican at least the Exercises seem valuable in so far as they induce an awareness of the *presence of Christ*, of 'what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life'. (I John I, I). Valuable too in that they engage a man's whole being. He is asked to commit himself to God, soul, body, senses and all. For there is a certain wholeness of devotion and dedication of our whole being which goes far towards bringing about the holiness of the saints. St Ignatius was one such wholly dedicated soul.

'Not only to me, but to all who love His coming'; our text suddenly opens up a new vista. The work of God concerns not one saint, but in some way affects *all* who look to that City which is above and who in their hearts say 'Come, Lord Jesus'. The prodigious accomplishment of St Ignatius is not ended. We are not simply gazing back upon four hundred years of history. We are thinking of the thousands and thousands who through St Ignatius, and the Company of Jesus, and their Spiritual Exercises, have been brought to love Christ above all things. The fourth centenary of his death will mean spiritual joy to thousand upon thousand of his spiritual children, and will encourage all children of God, wherever they may be, to be true soldiers of Christ,

resolved indeed to 'Fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life' (I Tim. 6, 12), that eternal life to which each and everyone of us here now, is, by God's mercy, called.



## ST AUGUSTINES SERMON ON PSALM XXXIII—II

TRANSLATED BY EDMUND HILL, O.P.

**H**APPY the man who hopes in him.' No need to explain that, is there? Whoever does not hope in the Lord is miserable. And who doesn't? Why, whoever hopes in himself. Sometimes it's even worse, my dear brothers; listen, sometimes men don't even want to hope in themselves, but in other men. 'While Jack Robinson's safe, you can't touch me'—and Jack Robinson may even be dead already. Here in this town the man says 'As long as So-and-so is safe and sound', and So-and-so is already dead somewhere else. And how ready people are to say this sort of thing, instead of saying 'I trust in God, he won't let you harm me'; instead of saying 'I trust in my God, even if he does let you touch something, everything even that belongs to me, he won't let you touch my soul'. But when they talk about 'While So-and-so is safe and sound' it shows that they don't want to have real security themselves, while burdening someone else with the bother of maintaining them in a false one.

'Fear the Lord, all you his saints, because there is nothing lacking to those who fear him'. Many people don't want to fear the Lord precisely for that reason, in case they go hungry. They are told they mustn't cheat. And they say 'What am I to live on then? No trade is possible without deceit, no business can succeed without cheating'. But God punishes cheating; listen to God.—But if I fear God like that, I won't get my living.—Fear the Lord, all you his saints, because there is nothing lacking to those who fear him. The timid man who has misgivings his little luxuries will vanish if he starts fearing God, is being promised he will have plenty enough. God used to feed you when you ignored him, do you think he will desert you once you start fearing him? Listen man to the psalm's words, and don't start saying 'He's rich, I'm poor; I fear the Lord, but look what a pile he has made by not fearing