



# FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH

A RETREAT GUIDE ON  
HEROIC YOUTH

FR. JOHN BARTUNEK, LC, STHD

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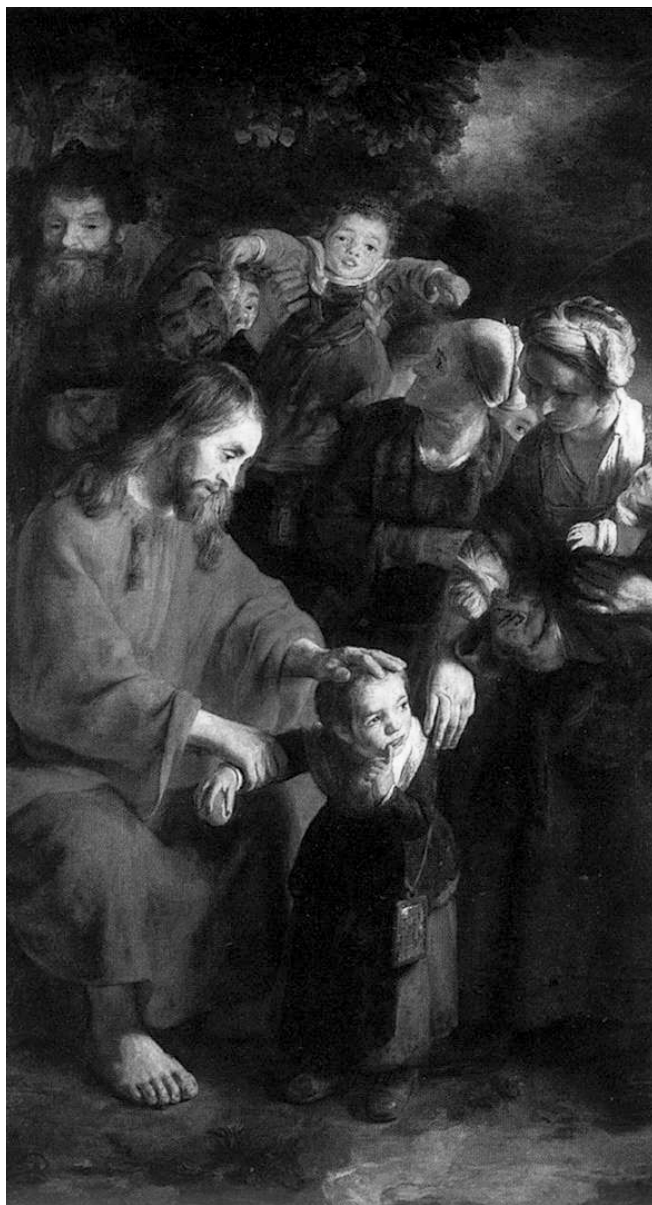
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# INTRODUCTION

*A Retreat Guide on Heroic Youth*



## RETREAT OVERVIEW

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The future of the Church, and of society in general, depends to a large extent on the quality and the formation of the younger generation.

And yet, in spite of that undeniable reality, our popular culture's overriding attitude towards young people tends to be either condescending or pessimistic. Older generations typically complain about the decadence of youth. That pessimism can overflow into dismissive or otherwise unproductive treatment of young people.

But Jesus had a different point of view.

He admonished his disciples, who were shielding him from contact with young people:

“Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

—Matthew 19:14

The history of the Church echoes Christ's optimism, recognizing through the canonization of many young saints that God's grace can indeed find amazingly fertile soil in the hearts and minds of young men and women.

If we want to contribute to a promising future in the Church and the world, we need to adopt that attitude and believe in our young people. This Retreat Guide will help us do so.

- The First Meditation profiles the inexhaustibly inspiring example of St. Agnes.

- The Second Meditation unpacks the more recent but equally stirring experience of Mexico's teenage martyr, St. José Luis Sánchez del Río.
- And the Conference offers reflections about how to help young people develop their full spiritual potential, even in a post-Christian world like ours.

Let's begin by quieting our hearts and turning our attention to the Lord, who never stops paying attention to us. Let's ask him for all the graces we need, and most especially, the grace to follow the example of so many of our Church's heroic young people, who have been faithful to Christ even until death.

## NOTES

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## FIRST MEDITATION

*St. Agnes: Girl Versus Empire*



## INTRODUCTION

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Our current Roman Missal's First Eucharistic Prayer, historically known as the "Roman Canon," commemorates by name 40 different saints in two separate lists. The second list concludes with the names of seven women martyrs, four of whom were youth, one of whom is St. Agnes.

This fact in itself shows how much of an impression her life and martyrdom made on the early Christians, who felt moved to preserve her memory not just on an annual feast day, but in the very words of that ancient Eucharistic prayer. God must have granted truly extraordinary graces to this young woman for the Church to memorialize her in such a way.

## THE SETTING

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To put those graces in context, let's begin by recalling the social milieu in which Agnes lived and died.

She resided in the city of Rome, around the year 300 AD. At that time, Christianity had been officially illegal for more than two centuries. Sometimes provincial governors would proactively enforce the anti-Christian laws, giving rise to waves of violent persecution in various parts of the Roman Empire. During other periods, the anti-Christian laws remained on the books, so to speak, but were only applied reactively, when someone was turned in to the authorities for being a Christian.

We need to pause and reflect on why the Roman Empire had outlawed Christianity. Many anti-Christian rumors had spread in the early years of the Church, falsely accusing Christians of crimes like cannibalism and infanticide, and caricaturing them as donkey-worshippers

and worse. This kind of defamation and misinformation often accompanies new movements in societies built on strong traditions, but the roots of Rome's official anti-Christian sentiment lay elsewhere.

## **RELIGION MATTERED**

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In ancient Rome, as in all pre-modern cultures, religion was considered essential for society's well being. All pagan cultures recognized their dependence on divine favor for peace, protection, and prosperity. But it wasn't enough just to believe in any god; you had to believe in and worship the particular gods of the society in which you lived. Otherwise, you were considered an enemy of that society. After all, if you didn't worship the right gods—if you were an atheist, for example, or if you exclusively worshipped some foreign god—you might incur the wrath of your city's divine protector, inviting devastation upon the whole nation. In the Roman Empire, anyone who did that was considered a traitor, guilty of treason and punishable by death.

That wasn't a problem for most pagans who lived under Roman rule. They could worship whatever traditional gods they wanted to, and they would also pay tribute to the official gods of Rome, including the divine emperor himself. Most pagan religions weren't particularly exclusive when it came to placating the many divinities of a polytheistic culture.

## **THE CHRISTIAN DIFFERENCE**

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But Christians were different. They believed that there was only one true God, creator and redeemer of all.

And their faith in that singular God required them to refuse the worship of any other gods at all. And so, to pay tribute to the gods of Rome, or to the supposedly divine emperor, would be a sin against the very first commandment. Christians were happy to obey all the other Roman laws, designed to keep order in society, but they couldn't offer incense to the Roman gods without renouncing their faith in Christ.

During the many waves of persecution, plenty of Christians did renounce their faith—sometimes out of fear, sometimes out of greed and ambition. But many more Christians stayed faithful, even until death. St. Agnes was one of them. Let's listen to her story.

## THE CASE OF AGNES

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Agnes was just a young teenager when she faced her life-threatening crisis. We don't know exactly how she had become a Christian, but we do know that she was a beautiful young woman who came from a wealthy, aristocratic Roman family. As such, she was considered a desirable match, and young Roman noblemen were vying for her hand in marriage. That was where the problem started.

Agnes, just like many of the other women martyrs from this period of Church history, had received the special vocation to consecrate her entire life—both her heart and her virginity—to the Lord. So she consistently informed each and every suitor that she was already promised to a heavenly husband, one whom they could not see except with the eyes of faith. At first they laughed at her, but when she persisted they became perturbed, and the most passionate of them became violently angry at this apparently absurd way of thwarting his plans.

Knowing she was a Christian, he denounced her to the governor, hoping that the subsequent interrogations and prospects of punishment would weaken her resolve and bring her to her senses. But he was wrong. First, she calmly resisted the governor's allurements and sweet cajoleries, refusing to renounce her faith and reiterating that she could have no spouse but Jesus Christ. Then she resisted threats. Then she stood firm when they lit fires and wheeled out various instruments of torture and execution for her inspection.

## **EXTREME MEASURES**

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Exasperated, the governor sent her to a well-known brothel, and announced that the Roman youth were to have their way with her free of charge. But, according to the tradition, her countenance shone with such an otherworldly light that no one dared approach her. She explained to the frustrated governor that "you may stain your sword with my blood, but you will never be able to profane my body, consecrated to Christ."

By this time, the entire city was abuzz with news of the extraordinary events. Crowds were gathering and everyone was talking about the beautiful teenaged Christian who was defying the powers of Rome. The governor, anxious because of the growing publicity and humiliated by the courageous affronts of such a young girl, gave up his attempts to convince her to renounce her faith and condemned her to be executed. She was publicly dispatched through the comparatively humane method of piercing her throat with a sword. According to witnesses, whose testimony was immortalized in a sermon by St. Ambrose, the young woman, having proved herself stronger than all the enticements and threats of



the Roman Empire, went to her execution more joyfully than most young women go to their weddings, peacefully offering her neck to the sword without even needing someone to hold her in place.

## **AGELESS HOLINESS**

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That's the account of St. Agnes's martyrdom as it has come down to us through the ages. And although some historians question the veracity of some of the details, the amazing story helps explain the special place she has always held in the Church's memory and liturgy.

But even if some exaggerations may have crept in over the centuries, the depth of her faith, the purity of her love, and the strength of her hope move our hearts even today. She was only a teenager, and a young teenager at that. But she had welcomed God's grace with undeniable wisdom and achieved spiritual maturity in spite of her years. And that is the point: we need to believe in the spiritual potential of everyone at any age, and treat them accordingly: Young people truly can be saints.

In the next meditation we will contemplate another, more contemporary example of this same truth. But for now, let's take some time, in the quiet of our hearts, to let the beauty of Agnes's testimony nourish our prayer. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.

## **QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION**

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1. In art, St. Agnes is usually depicted with a palm branch, symbolizing the victory of her martyrdom,

and a lamb. The Latin word for lamb, *agnus*, is similar to the spelling of *Agnes*. But what other biblical and liturgical references make the lamb an appropriate symbol for this martyr?

2. The example of martyrs like Agnes did wonders to spark interest in Christianity among pagan Romans. Why might that have been the case?
3. When I interact with young women, how does my consideration of their spiritual potential affect the attitude of my mind and heart? How would Christ interact with them?

### THREE QUOTATIONS TO AID YOUR MEDITATION

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“Almighty ever-living God,  
who choose what is weak in the world to  
confound the strong,  
mercifully grant,  
that we, who celebrate the heavenly birthday of  
your Martyr Saint Agnes,  
may follow her constancy in the faith.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

—Opening Prayer for the Memorial of St. Agnes


ROMAN MISSAL

“Do not be afraid of anything that you are going to suffer. Indeed, the devil will throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will

face an ordeal for ten days. Remain faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The victor shall not be harmed by the second death.”

—Revelation 2:10–11

NABRE

 We had all gone astray like sheep, all following our own way; But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all. Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers, he did not open his mouth. Seized and condemned, he was taken away. Who would have thought any more of his destiny? For he was cut off from the land of the living, struck for the sins of his people. He was given a grave among the wicked, a burial place with evildoers. Though he had done no wrong, nor was deceit found in his mouth. But it was the Lord's will to crush him with pain. By making his life as a reparation offering, he shall see his offspring, shall lengthen his days, and the Lord's will shall be accomplished through him.

—Isaiah 53:6–10

NABRE







## SECOND MEDITATION

*The King's Young Honor Guard:  
St. José Luis Sánchez del Río*





## INTRODUCTION

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One thousand and six hundred years after St. Agnes's amazing, faith-filled victory over pagan persecution, another young teenager found himself facing a similar challenge.

## THE BACKGROUND

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José Luis Sánchez del Río was born in 1913 in a small town in central Mexico, not too far from the city of Guadalajara, right in the middle of a revolution that eventually led to the establishment of a secularist government under President Plutarco Calles. President Calles began a legal persecution of the Catholic Church enforced by violence. During the persecution, many Catholics joined together to defend their rights even with the use of force. Their efforts are known as the Cristero War, the name being taken from the battle cry of the Catholics, *¡Viva Cristo Rey!* — “Long Live Christ the King!”

The Cristero War lasted from 1926 to 1929, with the most significant battles taking place in central Mexico, where St. José Luis lived. Besides the deaths of faithful Catholic soldiers during the actual battles, the struggle also led to summary executions of priests and religious by federal authorities, the seizure of Church property, the systematic desecration of churches, and the suppression of any public expression of the Catholic faith—to the point of outlawing clerical clothing and the use of crucifixes and religious images, even at home.

Many lay Catholics who refused to submit to the anti-Catholic laws were also arrested, imprisoned, and sometimes executed, regardless of whether they had

taken up arms in the rebellion. It was not uncommon to see the mutilated bodies of these Cristeros hanging in the village square or along the sides of roads—a bitter warning to other would-be resisters.

## WAITING LIKE A FARMER

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Soon after the start of the Calles persecution, Pope Pius XI wrote an encyclical letter to protest the violence and to encourage the Mexican faithful. In this letter he outlined the injustice of the anti-Catholic laws and described the horrors being perpetrated. He wrote:

“But the cruel exercise of arbitrary power on the part of the enemies of the Church has not stopped at these acts. Both men and women who defended the rights of the Church and the cause of religion, either in speeches or by distributing leaflets and pamphlets, were hurried before the courts and sent to prison. Again, whole colleges of canons were rushed off to jail, the aged being carried there in their beds. Priests and laymen have been cruelly put to death in the very streets or in the public squares which front the churches ...<sup>1</sup>

He went on to draw a parallel between the evils being committed in Mexico during the Cristero War and the evils suffered by our Lord himself during his Passion:

“For whosoever reveres, as all must, God the Creator and Our Beloved Redeemer, whosoever will obey the laws of Holy Mother Church, such a man, We repeat, such a man is looked on as a malefactor, as

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1 Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Iniquis Afflictisque*, 18 November 1926, #16 [Vatican.va]

guilty of a crime; such a man is considered fit only to be deprived of all civil rights; such a man can be thrown into prison along with other criminals. With what justice can We apply to the authors of these enormities the words which Jesus Christ spoke to the leaders of the Jews: “This is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53).<sup>2</sup>

## A TOUGH CHILDHOOD

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This atmosphere of intense religious persecution and war was the environment in which José Luis grew up, received the sacraments, and learned about his Catholic faith. While his older brothers joined the Cristero forces, the future saint stayed at home and nourished his faith under the guidance of his parents and through his own generous efforts to serve and catechize the younger children in his town. But the continuing persecution stirred up in his young heart a prayer for the grace of martyrdom and a longing to fight for Christ and his Catholic Church. When he was fourteen years old, he convinced his parents to let him join the Cristeros, overcoming their initial objections with the simple argument: “It’s never been easier to get to Heaven than it is now.”

We may feel tempted to attribute José Luis’s eagerness to a kind of naïve idealism, as if he simply wanted to follow in the footsteps of his older brothers. But what happened next shows us something else. This young teenager, much like St. Agnes, had filled his heart with God’s grace, and his soul was already enjoying an abundant harvest of the fruits of the Spirit.

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2 Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Iniquis Afflictisque*, 18 November 1926, #11 [Vatican.va]

## **A SOLDIER'S SHORT CAREER**

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José Luis was accepted by one of the Cristero generals as a standard-bearer and aide-de-camp. A few months later, his general's horse was killed in the midst of a battle. José Luis insisted on surrendering his own horse to the general and covered the Cristero retreat by firing on federal troops until his ammunition ran out. At that point, he was captured and eventually imprisoned in the baptistery of his hometown church—which had been requisitioned by the soldiers for a barracks and a stable.

For the next three days, friends and family members did what they could to negotiate the boy's release. In the meantime, the commander of the federal outpost offered to set José Luis free on condition of renouncing his faith, which he adamantly refused to do. He even defended the honor of God by sabotaging a cockfight the soldiers were planning to put on in the sanctuary area of the church, declaring as he did so, "this is not a farm house; it's the house of God!"

To wear down his resistance, they forced him to watch the brutal public execution of another teenage prisoner who refused to renounce his faith. But instead of being frightened, José Luis used the opportunity to shout encouraging messages to his fellow Cristero.

## **A TEENAGER'S WAY OF THE CROSS**

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Finally, the government authorities ran out of patience, and they issued their sentence of death. After sundown on February 10, 1927, his captors sliced off the soles of José Luis's feet, tied his hands behind his back, and marched him through the town to the cemetery. The

gruesome procession was accompanied by faithful townspeople, including the future martyr's own mother, who encouraged her son to stay faithful to the Lord even as she followed in his bloodstained footsteps, weeping.

Along the way, they beat him and stabbed him, repeatedly inviting him to end his pain by renouncing Christ. Exhausted and in agony, José Luis would only repeat: "Long live Christ the King!" and "Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe!" Reaching the graveyard, they forced him to dig his own grave, continuing to mock and beat him all the while. They tortured him further by submerging him in the nearby well almost to the point of drowning, but his faith held fast. Finally, a soldier unceremoniously ended the spectacle by shooting José Luis in the temple, and the federal troops departed, leaving his mother and priest to bury him.

## **FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT**

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The fruitfulness of his martyrdom wasn't long in coming. One of the very soldiers who had marched him to the cemetery was later seen frequently visiting and praying at the martyr's grave. Young José Luis's example inspired not only his contemporaries, but also subsequent generations, so much so that he was beatified in 2005 and canonized by Pope Francis in 2016.

God's grace found fertile soil in the young heart of St. José Luis Sánchez del Río, showing once again—1600 years after St. Agnes's demonstration—that holiness can blossom in young people just as much as it can in anyone else. In the Conference, we will draw some practical lessons from that fact, but for now, let's take some time to prayerfully reflect on this young saint's courage and

generosity, and what God may be inspiring in us through his example. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

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1. In the time of St. Agnes, the Roman Empire persecuted Christians because of their refusal to worship the imperial gods. In the time of St. José Luis, a secularist government persecuted the Church for its insistence on keeping God involved in society. How are the forces of evil trying to undermine the Church in my own society and culture?
2. What might José Luis's mother have been thinking and feeling as she watched her son's martyrdom? How would I react if I were to witness something similar happening to someone I love?
3. José Luis risked his life in order to protect the honor of God and the rights of the Church. How deeply do I feel motivated to spread Christ's Kingdom? How exactly do I engage in that mission in my day-to-day life?

## THREE QUOTATIONS TO AID YOUR MEDITATION

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Dear Mom,

Today in battle I was taken prisoner. I am pretty sure right now that I am going to die, but that's okay, Mom. Just accept the will of God. Don't worry about my dying—that's what would pain me; and

now tell my brothers to follow the example of their littlest brother. And you just do God's will, be strong, and send me your blessing together with Dad's. Say hello from me to everybody one last time, and please receive your son's heart, who loves you so much and wants so much to see you again before he dies.

—Letter to his Mother on the Day of his Capture

ST. JOSÉ LUIS SÁNCHEZ DEL RÍO



... [T]he “battle” of perseverance cannot be won without prayer. Not sporadic or hesitant prayer, but prayer offered as Jesus tells us in the Gospel: “Pray always, without ever losing heart” (Luke 18:1). This is the Christian way of life: remaining *steadfast* in prayer, in order to remain *steadfast* in faith and testimony ... True, each of us grows weary. Yet we are not alone; we are part of a Body! We are members of the Body of Christ, the Church ... Only in the Church, and thanks to the Church's prayer, are we able to remain steadfast in faith and witness ... This is the mystery of prayer: *to keep crying out, not to lose heart, and if we should grow tired, asking help to keep our hands raised...* The saints are men and women who enter fully into the mystery of prayer. Men and women who *struggle with prayer*, letting the Holy Spirit pray and struggle in them. They struggle *to the very end*, with all their strength, and they triumph, but not by their own efforts: the Lord triumphs in them and with them.

—Homily for the Canonization of St. José Luis  
Sánchez del Río and Six Other Saints

POPE FRANCIS

“The young blessed José Sánchez del Río should encourage all of us, especially you young people, to give witness to Christ in our daily lives. My dear young people, Christ will probably not ask you to shed your blood, but he is certainly asking you, from this very moment, to bear witness to the truth in your lives in the midst of an environment of indifference toward transcendent values and of a materialism and hedonism that look to suffocate consciences. Christ is also hoping for your openness to receive and welcome a vocational project that he has prepared for you. He alone has, for each one of you, the answers to your life’s questions, and he is inviting you to follow him through marriage, the priesthood, or religious life.

—Homily for the Beatification of José Luis  
Sánchez del Río and Twelve Other Mexican Martyrs  
CARDINAL JOSÉ SARAIVA MARTINS

## NOTES

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# **CONFERENCE**

*Helping Youth Be Heroic*



## INTRODUCTION

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Young people can achieve great holiness. God wants to shower his grace upon them and lead them to the heights of faith and courage and spiritual greatness. They are not exceptions to the mission of our Lord, which he himself described as coming “that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). This is certainly one of the lessons we learn when reflecting on the marvelous examples of St. Agnes and St. José Luis Sánchez del Río: Christ calls and equips young people to be heroic Christians.

Each of us needs to ask ourselves how firmly we believe that. If you are a young person yourself, you need to look into your heart and discover how open you are to receiving this gift of the Lord. If you have left your youth behind, you still need to look into your heart, to find out how similar your attitude toward the young people in your life is to Christ’s.

## THE RICH YOUNG MAN

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Four characteristics that mark Christ’s attitude towards young people come across powerfully in his encounter with a young person known as “the rich young man.” Here is how St. Matthew’s Gospel tells the story.



Now someone approached him and said, “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” He answered him, “Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He asked him, “Which ones?” And Jesus replied, “You shall

not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother;" and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

—Matthew 19:16–21

Jesus's principle message in this encounter touches on how easily riches and earthly wealth, can corrupt our hearts and obstruct the flow of grace. But if we look closely, we can also see in this exchange how our Lord approaches his interactions with young people.

## CLARITY

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In the first place, Jesus is clear. He clearly points the young man to God. He clearly rejects flattery and the temptation to create some kind of fan club. He also clearly reminds this young man about the moral demands of a fulfilling and fruitful life. He doesn't water down the commandments. He doesn't try to soft peddle the challenge of living authentically in a fallen world.

How easy it is for young people and those who serve young people to compromise on clarity! How easy it is to cut corners on the truths of our faith in order to try and win someone's favor or affection. We have to resist that temptation. Jesus put it powerfully in the Gospel of John:



“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

—John 8:31–32

Whenever we obscure the clear truth about what it means to follow Christ, we aren’t doing anybody a favor.

## AUTHENTICITY

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Jesus is not just clear; he is also authentic. He doesn’t put on a show for this young man. He doesn’t change his behavior or his personality in an effort to become more attractive to or popular with the youth.

This comes across clearly in the flow of the dialogue. We know a few more details from St. Mark’s version of the encounter. Here is how it begins:

“As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone ...”

—Mark 10:17–18

We can picture the scene: this inquirer kneeling in front of Jesus in the middle of the street, with the crowds watching and waiting to see what happens. Jesus detects the sincerity and the courage of his questioner. He shows that he is truly listening by commenting on the very first word the young man pronounces: “Good ...” And as the conversation continues, Jesus shows that he is taking the young man seriously. He isn’t condescending; he

doesn't talk down to the young man; he doesn't just use the opportunity to make a big speech that will impress the crowds but have nothing to do with this young man's dilemma. Jesus really hears what the young man says, and responds sincerely. That's authenticity. No show. No condescension. Just a real, honest, existential connection.

## **RESPECT**

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Jesus doesn't only act with authenticity himself, he also expects the young man to respond with authenticity. He thinks the best of this would-be disciple. He respects him enough to call him to the heights of holiness: "If you wish to be perfect," he says in St. Matthew's version, "Go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." St. Mark's version starts out a little differently, with Jesus saying, "You are lacking in one thing ..."

In both versions, Jesus presents this young man with a noble, inspiring goal, and offers to accompany him along the way of achieving it. He sets the bar high. This shows that he truly believes in this young man. He doesn't focus on this young man's flaws, the weaknesses, the past failures. Instead, Jesus focuses on his true dignity and spiritual potential. By calling this young man to follow him radically, Jesus reveals to this young man his true identity in God's eyes—that he is called to be a saint, to make an everlasting difference in the world, to be a unique reflection of God's glory in time and in eternity.

We must never lose this perspective—not while we are still in our youth, and not when we have left our youth behind. Youth is a season of life naturally filled with hope and idealism. Our fallen world tends to dampen and drain that youthful energy. But underneath the wounds and

the creeping cynicism, a young heart still wants to believe in great possibilities—and in Jesus, the greatest of all possibilities truly can become reality. Let's never forget that.

## AUTUMN'S SORROWS

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St. Mark's version of this encounter gives us a glimpse into Jesus's heart that St. Matthew's doesn't. Right before pointing out the one thing this young man is lacking, St. Mark tells us that: "Jesus, looking at him, loved him ...". Imagine that look. Imagine the depth of affection and excitement that must have shone from Jesus's eyes, the warmth of the smile that must have accompanied his invitation. "Jesus, looking at him, loved him ..."

Conrad Baars, the great twentieth-century Catholic psychologist who combined what was best in the psychological sciences with a truly Catholic worldview nourished on Thomistic philosophy and theology, has an insight that helps us unpack that look.

## AN INSIGHT FROM PSYCHOLOGY

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In his classic book, *Born Only Once*, Baars explores what he called at the time a widespread emotional deficit disorder. The basic idea is that every human being needs to be born not just physically—that's the first birth—but also psychologically, that's the second birth. This second birth can take place only when someone perceives our goodness, is delighted by that goodness, and then communicates back to us their delight. Only when we experience that kind of deep, existential affirmation, do we really come to believe in ourselves in a healthy way and experience the freedom we need to live with confidence and interior peace.

When Jesus, “looking at him, loved him”, I wonder if maybe that’s what was going on. I wonder if this young man discovered in the gaze of Christ that he truly mattered, and that his existence—just by existing—was, from God’s perspective, something uniquely good for this world.

We know how this encounter ended. The young man went away sad, tangled up in his riches and unable to break away. But maybe his encounter with Jesus was the first step of a spiritual journey that eventually led him to the deeper meaning he yearned for—the same meaning that St. Agnes and St. José Luis found and exhibited to the world under the most trying of circumstances.

Jesus approaches each one of us, especially young people, with clarity, authenticity, respect, and love. If we decide to follow his example, maybe we too will be part of a story as remarkable and moving as the stories of the heroic youth we contemplated in this Retreat Guide.

Take some time now to reflect on the following personal questionnaire, which is designed to help you apply these general principles to your particular situation.

## **PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

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1. What were (have been) the most impactful experiences of my youth? Why were they so impactful and what was their impact?
2. How firmly do I believe that Jesus is truly calling me to Christian greatness?
3. When has someone I care about been clear to me

regarding the demands of following Christ and living a truly meaningful life? How did I react? What were the results?

4. Which people in my life would I consider truly “authentic”? Why? How does it make me feel to be with them?
5. When have I felt deeply respected and believed in? When have I felt most disrespected and regarded with condescension? What in the people’s behavior made the difference?
6. When have I felt most loved by God? By another person? What fruits did that experience have in my own heart, mind, and actions?
7. How clearly do I communicate the real demands of the Gospel to those around me?
8. How authentic am I in my relationships with other people? What tends to make me “put on a show” in some of those relationships and why?
9. How firmly do I believe that others, especially the young people in my life, can truly become saints? What effect does this belief have on the way I treat them? What effect should it have?
10. What tends to get in the way of my perceiving the goodness in others, the way Christ perceived it in the rich young man?











## FURTHER READING

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If you feel moved to continue reflecting and praying about this theme, you may find the following books helpful:

*My Dear Young Friends: Pope John Paul II  
Speaks to Teens on Life, Love, and Courage*  
by St. John Paul II and John Vitek

*Blessed José: Boy, Cristero, Martyr*  
by Kevin McKenzie, LC

*José Luis Sánchez del Río: Cristero Boy Martyr*  
by Cornelia R. Ferreira

*Discipleship Focused Youth Ministry:  
A Getting Started Guide for Parishes*  
by Eric Gallagher and Jim Beckman

*Spiritually Mentoring Teenage Boys:  
Personal Dialogue to Make Young Saints*  
by Matthew P. Schneider, LC

*St. John Paul II's World Youth Day Messages*  
[available on the Vatican website: [https://w2.vatican.va/  
content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/youth.index.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/youth.index.html)]

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