

St. Ignatius of Loyola, letter to Fathers and Brothers Studying at Coimbra (May 7, 1547)  
The Advantages of Fervor

Therefore, give serious thought to your vocation so that you can give much thanks to God for so great a favor and ask Him for the special help needed to correspond to it with courage and diligence. Both of these you must have in large measure if you are to attain the end you have in view. Sloth, tepidity, weariness in study and in the other exercises which you have undertaken for the love of our Lord you must recognize as the sworn enemies of your vocation.

For his encouragement each one should keep before his eyes, not those who he thinks will accomplish less, but rather those who are active and energetic. Never permit the children of this world to show greater care and interest in the things of time than you show for those of eternity. It should bring a blush to your cheek to see them run to death more enthusiastically than you to life. Hold yourselves as worth little if a courtier serves with greater dedication to gain the favor of an earthly prince than you do for the favor of the King of Heaven, or if a soldier battles with greater courage for the glory of victory and hope of spoils, than you fight for victory and triumph over the world, the devil, and yourselves, all for a heavenly kingdom and eternal glory.

For the love of God, therefore, be neither careless nor tepid. For if tautness snaps the bow, slackness snaps the soul; while on the contrary, according to Solomon, *the soul of them that work shall be richly supplied* [Prov. 13:4]. Try to maintain a holy and discreet fervor in your work and in the pursuit of learning as well as virtue. With both alike, one energetic act is worth a thousand that are listless, and what a lazy man cannot accomplish in many years an energetic man can usually achieve quickly.

In the matter of learning, the difference between the earnest and the careless student stands out clearly. The same holds true in the mastering of passion and the weaknesses to which our nature is subject, as in the acquiring of virtue. It is certain that, because the negligent do not struggle against self, they never achieve peace of soul or do so tardily, and never possess any virtue in its fullness, while the energetic and industrious make notable advances on both fronts.

Experience proves that in this life peace and satisfaction are had, not by the listless but by those who are fervent in God's service. And rightly so. For in their effort to overcome themselves and to rid themselves of self-love, they rid themselves of the roots of all passion and unrest. And by acquiring habits of virtue, they naturally succeed in acting with ease and cheerfulness in accordance with these same virtues.

By this means they dispose themselves to receive the holy consolation of God our faithful consoler, for *to him who conquers I will give the hidden manna* [Rev. 2:17]. On the other hand, tepidity is the cause of a lifetime of uneasiness, for we never uproot its cause, self-love, nor do we ever deserve God's help. Therefore you should rouse yourselves to work earnestly at your praiseworthy tasks, since even in this life you will perceive the advantages of holy fervor, not only in the growth of perfection in your souls but even in the peace of mind it grants you in this present life.

But if you look to the eternal reward, as you often should, Saint Paul will easily convince you that *the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us* [Rom. 8:18], because *this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal measure of glory beyond all comparison* [2 Cor. 4:17].

If this is true of every Christian who serves and honors God, you can understand what your crown will be if you correspond with our Institute, which is not only to serve God for your own sakes but to draw many others to His honor and service. Of them Holy Scripture says that *they that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars for all eternity* [Dan. 12:3]. And this is to be understood of those who engage in the discharge of their duty, not only later in the exercise of arms but even before that, while they are getting themselves ready. If this were not so, we certainly could not apply to works that are in themselves good the words of Jeremiah, *Cursed is he that does the work of the Lord carelessly*

[Jer. 48:10], and of Saint Paul, *Do you not know that in a race all indeed run, but only one receives the prize?* [1 Cor. 9:24], and *for he is not crowned unless he strives according to the rules* [2 Tim. 2:5], and that means a good worker.

### God's Manifold Gifts

But more than anything else I should wish to awaken in you the pure love of Jesus Christ, the desire for His honor and for the salvation of souls whom He has redeemed. For you are His soldiers in this Society with a special title and a special wage. I say special because there are many general reasons which likewise oblige you to work for His honor and service. His wage is everything you are and have in the natural order, for He bestows and preserves your being and life, and all the perfections of body and soul, as well as eternal blessings. His wage is also the spiritual gifts of His grace with which He has so generously and lovingly bestowed on you and continues to offer even when you oppose Him and rebel against Him. His wage is also those incomparable blessings of His glory which, without any advantage to Himself, He has promised to you and holds in readiness for you, actually sharing with you all the treasures of His happiness so that you may, by a remarkable participation in His divine perfection, be what He is by essence and nature. Finally, His wage is the whole universe and everything material and spiritual contained in it. For He has placed under our ministry not only all that is under heaven, but even the whole of His sublime court, without exempting any of the heavenly hierarchy: *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?* [Heb. 1:14].

As though this wage were not enough, He has made Himself our wage, becoming a brother in our own flesh, as the price of our salvation on the cross, and in the Eucharist to be with us as support and company. Oh, what an unworthy soldier he would be whom such a wage would not induce to labor for the honor of such a prince. We know indeed that, to oblige us to desire and labor for this glory, His Majesty has bestowed on us these inestimable and priceless favors, in a sense stripping Himself of His own possessions to give us a share in them; taking on himself our miseries to deliver us from them; wishing to be sold as our redemption; to be dishonored to glorify us; to be poor to enrich us; accepting a disgraceful and painful death to give us a blessed and immortal life. How extremely ungrateful and hardhearted is he who after all this does not recognize his obligation to serve our Lord Jesus Christ diligently and to seek His honor.