



Introduction to Ignatian Prayer and Exercises

An eight week retreat based upon
An Ignatian Prayer Adventure
Prepared for the
Saint Francis Catholic Community of Cuenca

Compiled by Gary Pollice

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Preface

This book contains all of the materials that one needs for an eight-week introductory retreat based upon the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (Exercises). The material follows the online presentation *An Ignatian Prayer Adventure*¹ [2]² with added content from other sources. The retreat is an introduction to the Exercises that is designed for those people who do not have time, or the desire to make a full 19th annotation retreat of the Exercises. Those retreats typically last for 24 weeks or more. The online presentation is based upon the book, *The Ignatian Adventure* [20] which contains a full 32-week retreat. This means that about 75% of the material in the book has been left out of the online material. I have tried to balance the material for eight weeks with additional material to allow for exploration and adaptation and let the Holy Spirit lead the reader in the most effective manner. The additional material provides a fuller exposition of Ignatian spirituality and prayer.

While the retreat is designed for individuals, a more fruitful experience often occurs when a group of individuals together, sharing their faith, insight, and ideas that may elude the lone traveler. This book can certainly be used as an individual prayer guide, but it has been written for a small group.

My hope is that those who travel the road through the eight weeks will experience a deeper awareness of God in their daily lives and develop a greater love relationship with God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Mother, and all the saints. In so doing, may we gain the spiritual freedom to devote ourselves to the love and service of the Lord.

Any errors in this document are my human errors. If you have any suggestions, or want to report an error in the book, please send it to: gfp1947+ignatian@gmail.com.

¹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/an-ignatian-prayer-adventure/>

²The numbers in brackets refer to entries in the bibliography at the end of the book. This is helpful if you want to know the source of a quote or some other material. For websites, the entry contains the URL for that site or specific page.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to all of the Jesuits and others who have walked with me on my faith journey and taught me so much. I could not possibly list all of the people who have helped me over the years. Some of the ones that I want to call out for this work follow.

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Tina Hatzenbuehler, who did a fantastic job reviewing the draft and has been a sounding board for much of the material.

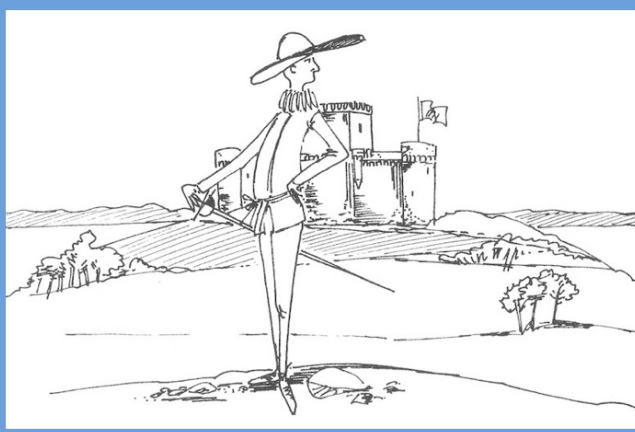
And most importantly, I am thankful for my wonderful wife Vikki who puts up with me spending so much time on the computer working on projects like this book. She also provided valuable comments on the draft. She's been my rock for the 54 years that we've had together so far. Her love and faith helps make me a better Christian.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam



Background & Preparation

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1. Saint Ignatius of Loyola: A short biography

Iñigo López de Oñaz y Loyola (Saint Ignatius) was born in 1491 to a Basque family of minor nobility. This was the age of art, literature, music, and romance, even though the Spanish Inquisition was in full swing. Stories of adventure, expeditions to foreign lands, and chivalry fueled the imagination of young Iñigo. He imagined himself as a great knight, slaying dragons, rescuing the fair ladies, and serving in the royal court.

When he was sixteen years old Iñigo obtained a position as a page to the royal treasurer at the court of Castile. He became known for having a fiery temper and a sharp sword, spending much of his time brawling, gambling, and partying. He spent ten years at the court developing quite a reputation.

After his years in the court, Iñigo became a soldier, stationed in Pamplona. His bravery was well-known and he defended the crown loyally. In 1521, the French attacked Pamplona. Only a small number of Spanish troops were stationed in the town fortress and the outcome was clear from the beginning. However, Iñigo and his companions would not surrender and defended the fortress bravely. During the battle, a cannonball crashed through the walls striking Iñigo in the legs. The French troops stormed the fortress and the battle was over. The French were so impressed by Iñigo's bravery that they carried him back to Loyola for treatment.

The doctors in Loyola reset Iñigo's legs. Infection set in and he almost died. He did survive, but he was left with a limp. Furthermore, he had a bone protruding from one leg and his right leg was shorter than the left one. His life as a knight was over with these deformities; this was unacceptable to the proud Iñigo. He demanded that the doctors take drastic action to get him back to soldierly condition. They broke one leg again and reset it, as well as sawing off the bone protrusion. The shorter leg was stretched to bring it into line with the other leg. All of this caused excruciating pain, but to Iñigo, it was worth it to regain his courtly stature.

An extended recuperation followed.¹ Iñigo was mainly bedridden and isolated for hours each day. To pass the time, he daydreamed about the exciting life he expected to regain. Just like he did as a boy, he imagined himself as the shining knight and dashing cavalier. While these daydreams amused him for a while he wanted more material for his imagination. He requested something to read. He was hoping for stories of adventure, chivalry, and romance. His sister-in-law, Doña Magdalena, who cared for Iñigo since he was seven years old, after his mother died, told him that she could only find a couple of books, *The Life of Christ* and a book on the lives of the saints. This was a turning point in the life of the man who would become Saint Ignatius Loyola.

Iñigo began to notice changes in his way of thinking. When he daydreamed of becoming the great knight, defending the crown, impressing the ladies, and gaining fame he felt excited and

¹The exact length is not clear, but seems to be six to nine months.

entertained, but after a little while, he felt dry and unhappy. The joy was short-lived. When he read about the life of Christ and the stories of the saints' lives he thought of how he might follow them and their examples, and he felt happy and fulfilled. The more he read and pondered on Jesus and the saints, the more he wanted to follow their journey. He was convinced that God was speaking to him throughout this experience. He needed to explore this idea more.

After he recuperated and was able to travel, he decided to explore the feelings and examine his life some more in order to discern his true calling. He made plans to travel to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage. Along the way he took his cue from the saints and begged, preached, and cared for the sick and poor. Early in the journey he stopped at the Benedictine shrine of Our Lady at Montserrat. After an all-night vigil he laid his sword before the altar of Our Lady. In a manner reminiscent of St. Francis of Assisi, he removed his fine clothes and donned the sackcloth of a beggar. He took up a pilgrim's staff and gave his raiment to a beggar he encountered.

From Montserrat Iñigo traveled to the small town of Manresa. He worked at a hospice and led the life of an ascetic. He spent hours each day at the hospice and in solitary prayer when not working. In his memoirs he reflects upon this time and says that "God worked on him like a student, gently schooling him in the ways of prayer and holiness." [20] Manresa is where Iñigo really began to pay attention to his inner self. He noticed movements of his soul; some things gave him consolation and seemed to bring him closer to God, while other things caused interior disruption and desolation, moving him away from God. He also began to have mystical visions that helped him to find God in all things—a fundamental part of Ignatian spirituality. Iñigo started to write down his insights and experiences while he was in Manresa. These notes were the beginning of what would become the Spiritual Exercises.

After Manresa, Iñigo was determined to journey to Jerusalem and spend the rest of his days walking the sacred ground that Jesus had walked. However, the Holy Land was a dangerous place at that time. The Franciscans who guarded the holy sites ordered Iñigo to leave after just a few weeks. This was a blow to his plan to follow Jesus. After praying and meditating, he realized that it was God's will that he leave. The romantic idea of living his life in the Holy Land was an idea of his own making, but God had other plans. He felt God telling him that he should spend some time in studies so that he could help others. This left a lasting impression on Iñigo, from this he realized that he had to be flexible in listening and following God's will.

When he returned to Spain, Iñigo spent two years in Barcelona studying with young children to learn Latin, the language of the church. Since he felt called to the priesthood, knowing Latin was prerequisite. Following this, at the age of 35, he attended universities in Alcalá and Salamanca. His desire was to become a priest, but thus far his education was not organized well. While he was in Alcalá and Salamanca Iñigo preached, taught, and started to offer direction in his developing Spiritual Exercises. Several times the Spanish inquisitors arrested him, trying to ascertain the orthodoxy of his actions and ideas. They limited his ability to preach and teach; however, they found nothing amiss in the Spiritual Exercises.

Iñigo realized that he still had much to learn formally. He went to Paris and entered the University of Paris where he studied philosophy and theology. He continued offering his Exercises and met many students who were drawn to Iñigo's experiences, vision, and his sense of adventure. They became a group of spiritual companions; many of them were some of the first members of the Society of Jesus. At this time Iñigo became known as Ignatius which is the Latin form of Iñigo.

On August 15, 1534 Ignatius and six of his companions went to a small chapel on Montmartre in Paris and professed vows of poverty and chastity. This tight-knit group also planned to travel to the Holy Land after completing their studies and entering the priesthood. They had a backup plan that if they were unable to travel to the Holy Land after a year of trying, they would go to Rome and offer their services to the pope. Among this group were Peter Faber, and Francis Xavier who are co-founders of the Society of Jesus.

The companions traveled to Venice where they grew to be a group of eleven. They ministered

to the poor and sick and continued to give the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius and the others of the group who were not ordained entered the priesthood in 1537. Venice was at war with the Ottoman Empire at the time, which made travel to the Holy Land impossible, so the group headed to Rome to profess their fealty to the pope.

On the way to Rome, the group stopped in a small village called La Storta. There, Ignatius had a mystical vision where God told him that he would look favorably upon the group in Rome. It was not crystal clear what this meant. Were they destined to be martyred when they arrived? Ignatius was convinced of his calling to serve the Lord. They finally entered Rome and continued their works of mercy and teaching. Pope Paul III received them warmly.

After much deliberation they decided to form a religious order. They called themselves the Society of Jesus.² This was quite surprising; no other religious order used the name of Jesus in their order's name. The Jesuits, as they became known, believe that it was appropriate. Their inspiration and goal was to know, love, and serve Jesus in his mission and be companions of Jesus to help carry his cross. The Jesuits were also unique in that they were not an order centered in a monastery or church. They would go and meet the people where they were and serve and work with them there. They offered practical, mystical spirituality that was different from anything in the church at the time. They were considered *contemplatives in action*.

Ignatius was the superior of the Jesuits from its formation until his death on July 15, 1556. By then the pope had come to rely on the Jesuits for missions around the world. They founded many schools and universities in order to provide the church with badly needed educated clergy and laity. Before his death, Ignatius wrote the constitution for the Society of Jesus and refined the Spiritual Exercises, which are a fundamental part of Jesuit formation. He, along with his companions decided upon the motto of the Jesuits: "Ad Majorem De Gloriam," (For the greater glory of God) At the time of his death, the Jesuits numbered over 1,000 companions throughout the world.

²The name was actually the Company of Jesus, but became known of the Society of Jesus.



2. The Spiritual Exercises

What are the Spiritual Exercises? Fr. Kevin O'Brien, SJ says that they are an “experience.” Like most experiences, each of us comes away with our own understanding and view of that experience.

The [IgnatianSpirituality.com website](https://www.ignatianspirituality.com)¹ says

The Spiritual Exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by St. Ignatius Loyola to help people deepen their relationship with God.

O'Brien provides a more complete description in *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life*.

People interested in the Exercises may be familiar with other spiritual classics, such as those by John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila, Thomas Merton, or Dorothy Day. Such books can be read privately and prayerfully. Their style may be mystical, poetic, or descriptive. The books have the form of narrative or exhortation. The Spiritual Exercises is nothing like those works. Ignatius's Exercises makes for very dry reading—it's more like reading a cookbook or how-to guide. The retreatant need not even read the book of the Exercises because Ignatius intended the book as a manual for spiritual directors or guides to lead others through the Exercises (SE 002)². In one sense, there is nothing new in the Exercises: Ignatius relied on prayer forms and spiritual traditions deeply rooted in the church. What is distinctive is how Ignatius artfully weaves them together and how much he emphasizes the experiential and practical in the life of prayer.

Thus, the purpose of the Exercises is very practical: to grow in union with God, who frees us to make good decisions about our lives and to “help souls.” Ignatius invites us into an intimate encounter with God, revealed in Jesus Christ, so that we can learn to think and act more like Christ. The Exercises help us grow in interior freedom from sin and disordered loves so that we can respond more generously to God's call in our life (SE 002, 021). The Exercises demand much of us, engaging our intellect and emotions, our memory and will. Making the Exercises can be both exhilarating and exhausting; it's no wonder that Ignatius compared making the Spiritual Exercises to doing physical exercise, such as “taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running” (SE 001).

¹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/>.

²Ignatius organized the Spiritual Exercises as a set of “annotations” (sentences or paragraphs) that were numbered. There are 370 of these annotations. We use this notation to identify particular ones.

The Exercises are a school of prayer. The two primary forms of praying taught in the Exercises are *meditation* and *contemplation*.³ [20]

There are many ways of making the Exercises. Jesuits make the 30-day, mostly silent, “long retreat” of the Exercises during their formation. The Exercises are about helping one to make good decisions and gain spiritual freedom. The Original name of the Exercises was *Spiritual Exercises to Overcome Oneself, and to Order One’s Life, Without Reaching a Decision Through Some Disordered Affection*. That’s quite a mouthful, which is why we just call it the Spiritual Exercises or the Exercises.

Ignatius realized that it is difficult for most people to take 30 days out of their busy lives. He believed that adaptation and flexibility is essential for each person to forge their own path to grow in union with God, free to make good choices along our journey. In this retreat, each participant is on an individual journey and walks with the other companions, sharing insight and experiences. This journey is, for some, the long journey from the head to the heart.

Structure of the Spiritual Exercises

The Exercises are structured as a very loose how-to guide. How to do what? How one might better fall in love with their God and learn how to discern God’s will, make good decisions, and respond enthusiastically to his⁴ call. This is the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises

During this retreat we explore various prayer techniques. In general, these fall into one of two categories, meditation and contemplation. Meditation requires the use of intellect. Critical reflection on Scripture or other resources that require thinking about things that guide our lives — this is the “head” part. Contemplation, however, is where we pay attention to the way we feel and notice the movements in our relationships with others and with God. This is the “heart” part of the Exercises. We pray with Scripture and other sources to help us connect the head and heart so that we are fully present and open to the Lord. For some, this is one of the longest, most difficult journeys they will ever undertake.

There are four main parts of the Exercises along with an introduction and preparation. The four parts are called **weeks**; although Ignatius says that one should not consider these as actual seven-day weeks, but phases, or stages that those who are making the Exercises will experience. He says that each one ends “when its aim is attained.” (SE 004) [18]

While we will have a schedule that we follow in the retreat, the reader should proceed at a pace guided by the Holy Spirit. In all things, be flexible and focus on what is useful for you. There is no single *right* way to make the Exercises.

Preparation

The preparation phase of the Exercises introduces the principles and guidelines for the rest of the Exercises. The first 20 annotations offer introductory material about the Exercises, ways of making them, and other information that is prerequisite for beginning.

After the introduction, there are sections on the Presupposition and Principle and Foundation. These help set the context for the retreat. This is the time to decide where, when, and for how long you will pray the Exercises each day, and get comfortable with the rhythm of the retreat.

Often, the first “week” of the 19th annotation retreats spends is spent on the preparation.. The *Ignatian Prayer Adventure* incorporates this as part of the first calendar week.

³See the Glossary for the way these two terms are defined in the context of the Exercises.

⁴I use a masculine pronoun for convenience and consistency, recognizing that God is neither male nor female. (CCC 239) CCC is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The number after this is the section/paragraph where this can be found.

The following short paragraphs describe the essence of and the rhythm of the Spiritual Exercises. A somewhat longer description can be found in *Jesuit 101: The Spiritual Exercises, the Heart of the Jesuits*.⁵ In order to make it clear that these are not calendar weeks, I use the work “phase.”

Phase 1

The first week of the exercises focuses on God’s infinite love for us and our response to the gifts. We see ourselves as a “sinner whom the Lord has looked upon,” as Pope Francis said when he was asked “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?”[1]

Phase 2

We spend the second week following Jesus’s ministry. We walk with him, listen to his words, and see how he carries out his mission. We talk to Jesus as a friend and react to his invitation to join him in his great adventure and calls us “friends.” (John 15: 15). We use all of our senses to actively meditate and contemplate the settings in the Bible stories. We gain a desire to join Jesus and help him heal the world. At the end of this week in the formation retreat, Jesuits may make their election to enter fully into the Society of Jesus.

Phase 3

We travel the path to Golgotha with Jesus as he shows us the depth of God’s great love for us. We may experience the sorrow, confusion, and horror that his friends did during this sacred time.

Phase 4

The culmination of the Exercises is a whirlwind of emotion; chaos, confusion, joy, and triumph. We celebrate the Easter resurrection and the promise of eternal life with our God and Savior.

⁵<https://thejesuitpost.org/2021/09/jesuit-101-the-spiritual-exercises-the-heart-of-the-jesuits/>.



3. Preparing for the Spiritual Exercises

We are almost ready to begin the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. The material in this chapter provides preparatory information so that those making the retreat are ready and in the proper frame of mind. The chapter should be read before the first group meeting. If something is not clear or you need more information about a topic, please bring your concerns to the first group meeting.

3.1 Personal Preparation

Spend a little time reviewing this section to ensure that you are prepared to begin the Exercises. The requirements are minimal.

Time commitment

The Exercises are about prayer. Prayer is a “conscious relationship with God.”^[3] Relationships take time. Most of us who have been given the gift of faith have spent most of our lives working on this relationship through prayer. Like any relationship, this one requires an investment of time.

Individuals who decide to make this retreat must be willing to commit time for daily prayer. How much time will vary. Kevin O’Brien, SJ suggests 30 to 45 minutes a day.^[20] In the 19th annotation, Saint Ignatius prescribes an hour and a half. (SE 019) My experience is that a half hour is the minimum for the experience. Each of us has different time demands; James W. Skehan, SJ ^[21] says “Whatever one’s situation, all will want to make some sacrifice of time ... in order to respond more generously to God’s invitation.”

If possible, you should try to set the same time(s) every day for the Exercises. This becomes a ritual that you will prioritize and allow you to use your time more effectively. Keep in mind the concept of adaptability that Ignatius built into the Spiritual Exercises. Do what you can, not what you cannot. However, it is extremely important to be faithful to spending time in prayer daily during the retreat, even if the time allocated is not consistent.

Sacred space

Along with establishing *when* to pray, one must decide *where* to pray. This is just as important as the time spent in prayer. A proper space for prayer can enhance your prayer. O'Brien gives advice on selecting a place to pray on the [Before you Begin](#) page of the online version of the retreat He says:

Find a regular prayer space: a quiet room in your home with a comfortable chair, a favorite church or chapel, even a secluded place outside. Find a space that is comfortable for prayer, but not so comfortable that it encourages you to sleep. It is often helpful to keep the same prayer space throughout the retreat: such regularity helps you ease into prayer. To remind you that this space is sacred, mark it with a candle, icon, painting, photograph, rosary, or crucifix. If it's helpful and not distracting, light incense or play soft, meditative music.

In this paragraph, he has a link to a wonderful article, [A Place to Pray](#).¹ This might be helpful for some. Find a place that suits you, where you feel most comfortable for your prayer. This is where you and God will meet for the next eight weeks.

3.2 Resources for the Journey

There are several resources needed to get the most out of the Ignatian experience. Some are required, or strongly suggested; others are optional. Optional materials are for each individual to select, if any, items that they find helpful in enriching the experience. One must be selective, however, in selecting materials to incorporate into your prayer or retreat routine. There is a temptation to try as many resources as possible, thinking that it will bring you closer to following the rhythm of the retreat. What often happens is that there are too many optional items in the works and one misses out on the true experience — spending personal time with God. The adage of not seeing the forest because of the trees comes to mind; and “less is more” may be applied.

Required resources

The main content for the retreat is the [An Ignatian Prayer Adventure](#) that is hosted on the IgnatianSpirituality.com website.² This sets the schedule for the eight weeks and provides daily guidance.³

A good version of the Bible is essential. Most retreatant have a favorite edition of the Bible. The only requirement is that it contains both the Old and New Testament, and is not a paraphrased version like the “Good News” Bible. If there are footnotes or annotations, they may be helpful, but the focus is not on Scripture study, but how the sacred words resonate with each person. Any biblical references or quotes in this book are taken from the *The Catholic Study Bible*[24].

The final required item for the retreat is a notebook or some other medium to use as a journal. If one is already keeping a journal, incorporating the notes from the retreat is possible. Consider whether this is a good choice or whether having a separate retreat journal is best. Journaling is not actually required, but strongly suggested by Saint Ignatius and every other director of the Exercises that I have encountered. There is a section ahead that discusses the type of journal entries you might make.

¹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/a-place-to-pray/>.

²<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/an-ignatian-prayer-adventure/>.

³I have taken the liberty of copying most of the text from this website into this book to make it easy to have the material at hand, in one place.

Optional resources

The book that the retreat is based upon, *The Ignatian Adventure* [20], containing the full 32-week retreat content may be useful for some, but is not necessary. I would suggest that, if you are interested in the additional material, that you wait until this retreat is over. I have tried to incorporate some of the extra materials from O'Briens book and other sources into this guide. If you add more, you may become overwhelmed and somewhat lost in the details. The book is available in printed and electronic form from several sources.

Mark Thibodeaux, S. J. wrote a book, *Ascending with Ignatius* [15]. This is a 30-day individual retreat that is like a 19th annotation retreat, but very condensed. He also made the material available in 30 [YouTube videos](#), where he reads the material.

A copy of *The Spiritual Exercises* is not required for those making them. The text is designed for the person directing them. However, sometimes one might be interested in what Ignatius actually says, or how he organizes parts of the material. If there is a desire to look at the actual text of the Exercises, use a translation that is updated for modern readers. Two good ones are the [online translation by Louis Puhl, SJ](#) [11] and the translation by David L. Fleming, SJ [9]. Most of the references and quotations to the Exercises in this book are from the Fleming book. When I cite a specific reference to a specific annotation in the exercises, you can assume that it is from Fleming's translation.

When I first made the Spiritual Exercises, it was directed by James W. Skehan, SJ, we used his book, *Place Me With Your Son* [21]. This was a full 24 week, 19th annotation retreat given at Boston College. Given the length of the retreat, we were able to incorporate additional material and exercises. We had several days when the exercise was a form of insight awareness meditation. The exercises came from the book, *Sadhana, a Way to God: Christian Exercises in Eastern Form* [17] by Anthony de Mello, SJ. De Mello was an Indian Jesuit who became well known for his ability to blend Eastern and Western traditions for spiritual exercises. I found these exercises to be a great way to help me focus in my prayer time. In the short eight weeks that we will spend on this retreat, there are no exercises recommended for insight meditation by Kevin O'Brien. I have added some recommendations with descriptions where it seems appropriate. If these seem helpful, I recommend getting a copy of *Sadhana*.⁴

A last optional resource would be to have a personal spiritual director who you could discuss your progress through the Spiritual Exercises with. This is not required, but recommended. I do not know how available English speaking spiritual directors are in Cuenca, but I suspect there are few. It is possible to obtain a spiritual director with whom you could meet online. One such website, where I found my current spiritual directory, is <https://bit.ly/3PAUns7>. An alternative to a personal spiritual director is to invite a friend or someone who you might want to share the journey with as a "spiritual companion" during the time spent on the retreat. Whether you have a spiritual director or not, the thing to remember is that the Holy Spirit is the perfect director and the purpose of a personal director is to simply clear the way so that the person making the exercise has a direct line to the Holy Spirit's counsel.

3.3 The Daily Prayer Period

There should be at least one prayer period each day. Depending upon the individual circumstances one might choose to spend more time in prayer, but at least one structured prayer period is necessary. Such periods have a well-defined structure.

The material for each week of the retreat ends with additional material. These entries give a fuller view of Ignatian spirituality. While one might use these as aids, and sometimes substitutions for the specified day's material, I **strongly recommend** that you try to ensure that you follow the

⁴There is a copy of *Sadhana* that I found online at a Pepperdine University webpage. I will not put the URL here, since I'm not sure that it does not violate copyright law, but if you search, you may come across the link.

main daily period's material.

Prepare for prayer

Just as one must warm up before any physical exercise, one must warm up for a spiritual exercise. This preparation should never be omitted. It usually takes five minutes or more.

There are two parts for the preparation. The first is to establish an attitude of reverence for this privileged time with God. (SE 046) Ask God to direct your thoughts and words to his praise and service. For example, you might take the initial attitude of someone who is searching to experience God's love in new ways. Suggested attitudes for particular parts of the Exercises are provided in subsequent chapters.

One suggestion that might help in this preparation comes from *The New Spiritual Exercises: In the Spirit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*:

Ignatius recommends that before each spiritual exercise you become consciously aware that you are immersed in the presence of God. Although in fact you cannot escape the presence of God, you can easily "forget" that you are kept alive from moment to moment in that divine presence, the divine milieu. Take a few moments—or as long as you need to realize that you are going to spend time with someone who loves you. This is not about you trying to find God. Ignatius turns that idea around. He says, "I am to imagine how God our Lord is looking in wonder at me" (75). He is suggesting that you are to picture God right here looking at you, as you might look with delight and admiration at your own child. If I knew that God was looking at me with delight and admiration as I enter a period of prayer, I think there would be a smile on my lips and a glow in my heart, realizing that God loves me that much.[19]

After determining your attitude You then decide what grace you want from the prayer period. Ignatius says that it is important to speak out: "There is an importance in my speaking out the area of my need for God's grace according to the time, subject matter, and my own dispositions during the retreat. Perhaps it may also act as a preparation of my inner being for an openness to God's entrance into a particular area of my life." (SE 048)

Many people have difficulty with asking for a specific grace. A fairly easy way to do this is to imagine God asking you "What would you like me to do for you now?" An honest, simple answer is all that is needed. For each week of the retreat, one or more suggestions are provided, but feel free to use different words or ask for something different for you that reflects where you are at that moment.

Do the prayer

O'Brien says this well in the online retreat page, copied here.

Having taken some time to compose yourself and center your mind and heart, engage the material presented for prayer. Ignatius leaves room to adapt the retreat to meet you where you are, emotionally and spiritually, during the retreat. This flexibility is especially important during a retreat in everyday life, when some person, problem, or experience may become the focus of your prayer or when you spend several prayer periods lingering over one meditation or contemplation.

The *prayer* may be praying over Scripture, an application of your imagination, awareness meditation, or some other non-traditional form of prayer. With the focus on your desire for God in your life, all is prayer.

Close the prayer with a prayer of your choice and/or with a colloquy.

Reflect on the prayer

After physical exercise, we do not just stop; we spend time cooling down. For a spiritual exercise this may include reviewing the movements of your spirit during the prayer. These might be feelings of consolation, desolation, boredom, love, and so on. If you were distracted during the prayer, reflecting on the distractions and how they affected you can be revealing. End by thanking God for his favors. If you were distracted or indifferent to the prayer session, ask God for pardon. (SE 077)

Record the key points of your reflection in your journal. Aids to spiritual journaling are in Chapter 4.

3.4 The Examen

The Examen is a prayer that Saint Ignatius said is the most important one of the Exercises. He was known to say that if you do only one prayer during the day, it should be the Examen. This prayer is a way to foster self improvement. However, it is often misunderstood and mistaken for the examination of conscience that one might make before receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation, or before receiving the Eucharist. The Examen is actually a method for *examination of consciousness*.

Praying the Examen is one of the more difficult parts of the Exercises. There are many descriptions of the method; some of them easier and more flexible than others. Ignatius describes the Examen, which he calls the *Particular and Daily Examen* in some detail. (SE 24-31) The language is difficult to get through and it is best to use a more modern description. The following is an excerpt from *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day* by Mark Thibodeaux, SJ[15] This excerpt can be found [on this Loyola Press webpage](https://rb.gy/m690g).⁵

In the Examen, we review our recent past to find God and God's blessings in life. We also look back to find moments in the day when things didn't go so well — when we were hurt by something that happened to us, or when we sinned or made a mistake. We give praise and thanksgiving for the blessed moments. We ask forgiveness and healing for the difficult and painful moments. Having reflected on this past day, we then turn to the day yet to come and ask God to show us the potential challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. We try to anticipate which moments might go one way or the other for us: toward God's plan or away from it. We ask for insight into what graces we might need to live this next day well; patience, wisdom, fortitude, self-knowledge, peace, optimism. We ask God for that grace, and we trust that he wants us to succeed in our day even more than we do.

That's the basic idea behind the Ignatian Examen. St. Ignatius Loyola would say that this should be the most important moment of our day. Why? Because this moment affects every other moment.

Specifically, How Do You Do the Examen?

Ignatius provides a simple five-step routine for our daily Examen, presented here. There are many ways of praying the Examen and incorporating it into your daily routing. Thibodeaux's book offers 30 different ways to pray the Examen. We will spend more time on the Examen as we move through the retreat.

Give thanksgiving.

I begin by giving God thanks for all the things I'm grateful for today. I allow my mind to wander as I reflect on the ways God has blessed me on this particular day. I allow big things and small things to arise—everything from the gift of my faith, to the gift of my marriage, to the easy commute to work today.

⁵<https://rb.gy/m690g>.

Next, I want to look at the moments in my day when I did not act so well. However, before doing so, I ask God to fill me with his Spirit so that the Spirit can lead me through this difficult soul-searching. Otherwise, I'm liable to hide in denial, wallow in self-pity, or seethe in self-loathing.

Review and recognize failures.

I look back at my day and ask the Lord to point out to me the moments when I have failed in big ways or small. I take a sobering look at the mistakes I've made this day.

Ask for forgiveness and healing.

If I have sinned, I ask God to forgive me and set me straight again. If I have not sinned but simply made a mistake, I ask for healing of any harm that might have been done. I ask for help to get over it and move on. I also ask for wisdom to discern how I might better handle such tricky moments in the future.

Pray about the next day.

I ask God to show me how tomorrow might go. I imagine the things I'll be doing, the people I'll see, and the decisions I'll be mulling over. I ask for help with any moments I foresee that might be difficult. I especially ask for help in moments when I might be tempted to fail in the way I did today.

To help me remember the five steps, I like to use a 5-Rs mnemonic:

- Relish the moments that went well and all of the gifts I have today.
- Request the Spirit to lead me through my review of the day.
- Review the day.
- Repent of any mistakes or failures.
- Resolve, in concrete ways, to live tomorrow well.

3.5 Discernment of Spirits

Discernment of spirits is a venerable phrase in the Christian spiritual tradition. From the action of good or evil spirits upon one, result “movements of one’s heart or spirit”, “motions affecting one’s interior life”, “a certain impetus in one’s life”, “a feeling for or against some course of action”, and so on. Since such discernment is at the heart of Ignatian spirituality, it will be a recurring consideration throughout the several phases of the Exercises. Because of their importance to the process of discernment of spirits, special mention is made of spiritual consolation and of spiritual desolation.[21]

A good introduction to discernment of spirits is the following, taken from *Introduction to Discernment of Spirits* from the IgnatianSpirituality.com website.⁶ The same website has a page of resources that may be helpful on the topic of discernment of spirits.⁷

⁶<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/introduction-to-discernment-of-spirits/>.

⁷<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/>.

Introduction to Discernment of Spirits

St. Ignatius of Loyola began to learn about the discernment of spirits while convalescing from serious battle injuries. He noticed different interior movements as he imagined his future. In his autobiography, Ignatius writes (in the third person):

He did not consider nor did he stop to examine this difference until one day his eyes were partially opened and he began to wonder at this difference and to reflect upon it. From experience he knew that some thoughts left him sad while others made him happy, and little by little he came to perceive the different spirits that were moving him; one coming from the devil, the other coming from God (Autobiography, no. 8).

Good and Evil Spirits

Ignatius believed that these interior movements were caused by “good spirits” and “evil spirits.” We want to follow the action of a good spirit and reject the action of an evil spirit. Discernment of spirits is a way to understand God’s will or desire for us in our life.

Talk of good and evil spirits may seem foreign to us. Psychology gives us other names for what Ignatius called good and evil spirits. Yet Ignatius’s language is useful because it recognizes the reality of evil. Evil is both greater than we are and part of who we are. Our hearts are divided between good and evil impulses. To call these “spirits” simply recognizes the spiritual dimension of this inner struggle.

Consolation and Desolation

The feelings stirred up by good and evil spirits are called “consolation” and “desolation” in the language of Ignatian spirituality.

Spiritual consolation is an experience of being so on fire with God’s love that we feel impelled to praise, love, and serve God and help others as best as we can. Spiritual consolation encourages and facilitates a deep sense of gratitude for God’s faithfulness, mercy, and companionship in our life. In consolation, we feel more alive and connected to others.

Spiritual desolation, in contrast, is an experience of the soul in heavy darkness or turmoil. We are assaulted by all sorts of doubts, bombarded by temptations, and mired in self-preoccupations. We are excessively restless and anxious and feel cut off from others. Such feelings, in Ignatius’s words, “move one toward lack of faith and leave one without hope and without love.”

The key question in interpreting consolation and desolation is: where is the movement coming from and where is it leading me? Spiritual consolation does not always mean happiness. Spiritual desolation does not always mean sadness. Sometimes an experience of sadness is a moment of conversion and intimacy with God. Times of human suffering can be moments of great grace. Similarly, peace or happiness can be illusory if these feelings are helping us avoid changes we need to make.

Rules for Discernment

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius provides various rules for the discernment of spirits (Spiritual Exercises, 313-336). Good and evil spirits operate according to the spiritual condition of the individual.

For people who have closed themselves off from God’s grace, the good spirit disturbs and shakes up. It stirs feelings of remorse and discontent. The purpose is to make the person unhappy with a sinful way of life. On the other hand, the evil spirit wants such people to continue in their confusion and darkness. So the evil spirit tries to make them complacent, content, and satisfied with their distractions and pleasures.

For people who are trying to live a life pleasing to God, the good spirit strengthens, encourages, consoles, removes obstacles, and gives peace. The evil spirit tries to derail them by stirring up anxiety, false sadness, needless confusion, frustration, and other obstacles.

Discernment of spirits is a challenging task. It requires maturity, inner quiet, and an ability to reflect on one's interior life. Discernment takes practice. It is something of an art. Ignatius Loyola's rules for discernment provide a framework, not a program. We must be ready to improvise and adjust because God works in each of us so uniquely. That is why most counselors recommend undertaking discernment of spirits with the assistance of a spiritual director.



The Eight Weeks

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Introduction

This part of the book contains eight chapters, one for each week of the retreat. Each chapter contains much of the text from the *Ignatian Prayer Adventure* web pages. I have added material that contains alternative recommendations for prayer, meditations, readings at the end of each week. There is also advice and suggestions, from the Spiritual Exercises and other sources, The Exercises are for you and are meant to be tailored as necessary. I suggest the following approach:

- At the start of each week, scan the chapter for the week.
- For each day, read the material for that day. Most of the daily material is taken from *Ignatian Prayer Adventure*. If you find an attraction to the daily meditation or exercise, use it.
- If you find that the daily meditation or reading leaves you wanting something different, then you might look at some of the suggested additional material that is located at the end of the chapter for that week.
- If you still find that nothing speaks to you, try repeating a previous meditation from the current week. Repetition is an important part of the full Spiritual Exercises.

Preliminary helps for the retreatant

In the first 20 annotations of the Exercises, Ignatius provides some tips for the person making the Exercises. A short summary of key ones follows; see [11] if you want the actual text.

- In the Spiritual Exercises we find ourselves sometimes thinking and reasoning in our head. At other times we experience more the responses of our heart. Remember that we are always in the context of prayer, regardless of whether it is meditative or affective (contemplative), and should always try to maintain a spirit of deep reverence before God. (SE 003)
- The most important quality in the person who enters the Exercises is openness and generosity. Put yourself at the disposal of God so that in all ways you seek only to respond to that love which created you and wraps you with total care and concern. (SE 005)
- Do not give into the temptation to look ahead at what may be coming in later parts of the Exercises. At each stage of the retreat make your whole focus and response to God from what is found in the matter at hand. (SE 011)
- When you find joy in prayer, you may be tempted to prolong the prayer period. When you find prayer dry and a burden, you may also be tempted to shorten the prayer period. Avoid these temptations and stick to the time you have allocated (see 3.1). (SE 013)

There is also one more piece of advice that I believe is crucial. O'Brien offers this advice in the introduction to the first week of the 32-week retreat:

I suggest prayer points for each day of the week. These are only suggestions; remember that adaptability is a hallmark of the Spiritual Exercises. Do not feel that you must run through the Scripture passages as if you were completing homework. You may choose to stay with one or two passages all week. Follow the lead of the Spirit and the counsel of your spiritual guide if you have one.[20]

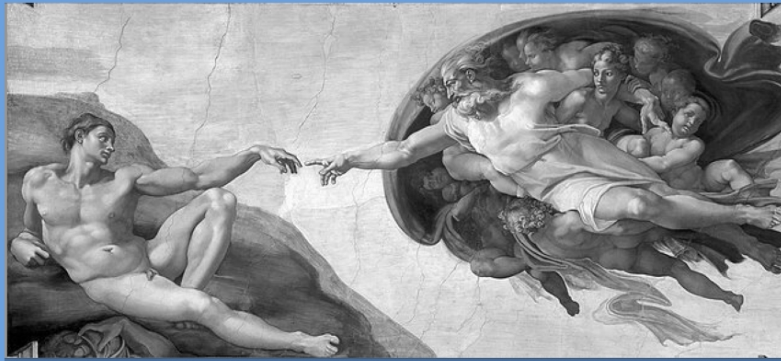
Presupposition

The last annotation in the Exercises, before beginning with the Principle and Foundation is called the *Presupposition*. Ignatius wrote it as advice to both the retreatant and the director. In a group retreat, it offers counsel on how to interact with the rest of the group, including the director. The contemporary reading for the Presupposition from Fleming's book follows:

For a good relationship to develop between the retreatant and the director and for the continual progress of the retreat, a mutual respect is very necessary. This may be especially true in areas of scriptural and theological presentation. A favorable interpretation by the director or by the retreatant should always be given to the other's statement. If misinterpretation seems possible, it should be cleared up with Christian understanding. So, too, if actual error seems to be held, the best possible interpretation should be presented so that a more correct understanding might develop.^[9]

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O Good Jesus, hear me.
Within your wounds hide me.
Permit me not to be separated from you.
From the wicked foe, defend me.
At the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you
That with your saints I may praise you
For ever and ever. Amen.



4. Week 1: Love, Freedom, and Purpose

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

—Thomas Merton

We begin our An Ignatian Prayer Adventure by reflecting on God's unconditional love for each of us. Then Days 3 and 4 introduce a theme that will recur often: the importance of achieving spiritual freedom. The week ends with three days of reflection on the First Principle and Foundation, St. Ignatius's meditation on the purpose of life. (Ignatian Prayer Adventure Week 1)

Since this is the first week of our adventure, there are several concepts that you may not be familiar with. The *Additional Materials for Week 1* (Sec. 4.8) is fairly long and has aids that may help you.

Each day, begin your prayer period with a prayer. O'Brien suggests the Anima Christi. Feel free to use any prayer, or verse, that reminds you of the great love of God and the gift of Jesus as our savior.

4.1 Day 1: God's Unconditional Love

Establish your attitude, or setting.¹

My attitude

We begin the retreat by reflecting on God's faithful, unconditional love for each of us. We consider who we are most fundamentally—or rather, Whose we are. Each one of us is God's beloved son or daughter: this is the core of our identity.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: to be more aware of how God is near; to trust in God's personal care and love for me.

Reading

Isaiah 43:1-7

Pray slowly over the verses. What words or images move you? Consider: Who is God for me? How does God see me?

Reflection

Prayer has far more to do with what God wants to do in us than with our trying to “reach” or “realize,” still less “entertain,” God in prayer. This truth eliminates anxiety and concern as to the success or non-success of our prayer, for we can be quite certain that, if we want to pray and give the time to prayer, God is always successful and that is what matters. . . . What we think of as our search for God is, in reality, a response to the divine Lover drawing us to himself. There is never a moment when divine Love is not at work. . . . This work is nothing other than a giving of the divine Self in love. The logical consequence for us must surely be that our part is to let ourselves be loved, let ourselves be given to, let ourselves be worked upon by this great God and made capable of total union with Him.

—Ruth Burrows, *Essence of Prayer*

¹Often the same attitude is used for the week in a longer retreat. However, for this eight-week retreat, the attitude may change from day to day.

4.2 Day 2: God's Love for Me

My attitude

We begin the retreat by reflecting on God's faithful, unconditional love for each of us. We consider who we are most fundamentally—or rather, Whose we are. Each one of us is God's beloved son or daughter: this is the core of our identity.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: to be more aware of how God is near; to trust in God's personal care and love for me.

Reading

Psalm 139:1-18

Consider: How does God gaze upon me? How open am I to receiving this intimacy?

Reflection

As we enter into the Spiritual Exercises, we retreatants find ourselves sometimes doing much thinking and reasoning things out. At other times, we experience far more the response of our hearts, with little or nothing for the head to be concerned about. It is good to remember that we are always in the context of prayer, whether the prayer is more meditative or affective. We should always try to maintain a spirit of deep reverence before God, especially when our affections are involved.

4.3 Day 3: Spiritual Freedom

My attitude

Spiritual freedom is mine when I am seized so completely by the love of God that all the desires of my heart and all the actions, affections, thoughts and decisions which flow from them are directed to God, my Father, and his service and praise. My attitude is that of Samuel, “Here I am Lord, send me.”^[21]

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: to grow in interior freedom; to become more aware of disordered attachments that get in the way of loving God, others, or myself.

Reading

Luke 1:26-38

Pray over the story of the Annunciation and marvel at Mary’s freedom to say, “Yes!” Notice how she deals with her fears and keeps her focus on God. Pray over the words of the Gospel slowly, meditatively, or use your imagination to place yourself in the scene.

It may be helpful to read *Ignatian Contemplation: Imaginative Prayer* in the additional materials (Sec. 4.8) for this week.

Reflection

O'Brien points to a web page with an excerpt from *Putting on the Heart of Christ: How the Spiritual Exercises Invite Us to a Virtuous Life*. The text of that excerpt follows:

Mary at her Annunciation models faith for us. She shows us that faith is more than assent, but is also trust, commitment, obedience, and submission. Mary trusted in God's promises, was obedient to God's word of invitation in her life, surrendered to the mystery before her, and committed herself to be part of God's plan of salvation in Jesus.

At the same time, we can easily romanticize the Gospel scene—Mary is at prayer, an angel appears, and she says a faith-filled yes. The Scripture also tells us that she was deeply troubled and wondered what the angel's greeting meant. Certainly the angel's explanation only left her with more questions and concerns. She did not say yes because she fully understood or had all her questions answered. She said yes in faith and trust. We do Mary a disservice to think she had some infused knowledge that dispelled all her doubts. She was a young woman of extraordinary faith. The "yes" at the Annunciation was not the first "yes" in her life nor would it be the last.

The really significant yeses in our lives also demand a great deal of trust and openness. We cannot know all the implications of them. We respond to the gift of God's call in our lives. We say yes in hope and trust. Like Mary, we say "yes" to something being born in us that must grow and mature and take a shape we cannot predict. We are called to that depth of faith as we contemplate the story of the Annunciation and all the stories of the life of Jesus in the rest of the [Spiritual] Exercises. We are called to trust, obedience, surrender, and commitment in our own lives. We will hear an invitation to share in the work of Jesus and respond and live in faith.

Living in faith demands surrender to the stories of God and Jesus recorded in the Scriptures. Christian faith especially demands that we let the stories of Jesus shape our minds and hearts. Paul Wadell says that to live in faith means that we "appropriate these stories, striving to embody their viewpoints, values, and vision as our own. To assent to the truths of faith portrayed in the Scripture is to allow them to become the interpretative framework for our world."

Wadell feels we need these narratives "to mold and shape us, especially in the attitudes and virtues of Jesus." Ignatian imaginative prayer on the Gospel stories is a powerful way to grow in faith by putting on the heart of Christ. As Jesus trusted, obeyed, surrendered, and committed his life to the Father, we are to respond in the same way. All the contemplations on the Gospels throughout the Exercises foster growth in the virtue of faith that empowers us to trust God and commit ourselves to service.

—Gerald M. Fagin SJ [8]

4.4 Day 4: Interior Freedom

My attitude

Spiritual freedom is mine when I am seized so completely by the love of God that all the desires of my heart and all the actions, affections, thoughts and decisions which flow from them are directed to God, my Father, and his service and praise. My attitude is that of Samuel, “Here I am Lord, send me.”[21]

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: to grow in interior freedom; to become more aware of disordered attachments that get in the way of loving God, others, or myself.

Reading

Philippians 3:7-16.

Pray for St. Paul’s single-minded and single-hearted focus on Christ. Ask: When have I experienced or witnessed such focus, such freedom in my life? We always need to pray for more spiritual freedom; we cannot become free on our own.

Reflection

O’Brien points to a video on [Interior Freedom](#).² If you do not have access to this, consider the following from *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life* (p. 57).

Spiritual freedom is an interior freedom, a freedom of the mind and heart. People who are spiritually free know who they are—with all of their gifts and limitations—and are comfortable with who they are. They are able to discern God’s presence; find meaning in their lives, and make choices that flow from who they are, whatever the circumstance. In his oft-quoted study of the Exercises, *Spiritual Freedom*, John J. English, SJ, describes this freedom as an “acceptance of oneself as historically coming from God, going to God, and being with God.”[20]

²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiVJeVXUPeI>.

4.5 Day 5: The Principle and Foundation

We begin three days of prayer and reflection on the Principle and Foundation. (SE 023)

Holy desires are at the core of the first key meditation of the Exercises, the Principle and Foundation. It reads like a mission statement for the human person: “I am created to praise, love, and serve God.” Of course, this vocation is specified in each unique human life. When we live out of this vocation, we are truly happy and fulfilled. When we allow disordered loves and self-preoccupations to clutter our lives, we find ourselves out of balance, unhappy, and discontented.

My attitude

Spiritual freedom is mine when I am seized so completely by the love of God that all the desires of my heart and all the actions, affections, thoughts and decisions which flow from them are directed to God, my Father, and his service and praise. My attitude is that of Samuel, “Here I am Lord, send me.”[21]

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: a deepening awareness of my fundamental vocation to praise, love, and serve God and others; a desire for greater indifference in my life; a willingness to embrace who I am before our loving God.

The grace we seek is indifference. In Ignatian vocabulary, this term does not mean an unfeeling lack of concern. Instead, indifference means that we hold all of God’s gifts reverently, gratefully, but also lightly, embracing them or letting them go, all depending on how they help us fulfill our vocation to love in everyday, concrete details.

Reading

Read the traditional translation of the Principle and Foundation prayerfully.

Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save their souls.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created.

From this it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it.

To attain this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our free will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on our own part we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so in all other matters.

Rather, we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created.[11]

Ask: How do I concretely praise, love, and serve God? What activities, people, or material things help me achieve this end?

Reflection

It is true to say that for me sanctity consists in being myself and for you sanctity consists in being your self and that, in the last analysis, your sanctity will never be mine and mine will never be yours, except in the communism of charity and grace.

For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.

—Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

4.6 Day 6: The Purpose of My Life

Indifference is another way of describing spiritual freedom. It is a stance of openness to God: we look for God in any person, any situation, and any moment. Indifference means that we are free to love and serve as God desires. Spiritual freedom or indifference is a gift from God; we can't make it happen. But we can, over time, foster indifference by developing good habits of thinking, choosing, and acting.

Consider it an invitation for you to experience more deeply how intimately related you are to God and to all of God's creation (including persons, other creatures, and the natural world). In so doing, certain fundamental truths about our existence come alive: God creates me out of love, in a particular time and place, with particular talents and temperaments, strengths and limitations. God continues to create and to reveal who God is to me and who I am before God. God invites me to partner with God to build a more just and gentle world. I learn that the best way to praise God is to be who God made me to be and to honor the uniqueness of other creatures.

My attitude

Spiritual freedom is mine when I am seized so completely by the love of God that all the desires of my heart and all the actions, affections, thoughts and decisions which flow from them are directed to God, my Father, and his service and praise. My attitude is that of Samuel, "Here I am Lord, send me."^[21]

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: a deepening awareness of my fundamental vocation to praise, love, and serve God and others; a desire for greater indifference in my life; a willingness to embrace who I am before our loving God.

Reading

Read the contemporary translation of the Principle and Foundation prayerfully. The Fleming translation is:

God freely created us so that we might know, love, and serve him in this life and be happy with him forever. God's purpose in creating us is to draw forth from us a response of love and service here on earth, so that we may attain our goal of everlasting happiness with him in heaven.

All the things in this world are gifts of God, created for us, to be the means by which we can come to know him better, love him more surely, and serve him more faithfully.

As a result, we ought to appreciate and use these gifts of God insofar as they help us toward our goal of loving service and union with God. But insofar as any created things hinder our progress toward our goal, we ought to let them go.

In everyday life, then, we should keep ourselves indifferent or undecided in the face of all created gifts when we have an option and we do not have the clarity of what would be a better choice. We ought not to be led on by our natural likes and dislikes even in matters such as health or sickness, wealth or poverty, between living in the east or in the west, becoming an accountant or a lawyer.

Rather, our only desire and our one choice should be that option which better leads us to the goal for which God created us.^[9]

Ask: How have I been a "good steward" of the gifts God has given me, including created things, my talents, and my abilities? From my own experience, what gets in the way of my praising, loving, and serving God? How do the following influence my choices and actions: titles, honors, possessions, career, opinion of others, lifestyle? Be as concrete as possible.

Reflection

Read the following article from *Inner Compass*, written by Margaret Silf.³

Ignatius urges us to seek the freedom of detachment or indifference. Neither of these words carries weight in today's language or culture. Both sound cold and uncaring, which is far from the spirit in which Ignatius used them. A better word might be balance.

In his First Principle and Foundation, Ignatius talks about "making use of those things that help to bring us closer to God and leaving aside those things that don't."

At first this notion seemed rather exploitative to me, as if the whole of creation were only there for us to select from it the bits that seem to serve our purpose. It didn't come to life for me until one day when I was sitting on a bench in a quiet, sunny courtyard, looking at a fuchsia bush. It was late August, and the bees were constantly visiting the fuchsia. They would land very gently on those flowers that were fully open to receive them. They made no attempt to enter a closed flower or to force the petals in any way. When they found an open flower they crept into its depths to extract the nectar. In doing so, of course, they also carried the pollen from flower to flower, bush to bush, thus ensuring further fruitfulness.

As I watched them, I realized that although the bees were choosing the fuchsia flowers and disregarding other plants growing in the courtyard, other insects were seeking their nourishment from different sources. In choosing what was exactly right for them, they were not only receiving their own nourishment but were also playing an essential role in the fruitfulness of their environment. And in choosing one plant rather than another, they were in no way rejecting or denigrating the others. The secret of this harmonious, cooperative life seemed to lie in each creature's being true to its own essential nature. Each gained what it needed for survival and growth from the source that was right for it, and it did so without harm either to itself or to the flowers. In fact, after each encounter, both insect and flower were left in a richer state than before: the insect had been nourished and the flower had been pollinated.

I found this picture to be a very vivid illustration of what it might mean to "make use of what leads to life" and to leave aside what, for each individual, does not lead to life. It was a truly creative kind of "detachment." It helped me to understand what God might be calling us to when he asks us to let go of our attachments. The bees, I noticed, made no attempt to "possess" the flowers, nor did the flowers attempt to trap and hold the bees. This was a free interchange, perfectly fulfilling the needs of the bees, the fuchsia, and the wider circle of creation around them.

³<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/the-meaning-of-detachment/>

4.7 Day 7: A Work in Progress

The past couple of days have been repetitive. Repetition is fundamental to the Spiritual Exercises. This last day of the first week is somewhat repetitive, but I have tweaked this a little bit by using an attitude and grace sought from *Place Me With Your Son*.^[21] The reading is from An Ignatian Prayer Adventure.

My attitude

Spiritual freedom is mine when I am seized so completely by the love of God that all the desires of my heart and all the actions, affections, thoughts and decisions which flow from them are directed to God, my Father, and his service and praise. My attitude is that of Samuel, "Here I am Lord, send me.

The grace I seek

I beseech you, Lord, to direct all my actions by your inspiration, to carry them on by your gracious help, that every prayer and work of mine may always begin from you and through you be happily ended.

Reading

Exodus 3:1-15.

Consider how God calls Moses to partner with God in the work of liberation: "I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." Reflect on your own life: How have I partnered with God to help people, to build a more just and gentle world, to care for creation?

Reflection

The following is from 3 minute retreat web page on the Loyola Press website.⁴

A Work in Progress

God has begun a work in me, I'm told.

I want to believe, but I hope God is better about finishing what he starts than I am. I've got that half-read novel lying around somewhere, and then there's that basket of laundry I've been meaning to fold.

Or for that matter, that online retreat I started...

Actually, what I really need to believe—and on my best days, what I do believe—is that God is not just better at finishing things, but better at beginning them. I may struggle to get up in the morning and find time to pray, but it's not because God is procrastinating about deciding to show up in my life.

God's work in me is in progress, and that calls for patience. But the work is in progress because God has already begun it—and that's reason for hope.

—Sam Sawyer, SJ

⁴<https://www.loyolapress.com/retreats/3minuteretreat-a-work-in-progress/>

4.8 Additional Material for Week 1

This section contains additional reading suggestions and resources that may be appropriate alternative additions, or help for week 1 of the retreat.

Scripture Readings

During the first phase of the Exercises, Skeehan says *“I suggest that during these weeks you meditate on Psalms 103, 104, and 105 and any others, that may provide a pattern for your prayer to God in praise and thanksgiving for all that he has done. For instance, look at the flowers, the hills, trees, sunlight, rain. Smell them, feel them, hear them, and then let the response well up in your heart. In other words I encourage you to pray spontaneously, to enjoy this kind of prayer, and to find your own way and content. If the attached materials are helpful, use them; but if the Lord moves you in directions other than in making use of these pages, follow the Lord and the Spirit.”*[21]

The following Scripture passages may be appropriate for you in this first week.

- Psalm 8
- Psalm 61: 1-8
- Isaiah 6: 1-8
- Isaiah 35: 1-13
- Isaiah 54: 9-10
- Isaiah 55
- Jeremiah 1: 4-10
- Luke 12: 2-34

Prayers, Poems, and Other Resources

I have tried to keep the typesetting of poems and some other meditations the same as in the original sources where I found them.

Prayer of St. Anselm

Teach me to seek you,
and reveal yourself to me as I seek;
for unless you instruct me
I cannot seek you,
and unless you reveal yourself
I cannot find you,
Let me seek you in desiring you;
let me desire you in seeking you,
Let me find you in loving you;
let me love you in finding you.

Prayer of St. Francis Xavier

I love thee, God, I love thee —
Not out of hope for heaven for me
Nor fearing not to love and be
In the everlasting burning.
Thou, my Jesus, after me
Didst reach thine arms out dying,
For my sake sufferedst nails and lance,
Mocked and marred countenance,
Sorrows passing number,
Sweat and care and cumber,
Yea and death, and this for me,
And thou couldst see me sinning:
Then I, why should not I love thee,
Jesu so much in love with me?
Not for heaven's sake, not to be
Out of hell by loving thee;
Not for any gains I see;
But just the way that thou didst me
I do love and will love thee.
What must I love thee, Lord, for then?
For being my king and God. Amen.

Mismatched Newlyweds

Like
A pair
Of mismatched newlyweds,
One of whom still feels very insecure,
I keep turning to God
Saying,
“Kiss
Me.”

—Hafiz[[10](#)]

God Would Kneel Down

I think God might be a little prejudiced.
For once He asked me to join Him on a walk
 through this world,
and we gazed into every heart on this earth,
and I noticed He lingered a bit longer
 before any face that was
 weeping,
and before any eyes that were
 laughing.
And sometimes when we passed
 a soul in worship
 God too would kneel
 down.
I have come to learn: God
 adores His
creation.

—Saint Francis of Assisi[[13](#)]

God's Admiration

God's admiration for us is infinitely greater
than anything we can conjure up
for Him.

—Saint Francis of Assisi[[13](#)]

Dear God

Dear God, please reveal to us
 your sublime
 beauty
that is everywhere, everywhere, everywhere,
so that we will never again
 feel frightened,
 my divine love, my love,
 please let us touch
your face

—Saint Francis of Assisi[[13](#)]

Ignatian Contemplation: Imaginative Prayer⁵

Ignatius was convinced that God can speak to us as surely through our imagination as through our thoughts and memories. In the Ignatian tradition, praying with the imagination is called contemplation. In the Exercises, contemplation is a very active way of praying that engages the mind and heart and stirs up thoughts and emotions. (Note that in other spiritual traditions, contemplation has quite a different meaning: it refers to a way of praying that frees the mind of all thoughts and images.)

Ignatian contemplation is suited especially for the Gospels. In the Second Week of the Exercises, we accompany Jesus through his life by imagining scenes from the Gospel stories. Let the events of Jesus' life be present to you right now. Visualize the event as if you were making a movie. Pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event. Lose yourself in the story; don't worry if your imagination is running too wild. At some point, place yourself in the scene.

Contemplating a Gospel scene is not simply remembering it or going back in time. Through the act of contemplation, the Holy Spirit makes present a mystery of Jesus' life in a way that is meaningful for you now. Use your imagination to dig deeper into the story so that God may communicate with you in a personal, evocative way.

We might initially worry about going beyond the text of the Gospel. If you have offered your time of prayer to God, then begin by trusting that God is communicating with you. If you wonder if your imagination is going "too far," then do some discernment with how you are praying. Where did your imagining lead you: Closer to God or farther away? Is your imagining bringing you consolation or desolation?

Some people find imaginative prayer difficult. They may not be able to picture the scene easily, yet they may have some intuition or gut reaction to the story. Or they may hear or feel the story more than visualize it. In a spirit of generosity, pray as you are able; don't try to force it. Rest assured that God will speak to you, whether through your memory, understanding, intellect, emotions, or imagination.

Excerpt from *The Ignatian Adventure* by Kevin O'Brien, SJ.[20]

Ignatian contemplation is also called *Application of the Senses*. Three online articles that you might find helpful are

- [Application of the Senses](#) by Joseph Tetlow., SJ,⁶
- [Ignatian Contemplation](#) by Jim Manney.⁷
- [What is Ignatian Contemplation? A Brief Guide](#)⁸

⁵<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/ignatian-contemplation-imaginative-prayer/>

⁶<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/application-of-the-senses/>.

⁷<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-contemplation/>.

⁸<https://focusequip.org/what-is-ignatian-contemplation-a-brief-guide/>.

Distractions in Prayer⁹

It's natural to become distracted during prayer sometimes. If you can, simply acknowledge the distracting thought and let it go. Sometimes, however, what at first seems like a distraction offers an opportunity for a graced encounter with God. Thus, if the distracting thought continues, then carefully discern whether it's really a distraction or something you need to pray about.

In the course of a retreat in daily life, things happen at home, at work, or in relationships that beg for prayerful reflection. We should not hesitate to pray over the "scripture of our lives" if we think that God is trying to get our attention through what we initially thought was a distraction.

In contrast, some thoughts are really unnecessary preoccupations; we can tend to them later. Review the suggestions for preparing for and structuring your prayer time. Following these long-tested counsels can help focus your prayer. If distractions persist, talk with a spiritual director or guide about them. If you tend to fall asleep when you pray, adjust your posture or time of prayer.

Sometimes it can seem that nothing is happening, but deep down, God might be stirring up something—we just haven't realized it yet. As you grow in the habit of prayer, avoid the temptation to judge or rate your prayer: "'Today was good prayer; yesterday was just OK.'" (Imagine rating each time you spent with a friend or loved one!) God can put anything to good use, even distractions and preoccupations.

In the end, heed the encouragement of St. Francis de Sales and others after him: If all you do is return to God's presence after distraction, then this is very good prayer. Your persistence shows how much you want to be with God.

Excerpt from *The Ignatian Adventure* by Kevin O'Brien, SJ[20]

⁹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/distractions-in-prayer/>

Images of God¹⁰

Fr. William A. Barry, SJ, a renowned spiritual director and scholar of the Spiritual Exercises, offers a very helpful, concise definition of prayer: “prayer is a conscious, personal relationship with God.” He proposes that we can learn about our relationship with God by considering our relationships with other people. In his book, *A Friendship Like No Other*, Fr. Barry refines his long-standing definition of prayer: “The best analogy for the relationship God wants with us is friendship. God desires humans into existence for the sake of friendship.”

Barry’s image of God’s friendship may be novel to some, particularly those who wrestle with fearing God. We all have various images of God floating around in our heads. For example, because of our childhood experiences, we may see God as a kindly yet distant grandfather figure or as an accountant of good and bad deeds. Scripture gives us an assortment of images, including God as a nurturing mother; as a merciful Father; as a judge; as a benevolent Creator; as the Spirit; and of course, as Jesus Christ.

As we get older, our images of God evolve. You may encounter new images of God as you pray the Exercises. We need to let go of images that get in the way of a grown-up relationship with God, who is both far beyond us, yet so close to us.

No image fully captures who God is. We naturally try to put our experience of God into words, but all words will be inadequate because we are dealing with God, who is Ultimate Mystery. We must be careful not to turn our images of God into idols. Instead, we let God reveal Godself to us, gently and naturally.

If you experience God as mostly removed from your life, or if you commonly have feelings of fear when approaching God, then you may want to take extra time with [the] introductory days of the Exercises, praying your way to a more trusting experience of God. The writer of the first letter of John assures us, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (4:18). Pray to experience such consoling love of God, who deeply desires for us to experience the joy of our creation.

Excerpt from *The Ignatian Adventure* by Kevin O’Brien, SJ[20]

¹⁰<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/images-of-god/>

Review Prayer by Keeping a Journal¹¹

Ignatius advises that we reflect on our experience of prayer (SE 077). Keeping a journal is most helpful during a retreat. This exercise can be challenging because we are trying to put into words our encounter with God, who is Holy Mystery. Although it is challenging, trying to articulate such sublime experiences can help us discern how God is meeting us or leading us in our prayer. . . The journal is for your eyes only. When the retreat concludes, the journal becomes a rich spiritual treasure to which you can return months or even years after the retreat.

The purpose of journaling is not to replay your time of prayer minute by minute. Instead, after your prayer period concludes, consider the following:

- What were the significant interior movements (that is, feelings, reactions, intuitions, desires, emotions, thoughts, or insights)?
- What was the prevailing mood of my prayer: peace, agitation, excitement, boredom, confusion, calm?
- Was my prayer more about the head or the heart, or about both?
- What word, phrase, image, or memory meant most to me during prayer?
- Is there some unfinished business that I think God is calling me to return to during another time of prayer?
- Is there something happening in my life that is becoming part of my prayer? Do I feel moved to do something concrete in my life?
- Am I making the necessary preparations for my prayer? Is there anything I am doing or not doing that is getting in the way of my listening to God?

The review of prayer is not homework; do not feel bound to answer each of these questions every time you journal. Instead, consider journaling as another way of praying, of going deeper to sift through the graces. Write in a style that is comfortable for you. In your journaling, feel free to write directly to God the Father or to Jesus, as if you were writing a letter or an e-mail.

Excerpt from *The Ignatian Adventure* by Kevin O'Brien, SJ[20]

¹¹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/review-prayer-by-keeping-a-journal/>

Awareness Meditation and Its Relation to Ignatian Prayer

Skehan's *Place Me With Your Son* adds material about awareness meditation from the eastern traditions and how it can enhance the Ignatian prayer experience. I remember Fr. Jim talking about his visits to the Insight Meditation Society retreat center in Barre, MA for weekend meditations. He clearly believed that we can gain much from incorporating different traditions into our prayer. The following excerpt is from the book; after this is an exercise from the first week of the book, based upon DeMello's *Sadhana, a Way to God: Christian Exercises in Eastern Form*

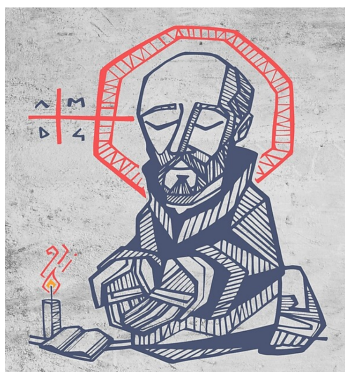
Eastern awareness meditation or "centering" forms of prayer, may differ from the Ignatian types discussed above, but I believe that awareness discipline is not only basic to, but presupposed in the Ignatian method. Additionally I believe that it is an important path to contemplation as defined above. Contemplation may be regarded as communication with God that makes a minimal use of words, images, and concepts or dispenses with them altogether. This is the sort of prayer that John of the Cross speaks of in his writing about the dark night of the soul or the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* explains in his admirable book.

Mystics have told us that, in addition to the mind and the heart with which we ordinarily communicate with God, we are all endowed with a mystical mind and a mystical heart together a faculty which makes it possible for us to know God directly, to grasp and intuit him in his very being, though in a dark manner, apart from thoughts, concepts, and images. In most of us this "Heart" lies deep asleep and undeveloped. If it were to be awakened it would be constantly straining toward God and, given a chance, would draw our whole being toward him. But for this, it needs to be developed, it needs to have the dross that surrounds it removed so that it can be attracted toward the "Eternal Magnet."

Notice how sharp is the hearing and the sense of touch of the blind person. Having lost the faculty of seeing, such a person has been forced to develop other faculties of perception. Something similar happens in the mystical world. If we could go mentally blind, so to speak, or if we could blindfold our mind while we are communicating with God, we would be forced to develop some other faculty for communicating with him that faculty which, according to a number of mystics, is already straining to move out to him anyway if it were given a chance to develop the heart.

If you would communicate with God through this heart that the mystics speak of, you must first silence the mind. Awareness meditations, such as those in *Sadhana*, are an excellent way to attain to this silence of spirit. Even in your prayer time try gently to reduce the amount of thinking that you do and pray more with the heart. Saint Teresa of Avila used to say, "The important thing is not to think much but to love much." So do a lot of loving during your time of prayer. And God will guide you even though it be through a period of trial and error.

–Place Me With Your Son, p,10 [21]



To learn to meditate we must learn to listen to the silent voice of the great teacher whom St. Augustine called “the Master Within.” If you listen to his voice you will learn to pray. Our Judaeo-Christian tradition offers many helps to meditation and we will, of course, make use of these. But the other spiritual traditions provide us with a practices that can facilitate and enrich our Christian meditation practice. Awareness meditation is an important practice that has profound implications for assisting our Christian prayer and for improving many aspects of everyday life as well.

Awareness meditation is a powerful means for cultivating the emotional silence necessary for satisfactory prayer. In and of itself it is not necessarily prayer, but there can be little sustained prayerfulness and actual prayer without awareness or mindfulness. Let us now begin the practice of awareness meditation and you will quickly see what I mean. Sustained practice of awareness meditation from time to time will improve the quality of your Christian meditation.

Begin this first awareness meditation by taking a comfortable posture that you can maintain without moving for the period indicated, or at least without a conscious decision to do so. This may require a bit of discipline at first, but you will come to appreciate its value as time goes on.

1. While sitting still in as deep a silence as possible for ten minutes, make your breathing in and then out the focus of your attention throughout the period, noting whether it is shallow or deep, rapid or slow, soundless or wheezing, and any other features that you become aware of. As the period progresses, does your breathing slow down perceptibly? Don’t try to control your breathing this is an awareness exercise meant only to observe what happens not to control the results.
2. If your thoughts wander, take note of the fact and gently guide your wandering attention back to the breathing as often as necessary.
3. If you had some success in attaining interior silence such that you could focus for most of the period on the breathing, try to describe the qualities of that silence. Repeat this exercise two or three times in a row from time to time and you will become aware of an improvement in your ability to focus your mind on whatever you choose.

However, the chief importance of this exercise to your spiritual life ultimately is twofold: First, over time, as you repeat this and related breathing exercises, you will become aware that your interior silence, your ability to focus and to concentrate, will increase greatly as you let go of anxiety, fear, laziness, etc. You will gain controlled energy. Second, the important objective of this kind of exercise is to develop an awareness of what influences are operative in your mind and in your activities. You will find that increased awareness and perception will be very significant in the “discernment of spirits.”[21]



5. Week 2: Finding God in All Things

By now, you should be comfortable with the routine of the daily prayer. If there are difficulties, talk to your spiritual director, the retreat director, or bring it up during the weekly gathering. If there are some things you have found especially helpful, you might mention them at this meeting as well.

The introduction to this week on [An Ignatian Prayer Week](https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/an-ignatian-prayer-adventure/week-2/) website follows.¹

For all seven days, most of the text is taken from the website for An Ignatian Prayer Adventure. Some sections have been rearranged. There will be many resources for you to find more information and different perspectives on the Examen. Do not feel obligated to look at all of them and try to incorporate everything. Find one that resonates best with you and use that in your practice.

St. Ignatius believed that we can find God in all things, at every moment, even in the most ordinary times. To do this, we must take time to reflect on our experience, to look at the data of a day and discern their meaning.

Ignatius recommended a five-step method of prayer called the Examen to help us find God in all things. The Examen encourages us to look back over a period of time and pay attention to what is happening in and around us. Then we look ahead, to what comes next, so that we can act in a way worthy of our vocation as Christians.

These are the five steps of the Examen:

1. Pray for God's help.
2. Give thanks for the gifts of this day.
3. Pray over significant feelings.
4. Rejoice and seek forgiveness.
5. Look to tomorrow.

This week, we'll reflect on the steps of the Examen for five days. And for two days we will concentrate on listening to God.

¹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/an-ignatian-prayer-adventure/week-2/>.

5.1 Day 1: Pray for God's Help

We focus today on the first step of the Examen, *Pray for God's Help*.

My attitude

The Examen begins by opening your heart to God. You want to see with God's perspective, not your own. You may choose to make one or more of your prayer periods outside, soaking in the natural beauty of creation. Use all of your senses to experience the world. This week, as you walk the streets and go about your daily tasks, be attentive to the variety of God's creations, especially in the people you encounter.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: wonder at God's ongoing creation; gratitude for the gift of God creating me and creating the world.

Reading

Psalm 121

Pray the psalm slowly. Open your heart to God. Consider: What is God like? How can God help me?

Reflection

Conversation with God

There is nothing magical about praying. Prayer is a conversation with God. So invite God to be with you during this sacred time. Ask God to help you be grateful and honest as you look back on the day. With God's help, be attentive to how the Spirit was working in and through you, others, and creation. Let yourself see your day as God sees it.

Lingering Over God

God's touch, though taking place in a moment of time, lives on within us forever. When we experience God's love, God's self-giving, we are never the same. We may return to some of our old ways of being and acting, but deep down within we are not the same.

We can continue to let an experience of God bear fruit within us by going back to it and lingering over it. Through this remembering, lingering, and reliving process, we open ourselves to God—we allow God to move within us, to touch our hearts again so that our own experiences of God ripple deep within us and can continue to make a difference in our lives.

—Maureen Conroy, *The Discerning Heart*^[6]

5.2 Day 2: Give Thanks for the Gifts of This Day

Today we focus on the second step of the Examen, *Give thanks for the gifts of this day*

My attitude

The second step of the Examen is giving thanks. For Ignatius, gratitude is the first, most important step on the spiritual journey. An attitude of gratitude, practiced often enough, helps us find God in all things and can transform the way we look at our life and at other people.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: wonder at God's ongoing creation; gratitude for the gift of God creating me and creating the world.

Reading

Psalm 100

Read slowly and prayerfully. Ask yourself: What am I thankful for?

Reflection

Review the Day

Review the day and name the blessings, from the most significant and obvious to the more common and ordinary. God (not the devil) is found in the details, so be very specific! As you take stock, honor the gifts of others in your life, but don't forget to recognize the gifts in you, for they, too, are God given.

Don't feel that you must mechanically go through the day hour by hour or make a list of all the day's gifts. Instead, savor whatever gifts God shows you. With God's gentle guidance, let the day go through you.

In his book, *A Simple, Life Changing Prayer*, Jim Manney summarizes the second step of the Examen this way: "Give thanks. The day I have just lived is a gift from God. Be grateful for it."

While one can never go wrong with gratitude, in the context of the Examen gratitude is more than saying "thank you" in appreciation. Here are a few things to remember about gratitude in the Examen.

- **Its endpoint is always the greater glory of God (AMDG).** This is a gratitude steeped in the Ignatian concept of *magis*.² We are called to notice the gifts of our days in the context of the sacred.
- **It's relational.** Examen-gratitude takes place in the context of a specific relationship—the relationship between God and human. More specifically, it's the relationship between the Divine Lover and the beloved (us). It is a gratitude that presupposes God's continuous life-breath of love and our response to that love.
- **It demands presence.** Gratitude in the context of the Examen calls us to be attentive to the gifts that God has placed in our path over the past 24 hours. God knows what we need and enjoy. Perhaps that is warm sun on the face, gentle wind on the back, a compliment from a friend, encouragement from a co-worker, a warm cup of coffee, or all kinds of other good things. Yet, in our haste, we often miss these gifts that are right in front of us. The Examen calls us to presence so that we can recognize the gifts.
- **It encourages reflection.** Through the Examen, St. Ignatius invites us to take a step back every day and ask for the grace to see with new eyes. With God's help and our own reflective posture, we become more able to recognize the gifts.

²See the Glossary. Also see *Magis* by James Martin SJ. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/magis/>.

- **It puts a stop to negative cycles.** In his wisdom, St. Ignatius recognized that certain thought patterns hold us back from recognizing God's gifts. How many times can we recall saying, "I will be happy when I reach this goal, finish this project, this or that situation changes, or when I'm a better person, better pray-er, etc."? This way of thinking leaves us feeling unsettled and unfulfilled.
- **The Examen encourages us to focus on and cultivate gratitude for the blessings we have in the here-and-now.** It's not enough, but is enough. When we become attentive to God's overwhelming generosity throughout our days, gratitude blossoms in our hearts. We realize that no amount of thanks would ever be sufficient to acknowledge the abundance of gifts that spring forth from God's love for us. And though we sense our own insufficiency, knowledge of this love gives rise to a true and satisfying joy and the sense that our gratitude is enough and does bring joy to the Giver.
- **It is hope-filled.** Most fundamentally, gratitude is the profound feeling that arises when we recognize and respond to the revelation that we are God's beloved. The Examen is a daily check-in—a conversation—with our Beloved that gives rise to a gratitude that propels us forward. Rooted in this loving relationship, we look forward in hope.

Daily practice of the Examen teaches us how to be open to and aware of God's continuous loving presence in our lives. It teaches us that God doesn't wait for us to finish everything or for everything to be perfect. God is present in the good times and the in-between times, in the imperfection, and in the messes—bestowing gifts on us every day. This recognition gives way to the gratitude of the Examen.

—Rebecca Ruiz³

³<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/exploring-the-examen-step-by-step-give-thanks/>

5.3 Day 3: Pray Over Significant Feelings

Today we explore step 3 of the Examen, *Pray over significant feelings*.

My attitude

In the third step of the Examen we look at our feelings. Ignatius believed that God communicates with us not only through mental insight but also through our “interior movements,” as he called them: our feelings, emotions, desires, attractions, repulsions, and moods. Feelings are neither positive nor negative: it is what you do with them that raises moral questions.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: wonder at God’s ongoing creation; gratitude for the gift of God creating me and creating the world.

Reading

Psalm 117

Reflection

Reflect on Your Feelings

As you reflect on the day, you may notice some strong feelings arise. They may be painful or pleasing—for example, joy, peace, sadness, anxiety, confusion, hope, compassion, regret, anger, confidence, jealousy, self-doubt, boredom, or excitement.

Pick one or two strong feelings or movements and pray from them. Ask God to help you understand what aroused those feelings and where they led you:

Did they draw you closer to God? Did they help you grow in faith, hope, and love? Did they make you more generous with your time and talent? Did they make you feel more alive, whole, and human? Did they lead you to feel more connected to others or challenge you to life-giving growth?

Or did the feelings lead you away from God, make you less faithful, hopeful, and loving? Did they cause you to become more self-centered or anxious? Did they lure you into doubt and confusion? Did they lead to the breakdown of relationships?

Ignatius’s Great Discovery

The point has often been made that the Christian Gospel is a story of strength and triumph arising from weakness and defeat. The Savior is a poor man in a provincial, backwater land. Salvation comes about through suffering and death. In the words of Mary’s Magnificat prayer: “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

We’re afflicted with divided hearts that cause us to be burdened by angst, uncertainty, and fear when making important decisions. But this very confusion of thoughts and feelings is the place where we find God’s footprints. It’s the raw material for discernment.

This was Ignatius’s great discovery.

—J. Michael Sparough, SJ; Jim Manney; Tim Hipskind, SJ (from *What’s Your Decision?*)[22]

5.4 Day 4: Rejoice and Seek Forgiveness

Step 4 of the Examen is on the menu today, *Rejoice and Seek Forgiveness*.

My attitude

I want to follow the path God has set me on. Knowing that God loves me unconditionally, despite my human faults, I rejoice in that love, ask for forgiveness for my shortcomings, and promise to improve my ways.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: wonder at God's ongoing creation; gratitude for the gift of God creating me and creating the world.

Reading

Psalm 51

The psalm is a psalm of contrition; pray the psalm slowly in a spirit of confidence.

Reflection

You did a marvel, Lord Jesus Christ,
and make me feel beside myself in surprise.

My spirit glistens with Your rising.

I smile and smile with You.

I am drowning in the laughter of Your friends.

You have won, Lord, we know You have won!

You have defeated all the worst that we could do,
each alone and all together.

You crushed the powers of darkness and of death
to walk peacefully again in our flesh,
now and forever.

Come to me, great Lord of Life,
as You come to all Your friends.

Send me to console those around me who hurt.

Come, and send Your friends into this daily world
to labor full of hope for the Reign of God.

—Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ, *Choosing Christ in the World*[23]

5.5 Day 5: Look to Tomorrow

We finish the exploration of the Examen with the last step: *Look to Tomorrow*.

The Examen ends with a look at the day to come. Just as God is with you today, God will be with you as you sleep and when you wake up tomorrow. Invite God to be a part of your future. What do you need God's help with? Be very practical and specific. If it's helpful, look at your schedule for tomorrow. God wants to be there with you, in the most dramatic and mundane moments of your life. Ask God to give you the grace you need—for example, courage, confidence, wisdom, patience, determination, or peace. Or perhaps there is someone you would like to pray for by name.

My attitude

My attitude is one of gratitude for all of the gifts that God has given me. This brings me the desire to continue to improve my love affair with God.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: wonder at God's ongoing creation; gratitude for the gift of God creating me and creating the world.

Reading

Luke 11: 1-13

Invite God to be a part of your future. What do you need God's help with?

Reflection

Our examen teaches us, above all, to live in the present. Our days typically unfurl in frenzied preoccupation with the next meeting to attend, errands to be done, dinner to be prepared, and a hundred other tasks that crowd an efficient day. The monk Thich Nhat Hanh points out that we humans are great at planning and willing to sacrifice today to save for cars and houses tomorrow, "But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive." So he exhorts us to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, being fully and consciously aware (or mindful) of the present moment. The examen, by briefly pulling us out of our daily maelstrom, can help reorient us to the present. When we get it right, as Thich Nhat Hanh puts it, "Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity."

Learn from the past; envision the future; live in the present. It's a challenging life model to master, but the examen helps us do so.

—Excerpt from *Heroic Living* by Chris Lowney[14]

5.6 Day 6: “Do Not Be Afraid”

Our reflections for the next two days focus on listening to God.

My attitude

God is always trying to get our attention in ways both obvious and subtle. I am reminded of the prophet Elijah who, standing on a mountaintop, found God not in a mighty wind, or in an earthquake, or in fire, but in a “sound of sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:11-13). I seek God throughout the day, listening in the silence of my prayer.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: a grateful awareness of the many ways in which God calls me.

Reading

Luke 5: 1-11

Listen to Jesus telling Simon Peter, and you, “Do not be afraid.” Ask: Where do I experience God calling me in the midst of my daily life?

Reflection

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don’t try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

5.7 Day 7: "What Are You Looking For?"

Only when we are really free can we hear God's call. We reflect on how God calls us right now in the concrete particulars of our lives. Do not worry about making big decisions or changing the way you live. That may come later. Instead, simply marvel that God calls each of us specially. Listen not only to the call but also to the One who calls.

We encounter God in a variety of ways: in the people around us and in the work we are doing; in something we read or see in the world; and in the inspiration of Scripture and the church's liturgy. We also find God in the holy desires brewing deep in our hearts. This is a central insight to Ignatian spirituality. Because God, our Creator, gives us life and because we are the image of God, God's desires and our deepest desires are one and the same. What we truly desire is also what God desires for us.

My attitude

God is always trying to get our attention in ways both obvious and subtle. I am reminded of the prophet Elijah who, standing on a mountaintop, found God not in a mighty wind, or in an earthquake, or in fire, but in a "sound of sheer silence" (1 Kings 19:11-13). I seek God throughout the day, listening in the silence of my prayer.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: a grateful awareness of the many ways in which God calls me.

Reading

John 1: 35-39

Listen to Jesus say to the disciples, and to you: "What are you looking for?" How do you respond?

Reflection**Some Definite Service**

God knows me and calls me by my name...
God has created me to do Him some definite service;
He has committed some work to me
which He has not committed to another.
I have my mission—I never may know it in this life,
but I shall be told it in the next.

Somehow I am necessary for His purposes...
I have a part in this great work;
I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection
between persons.
He has not created me for naught. I shall do good,
I shall do His work;
I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not
intending it,
if I do but keep His commandments
and serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him.
Whatever, wherever I am,
I can never be thrown away.
If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him;
In perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him;
If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.
My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be
necessary causes of some great end,
which is quite beyond us.
He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life,
He may shorten it;
He knows what He is about.
He may take away my friends,
He may throw me among strangers,
He may make me feel desolate,
make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—
still He knows what He is about...
Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—
I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.

—John Henry Cardinal Newman

5.8 Additional Material for Week 2

This section contains additional reading suggestions and resources that may be appropriate alternative additions, or help for week 2 of the retreat.

Scripture Readings

There are only a couple of readings included here. The reading from each day does a good job of presenting the five parts of the Examen. You may find several passages that are about finding God, but we are talking about listening to God and hearing his call.

- John 1: 35-39
- 1 Kings 19: 11-13

Prayers, Poems, and Other Resources

Hearing His Voice Above All Others

From the moment when I wake, the distractions buffet me.
Clamoring for my attention, they assail relentlessly.
The voices of this busy world seem to fill my ears,
Drowning out your still small voice, the only voice I long to hear.
Lord, meet me in the moment in the quiet of this place.
Help me to hear your voice alone as I rest in your embrace.
Lord, drive the other voices from the temple of my heart,
And whisper words of wisdom which your Spirit can impart.
That I would hear no other voice,
O Master, draw me near.
May I incline my heart to you,
Speak, Lord, and help me hear.

—Frank Carpenter⁴

Everything

Everything I see, hear, touch, feel, taste,
speak, think,
imagine.
is completing a perfect circle
God has drawn

—Meister Eckhart excerpted from *Love Poems from God*[13]

⁴<https://trochia.org/voices-a-poem-asking-god-for-help-hearing-his-voice-above-all-others/>.

Finding God in All Things

The Examen is a simple form for “checking in” daily with God. It’s a review of your day, by which you observe how you felt, what you did or didn’t do, and how grace was present and active. The Examen is just one way of training yourself to notice God’s presence in daily life. And, actually, it’s quite effective, because you develop the habit of looking at your life and expecting to find God there.

I’ve said more than once to a group of people at a talk or retreat: “If God isn’t here, then God isn’t anywhere.” If God is not present in your day-to-day work and struggle and fun, in your emotions and discoveries, and even in the incidental things that happen—then why should you invest so much time and energy trying to get to whatever place God inhabits?

This isn’t a form of pantheism—of believing that God is in everything all the time. The idea of finding God in all things points to the love and grace of God that find us no matter what we’re going through and no matter what shape we’re in.

I challenge you to look at the details of your life this week and ask the questions, “Where is God in this situation? Where is the grace? In what way do I encounter Divine love?”

—Vinita Hampton Wright⁵

The History of One Day

You can look at the day you just lived through, and notice certain things.

The physical: What did you see? What did you hear? Taste? Smell? Touch? What was the weather like? How was the sky? What impact did all of these sensual elements have on you?

The emotional: What were the primary emotions of the day? When did you feel most emotionally alive, and when were your emotions more muted? What part of your day was most emotionally satisfying, and what part of it was most emotionally painful or difficult?

The relational: What were the primary relationships of the day? (For instance, if it was a work day, chances are that colleagues were primary relationships through at least part of the day.) What conversations did you have, and how did they go? Did any of your relationships today involve conflict or hurt, and if so, what happened? Did any of your relationships provide pleasure and/or healing, and if so, what happened?

The interior/spiritual: What aspects of the day seemed to touch upon obvious spiritual activity or material? Did you engage in any intentional spiritual practice, and if so, what was it and how did that go?

The eventful: What events occurred in your life today? Were they big or small, exciting or deadening? What impact, if any, did those events have on your life as a whole?

The creative: What did you do today that required creative thinking? What were the raw materials of the day—and what did you make out of them? Try to locate the moments in which you were truly engaged with your creative gifts.

You might come up with more categories. But take just one or two of them to review and explore your day, and to identify where grace, peace, truth, healing, beauty, and joy made their appearances.

—Vinita Hampton Wright⁶

⁵<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/finding-god-in-all-things-vhw/>.

⁶<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/the-history-of-one-day/>.

Examen Online Resources

O'Brien provides three resources for additional reading for this week. One is actually a series of audio clips. I provide the links here. The text is too long to copy into this book. I have also included some online resources that might help. This list is fairly long for a couple of reasons. First, the Examen is a very large part of the Exercises according to Ignatius. Second, it seems to be one of the more difficult practices to acquire because of the many variations. I have tried to put in a mixture of the ways to incorporate the Examen into your daily practice. If previous descriptions do not work, try one of these, or others, that help you best.

- [*The Ignatian Examen—James Martin, SJ*](#)⁷ This is about a 20 minute talk by James Martin, a popular author on Ignatian topics and a former editor of *America Magazine*. There is also a link to a podcast of him leading the Examen on this page; however, it is incorrect. You can find the podcast at <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/02/13/examen-podcast-228687>.
- [*Lunchtime Examen*](#). This is a set of audio clips.⁸
- [*Rummaging for God: Praying Backwards through Your Day*](#). This is another approach to praying the Examen.⁹
- [*Reflection and Our Active Lives*](#). David Fleming, SJ presents some tips on making the Examen a daily habit.¹⁰
- [*Fr. Joeseph Telow, SJ: The Examen*](#). An eleven minute video with some interesting ways of thinking about, and praying the Examen.
- [*The Daily Examen*](#). This is a small set of online resources in addition to ones you might already have explored.¹¹
- [*Confetti All Around*](#). Eric Clayton, a writer who contributes to several Ignatian sources, talks about the Examen and finding God in all things. This would make a good reflection for most of the days this week.¹²
- [*The Examen is One of My Favorite Prayers*](#). An Ignatian author talks bout the Examen.¹³
- [*Praying with the Examen*](#). Two Jesuits on the *Jesuit Post* YouTube channel talk about the Examen in their “Ask Iggy” (really) series.

⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWDisMOkaOo>.

⁸<http://ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/lunchtime-examen/>.

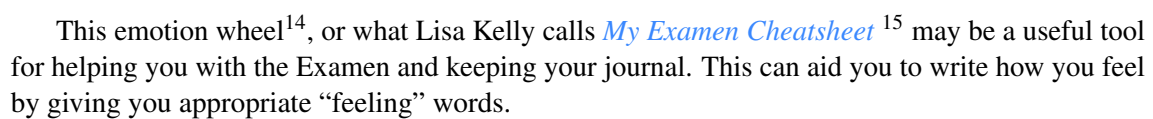
⁹<https://shorturl.at/CEGZ7>.

¹⁰<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/reflection-and-our-active-lives/>.

¹¹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>.

¹²<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/confetti-all-around/>.

¹³https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQ30ELiBn_Q&t=3s.



¹⁵<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/my-examen-cheat-sheet/>.

Awareness Meditation: Feeling Your Body's Sensations

This awareness meditation practice can be carried out in many situations in part for example, while waiting for an appointment, riding to or from work, etc. It will provide you with insight into how well or how poorly attuned your bodily senses are to registering sensations. As to many persons, it may come as a surprise to you how insensitive one can become, through tension and preoccupation. However, with the practice of awareness, you can “sensitize” your senses and become alive once again as they relax. The importance of this kind of meditation is that it dispels the nervous tension that is one of the biggest obstacles to dynamic concentration and to prayer. If you are relatively unaware of what your body is experiencing, how can you be attuned to spiritual movements within you? St. Ignatius referred to the importance of “discernment of spirits” so that delusions may disappear from your life. The awareness meditation practice will prepare you to discern more readily other movements within you, including the movement of spirits. And it will assist you greatly in preparing for the examination of consciousness.

Take up a posture that is comfortable and restful. Slowly read the following instructions, then close your eyes and become totally alive to the following sensations:

Now become aware of certain sensations in your body that you are feeling at this present moment, but of which you may commonly not be explicitly aware . . . Be aware of the touch of your clothes on your shoulders, on your back, or of your back touching the chair on which you sit. Now become aware of the feel of your hands as they touch each other or rest on your lap. Now be aware of your thighs or your buttocks pressing against your chair, of your feet touching your shoes, of your sitting posture. Repeat the sequence of awareness activities several times and attend to whether you experience new sensations as they are repeated.

It is important for you to “feel” the sensation of each part momentarily and then move on to another part of the body. End the exercise by opening your eyes gently. Reflect on those parts of your body in which you were aware of some sensation, noting whether it was barely perceptible, moderately so, or strongly felt. It may be surprising to realize how insensitive many parts of your body are to sensations. With repetition of the exercise you may gradually become more aware of subtle sensations. To that extent you become more fully alive. To a certain extent you prepare yourself as well to perceive, as an impartial observer, other interior movements that transcend the sensual experience.

This simple exercise produces a sense of relaxation in most people, a good preparation for prayer as it helps to dissipate nervous tension. When I first heard Tony de Mello speak about awareness meditation, I was, in the way of a university professor, suspicious of this approach until its results were proven to me. Most of us are too little aware of the activity of our senses and as a result we live most of our lives either in the past or in the future but rarely in the present.

Reflect for some time about what parts of your life are lived in the past, regretting past mistakes, feeling guilty about past sins or failures, basking in the glow of past achievements, resenting past slights or injuries by other people. How much of your life is commonly devoted to the future? How much time do you spend, fearing possible setbacks, calamities, or unpleasantness, dreaming of future happiness, pleasure, or looking forward to future events? The only time that is real is the present moment and yet we so commonly discard the present experience as of trivial value in favor of the future or the past. The awareness meditation practice can change that and ourselves for the better, and free us so that we can pray in the present. From day to day keep track of whether you live more in the past, in the future or in the present. If you spend much time thinking in the present, you probably enjoy much peace of mind, and will find it so much easier to enter into prayer.[21]



6. Week 3: Something's Broken

In previous weeks we set the stage in order to understand who we are in relation to God and to get into the rhythm of the Exercises. Sometimes these are included in the first phase of the Exercises and at other times they form preliminary exercises. O'Brien starts the first phase with this week of the retreat.

This week, we begin what Ignatius calls the First Week of his Exercises. By “week,” Ignatius does not mean seven calendar days, but a particular movement or phase of the retreat. Most broadly, the First Week focuses on our experience of sin—personally, communally, and globally. Sin can be described in many ways: as a breakdown of a relationship with God and others; as a failure to love God, others, and self; as a turning away from God.

Sin is an inescapable reality of the human condition; we abuse the freedom God gives us and make choices that hurt God, others, and ourselves. God does not punish us for our sins; instead, we suffer the natural consequences that flow from our sinful choices and the sinful choices of others.

In the meditations this week, we look closely at sin and how it plays out in every human heart. Our aim is not to become mired in guilt, self-hate, or despair. Instead, we ask for a healthy sense of shame and confusion when confronting the reality of sin. Knowing how good God is to us, how and why do we still choose to sin, still choose to respond so meagerly to God's generosity?

Even as we recognize these hard realities, we remember that God loves us unconditionally and wants to free us from anything that blocks our growing into the people God calls us to be. We don't get very far just by counting our sins and trying to overcome them by sheer force of will. Instead, we need to keep our eyes fixed on God's ever-present mercy, which is the ultimate source of our lasting liberation from sin.

Several of these meditations involve an intimate conversation called a colloquy.

Help with the Colloquy and the discernment of spirits are provided in the additional materials for this week (Section 6.8).

6.1 Day 1: The Sin of Adam and Eve

The Sin of Adam and Eve

Biblical scholarship has long held that the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis is not history but a theological reflection by the people of Israel on the reality of good and evil. This story speaks a timeless truth known to all humanity: human beings, like the angels, enjoy the gift of freedom, yet we sometimes choose to abuse that freedom by trying to put ourselves at the center of creation and displacing God. This is the essence of original sin.

My attitude

What is it to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus? “It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was. What is it to be a companion of Jesus today, to have values that tend to be in part cultural but in part counter-cultural? It is to engage, under the standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and that struggle for justice which it includes.”

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: a healthy sense of shame and confusion before God as I consider the effects of sin in my life, my community, and my world.

Reading

Genesis: 3

What do you learn about the nature of sin and the effects of sin? Notice how subtle evil can be and how alluring the temptation to avoid responsibility. Consider some of your own sinful choices. In your journal, note any emotional responses to your considerations of sin.

Reflection

Rev. Michael Himes of Boston College has an interesting take on this age-old story. The first chapter of Genesis tells us that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God and that God called our creation very good. The temptation of Adam and Eve is to disbelieve that good news and refuse to accept our innate goodness and the goodness of others. Instead, they think that they must do something else to become like God or become valuable in God's eyes. Consider all the evil effects that flow from not accepting the inherent goodness and dignity of each person.

6.2 Day 2: The Sin of One Person

Today we look at individual sin. How much harm does the sin of one person do? This is often a difficult, emotional day for many. Remember, we are sinners loved by a merciful God.

My attitude

The attitude is one of contrition for my sins and the sins of all others. Sin brings sorrow to so many, the sinner and those who suffer the effects of the sins. My attitude is that of a sinner who brings my sins to the cross.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: a healthy sense of shame and confusion before God as I consider the effects of sin in my life, my community, and my world.

Reading

Luke 16: 19-31

Ask: When have I failed to notice or respond to the needs of others? When have I felt isolated from God or others by my own sin?

Finish with the following colloquy:

I try to experience the breadth and length and height and depth of hell—the despair of facing a cross with no one on it, the turning out upon a world which has no God, the total emptiness of living without purpose, an environment pervasive with hatred and self-seeking, a living death.

Once I have let the awfulness of this experience sink deep within me, I begin to talk to Christ our Lord about it. I talk to him about all the people who have lived—the many who lived before his coming and who deliberately closed in upon themselves and chose such a hell for all eternity, the many who walked with him in his own country and who rejected his call to love, the many who still keep rejecting the call to love and remain locked in their own chosen hell.

I give thanks to Jesus that he has not allowed me to fall into any of these groups, thus ending my life. All I can do is give thanks to him that up to this moment he has shown himself so loving and merciful to me.

Then I close with an Our Father. (SE 66-71)

Reflection

The Sin of One Person We have reflected on the original sin of Adam and Eve. Now we consider the effect of sin on one person—a person who chooses definitively against God. The person is the rich man in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus. We imagine what it would be like for a person to be totally closed off from God's love.

Use your imagination as you reflect on this parable. You may want to craft a parable of your own, replacing the rich man and Lazarus with modern-day counterparts based on the current century's sad history of sin, violence, genocide, and injustice.

6.3 Day 3: What Have I Done for Christ?

Today we turn from reflection on sin to reflection on Jesus, who restored us to the Father. We consider the suffering Jesus on the cross.

My attitude

The attitude is the same as the previous day.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: a healthy sense of shame and confusion before God as I consider the effects of sin in my life, my community, and my world.

Reading

Romans 5: 1-11

“God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”

Reflection

Imagine Christ our Lord suspended on the cross before you, and converse with him in a colloquy: How is it that he, although he is the Creator, has come to make himself a human being? How is it that he has passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for my sins?

In a similar way, reflect on yourself and ask:

What have I done for Christ?

What am I doing for Christ?

What ought I do for Christ?

In this way, too, gazing on him in so pitiful a state as he hangs on the cross, speak out whatever comes to your mind.

6.4 Day 4: The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Today we read the parable of the prodigal son, a story of sin, mercy, and forgiveness. In this parable, Jesus tells us who the Father is. Notice that the father in the parable is also prodigal—that is, extravagant—with his love. God is always trying to overcome separation. Notice the festivity of the parable. Realize how much joy it brings God when we return home.

My attitude

A thoughtful review of experience reveals that most of the ills of the world can be traced to personal greed, anger, hatred and delusion. These, in turn, lead us to treat ourselves and others in ways that are unbecoming of children of Our Divine Father, and of brothers and sisters of Jesus.

The grace I seek

In the presence of my Father in heaven, Jesus, my brother and companion, and the Holy Spirit, my consolation and strength, I ask for the gift of experiencing myself as a loved sinner, but to know my sinfulness and to purify my mind so well that I may experience a growing desire for conversion, a new insight into the tactics of God's enemy, and a renewed enthusiasm to follow Jesus.¹

Reading

Luke 15:11-32

Consider: How does Jesus' parable help me understand my own estrangement from God and others? How does it help me appreciate God's welcome to me, a sinner?

Reflection

This Addict Is a Saint

A friend of mine recently sent me a unusual holy card. It honors St. Mark Ji Tianxiang, a Chinese layman who was murdered in 1900, along with dozens of other Catholics in his village, in the vicious persecution of Christians during the Boxer rebellion. That's not the unusual thing. The Church has canonized many martyrs, including many Chinese martyrs. What's unusual about St. Mark is that he was an opium addict who was barred from receiving the sacraments for the last 30 years of his life.

Mark couldn't receive communion because his addiction was regarded as gravely sinful and scandalous. He prayed for deliverance from his addiction, but deliverance never came. Nevertheless he remained a believing Catholic. At his trial he was given a chance to renounce his faith, but he refused. It is said that he sang the litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary as he was led to his execution.

Saints are exemplary people. The Church creates them so we can learn from them. So what can we learn from St. Mark Ji Tianxiang?

For starters, he shows that anybody can become a saint—even a man who was kicked out of the church for giving public scandal. By canonizing him, the Church also signals a different attitude toward addiction than the one St. Mark's pastors had a century ago. Drug abuse is sinful, but addiction is also a disease of the mind and body. Addicts today are not excluded from the sacraments because they are addicts.

I also marvel at St. Mark's confidence in the mercy of God. He probably shared the village's opinion of him—that he was serious sinner who was behaving terribly. He must have felt despair in his futile struggles and perhaps some bitterness too. But he persevered in his faith. I suspect that in his brokenness he met the suffering Christ. In the end, he went to his death confidently, trusting that love would receive him. May we all imitate St. Mark.

—Jim Manney²

¹The attitude and grace are taken from *Place Me With Your Son*, p. 38.[21] I think they convey the setting better than O'Brien's version.

²<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/this-addict-is-a-saint/>.

6.5 Day 5: My Own History of Sin

For the next two days you will reflect on your own history of sin. Try to be very concrete. Note specific actions or patterns of acting that are sinful, and then go beneath actions or habits to discern the attitudes, tendencies, and intentions that cause them. We aim for a graced understanding that cuts to the heart.

This taking stock is not easy, but awareness is a grace when it leads us to freedom from a self-centered isolation and freedom for loving service of God and others.

My attitude

We aim for our understanding of sin to be heartfelt because conversion involves a change in thinking and feeling, in choosing and desiring. With this deepening understanding may come strong affective reactions, including sorrow for sins and gratitude for God's mercy.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: deepening awareness and sorrow for my sins and a heartfelt experience of God's merciful love for me.

Meditation: A Meditation on our Own Sins

There is no reading today. Ignatius suggests that we use our memory to reflect on our particular history of sin. Notice the specificity of this exercise:

I will call to memory all the sins of my life, looking at them year by year or period by period. For this three things will be helpful: first, the locality or house where I lived; second, the associations which I had with others; third, the occupation I was pursuing. (SE 056)

The point here is not to rehearse every sinful moment of your life, which is impossible anyway. Instead, invite God to lead you through your life history and reveal those moments in which you failed to love God, others, or yourself. You may consider specific events or people, or reflect on more general attitudes or patterns of conduct.

In your reflection, notice the contagion of sin: how my sin affects my world and others around me.

End this prayerful exercise as Ignatius advises:

Conclude with a colloquy of mercy—conversing with God our Lord and thanking him for granting me life until now, and proposing, with his grace, amendment for the future. (SE 061)

You may wish to record your reflections in your journal.

6.6 Day 6: Sorrow for Sin

Continue your meditation on sin today.

Remember that we do this heavy lifting in the context of having experienced ourselves as sinners who are loved. God seeks to free us from everything that gets in the way of loving ourselves, others, and God. The focus is not simply naming our sins, which can itself become a form of self-preoccupation. Instead, we focus on who God is and who we are before God. With this orientation, we discover the source of our liberation: the boundless mercy of God. We begin to see how sin has distorted our relationships. Recognizing how generous and faithful God is, we become dissatisfied with our meager, self-directed responses. We naturally want to reorder our values and make tangible changes. We do this not out of duty or obligation, but out of love for Someone greater than ourselves.

My attitude

We aim for our understanding of sin to be heartfelt because conversion involves a change in thinking and feeling, in choosing and desiring. With this deepening understanding may come strong affective reactions, including sorrow for sins and gratitude for God's mercy.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: deepening awareness and sorrow for my sins and a heartfelt experience of God's merciful love for me.

Reading

2 Samuel 11: 1-12:25

Prayerfully read the account of David and his sin. What do you learn about sin and its effects in this age-old story?

Reflection: The Triple Colloquy

Pray the following triple colloquy (SE 062-063), which Ignatius proposes as a way to demonstrate the sincerity of your sorrow and your desire for conversion in the way you think, feel, and act.

First, pray to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother.

Pray that Mary ask Jesus Christ, her Son, for the following gifts on your behalf:

- For you to know deep down the rootedness of sin in your life and to truly abhor your sinful tendencies, choices, and actions
- For you to have a deeply felt understanding of how your sins have caused disorder in your life and the world around you
- For you to recognize those things in the world that get in the way of your loving and serving God as you are called
- For you to experience a deep desire to amend your life and turn away from all that is opposed to Christ

Conclude this first colloquy with a Hail Mary.

Second, offer the same petitions to Jesus Christ. Ask him to obtain the same graces for you from God the Father. Conclude with the Anima Christi.

Third, offer the petitions here directly to God the Father. Conclude with an Our Father.

6.7 Day 7: "Who Will Rescue Me from This Body of Death?"

We end this week of reflection on sin by reading a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans. St. Paul candidly expresses his own inner conflict, which we all can relate to. Note how he ends with thanksgiving. Your week should end in the same spirit of thanksgiving.

My attitude

We aim for our understanding of sin to be heartfelt because conversion involves a change in thinking and feeling, in choosing and desiring. With this deepening understanding may come strong affective reactions, including sorrow for sins and gratitude for God's mercy.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: growing awareness of the hidden, sinful tendencies that influence my decisions and actions; heartfelt sorrow for my sins; and sincere gratitude for God's mercy and faithfulness to me.

Reading

Romans 7: 14-25

Reflection

The God of My Beginning and End

I should like to speak with you, my God,
and yet what else can I speak of but you?
Indeed, could anything at all exist
which had not been present with you from all eternity,
which didn't have its true home
and most intimate explanation in your mind and heart?
Isn't everything I ever say
really a statement about you?
On the other hand,
if I try, shyly and hesitantly,
to speak to you about yourself
you will still be hearing about me.
For what could I say about you
except that you are my God,
The God of my beginning and end,
God of my joy and my need,
God of my life?

—Karl Rahner, SJ

6.8 Additional Material for Week 3

Scripture Readings

- Psalm 51: 1-13 (*The Miserere*)
- Luke 8: 43-48
- Romans 5: 12-15

Prayers, Poems, and Other Resources

The Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
have mercy on me,
a sinner³

³<https://www.goarch.org/-/the-jesus-prayer>.

The following two poems/prayers are from *Seasons of Your Heart: Prayers and Reflections* by Macrina Wiederkehr. These can be used as alternative or additional reflection meditations.

Bleeding and Believing

Once there was a wound
It was no ordinary wound
It was *my* wound
We had lived together long.
I yearned to be free of this wound
I wanted the bleeding to stop
Yet if the truth be known
I felt a strange kind of gratitude
for this wound.

It had made me
tremendously open to grace
vulnerable to God's mercy.

A beautiful believing in me
that I have named Faith
kept growing, daring me
to reach for what I could not see.
This wound had made me open,
I was ready for grace
And so one day, I reached.

There I was thick in the crowd
bleeding and believing
and I reached.
At first I reached
for what I *could* see
the fringe of a garment,
But my reaching didn't stop there
for Someone reached back into me.
A grace I couldn't see
flowed through me.
A power I didn't understand
began to fill the depths of me.

Trembling I was called forth
to claim my wholeness.
The bleeding had left me.
The believing remained
And strange as this may sound
I have never lost my gratitude
for the wound
that made me so open
to grace.

—Macrina Wiederkehr[26]

This next meditation is appropriate for a reflection on the reading for Day 7.

Understanding Your Wounds

Slowly, gently, I lift the clutter out of my life.
I must let go of my ego-self.
I've known this part of myself intimately.
It's like an old friend.
It's a bit hard to send it on its way.
It has become a kind of cherished sin for me
a dis-ease that I am familiar with.
Still, it has hindered my growth and kept me from adoring
It has prevented me from noticing the *holy ground* of my life.

And so, I kiss it good-bye.
Yes, I kiss it. I embrace it.
It is part of myself
I cannot simply cast it aside.
I pray for its conversion.
All the clutter in my life that I have clung to
with such devotion will be born again in some new and better form.

It is the shadow side of myself.
If I befriend it it will arise
from the ashes of falseness into the glory of truth.

My uncontrollable anger becomes a passionate, prophetic zeal.
My possessive clutching becomes a generous giving.
My abundance of unnecessary words melts into the one *great word*.
My deafening noise becomes the sound of silence.
My need for approval from others becomes a need to affirm others.
My need to control becomes a need to affirm others.
My need to control becomes my need to share
My fear is changed into love, my anxiety into trust.

Yes, all the clutter of my life that ego stuff that held me back
when embraced and owned can change before my very eyes into grace.
What was a hindrance becomes a blessing.
What was an enemy becomes a friend.
What was darkness is now my light.
What was my clutter is now my treasure.

There is no freedom like seeing myself as I am
and not losing heart
There is no freedom like looking at myself as I am
and saying, "Yes, that's me!"
There is no freedom like taking myself in my arms.
Only in that embrace will I understand my wounds.
Only in that embrace will I experience healing.
Only in that embrace will I come to know my true self.

—Macrina Wiederkehr[26]

A video on “happy” sin

Paul Brian Campbell, SJ has a very short (less than two minutes) video that is worth looking at. He discusses his three favorite words, “O felix culpa—O happy fault.”

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/sin-o-happy-fault/>.

Sin and Falling Short of Ideals

O’Brien also points us to this video.

Looking at our sins and faults allows us to take responsibility for them. We can possess them; they no longer possess us. We become more and more able to give our whole selves to God, and to become the people we’re created to be.

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/sin-and-falling-short-of-ideals/>.

Anthony de Mello on Sin

One of the disconcerting—and delightful—teachings of the Master was “God is closer to sinners than to saints.”

This is how he explained it: “God in heaven holds each person by a string. When you sin, you cut the string. Then God ties it up again, making a knot—and thereby bringing you a little closer to him. Again and again your sins cut the string—and with each further knot God keeps drawing you closer and closer”

—Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Wisdom*, p. 116 [7]

Sin: The Big Picture

This is one of the suggested readings by O’Brien for the third week of our retreat.

Lent is the season during which we consider what it means to be fallen creation, in need of divine help. In Week 3 of our Ignatian Prayer Adventure, we’re encouraged to think about sin at different levels. There’s the sin of Adam and Eve. There’s the sin of the individual. There’s also sin on a larger scale—sin that is entrenched in our social and political systems.

For the moment, I’d rather not try to define what “sin” means; for some people the very word sin is difficult to relate to, because often it is had been used to convey the idea that people are basically bad, and we do bad things. The larger Christian tradition believes that people are created in the image of God, and that we are defined, not by the “fall” into sin, but by our original state of glory and beauty as creatures made and loved by God.

So, rather than start with the word sin and define who we are by that, let’s start with the reality we live in and determine from that what sin is.

This week, take a slow and thoughtful look at the world around you, including your own home. Start with the idea that we are made because God desires us, and God’s dream for us is to love—to do and say and be everything out of love.

However, if we open our eyes, it soon becomes clear that love is not the impetus for so much that goes on in life. Where do you see love disrupted? Where do you see it despised and ignored? Where is love pushed to the side so that another force might take its place?

What damage occurs because love is not at the center? Identify the damage you either experience personally or observe as a witness.

Now, having taken that slow and thoughtful look, how would you define sin?

—Vinita Hampton Wright⁴

⁴<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/sin-the-big-picture/>.

Sin: The Individual Portrait

Vinita Hampton Wright has a follow up to the *Sin: The Big Picture*.

We have begun to consider what sin looks like in the big picture. But that's not enough. Sooner or later, I must take that slow and thoughtful look at my own life and identify where, in that life, God's love is disrupted, ignored, or pushed aside.

Here are a few questions to help us with this difficult—and sometimes painful—task:

- Where is the pain in my life? What is causing it? At what point was love disrupted and some lesser thing allowed to be central? (Please note: pain may come from my own actions/thoughts, but often it comes from sources I do not control—systems, people, circumstances.)
- Whom have I hurt, and how did that happen?
- What patterns in my thoughts tend to lead to behavior that is not loving?
- What patterns in my behavior tend to make my wounds deeper and my life harder?
- Where am I not free but somehow trapped or held back or stuck in unhealthy patterns?
- At what points am I saying no to God's efforts to love me?

—Vinita Hampton Wright ⁵

The Colloquy

The following is taken from Kevin O'Brien's book, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life*.^[20]

A colloquy is an intimate conversation between you and God the Father, between you and Jesus, or between you and Mary or one of the saints. It often occurs at the end of a prayer period, but it can take place at any time. Let this conversation naturally develop in your prayer.

In the colloquy, we speak and listen as the Spirit moves us: expressing ourselves, for example, as a friend speaks to a friend, or as a person speaks to one whom he or she has offended, or as a child speaks to a parent or mentor, or as a lover speaks to his or her beloved.

Whatever the context, be “real,” speaking from the heart. As in any meaningful conversation, make sure to leave times of silence for listening.

In the meditations on sin, Ignatius suggests that we place ourselves before the cross and consider three questions that echo throughout the Exercises:

- What have I done for Christ?
- What am I doing for Christ?
- What ought I do for Christ?

Return to these questions throughout the retreat. In one sense, they are not completely answerable during the retreat itself; we often lean into the answers as we continue our normal routines. By considering the questions, we realize how practical the Exercises are. Just as our sin is reflected in concrete decisions and actions, so, too, does grace come to life in choices and deeds for the love of Christ and others. We encounter Christ not only in our prayer and in the sacraments but also in our relationships with the Body of Christ, living now as the church, the people of God.

⁵<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/sin-the-individual-portrait/>.



7. Week 4: Knowing Jesus

We enter into the second phase of the Exercises this week. This phase is the one that takes the most time of all the phases. We will spend three weeks of our adventure in this phase. We focus on knowing Jesus better and understanding his call to join him in his mission. O'Brien introduces this week of the retreat as follows:

This week we move into the Second Week or main section of the Spiritual Exercises. In the First Week, we savored the grace of being loved by God in our sinfulness. In the Second Week, we naturally respond to God's mercy by wanting to get to know this God who is so generous and loving, who calls us by name, just as we are.

In the Second Week, we accompany Jesus in his earthly ministry. We seek not scientific or biographical facts about Jesus, but a knowledge more akin to knowing a friend in mystery and depth—a heartfelt knowledge.

We will reflect on Jesus' public ministry later in this prayer adventure. This week we will reflect on the Incarnation and Jesus' birth and early life.

This week uses a technique of Ignatian prayer called imaginative contemplation. This way of praying involves imaginatively placing yourself in the Gospel scene as if you were a participant in the event. The idea is to gain a deep heartfelt connection with Jesus and his work.

You might want to reread the discussion on Ignatian Contemplation from Week 1 (see Sec. 4.8) to refresh your understanding of this important meditation technique. It is used in most of the daily prayers in the next weeks.

7.1 Day 1: Contemplation on the Incarnation

We begin by looking at the big picture. Last week we reflected on sin and its terrible effects on us and our world. Now we contemplate the Incarnation of Jesus—God’s response to sin.

In the Contemplation on the Incarnation, we gaze on the world with the Trinity—with God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We get lost in the mystery of the Incarnation. We marvel at how God works through ordinary people like Mary and Joseph. We are filled with great gratitude because God wanted to get close to us by becoming human in Jesus of Nazareth. In this way, God makes divine love imminently available to all people.

There is no scripture reading for today.

My attitude

God intervened in the history of His people to become one of us and share our lot. In the mystery of my own being and in the story of my own life he is an Advent God, intervening to save me, to love me, to be my companion, and to share my adventure.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: a deeply felt knowledge of God’s dream for the world; awe and wonder at the mystery of the Incarnation.

Meditation: Contemplate the Incarnation



We begin the contemplation by imagining the three Divine Persons gazing on “the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people” (SE 102).

Consider what the Divine Persons (and you) see and hear: men and women of different sizes, shapes, and colors; rich and poor; old and young. People speaking different languages. Some being born, others dying; some running and playing, others sick and suffering. Some laughing, others crying. Some screaming and shouting, others praying and singing.

With the gaze of the Trinity, consider how people are treating one another: some loving, others hating; some hugging, others hitting; some helping, others ignoring, hurting, and killing. What do you see and hear?

How do you feel as you imagine the world in this way? How do the three Divine Persons respond to the joys and sufferings of the world? How does the God who is Love respond to us, God’s children, who are lost, aimless, suffering, sinning, confused, and hurting?

Hear the Divine Persons saying, “Let us work the redemption of the human race” (SE 107).

What words do you want to speak to God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Reflection: The Trinity Looks Down from Heaven

The lion's share of the Spiritual Exercises, perhaps two-thirds, is given over to imaginative contemplation of Gospel episodes from the life of Jesus. The retreatant prays to "see Jesus more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow him more nearly" as a disciple. (St. Ignatius found the prayer where the authors of *Godspell* found it; it was written by Richard of Chichester in the 1200s.) The Exercises begin at the beginning of the life of Jesus; the first contemplation is of the moment of Jesus' conception (yes, St. Ignatius was pro-life). The prayer, as Ignatius envisions it, is a diptych. The first "panel" is God's decision and offer; the second "panel" is Mary's human response.

The first part of the meditation emerges not from the Gospels, but from Ignatius's imagination. After collecting him or herself, becoming aware of God's presence, and asking for "what he or she desires" (to see more clearly, etc.), the retreatant is invited to enter into God's viewpoint. Allowing the Spirit to guide, the person praying is asked to imagine the triune God, before the moment of Jesus' conception:

Looking upon our world: men and women being born and being laid to rest, some getting married and others getting divorced, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the happy and the sad, so many people aimless, despairing, hateful, and killing, so many undernourished, sick, and dying, so many struggling with life and blind to any meaning. With God, I can hear people laughing and crying, some shouting and screaming, some praying, others cursing.

Try to pay attention to the Trinity's affective responses to this complicated, messy mass of humanity. Pay attention to your own feelings as well. If you pretend in your imagination to be back in the time before Jesus' coming, how do you feel looking down "from where God sits" at the mixed, complicated messiness of the unredeemed human condition? Would you respond as the Trinity did?

Then, let the miracle of divine love unfold in your mind's eye.

The leap of divine joy: God knows that the time has come when the mystery of salvation, hidden from the beginning of the world, will shine into human darkness and confusion. It is as if I can hear the Divine Persons saying, "Let us work the redemption of the whole human race; let us respond to the groaning of all creation."

The Trinity's response—O, wonder of wonders!—is to incarnate the Divine Word, the second Person. God the Son will take human flesh as Jesus of Nazareth and become Emmanuel, "God with us." The Trinity's plan is the mystery of the Incarnation—the very reason for the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Give this prayer exercise a whirl; walk imaginatively in God's shoes for a while. See what it does for your heart and your spirit. Fall in love with God and Jesus. Feel free to discuss what you are seeing and feeling in prayer with God—with any or all of the three Persons. Maybe thank Jesus Christ for his willingness to become human.

—Daniel Ruff, SJ¹

¹I have taken the liberty of some modifications to better fit the context of our retreat. The original is at <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/contemplation-on-the-incarnation-part-one-the-trinity-looks-down-from-heaven/>.

7.2 Day 2: The Annunciation

God responds to the “groaning” of creation very concretely. Narrow your imaginative gaze from a broad perspective and focus on the details of how God saves in history: “See in particular the house and rooms of Mary, in the city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee” (SE 103).

My attitude

God intervened in the history of His people to become one of us and share our lot. In the mystery of my own being and in the story of my own life he is an Advent God, intervening to save me, to love me, to be my companion, and to share my adventure.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: a deeply felt knowledge of God’s dream for the world; awe and wonder at the mystery of the Incarnation.

Reading

Luke 1: 26-38

Imagine the sights, sounds, and smells of the scene, when the angel Gabriel greets the young woman. Listen to their conversation. Notice the expressions on their faces and the movement of their bodies. Conclude by praying a colloquy with Mary.

Reflection: Magnificat

Read the Magnificat, Mary's response to God's call. Consider that she was free to respond and chose to say "yes" to God. How might you respond to such a call?

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

7.3 Day 3: The Birth of Jesus

Having rejoiced with Mary in her “yes” to God, we begin to walk with Jesus from his birth, through his hidden life and public ministry, to the foot of the cross at Calvary.

In these weeks, we ask repeatedly for a grace fundamental to the Second Week of the Exercises: “to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely” (SE 104). This idea of the “more”—encapsulated in the Latin word, *magis*—is vital for Ignatius. The Exercises are intended to tap into a zeal that impels us to more knowledge, love, and service of God and others.

The order of these graces is important. We can rush to find out what our calling in life is, without really knowing the One who calls us. If we focus on first knowing and loving Jesus, then the call to serve becomes clearer and we can approach it with less fear. We really cannot love someone unless we first know him or her on some deeply personal level. Ultimately, it is possible to follow Jesus only if we are rooted in our love for him.

My attitude

God intervened in the history of His people to become one of us and share our lot. In the mystery of my own being and in the story of my own life he is an Advent God, intervening to save me, to love me, to be my companion, and to share my adventure.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Luke 2: 1-7

Contemplate the scene of Jesus’ birth. Ignatius suggests placing yourself directly in the scene:

See the persons; that is, to see Our Lady, Joseph, the maidservant, and the infant Jesus after his birth. I will make myself a poor, little, and unworthy slave, gazing at them, contemplating them, and serving them in their needs, just as if I were there, with all possible respect and reverence. (SE 114)



Reflection: Some Insight into Redemption

Consider a blissfully happy couple finding all they need in one another. For no other reason than generosity and the desire to share their happiness, they decide to adopt children as their own. From then on their life undergoes a profound change. Now they are vulnerable; their happiness is wrapped up in the welfare of the children; things can never be the same again.

If the children choose to alienate themselves and start on the path to ruin, the couple are stricken. They will plead, humble themselves, make huge sacrifices, go out of themselves to get their loved ones to understand that the home is still their home, that the love they have been given is unchanging.

This perhaps, gives us some insight into redemption. In a mystery we cannot fathom, God “empties,” “loses” Himself, in bringing back to Himself His estranged, lost children. And this is all the Father wants. This is the only remedy for His wound. God is no longer pure God, but always God-with-humanity-in-His-heart.

—Ruth Borrow, *Essence of Prayer*[\[5\]](#)

7.4 Day 4: Glory to God in the Highest

Continue contemplating the Nativity. Join the shepherds in the countryside and then journey with them to visit the baby Jesus. As you pray through Jesus' life, you will notice how often he surrounds himself with people like the shepherds—those who are poor and on the margins of society. Rejoicing in the good news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds become Jesus' first disciples.

My attitude

God intervened in the history of His people to become one of us and share our lot. In the mystery of my own being and in the story of my own life he is an Advent God, intervening to save me, to love me, to be my companion, and to share my adventure.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Luke 2: 8-20

Accompany the shepherds as they hear the good news and visit the baby Jesus.

Reflection: The Shepherd Girl's Experience

The Shepherd Girl's Experience

I try to imagine night in an ancient land and myself in it, millennia before the mechanical hum of machines and motors entered the world. I try to think of the most natural quiet I have ever known, maybe after a fresh nighttime snow. Maybe the expectant hush that falls over the crowd as the houselights go down and the conductor raises his baton. Maybe a holy hour in the dead of night when it's just me and Jesus—that still quiet that is filled with presence, the holy, mystical touch of God.

When I close my eyes, I imagine I am one of the shepherds, the youngest of them, very little, nothing but a child, and the whole world exists for me, just as it does for all children.

The air is clear and chilly, and there is dew on the grass. I hear the faint movement of the herds, the soft night sounds of a world at rest. Herd animals have an aroma of their own at night; they take on the warm and reassuring smell of sleeping beasts—it is as though their very slumber has a fragrance. I am quiet and calm and at peace in all of this, even in my own nothingness. As it often does, my gaze turns toward the heavens, the glory of the stars, the vast, hovering universe stretching out over the fields, over me, and my mind is filled with a child's wonder.

Suddenly the sky erupts with light and singing. It is frightening, confusing, and I shield myself. What could this be? There are voices and beings, brightness beyond imagining, sounds I've never heard, and after some moments the sky goes dark again, the stars reappear, but nothing will ever be the same. A startled silence falls over "the other shepherds and then I hear the word—though I barely know what it means: "angel."

Everyone starts running, and I cannot understand what is going on nor do I know where they are going, but I follow along with the others. What else would a child do?

It is dark, but our feet fly. We are light and quick. We do not miss a step. Until in the distance I see we are approaching a cave—only it is illuminated, not cold, dark, damp but a warm, living, glowing sort of place. As we draw nearer, the other shepherds slow down, and when we are quite close, they stop and kneel. I kneel too. I think I should keep my head down, but I want to sneak a glance. There is something—someone—ahead in that cave. Dare I look? A woman, a baby. Didn't the angel say something of this, something of infants and that other word so inviting and mysterious, "savior"?

We are captivated, speechless. Then one, the oldest and wisest of us, thinks to approach this woman, and the woman says, “Wait a moment,” and then she turns to look directly at me. She gestures for me to come forward. And I can see the head shepherd is taken aback, confused by this, as if to say, “What could you possibly want with her?” He is a humble, good man, hardworking and honest; it’s disorienting to see him confounded.

But I go. Though I have no sense of what is taking place or who she is, it seems I cannot resist her invitation to approach, and when I get closer, I see she’s so beautiful and lovely and superb in every way. She smiles at me, and I draw nearer. We look down on the baby in her arms together.

I say, “He’s so small.”

And she says, “Yes, babies are very little.”

“He’s so soft,” I say, and she smiles and nods. “He smells good,” I say, and she laughs a little.

“Yes, so sweet,” she says. Then somehow I am in her lap and so is the baby. She is holding me, and I am holding him. And then he takes my finger—curls his little fist around my own child’s finger—and squeezes. And I look at this beautiful woman and say, “Look! He’s touching me.”

Her whole expression changes, deepens, and she says, “Yes, he is.”

He is touching me, touching my heart, in this prayer, in this meditation, and in that slightest connection, sending a world of healing, oceans of grace, a universe of glory pulsing through an infant’s grip.

Child, how I love you!

Then I remember the question I had been asking: “Why did you come? Why pour all your glory and power into one little baby?”

And he says to me, not in words, but through that little innocent fist, this helpless little creature, “So I could touch you, flesh of my flesh.”

I believe him down to my bones.

—Elizabeth M. Kelly[12]

If you have access to the Internet, visit the [3 Minute Retreat, Good News of Great Joy](https://www.loyolapress.com/retreats/3minuteretreat-good-news-of-great-joy/?displang=en-US) ²

²<https://www.loyolapress.com/retreats/3minuteretreat-good-news-of-great-joy/?displang=en-US>.

7.5 Day 5: Jesus is Presented in the Temple

We continue to contemplate the early life of Jesus. We notice how Jesus grows up in a particular social, economic, political, and religious context. Even in the comforting stories of the Nativity, we see the beginnings of opposition against Jesus. We cannot separate the saving work of Christ from the times in which he lived. Salvation does not take place apart from the world, as if God were throwing a lifeline down from heaven and pulling us up. Instead, God saves in the world.

In the Gospel contemplations, Ignatius often instructs us to pray “so as to draw some profit.” This does not mean that we have to be “productive” when we pray, analyzing the text to find some insightful application. The review of prayer (journaling) is a better time to use the intellect to draw real-world applications. In contemplation, we let our prayer affect us and touch our hearts. We allow memories, emotions, desires, and longings to be stirred as God wishes.

My attitude

God intervened in the history of His people to become one of us and share our lot. In the mystery of my own being and in the story of my own life he is an Advent God, intervening to save me, to love me, to be my companion, and to share my adventure.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading



Luke 2: 21-38

Accompany the Holy Family as Jesus is named and then presented in the temple. Join Simeon and Anna as they wait for Jesus and then as they meet him.

As you marvel at the child Jesus, what hopes spring in your heart? What names do you give the child?

Reflection: A sense of Reverence

Ignatius believed that anyone who prayerfully considers the basic truth that we are created out of love by a transcendent God of holiness will grow in a sense of reverence. We will have a deepened sense of the sacredness of all things if we think of everything as continually being called and sustained in being by God. We will stand in awe not just before sunsets and mountains, flowers and trees, but also, and especially, before every person we meet. Reverence is a disposition of a heart that allows us to live before the beauty and goodness of every creature and the God who made them.

—Gerald M. Fagin, SJ, Putting on the Heart of Christ[8]

7.6 Day 6: Exile in Egypt

God continues to save us in the details of our lives today, in the beauty and messiness of our world. As we pray in the midst of daily life, we may become more sensitive to the joys and tragedies of our world and to the needs of people around us. In accompanying the Holy Family in their flight to Egypt and their return to Nazareth, how can we not feel deeply the plight of millions of displaced persons in our world? How can we not be more attentive to the supports and the pressures that young families experience today?

My attitude

God intervened in the history of His people to become one of us and share our lot. In the mystery of my own being and in the story of my own life he is an Advent God, intervening to save me, to love me, to be my companion, and to share my adventure.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Matthew 2: 13-23

Accompany Joseph, Mary, and Jesus as they escape into exile. Spend time with them in Egypt, and join them on their return to Nazareth.

Reflection: Women of Goodness

This reflection is by Gary Smith, SJ, on Sudanese refugee mothers.

“I have known and wept with and consoled the Sudanese refugee woman, particularly as she is a mother. When you know her as a mother, you understand how she can age so quickly. The Sudanese refugee mother is poor and frequently has a baby strapped to her back or nursing at her breast. She is always working—sweeping, cooking, cleaning, carrying huge loads on her head—and is often pregnant; most likely, she has had children who have died of malaria. She is friendly and long-suffering, loves to talk and joke with her sisters, is close to her tribe and clan, most often cannot read or write, and is born into and suffers from a rigid male-dominated culture. She dies young. Often she is old before her time, but she possesses an interior beauty that endures until she dies. She would die in an eye blink for her family.

“I have buried her after childbirth. I have anointed her as she was dying of some tropical disease. I have given her alms when she has extended her hand, fingers lost to leprosy. I have raced my car over impossible roads to get her to a clinic where she can deliver her baby. I have been with her when she is dying of the shock of a breech birth, a little foot sticking out of her body. I have helped her younger daughters continue with their studies in the face of a cultural attitude that educating a girl child is not necessary—an attitude she has faced firsthand. I have fallen in love with the African mother, whose goodness and beauty have left me shaking.

“One day, such a mother, Mary Kenyi, came to me. Her old body was covered in a threadbare dress. She often came by, asking for a few beans or some grain and sometimes for a blanket. She has nothing, not even a son or daughter to care for her in her old age. All of her children were killed in the Sudan civil war, along with her husband. I saw her, a long walking stick in hand, coming toward me as I was conversing with a staff member outside our compound. I thought to myself, perhaps with an edge of irritation, I wonder what she will be asking for today? She carried a small plastic bag and handed it to me, giving me a smile that would capture the heart of the most heartless.

“In the bag was a gift for me. Three eggs.”

7.7 Day 7: Jesus Teaches in the Temple



The years of Jesus' boyhood and young adulthood in Nazareth are mentioned only briefly in the Gospels. You will supply many of the details through imaginative prayer. We ask the Spirit to show us what Jesus was like growing up. Accompany him as a friend, relative, or neighbor in Nazareth. Though fully divine, Jesus is also fully human (like us in all things but sin, our tradition teaches). Notice, then, how Jesus grows into his humanity.

It doesn't matter whether the details you supply are historically accurate. We are not reconstructing history. Instead, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are coming to know Jesus more intimately so that we can love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

My attitude

God intervened in the history of His people to become one of us and share our lot. In the mystery of my own being and in the story of my own life he is an Advent God, intervening to save me, to love me, to be my companion, and to share my adventure.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Luke 2: 41-50

Accompany Jesus on his journey to the temple, where he experiences a deepening sense of his vocation. Be present to Mary and Joseph in their concern. Share with them the experiences of your own youth and how you feel about them now, looking back.

Reflection**Draw Me Into Your Friendship**

Lord Jesus, from the start
You invite ordinary people to come to where you live.
When they come, you welcome them
and call them to labor and rejoice with you.
You are the most beautiful among all men,
and I hardly believe you want me for your friend.
You are powerful, Lord.
Draw me more and more into your friendship
and lead me along the way you took with friends.

From *Hearts on Fire*, Joseph Tetlow, SJ

7.8 Additional Material for Week 4

Scripture Readings

- Isaiah 7: 14
- Isaiah 9: 6
- John 1: 14
- Matthew 1: 18-23
- Galatians 4: 4-5

Prayers, Poems, and Other Resources

The Incarnation

Then he summoned an archangel;
Saint Gabriel came,
And He sent him to a maiden,
Mary was her name,

Whose consent and acquiescence
Gave the mystery its birth;
It was the Trinity that clothed
With flesh the Living Word.

Though the three had worked the wonder
It was wrought in but this one,
And the incarnated Word
Was left in Mary's womb.

And He who had a father only
Now possessed a mother,
Though not of man was He conceived
But unlike any other.

And deep within her body
His life of flesh began:
For this reason He is called
The Son of God and Man.

—St. John of the Cross

Annunciation

Salvation to all that will is nigh;
That All, which always is all everywhere,
Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear,
Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die,
Lo, faithful virgin, yields Himself to lie
In prison, in thy womb; and though He there
Can take no sin, nor thou give, yet He will wear,
Taken from thence, flesh, which death's force may try.
Ere by the spheres time was created, thou
Wast in His mind, who is thy Son and Brother;
Whom thou conceivst, conceived; yea thou art now
Thy Maker's maker, and thy Father's mother;
Thou hast light in dark, and shutst in little room,
Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb.

—John Donne

The Maid-Servant At The Inn

"It's queer," she said; "I see the light
As plain as I beheld it then,
All silver-like and calm and bright-
We've not had stars like that again!
"And she was such a gentle thing
To birth a baby in the cold.
The barn was dark and frightening-
This new one's better than the old.

"I mind my eyes were full of tears,
For I was young, and quick distressed,
But she was less than me in years
That held a son against her breast.

"I never saw a sweeter child-
The little one, the darling one!-
I mind I told her, when he smiled
You'd know he was his mother's son.

"It's queer that I should see them so-
The time they came to Bethlehem
Was more than thirty years ago;
I've prayed that all is well with them."

—Dorothy Parker

Immanuel

In God's Presence
Is the essence
Of perfect earth;
In one birth
Knows all earth
The essence
Of God's Presence.

—Elton Higgs

Videos

O'Brien points out two videos for additional material for this week of our adventure.

- **Give Up Being Tough on Yourself** is a video follow up to last week's *Sin, O Happy Fault* by Paul Brian Campbell, SJ.³
- **Reflection Video: Jesus the Child** is a video reflection on Jesus as a child by Vinita Hampton Wright.⁴

If Jesus Were Born Today

It's easy to distance ourselves from the birth of Jesus. After all, it happened more than 2,000 years ago, and it happened in a place quite different from where most of us—the blog-reading community—live. A few of us have seen the Holy Land and understand a bit more about the landscape and the people, but still, there's so much we don't know about what actually happened when the Incarnation announced itself in the cries of a newborn baby.

Why not try to imagine the situation translated to this place and time? Consider these characteristics of the situation:

Mary and Joseph were probably already saddled with a bad reputation because of the timing of her pregnancy. It would have looked particularly bad for her but also for him. We won't linger on what out-of-wedlock pregnancy really meant in that culture, but just try to imagine two people dealing not only with a first pregnancy but with very shaky standing in their home town.

They were working-class people. Joseph had a trade, so they weren't at the bottom of the social strata, but they were not people of privilege, and they lived from one "paycheck" to another. They had no financial safety net. Don't even think health insurance.

The journey they took to Bethlehem was harrowing because they were under hostile occupation, and there was a history of oppression and brutality when it came to Romans ruling the Jews. It would be similar to undocumented people trying to travel across our borders when there's a huge political crackdown on immigration. Or, more ironically, it would have been similar to what present-day Palestinians have to deal with in various regions of the Holy Land, where Israeli occupation makes it impossible for people to get medical care, go to work, or even keep their homes. In other words, Mary and Joseph were extremely vulnerable and had no real power over their situation.

After months of preparation for the birth, undoubtedly with female relatives and a local midwife involved, **Mary would end up giving birth who-knows-where**, and if she were lucky, perhaps she would get help from someone. Imagine doing all the prenatal preparation, the classes, getting to know your medical helpers, only to end up in labor in a small town that is overrun with people attending a huge festival or conference play-off. The hospital is already full and the small staff overwhelmed. Or, I like to imagine out-of-town immigrants landing at Chicago's Cook County Hospital emergency room—on a weekend, at the height of summer tourist season.

If Jesus were born in your town, how would that look?

—Vinita Hampton Wright

³<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/give-up-being-tough-on-yourself/>.

⁴<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/reflection-video-jesus-the-child/>.

A Twelve-Year-Old, Where?

There's so much to contemplate on during this part of the Spiritual Exercises. This week we consider Jesus' birth and presentation in the temple (for naming and circumcision), also the small family's exile in Egypt to protect the boy's life, and then the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple at Jerusalem.

Monday's post explored the birth of Jesus. Let's skip ahead now to his little show in the temple. His parents have made the annual pilgrimage with him to Jerusalem, and then they and others from Nazareth head for home, but as it turns out, Jesus isn't with them or with any of the other families. After searching a day or two, Mary and Joseph find him back in Jerusalem, still in the temple, talking at length with the religion teachers—the experts of the Jewish faith. He's making quite an impression.

What do we make of that?

Please remember that he was twelve. Twelve-year-olds are coming into their own—especially back then, when a Jewish boy was considered an adult at around age thirteen. It's a time of separating from family, at least at the interior level, and finding one's own place in the world. Even now, twelve-year-olds do what they enjoy doing and what they're drawn to, not what they're told they should enjoy.

What I'm saying is, Jesus was in his element, and he knew it. My guess is that, from an early age, he had loved the Scriptures and had an affinity for prayer, and when he landed in the temple at age twelve, he suddenly felt that he'd come home. He even said as much to his parents: "Don't you know I need to be in my Father's house?"

What does this mean for us?

I think it's worth exploring within myself, from time to time, what I truly love and why. It's healthy to ask periodically if I am in my element—if I'm doing what I'm gifted to do and what I'm drawn to. Jesus went on to be the man, the Son of God. But first he had to be the boy, the kid figuring out who he was, what he loved, and where he belonged. That's a lesson each of us must learn many times throughout life.

Are you in your element? Have you found home?

—Vinita Hampton Wright



8. Week 5: What Do I Really Want?

Our prayer this week explores the implications and consequences of following Christ. Ignatius does this by proposing three scenarios or “thought experiments” involving the challenge of being one of Christ’s disciples.

The question hovering over the whole week is: What do I really want?

What do you *want*? That is, what does your heart say? What do you really want? That is, look honestly at your desires as they are. God is more interested in what you feel than in what you think. And God is interested in your real feelings, not the feelings you think you *should* have.

The above description for this week comes from O’Brien’s introduction on the Web retreat. The material of this particular week of the retreat is considered the transition from phase one to phase two of the retreat. Ignatius had a lot to say about this. I include the following, edited excerpt from Skehan’s *Place Me With Your Son, Ignatian Spirituality in Everyday Life*.

A Consideration or Appeal to Reason

St. Ignatius presents this exercise, entitled Del Rey, “About the King,” (SE 091-098) not as a contemplation but as a Consideration calculated to lead to contemplation. By Consideration Ignatius means an appeal to reason rather than an appeal to the heart as in contemplation, by which the devout heart is raised to Jesus through consolation. This exercise has long been referred to as “The Kingdom,” but this term is not used in the Ignatian text, a careful reading of which reveals that this exercise is concerned mainly with the challenging call by the risen Jesus to follow him.

A Perspective on the Call of Christ to Each of Us

Ignatius nowhere in the First Phase develops a meditation that focuses specifically on the mercy of Jesus, but he concretizes the mercy of God in the exercise entitled “Christ the King and His Call.” (SE 091-098)

There is a way of showing love by doing something for another person, as a father can send his child gifts while living far away. But a far greater sign of love is shown by being present and mutually involved, such as a father spending time with his child. . . . It is in this second way that Ignatius presents the parable of a king calling to all the inhabitants of his kingdom .

The parable (of the Prodigal Son) is intended to be a pale image, though it has been repeated many times in actual human history of the call which Jesus Christ gives to each person. He not only identifies himself as our personal savior but invites each man, woman, and child to be involved with him in working for the salvation of their fellow men and women and their world. The victory has been won in Christ, though it is still in process in us and in

our world.

Ignatius would have us understand even more deeply the mercy of God as it is extended by the very means of this call to work with Christ and to follow him in all the ways that our devotion to him can draw us. Ignatius proposes that we consider the response which a very generous person would make to Jesus, but he very carefully does not demand that we make the same response. In fact, no colloquy is outlined, though a grace has been sought in terms of hearing and responding to the Call of Christ.

This exercise—put together by Ignatius to introduce us to the present and risen Christ and to his call—is best described as a “consideration.” In a consideration the mind is absorbed with the search for truth, rather than a meditation on it. St. Bernard defines a consideration as “a true and certain insight of the mind concerning any reality, or a grasp of the truth that is free of all doubt.” This consideration is meant to be an aid to contemplation. “The evident logic involved in a consideration does not demand the kind of reasoning process which the meditation form does. Both prayer forms, however, ultimately call for some response from us.^[21]

8.1 Day 1: The Call of Christ, Our King

We begin by contemplating the call of a worldly leader, which then leads us to consider the call of Christ, our King. In considering the call of a worldly leader, Ignatius relies on language and feudal images fitting for his time.

If the medieval imagery is distracting or unhelpful, consider the inspiration of a person of our time who personifies virtue and integrity, fights against injustice, or labors for the oppressed and marginalized. This person may be a civic leader, a modern-day saint or prophet, or a personal friend. Or you may rely on some mythical figure in literature or film. Reflect on anyone who inspires you and summons your zeal to make the world a more just and gentle place.

My attitude

Although spoken by Pope John Paul II to the Jesuits of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society on September 2, 1983, these words are equally applicable to all Christians today: “Your vocation consists precisely in seeking to follow Christ, Redeemer of the world, by being his collaborators in the redemption of the entire world; consequently you should excel in the service of the Divine King, as stated in the offering that concludes the Contemplation on the Kingdom of Christ in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.” . . . The King’s call is to high adventure, an invitation to companionship, to experience his loving care and to join with him in the service of His people. This is a call issued to every generous Christian who seeks to help our Saviour to fulfill his mission on earth.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: to listen more attentively to Christ’s call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

Consideration: The Call of a Worldly Leader

Read through the scene slowly. Pause frequently as you immerse yourself in it.

First, I will place before my mind a human king, chosen by God our Lord himself, whom all Christian princes and all Christian persons reverence and obey. (SE 092)

Second, I will observe how this king speaks to all his people, saying, “My will is to conquer the whole land of the infidels. Hence, whoever wishes to come with me has to be content with the same food I eat, and the drink, and the clothing which I wear, and so forth. So too each one must labor with me during the day, and keep watch in the night, and so on, so that later each may have a part with me in the victory, just as each has shared in the toil.” (SE 093)

Third, I will consider what good subjects ought to respond to a king so generous and kind; and how, consequently, if someone did not answer his call, he would be scorned and upbraided by everyone and accounted as an unworthy knight. (SE 094)

What feelings does this leader stir in you? What do you imagine you could do if you followed such a leader? Make note of your thoughts in your journal.

Reflection

There are so many world leaders whose words and actions inspire us to service and who can remind us of Christ's even greater summons. One of my favorite inspirations is from Theodore Roosevelt, who said this in a speech at the Sorbonne in 1910:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

If you have access to the Internet, also view this video. *Kevin O'Brien, SJ, on the Call of Christ the King*, <https://shorturl.at/OPUW3>.

8.2 Day 2: The Call of Christ, Our King (Continued)

We now consider the call of Jesus Christ. Note the repeated use of two phrases, the “more” (or “greater”) and “with me.” Christ summons the best from us, calling us to the magis, to greater service and generosity.

My attitude

As in the previous day’s consideration: The King’s call is to high adventure, an invitation to companionship, to experience his loving care and to join with him in the service of His people. This is a call issued to every generous Christian who seeks to help our Saviour to fulfill his mission on earth.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: to listen more attentively to Christ’s call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

Consideration: Responding to the Call

You might review your notes from yesterday before reading the meditation.

If we give consideration to such a call from the temporal king to his subjects, how much *more* worthy of our consideration it is to gaze upon Christ our Lord, the eternal King, and all the world assembled before him. He calls to them all, and to each person in particular he says: “My will is to conquer the whole world and all my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my Father. Therefore, whoever wishes to come *with me* must labor *with me*, so that through following me in the pain he or she may follow me also in the glory.” (SE 095, emphasis added)

Ignatius suggests two responses. Both are loving responses of a generous disciple. The first response is the offering of a disciple who commits him or herself wholeheartedly to the work of the kingdom of God:

[I will reflect that] all those who have judgment and reason will offer themselves wholeheartedly for this labor. (SE 096)

This offering is a matter of reason and good judgment: it makes sense that if we are going to follow a noble, worldly leader, we will want to follow Christ all the more.

The second offering suggests an even more generous, more heartfelt response. The disciple devotes him- or herself not simply to laboring for the kingdom but also to being with Christ and imitating more completely his way of living:

Those who desire to show greater devotion and to distinguish themselves in *total* service to their eternal King and universal Lord, will not only offer their persons for their labor, but *go further* still. They will work against their human sensitivities and against their carnal and worldly love, and they will make offerings of *greater* worth and moment, and say (SE 097, emphasis added):

“Eternal Lord of all things, I make my offering, with your favor and help. I make it in the presence of your infinite Goodness, and of your glorious Mother, and of all the holy men and women in your heavenly court. I wish and desire, and it is my deliberate decision, provided only that it is for your *greater* service and praise, to imitate you in bearing all injuries and affronts, and any poverty, actual as well as spiritual, if your Most Holy Majesty desires to choose and receive me into such a life and state.” (SE 098, emphasis added)

Reflection: Better Than Your Best?

Magis is one of the more mysterious Ignatian terms. It's a Latin word meaning "the greater, the excellent, the best." It's associated with restless striving to always do better, to undertake a greater project, to set more ambitious goals. Sometimes I find the notion of *magis*¹ inspiring. Often I find it intimidating.

The idea of the *magis* comes from the Call of the King meditation in the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius has us imagine Christ as a King calling us to join him in his work to save and heal the world. Who wouldn't want to respond eagerly to this call? It makes perfect sense to sign up. "All those who have judgment and reason will offer themselves wholeheartedly for this labor," St. Ignatius comments.

But Ignatius urges us to consider something more: to "go further still," to "make offerings of *greater* worth and moment." We're asked to serve the King with something *more* than wholehearted service. How is this possible?

It really isn't possible. I think Ignatius is raising the possibility of greater-than-wholehearted service as a personal invitation. He's putting it out there for us to consider. It has more to do with personal commitment to Christ than with restless type-A overachieving. What can you imagine that would motivate you to do more than your best? It's a question each of us can answer only for ourselves. It's a question we can answer only as we get closer to our King.

Ask: What desires, dreams, concerns, fears, or hopes does Christ's invitation stir in me? How am I moved to respond now?

—Jim Manney²

¹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/meaning-of-magis-video/>.

²<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/better-than-your-best/>.

8.3 Day 3: The Call of the Disciples

God's call is meant to give us a fuller life of deeper meaning and authentic joy (though not without the sacrifices that accompany a life of discipleship). Far from being imposed from above, God's will—or God's desire—for us is found in our own deepest, truest desires.

My attitude

Allow God's Spirit to inspire holy desires in you. We don't have to make any offering or commitment if we're not ready. For now, we just want to be open enough to hear the call and to get excited about Christ's engaging vision for us and the world.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: to listen more attentively to Christ's call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

Reading

Matthew 4: 18-25

Consider Jesus' call and the response of the disciples. Use the techniques of imaginative prayer to reflect on this passage. Review *Ignatian Contemplation: Imaginative Prayer* in the week 1 additional materials (Sec. 4.8).

Reflection

: Why God Makes Us Wait

I have heard that God always answers prayer. Sometimes the answer is "Yes." Sometimes it is "No." And sometimes it is "Wait."

There was a time when God's answer to my prayer was "Wait." I didn't really listen, though. I figured I could make it all happen on my own. I went out and made one stupid decision after another to get what I wanted, until I was so far from God, I didn't know how to get back.

Maybe you've done this before. Maybe you are there right now.

Don't worry. God is there. He was waiting for me to come back to him. As soon as I turned my eye back on God, his arms were open, ready to embrace me.

It was during this time that I understood why God had me wait in the first place. This is a little embarrassing but maybe obvious: my ego and pride needed reigning in. Yes, I thought I could make it all happen on my own—without God. Like a toddler throwing a tantrum, I stomped my feet and said, "If you won't do it, I'll do it!"

I started to understand that waiting was for me, not for God. Waiting was for me to learn to surrender to the will of God and to learn to trust him. That time when I waited trained me to be the person who could handle all that I requested.

My friend Sarah calls this "good parenting." I laugh aloud when she says this, because it is absolutely true. My own children ask for things that I have no intention of giving them right now. To do so would not be wise. It is not that I don't want to give them good things; it is because I know they do not have the maturity, knowledge, understanding, or wisdom to have the things they request. I can see more of the big picture than they can.

Yes, God is the best Father. He knows all of this. And here's the thing: when I finally surrendered myself to God's will, when I finally rested in waiting and trusted him, what he had in store for me was so much better than what I had planned and hoped for myself.

Maybe you are in this space right now. I encourage you to "wait for the LORD; / be strong, and let your heart take courage." (Psalm 27:14) Your Father knows what is best for you.

—Shemaiah Gonzalez

8.4 Day 4: Meditation on Two Standards

For the next two days we pray with another key exercise: the Two Standards. Ignatius borrows from his military past to construct this meditation. A standard is a banner or flag under which the followers of a particular leader rally. Ignatius asks us to consider the opposing tactics and values of Christ and Lucifer (also known as the enemy of our human nature, the father of lies, the evil one, the deceiver). We are asked to choose the banner under which we will stand.

My attitude

An adventurer who is sought by two different leaders to join in their missions. The desire is to understand the motives of each and choose which side to pledge your service.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: an awareness of the enemy's deceptions and courage in the face of them; an understanding of Christ's way of living and a desire to live that way.

Meditation: Stand with Jesus or with the Way of the World

We begin this meditation by imagining the setting of our choice between the two standards. In the end, there is no middle ground: we must choose.

Here it will be to imagine a great plain in the region of Jerusalem, where the supreme commander of the good people is Christ our Lord; then another plain in the region of Babylon, where the leader of the enemy is Lucifer. (SE 138)

In other words, we imagine a place that is peaceful, just, and beautiful, and another place that's full of corruption. Feel free to imagine places like these in the world today.

Next, we meditate on the two standards, beginning with the standard of the enemy:

Imagine the leader of all the enemy in that great plain of Babylon. He is seated on a throne of fire and smoke, in aspect horrible and terrifying. (SE 140)

Consider how he summons uncountable devils, disperses some to one city and others to another, and thus throughout the whole world, without missing any provinces, places, states, or individual persons. (SE 141)

Consider the address he makes to them: How he admonishes them to set up snares and chains; how first they should tempt people to covet riches (as he usually does, at least in most cases), so that they may more easily come to vain honor from the world, and finally to surging pride. In this way, the first step is riches, the second is honor, and the third is pride; and from these three steps the enemy entices them to all the other vices. (SE 142)

Pay attention to your affective or emotional reactions when praying this meditation.

Reflection: The Two Standards

Jesus contrasted his way to the way of the world quite emphatically: “He who is not with me is against me” (Luke 11:23). Master Ignatius helps us apply this to ourselves in a key meditation in the Spiritual Exercises called “A Meditation on the Two Standards”—a “standard” meaning a flag.

Stand with Jesus or with the Way of the World

All disciples have to choose where we are going to stand—with Jesus or with the world. No matter what life the Spirit has drawn us to, once we are baptized and confirmed we are called to stand in Jesus’ company under his flag.

We begin to move under Jesus’ standard when we join him in the living conviction that everything we have and are is God’s gift. However much or little we have, we say gratefully, “Look at all God has given me.” Then the way opens through the smoke of self-satisfaction and approval of others. “How can I help?” becomes a daily preoccupation. And through a life of love and service, the Spirit leads us to live as meekly and humbly as the Lord lived—whether we are a famous ballerina or an anonymous computer programmer.

The way of the world differs entirely. The starting point is getting as much wealth as you can. You say, “Look at all this stuff I have!” When the world’s way opens before you, you shift your focus, saying, “Look at me with all this stuff.” As those around you grow more deferential, you start saying, “Look at me.” You become convinced that you are the center of your world. You may not have sinned yet, but it is only a matter of time.

Three Forms of Collusion with the World’s Standard

Even without subscribing to theories of the subconscious, we can see that the world’s standard is as inviting to Christ’s disciples as it is to anyone else. In a way, even after we have made a solemn, lifelong choice to follow Christ’s standard, we have to purify our daily life of collusion with the world’s standard. The collusion comes in three forms.

First, there is benign secularism. Certainly, there are people who do not know Jesus Christ who lead deeply good lives. But even the baptized can live in a benignly secular way. We join civic movements and help the needy because that’s what our neighbors do. We are good to our families and honest in the workplace. There is no immediate harm in this way, but neither is there anything more than a secular spirit, even though people today call it spirituality.

The second form of collusion, seen particularly in the affluent first world, is the search for pleasure. We are surrounded by people who live what St. Paul describes as the way of the flesh. Those who follow this way are the target of advertising; they need to have whatever everyone else has right now. Their less lovely side manifests self-indulgence, lust, envy—all seen as acceptable social mores. The flesh has its own laws, and those who follow this way will readily obey those laws into sin.

Finally, there is the collusion of succumbing to darkness. Think of the report of an adult who forced a twelve-year-old to kill another and then drink some of his blood. It is evil manifest. But most of the works of the dark are not manifest. Hatred, vengeance, violence, self-destructive habits—these flourish in the dark corners of the sinful human self.

In your heart of hearts, you may loathe the dark and leap to the light. But in everyday life, you will find yourself in the twilight of benign secularism or the flesh over and over again. You will find safety in Christ’s standard only if you resolutely begin everything with thanks to God and keep watching what you are doing and why you are doing it.

—Excerpt from *Making Choices in Christ* by Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ.

8.5 Day 5: Meditation on Two Standards (Continued)

We now consider the standard of Christ, who stands in stark contrast to Lucifer. Although the enemy is repulsive, harsh, and seeks only to deceive and enslave people, Christ is inviting, gentle, and desires only to liberate people to love God and serve others. Both want to rule the world, but in different ways and for different reasons.

My attitude

An adventurer who is sought by two different leaders to join in their missions. The desire is to understand the motives of each and choose which side to pledge your service.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following graces: an awareness of the enemy's deceptions and courage in the face of them; an understanding of Christ's way of living and a desire to live that way.

Meditation: Christ's Invitation

Listen to Christ's invitation. Gaze upon him as he speaks to his disciples. Feel free to imagine a modern-day setting for the parable:

In contrast, gaze in imagination on the supreme and true leader, who is Christ our Lord. (SE 143) Consider how Christ our Lord takes his place in that great plain near Jerusalem, in an area which is lowly, beautiful, and attractive. (SE 144)

Consider how the Lord of all the world chooses so many persons, apostles, disciples, and the like. He sends them through the whole world, to spread his doctrine among people of every state and condition. (SE 145)

Consider the address that Christ our Lord makes to all his servants and friends whom he is sending on this expedition. He recommends that they endeavor to aid all persons, by attracting them, first, to the most perfect spiritual poverty and also, if the Divine Majesty should be served and should wish to choose them for it, even to no less a degree of actual poverty; and second, by attracting them to a desire of reproaches and contempt, since from these results humility.

In this way there will be three steps: the first, poverty in opposition to riches; the second, reproaches or contempt in opposition to honor from the world; and the third, humility in opposition to pride. Then from these three steps they should induce people to all the other virtues. (SE 146)

Reflection: Poverty of Spirit

As we see in the exercises on the call of Christ, our King, and in later exercises, the disciple of Christ aspires to poverty.

All of us are called to “poverty of spirit,” or **spiritual poverty**, which describes a stance of utter dependence before God, not in any demeaning, servile sense, but in the sense of the Principle and Foundation: God is God, and we are creatures created to praise, love, and serve God. Before all else, we depend on God for our happiness and fulfillment. While we are grateful for our talents, abilities, wealth, and achievements, we are free enough to offer them to the service of God and others and to let go of them when they get in the way of that self-giving.

In short, poverty of spirit is an emptying of self so that God can fill us with life and love. Our prayer helps us grow in spiritual poverty and freedom. Christ is the model of spiritual poverty par excellence.

Christ also lived in actual or **material poverty**, with a lack of material goods. Some people may be called to this way of living. Priests, brothers, and sisters in religious orders profess a vow of poverty, renouncing personal possessions and wealth and depending on their religious community for their material needs. God may call others to a life of material poverty without professing vows. Material poverty is not an end in itself, for abject poverty is degrading to the human person (as a survey of our world so tragically reveals). Instead, for those called to this state of life, material poverty is a means to deepen one’s commitment to the poor whom Christ held so dear.

Although not everyone is called to live a life of actual poverty, we are all called to live simply and in freedom with respect to the riches we have—whether they are in the form of material possessions, talents, reputation, or influence. All are called to labor with Christ to help the poor and powerless in some way. All are called to give countercultural witness to the rampant competition and materialism around us.

—Excerpt from *The Ignatian Adventure* by Kevin O’Brien, SJ.

8.6 Day 6: Meditation on the Three Types of People

The Meditation on Two Standards stirs in us noble desires to serve and follow Christ in his simplicity of life, his humility, and his selflessness. It presents an ideal way of living. Now we do a reality check. With the call of Christ come the demands of discipleship. Do we want to be disciples?

My attitude

In this meditation, we reflect on concrete choices that three different types of persons may make as they try to live according to their calling in life. In doing so, we experience some tension between the high ideals of Christ's call and our lack of interior freedom and deeply embedded resistances to Christ's invitation to us personally.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to grow in interior freedom so that I'm able to respond wholeheartedly to Christ's invitation in my life.

Meditation: The Procrastinator, the Compromiser, and the Truly Free Person

Imagine three persons of good will who are trying to serve God and grow in faith. They sincerely want nothing to get in the way of their relationship with God.

Imagine that each acquires something that is very attractive to him or her. Ignatius suggests a large amount of money, but you can imagine something especially attractive to you, such as a certain material possession, a place to live, a high-profile job, or a particular honor. None of these things is intrinsically evil; each one can be used for good. But each of the three typical persons is excessively attached to the possession in some way.

The one who procrastinates. The first person wants to let go of the attachment, but she never gets around to it. Even on her deathbed, she is still thinking about letting go of her attachment.

The one who compromises. The second person sincerely desires to be free of that excessive preoccupation; at the same time, he wants to keep the possession. So he does lots of good things and makes honorable sacrifices, but he fails to do the one thing that he really needs to do: free himself from his disordered attachment. This person is trying to negotiate with God. Rather than conforming his will to God's will, the compromiser wants God to do what he wants to do.

The one who is truly free. In Ignatius's words:

The person typical of the third class desires to get rid of the attachment, but in such a way that there remains no inclination either to keep the acquired money or to dispose of it. Instead such a one desires to keep it or reject it solely according to what God our Lord will move one's will to choose, and also according to what the person himself or herself will judge to be better for the service and praise of the Divine Majesty. (SE 155)

Considering the important choices you have made, how have you resembled the three persons: the procrastinator, the compromiser, and the truly free person?

Reflection

Note where the third person begins: she is not sure whether or not God is asking her to give up the possession; she simply desires to be free to do what God wants her to do. So she begins by asking God what she should do. She is open to how God directs her through her prayer, her experience, her reasoning through different options, her discernment of consolations and desolations, and the wise counsel of others.

The truly free person checks her motivations, which are often mixed. She tries to choose from a desire to better serve God and others. The third person may feel some attachment to the possession and does not mind waiting to make a decision. But she does not procrastinate. She does make a timely decision (acknowledging that we rarely reach complete indifference).

—Kevin O'Brien, SJ

8.7 Day 7: Jesus Calls the Rich Man



End this week by listening to what God is saying to you. Recall your reaction to the meditations on the Call of the King, the Two Standards, and the Three Types of People. Review your journal notes.

My attitude

As an adventurer who seeks God, I want to know Jesus so intimately so that I may discern my role in his continuing work.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to grow in interior freedom so that I'm able to respond wholeheartedly to Christ's invitation in my life.

Reading

Mark 10: 17-31

Read the passage imaginatively, placing yourself in the scene. Notice the rich man's noble desires but also his lack of interior freedom because of his excessive attachments. Look at Jesus looking upon him with love. Hear Jesus' words of encouragement to Peter and to you. Ask: *What attachments or disordered loves are getting in the way of my responding to Christ's invitation?*

Reflection: A Loving Disciple's Offering

Eternal Lord of all things,

I feel your gaze on me.

I sense that Your Mother stands near, watching;

and that with You are all the great beings of heaven—

angels and powers and martyrs and saints.

Lord Jesus, I think You have put a desire in me.

If You will help me, please,

I would like to make my offering:

I want it to be my desire, and my choice,

provided that You want it, too,

to live my life as You lived Yours.

I know that You lived an insignificant person

in a little, despised town;

I know that You rarely tasted luxury and never, privilege,

and that You resolutely refused to accept power.

I know that You suffered rejection by leaders,

abandonment by friends, and failure.

I know. I can hardly bear the thought of it all.

But it seems a toweringly wonderful thing

that You might call me to follow you and stand with You.

I will labor with You to bring God's reign,

if you will give me the gift to do it.

Amen.

—Joseph Tetlow, SJ, Hearts on Fire

8.8 Additional Material for Week 5

Scripture Readings

- Matthew 4: 1-11
- Mark 1: 16-20
- Mark 2: 13-14
- Luke 4: 1-13
- Luke 5: 1-11
- Romans 12: 1-8
- 2 Peter 1: 10-11

Prayers, Poems, and Other Resources

Choose you this day whom ye will serve ...
but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord

Joshua 24:15

If I can help somebody as I pass along,
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song,
If I can show somebody he's traveling wrong,
Then my living will not be in vain.

If I can do my duty as a Christian ought,
If I can bring salvation to a world once wrought,
If I can spread the message as the master thought,
Then my living will not be in vain.

Yes, Jesus, I want to be on your right or your left side,
not for any selfish reason.
I want to be on your right or your left side,
not in terms of some political kingdom or ambition
But I just want to be there,
in love and in justice and in truth and
commitment to others,
so that we can make of this old world a new world

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

That is God's call to us—simply to be people who are content to live close to
him and to renew the kind of life in which the closeness is felt and experienced.

—Thomas Merton

A Look of Love

The rich young man
inside of me
is sad.

I, too, am about to go away.

I am the one being called today.
I am asked to empty myself
to strip my life of the unnecessary
to evaluate my possessions
to leave everything and follow
Christ.

Long have I heard this call.
Deep within, it is being carved.
It cuts into the very core of me.
It doesn't allow me to forget.

I wear it like a wound
that needs healing,
rather than a call
that needs obedience..

Only one thing is necessary:
Leave all.

I turn to the rich young man of history
and ask for grace.

I, too, am about to go away
followed always
by that look of love.

—Macrina Wiederkehr

Videos

- **Distractions in Prayer:** a video from Paul Bryan Campbell, SJ. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/distractions-in-prayer-2/>.
- **What Does “Magis” Mean?:** Jim Manney reflects on the Ignatian meaning of *magis*. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/meaning-of-magis-video/>.

What If the Answer Is No?

What if God's answer to one of our prayers is "no?" We are given this answer at times. Sometimes when we are told "no" we easily accept the answer we are given, because what we are asking for is something that really did not matter that much. Occasionally, though, we find ourselves being told "no" when every part of our being wants the answer to be "yes." What happens to our relationship with God then? Does our relationship with God completely fall apart? Does our entire relationship with God depend on God answering our prayers?

Jesus did not get the "yes" he begged for with every part of his being: "Let this cup pass away from me" (Matthew 26:39). Jesus knew, though, that his prayer was heard, he knew God could answer his prayer, and he knew his Father would be there with him no matter what. Jesus' relationship with God the Father did not fall apart when his prayer was not answered, because his relationship with God did not depend on answered prayers.

We are invited into a similar relationship—a relationship with God that trusts that our prayers are heard yet does not demand our prayers be answered in the way we might ask. We are invited into a relationship of confidence that God can answer our prayers, yet at the same time, we are invited into a relationship that asks us for complete surrender to God's way. The relationship we are invited into with God is not an insurance policy that guarantees we get what we want. However, we are promised that God hears us and will be with us every step of the way.

I know many of us seek certain things "to pass away from us" in our own lives or in the lives of those we love. When we get an answer of "no" to a prayer we fervently prayed, may we continue to turn to Jesus to help us surrender to God's will, and may we have the courage to let God take us deeper.

—Becky Eldredge

Desire and Decision

Sometimes the Christian journey is framed in terms of making a decision, a commitment, to follow Jesus and his way. But we don't live strictly by decisions, acts of the will. We don't just make up our mind and do a certain thing. A deeper part of the self must be involved when it comes to true conversion.

One of the more prevalent forms of evangelical teaching focuses upon giving intellectual assent to a set of statements, such as "I'm a sinner" and "Jesus died for my sins." At times, conversion is presented as simply agreeing that certain statements are true and then saying a prayer to that effect.

But we don't change our lives through a series of thoughts. And, really, so much of the spiritual life is beyond intellectual comprehension anyway. I might agree with every single statement you make about Jesus and Christianity, but those statements will not provide an adequate explanation for the more profound mysteries of life.

In order to follow Jesus (actually, in order to make any significant change), something fundamental in a person must shift. I believe that at our core we understand what is true—and it is there, deep within us, that true conversion happens. But how often do we really access that core of the self?

This is where desire comes into the picture. Before you or I experience conversion of the whole self, we must grapple with what we truly want. What are the deepest, truest desires in me? St. Ignatius believed—and I agree (along with many others in the Christian family)—that our deepest desires are actually God's desires.

We are made in the image of God—we are designed to be divine, you might say. And so when we strip away all the superficial wants and whims, when we let go of cultural norms, layers of social expectation, and even our own emotional/mental habits, we can tap into what we really long for.

This is why many people don't experience conversion until they've hit bottom. Life circumstances can strip us down to essentials pretty quickly, and often that's when we can ask honestly, "Okay, what is really important to me? What are my true desires?"

Spend some time this week asking yourself the question: What do I really desire?

—Vinita Hampton Wright

What Is Worth Your Desire?

The Spiritual Exercises ask us to look at Christ and what he stands for. We're instructed to imagine him as a good king who brings his forces against the evil king. In today's world, especially here in the West, we don't think much in terms of kings and kingdoms. So this imagery can be difficult to integrate with our prayer.

But we can approach it this way. As we observe Jesus in the Gospel accounts, we can learn what was important to him. We can see the desires that drove him—desire to see people healed, whole, and free from the evil pressing in from all around, desire that people be fed, clothed, accepted into the community, loved.

Is this what you desire? Look with clear eyes at Jesus, at what he did in the Gospel accounts, what he said, what he taught. What were his priorities? What were his passions as he dealt with people day in and day out? Does the “kingdom” he brought into reality match in any way the reality you desire for your life and for the larger world?

In other words, is the kingdom of God worth your desire? Do your truest impulses take you toward that kind of reality?

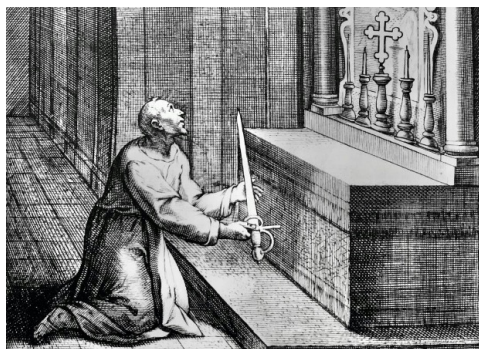
These are not rhetorical questions. Jesus wanted people to consider quite soberly what he stood for and what following him would require—yet another reason for you and me to be in touch with our real desires. Otherwise, we might be saying that we want to follow Jesus when in reality our hearts really aren't there, at least not yet.

What world did Jesus envision and work toward with his every word and act?

What world do you envision? What “kingdom” are you willing to work toward with everything you have?

—Vinita Hampton Wright

Surrendering Our Swords



As we wound our way up the Catalan mountain in our zippy, little car, I imagined St. Ignatius traversing Spain on his own pilgrimage to Montserrat. I found it hard to imagine how he would have made it over the rugged terrain on horseback. He was, at that point, traveling alone without servants, just months out from the crippling blow of the cannonball. What pain he must have suffered as he rode! It gave me new perspective into Ignatius's physical determination in his quest to become a saint.

At the top of the winding road, nestled into the side of the mountain and dwarfed by imposing and jagged peaks above, stands the Shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat. Inside the church, enthroned in an alcove high above the main altar, sits the legendary "Black Madonna" holding the Christ Child.

In the span of history, the 500 years that separates my visit to Montserrat from Ignatius's is relatively small—small enough, anyway, for me to imagine myself looking on as he approaches the altar of Montserrat.

I see the grand gestures of the young Ignatius as he places his sword and dagger on the altar below the Madonna. Desiring to put on only the armor of Christ, he spends the entire night in prayer before the altar. In reverence, he keeps guard, now standing, then kneeling, and then standing again. He releases, with that sword and that dagger, all of the dreams and ambitions he had held prior to that point. He surrenders the dream of being a valiant knight and all of the lofty ambitions that accompany it. He surrenders the dream of having a beautiful lady by his side. He surrenders his family inheritance and his status as a nobleman. Ignatius is completely confident that what he will gain in service to his new King is far more than what he has surrendered.

I touch the Madonna's hand.

I think for a long moment about my own sword. What earthly attachments am I willing to lay here before the Madonna? Am I willing to be as generous as Ignatius in surrendering all of my desires and defenses over to God? In which kingdom do my allegiances lie? I cringe a little as I come to terms with my answers. Apparently, I'm not yet a saint, so I'm glad to be following Ignatius.

How about you? Imagine yourself there before the Madonna and Child. What's your sword? What attachments might you surrender at the Madonna's feet? Possessions? Earthly ambitions? Status? Wealth? Relationships?

Do not be discouraged if your answers aren't yet quite what you wish they were. Most of us aren't yet saints, but with St. Ignatius leading the charge, we're in good hands!

—Rebecca Ruiz



9. Week 6: The Public Ministry of Jesus

Kevin O'Brien gives the following introduction to this week as follows:

This week we follow Jesus in his public ministry. Each day we'll pray and reflect on a Scripture passage describing Jesus interacting with people. The idea is simply to get to know Jesus better. Use your imagination to become part of these Gospel scenes. Watch what Jesus does. Listen to how he speaks. Note how people react to him. Ponder his words. If you wish, talk to Jesus in a colloquy.

There's no need now to make any big decisions and commitments about how specifically you will follow Christ's call in your life. If you need to make such a decision, it is best to make it only after getting to know better the One who calls you. Our hope is simply that we become more like the One who is the focus of our attention. We want to see, hear, speak, and feel as Jesus does.

The amount of time devoted to Jesus' public ministry in this retreat is minimal. The resources about this topic are numerous and could not possibly be covered in a full year retreat. I have included many scripture readings in the additional materials for this week (Sec. 9.8), but they only scratch the surface. If the Spirit leads you to rest in this portion of the retreat, do not feel obliged to move forward with the retreat schedule. You might also come back to the meditations and contemplations of the week after finishing the retreat. Remember to be flexible; this is not a contest where you must be in step with others.

9.1 Day 1: Join Jesus on a Busy Day

The grace of the Second Week is fundamental: to grow in a heartfelt knowledge of Jesus Christ so that we can love him more deeply and follow him more closely. But to grow in this intimate love, we need to get close. We need to walk with God, who became one with us.

My attitude

In this part of the adventure, the Gospels come alive for us. We are there with Jesus, immersed in the Gospels with the help of our senses and imagination. We do not simply obtain more insight or information. With our attentiveness fine-tuned and our imaginations sparked, we see the living God in daily life as we pray through the Exercises.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Mark 1: 21-39

Reflection

Jesus did not leave us a list of truths to affirm, but a task to carry out. We must try to discern in our time and place how God wants us to live our lives in this world in tune with God's Spirit, the one divine action at work in this universe. This is what the discernment of spirits is all about. Followers of Jesus have been given a task to carry out and the means to do it. Impelled by God's Spirit, they must try to live in this world with the conviction that with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus all the needful has been done, that God has won the victory he intends. Our task, therefore, is to follow the prompting of the Spirit, who has been poured out in our hearts, to follow the way of Jesus, the way of peace, of love, of the cross.

—William A. Barry, SJ, *Spirit, Style, Story*

9.2 Day 2: The Beatitudes

The kingdom of God is not simply what awaits us in heaven at some time in the future. By becoming one of us in Christ, God revealed how the kingdom of God breaks into history, here and now. The kingdom of God is not a place but a way of living and being.

My attitude

In this part of the adventure, the Gospels come alive for us. We are there with Jesus, immersed in the Gospels with the help of our senses and imagination. We do not simply obtain more insight or information. With our attentiveness fine-tuned and our imaginations sparked, we see the living God in daily life as we pray through the Exercises.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Matthew 5: 1-12

Reflection

The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* beautifully describes the kingdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ:

It is a Kingdom of love, justice, and mercy, where sins are forgiven, the sick are made whole, enemies are reconciled, captives are freed, and the needs of the poor are met.

It is all these things and more, for ultimately the Kingdom is Jesus Christ and all he means for us. The Kingdom is already here because of the redemption of Jesus Christ. But in another sense, it is “not yet” here, since Christ’s final transformation of individuals, society, and culture has yet to happen in its fullness. This is why we need to pray this petition [“Thy Kingdom come”] every day and work for its coming.

9.3 Day 3: The Wedding Feast at Cana



My attitude

In this part of the adventure, the Gospels come alive for us. We are there with Jesus, immersed in the Gospels with the help of our senses and imagination. We do not simply obtain more insight or information. With our attentiveness fine-tuned and our imaginations sparked, we see the living God in daily life as we pray through the Exercises.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

John 2: 1-11

Reflection

Marriage and wedding feasts are metaphors used in Scripture to describe God's salvation and the Kingdom of God. Here at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, John's Gospel seeks to establish that Jesus is going to re-interpret and fulfill God's promise to Israel. Jesus establishes the New Covenant. A hint about what this New Covenant will be like is made evident in the deed that Jesus performs. Asked to do something to address the awkward situation that the absence of wine at a wedding feast would create, Jesus' miracle produces vast quantities of wine—six jars holding thirty gallons each are filled to overflowing with choice wine.

This lavish response to a simple human need is a vision for us of the abundance of God's kingdom. It challenges us to respond generously when confronted with human need today. We respond as best we can, fully confident that God can transform our efforts, bringing the Kingdom of God to fulfillment among us.

—Loyola Press Sunday Connection

9.4 Day 4: Healing the Blind Man at Bethsaida

Jesus empowers us to embrace our humanity in all of its beautiful complexity. The more we express our humanity in loving, healing, forgiving, serving, and rejoicing, the more our divinity or holiness is revealed.

No definition or doctrine fully captures who Jesus Christ is. We are left with an alluring Mystery. Our deepening desire to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ draws us into this mystery of God becoming human for us.

My attitude

In this part of the adventure, the Gospels come alive for us. We are there with Jesus, immersed in the Gospels with the help of our senses and imagination. We do not simply obtain more insight or information. With our attentiveness fine-tuned and our imaginations sparked, we see the living God in daily life as we pray through the Exercises.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Mark 8: 22-26

Reflection: God's Grace and Our Efforts

I have watched myself and other people swing back and forth between two extremes of expectation when it comes to spiritual growth.

One expectation is that God will do everything if only I have faith and wait patiently. This view goes out of balance when, in my waiting and believing, I become passive. I pray but do not act. I pray but do not engage with the realities in my daily life. When I become spiritually passive, my prayers are more about escaping or about seeing myself as a victim who must wait for God's rescue.

Yet God urges us to engage with life. God required that Abram pack up his family and possessions and start walking. Jesus required that the man with the withered hand reach out to him—Jesus didn't reach out first and grab the man's hand, because that would have been coercion. No, Jesus invited the man by saying, "Stretch out your hand." In the life of faith there is movement on both sides; God understands that through our own action we participate with grace.

The other extreme expectation is that, "God helps only those who help themselves" (which, by the way, is not from the Bible at all). This attitude believes God set the world in motion, but it's up to me to get things done. Sometimes the people most inclined to slip into this extreme are those trying to do the most good, such as activists on the front lines of social-justice battles. It's not surprising that sometimes these well-meaning activists burn out—they have exhausted their personal resources and have not learned to partner with God's grace.

But ordinary folks in the pews can take this extreme view, too. How many of us are unwilling to share our struggles with others because we think that, as Christians, we should be able to overcome any struggle? Or how many of us have a family member who helps, helps, helps and rarely slows down until emotional and bodily stress and weariness lands her or him in the hospital or in bed with depression?

Jesus meant it when he said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He knew that the effort of giving ourselves to God's loving

purposes would become a crushing burden if we attempted to do this without the help of divine grace and power. Jesus also told his disciples that he was the vine and they were the branches and that they must abide in him, drawing energy and ability from their Source.

So, it's good to ask ourselves these questions from time to time:

- Have I become too passive, waiting for God to magically do or fix everything, even though I'm not engaging with tasks or problems myself?
- Have I become too self-sufficient, working hard to do God's work in the world without participating with God's grace through prayer, pauses, counsel, and rest?

—Vinita Hampton Wright

9.5 Day 5: The Grateful Leper

Continue to be aware of the areas in your life in which you experience greater freedom and in which some disordered loves linger. The practice of a daily Examen is very helpful in ongoing discernment and growth in freedom.

My attitude

In this part of the adventure, the Gospels come alive for us. We are there with Jesus, immersed in the Gospels with the help of our senses and imagination. We do not simply obtain more insight or information. With our attentiveness fine-tuned and our imaginations sparked, we see the living God in daily life as we pray through the Exercises.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Luke 17: 11-19

Reflection

Go through a day—or through a single hour—and discipline yourself to attend to each moment as it comes and to note what is praiseworthy in that moment. Try to build this habit of dwelling completely in the moment at hand rather than in the past or future.

—Vinita Hampton Wright, *Days of Deepening Friendship*

9.6 Day 6: Martha and Mary

My attitude

In this part of the adventure, the Gospels come alive for us. We are there with Jesus, immersed in the Gospels with the help of our senses and imagination. We do not simply obtain more insight or information. With our attentiveness fine-tuned and our imaginations sparked, we see the living God in daily life as we pray through the Exercises.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Luke 10: 38-42

Reflection: A Prayer by St. Teresa of Ávila

Let nothing disturb you,
Nothing frighten you;
All things are passing;
God never changes;
Patient endurance attains all things;
Whoever possesses God is wanting in nothing;
God alone suffices.

9.7 Day 7: Jesus and Children

In order to know Jesus, we must take his humanity seriously. We must not forget that while he is fully divine, he is also fully human. To gloss over Jesus' humanity is to miss one of the central meanings of the Incarnation: Jesus shows us that the way to our divinity (or holiness) is through our humanity, not around it. In other words, Jesus teaches us how to be fully human. The more we, who are created in the image of God, embrace our humanity, with all of its beauty and limitations, the more our divinity is revealed—that is, the more like God we become.

My attitude

In this part of the adventure, the Gospels come alive for us. We are there with Jesus, immersed in the Gospels with the help of our senses and imagination. We do not simply obtain more insight or information. With our attentiveness fine-tuned and our imaginations sparked, we see the living God in daily life as we pray through the Exercises.

The grace I seek

I pray for the following grace: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Reading

Mark 10: 13-16

Reflection: Teach Me Your Ways

Teach me your way of looking at people:
as you glanced at Peter after his denial,
as you penetrated the heart of the rich young man
and the hearts of your disciples.

I would like to meet you as you really are,
since your image changes those with whom you
come into contact.

Remember John the Baptist's first meeting with you?
And the centurion's feeling of unworthiness?
And the amazement of all those who saw miracles
and other wonders?

How you impressed your disciples,
the rabble in the Garden of Olives,
Pilate and his wife
and the centurion at the foot of the cross. . . .

I would like to hear and be impressed
by your manner of speaking,
listening, for example, to your discourse in the
synagogue in Capernaum

or the Sermon on the Mount where your audience
felt you "taught as one who has authority."

—Pedro Arrupe, SJ

9.8 Additional Material for Week 6

Scripture Readings

There are numerous passages in the Gospels where you find Jesus' ministry in action. The list would probably take up a page of references. If the daily Scripture readings selected by O'Brien do not speak to you, choose a favorite that you have, or let the Holy Spirit guide you to one.

Prayers, Poems, and Other Resources

Your Gaze

Lord, you look upon me with a gaze of love -
Consistent, unwavering
Constantly new
Whether I return the look or hide my face
Awake or asleep
Aware or unaware
Anywhere and everywhere
You invite me to meet your gaze
Look into your eyes
So you can fill my heart with love
Till it becomes too much for me
And I turn my eyes away
But you patiently wait till I glance your way again
So you can offer me just a little bit more
Your loving gaze takes many forms
Sometimes I sense your joy
Other times I'm struck by your delight
Or catch you showing favor
And notice when you revel
So each day I will open my eyes
Let your smile shine upon me
Warmed by your love
Surrounded with your care
Upheld with your compassion
Drawn deep into the heart of your love

—Dale Gish

The wise devote themselves to the welfare of all,
for they see themselves in all.

— from the Upanishads [4]

Service

The master was known to favor action over withdrawal. But he always insisted on “Enlightened” action.

The disciples wanted to know what “Enlightened” meant. Did it mean “right-intentioned”?

“Oh no,” said the Master. “Think how right-intentioned the monkey is when he lifts a fish from the river to save it from the watery grave.”[7]

Videos

- **Keep the Focus on Jesus:** a video from Paul Bryan Campbell, SJ. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/keep-focus-jesus/>.
- **Friendship with God:** A video by Jim Manney on the possibility of having a friendship with God. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/friendship-with-god/>.
- **God Wants Our Friendship.** This is a video and article by William A. Barry, SJ. Bill was one of the most well known spiritual directors and authors on prayer. <https://rb.gy/87k2o>.

Knowing Jesus of Nazareth

A major feature of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius is our focus on knowing Jesus and relating to him personally. Each person comes from a unique background, family, culture, and time, and so no two people will perceive Jesus in quite the same way. From the New Testament accounts of him we can relate to Jesus in various ways. Like each of us, Jesus' personality was multifaceted, and he played many roles in one life. Consider these various aspects of him:

- Wisdom figure / sage: he gives us the Sermon on the Mount.
- Radical / activist: he clears the Temple; breaks religious rules to help others; interacts with women, lepers, and others on the margins or without power.
- Healer / exorcist: he heals many people and casts out many demons.
- Prophet: he tells the painful truth, even to leaders—"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees."
- Master of debate: he avoids being trapped in argument—"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's."
- Teacher: he teaches through parables, storytelling, and example.
- Messiah: he proclaims, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."
- Friend: he says to his disciples (and to us) "I call you my friends."
- Mystic / shaman: he is able to manipulate physical elements (calms the storm) and exist between space and time in mystical union with Moses and Elijah (Transfiguration).

What aspect of Jesus do you relate to best, or with the most comfort? Why do you think this is so?

What aspect of Jesus do you relate to least, or makes you least comfortable? Why do you think this is so?

—Vinita Hampton Wright

An Imagination Encounter with Jesus

In the previous post, I briefly described various aspects of Jesus' personality and the different roles he plays in the Gospel accounts. I asked that you identify the role or roles you are most comfortable with or most attracted to. Also, identify the role(s) least attractive to you or that make you uncomfortable.

Now, use your imagination to sit down and have a conversation with Jesus. Choose the Jesus you are most comfortable with—maybe it's the teacher or healer. If you wish, put yourself in a Gospel story setting with him. Imagine the countryside, the weather, how the people are dressed, what the air smells like, etc. Imagine who you are—a bystander? An interested member of a crowd he's teaching? A person who comes to him for healing? Step into this encounter with Jesus, and see what happens.

If imagining first-century Palestine is too much of a stretch, bring Jesus to here and now. If he were a teacher today, where would you encounter him? Imagine that situation, and put yourself there.

Don't worry about having an "accurate" imaginative scene; this is prayer, and the imagination is a powerful tool. Your spirit—working with the Holy Spirit—can take your imagination where it needs to go. Of course this isn't a historical "real" conversation with Jesus. But it is quite real and true for you. Let it happen.

Here's an additional challenge: Choose the Jesus you are least comfortable with—maybe the prophet or radical or mystic—and do the same kind of imaginative encounter. You may be surprised at what happens!

Blessings on these wonderful prayers you are about to have.

—Vinita Hampton Wright

An alternative to one of this week's days

I have taken the liberty to propose an alternative meditation for one of the days of this week. This meditation from Skehan's *Place Me With Your Son: Ignatian Spirituality in Everyday Life* is one that I often return to for its richness and how it speaks to me. If you find it to be something that speaks to you, feel free to substitute it to one of the days of this week.

My attitude

Of the King's followers much will be asked. There will be the "one thing necessary" for an adequate following of our Lord; but for the generous follower of Jesus desiring to offer distinguished service there will be the "one thing more." Pondering the challenges, I look to see what movements are taking place within me.

The grace I seek

I beg the Father to draw me to Jesus so that I may hear and understand the challenge to which He calls me, thrill to the high adventure that stirs my being and ardently desire to serve Him and His people, sharing His lot and His suffering.

Reading

Luke 18: 35-43 (Blind Bartimaeus)

Reflection

A Fantasy Exercise: Contemplate this moving encounter between Jesus and the blind Bartimaeus. Using the Application of senses, take the place of the blind beggar and relive his experience as thoroughly as possible. Fill out the story in fantasy as you take on the identity of the “insignificant” beggar on the roadside in Jericho. Keep in mind that the exercise is designed to increase your generous response to Jesus as you come to appreciate the special love that prompts the Good Shepherd to single you out for the cure of your blindness. Take your place as the blind person sitting by the dusty, hot, unpaved road begging. As a beggar you depend on the gifts of others, often grudgingly given, as your only source of sustenance. You are basically an outcast without any socially redeeming qualities. Where did you sleep last night? How did you find your way to the roadside this morning to take up your suppliant’s position? As they go by, what do people say to you, if they say anything at all to recognize your common humanity? As they give to you, do they try to cheer you or do they contribute while wishing you did not exist?

All at once you hear the scurrying of many feet, and you cough from the cloud of dust that they stir up. You hear the clamor of excited voices. “What is happening?” you ask, and they tell you, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” A desperate surge of excitement seizes you as you recognize that here is the one chance in your lifetime to regain your sight. Though you are blind, you have grown up hearing and relishing the Scriptures that promised the Messiah, and you never forgot that the Messiah would be of the house of David and that he would bring salvation to his people.

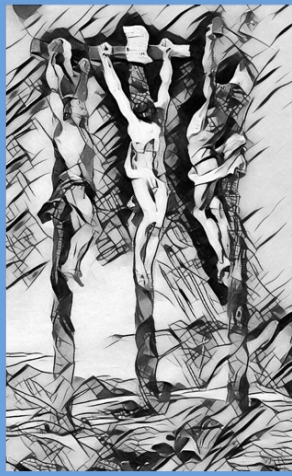
Upon hearing this hopeful news you jump to your feet and shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.” But the people walking in front of you try to hush you; they tell you to stop making a nuisance of yourself. But nothing and no one is going to deprive you of this one great opportunity. All of a sudden, Jesus hears you, turns and asks that you be brought to him! This is indeed your great opportunity!

What is your conversation, your colloquy with Jesus now as he asks you “What do you want me to do for you?” It sounds as if Jesus may give you anything you want—as he did with Solomon, who asked to be given wisdom. “Lord, please let me see.” Perhaps Jesus answers, “I know that you have been blind a long time, but I have blessed you with a different kind of vision—insight. As a result of this gift you have recognized me as your Savior. I say to you as I said to Bartimaeus long ago, ‘Have sight; your faith has saved you.’ ” Speak freely to your Savior and hear what he wants to say to you as he gazes on you lovingly and humbly.

As you begin to follow Jesus does he tell you that Jericho was his last stop before going to Jerusalem for his passion and death? Are you prepared to follow Jesus to Jerusalem and stick with him through those terrible days? Does your insight into the Scriptures tell you that Jesus, Son of David, would suffer, die and rise again? And when Jesus asks you, “are you willing to give up your life, if necessary, in exchange for your sight?” Do you not say, “No, Lord, that I could not do; however, I am ready to give my life in exchange for the opportunity to follow you, because you have saved me through my God-given faith. I will follow you anywhere that you lead me!” And where does he lead you?¹

—James Skehan, SJ, *Place Me With Your Son: Ignatian Spirituality in Everyday Life* [21]

¹I have modified the text of the reflection very slightly for readability.



10. Week 7: The Suffering Jesus

This week we pray through the Passion of Christ. This is the third phase of the Spiritual Exercises—the Third Week. In the Second Week, we asked for the grace to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more dearly, and to follow him more closely. This love leads us to be with Jesus in his suffering.

The grace we seek this week is compassion. We reflect not merely on the physical pain he endured but also on the emotional, interior suffering of a person who is misunderstood, isolated, rejected, and alone.

The colloquy is very important in the Third Week. We speak to Jesus as a friend would speak to a friend (SE 054). We speak words of sorrow, confusion, compassion, regret, fear, anticipation—whatever moves us. Or perhaps we are present to Jesus without words.

There is . . . [a] remarkable renewal taking place today in the giving and the making of the Spiritual Exercises, whose vivifying influence extends beyond the limits of the formal retreat into the daily life of prayer.

Not only that, fidelity to the Exercises energizes our apostolic action. It enlarges our inner freedom to respond readily to the demands which the service of the faith may make of us. It deepens in us the self-abnegation that unites us to Christ crucified, and thus to the poverty, humiliations and sufferings by which He saved the world.

—James Skehan, SJ [21]

There is a video that Kevin O'Brien, SJ suggests you watch.¹ Please take time to view it. The introduction to the video is:

Kevin O'Brien, SJ, explains that the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises is an extended meditation on the passion, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. This week can be difficult, because we are accompanying our friend Jesus Christ whom we have gotten to know throughout the Exercises, through our days of prayer. We are accompanying our Lord in suffering and in death.

But we are not to inflict amnesia on ourselves, because we know as Christians that the shadows of Good Friday will yield to the dawn of Easter morning. And so the suffering and death of Jesus must always be remembered and lived in context of the hope that springs eternal, the hope of Easter morning.

¹<https://shorturl.at/gpKRS> .

10.1 Day 1: Agony in the Garden



In our prayer this week we personalize God's saving activity: Jesus endures suffering for me. This focus is not meant to induce guilt and to inflict needless pain on us. Rather, Jesus' offering is a sign of friendship with each of us, friendship that sacrifices for the other.

In your prayer, you may find yourself drawn to contemplate your own trials or the suffering of others, whether family, friends, or strangers. This is natural. However, the point is not to become absorbed in our own hardships but to embrace them as a source of compassion for the suffering of others.

My attitude

Christ our Lord continues to labor in our world to save all men and women. I ask the Father to place me with Christ suffering in the world today.

The grace I seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sin" (SE 193).

Reading

Matthew 26: 36-46

Reflection: From Death to Life

Jesus Christ, may your death be my life
and in your dying may I learn how to live.
May your struggles be my rest,
Your human weakness my courage,
Your embarrassment my honor,
Your passion my delight,
Your sadness my joy,
in your humiliation may I be exalted.
In a word, may I find all my blessings in your trials.
Amen.

—St. Peter Faber, SJ

10.2 Day 2: Trial and Denial

Keep your eyes and heart fixed on Jesus. Use your imagination to place yourself in the scene if you like. Note in these meditations how much Jesus' opponents are concerned with self-seeking, face saving, and power tripping. Conversely, notice how Jesus refuses to play their games and instead remains true to who he is.

My attitude

As a companion of Jesus, I want be received under His standard. I do not do this in any spirit of prideful privilege, but in the spirit of Him who “emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, even to accepting death, death on a cross.”

The grace I seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sin” (SE 193).

Reading

Matthew 26:57-75

Reflection: The Attitude We Should Have

As a preface to his declaration about the Incarnation in Philippians, St. Paul said, “The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had.”

Wisdom is making peace with the unchangeable. We have the freedom to face the unavoidable with dignity, to understand the transformational value that attitude works on suffering. Viktor Frankl wrote that in concentration camps, “what alone remains is ‘the last of human freedoms’—the ability to choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances.” What Frankl asked is not optimism in the face of pessimism but hope in the face of hopelessness.

Are we responsible for our unmerited suffering? The answer is no. And yes. We are not responsible for our predicament as its cause—whether it be cancer or job loss or the death of a child or spouse. But we are responsible for what we do with the effects, for what we build from the rubble that fate has made of our lives.

—Excerpted from *God—The Oldest Question* by William J. O’Malley, SJ

Trial And Suffering

This is a reflection by Tim Muldoon in his book *The Ignatian Workout for Lent*. In a standard 19th annotation retreat, this reading would occur during Lent. However, in our eight-week retreat it is appropriate for whenever we are at this point in the third phase.

Prayer What does a meditative reading of the story of the trial stir up in you? What trials have you faced, or are you facing? Can you find a place in your heart where you are willing to trust God the way Jesus did?

Action In the coming days, set aside time to undertake the stations of the cross. Give yourself time to consider how meditating on Christ’s way of the cross sheds light on the specific struggles you are facing.

10.3 Day 3: Crowning with Thorns



In the Third Week of the Exercises, Ignatius invites us to consider how Jesus' divinity "hides itself" (SE 196). We must not easily explain away the suffering we encounter. Jesus is not merely playacting his way through a passion play. We must take Jesus' humanity seriously enough to realize just how much he loves us. He remains faithful to his Father and the mission of the kingdom and accepts the very real consequences of that faithful obedience, which he does out of great love.

My attitude

As a companion of Jesus, I want be received under His standard. I do not do this in any spirit of prideful privilege, but in the spirit of Him who "emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, even to accepting death, death on a cross."

The grace I seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sin" (SE 193).

Reading

Matthew 27: 26-31

Reflection

Where is our God in suffering? We Christians do not have a fully satisfying explanation for why the world contains so much suffering. But we have something better: we have the power to deal with the suffering. We know where our God is during suffering. Our God is with us: with the Jewish boy on the gallows, with Ivan Ilyich in sickness, with Job in adversity, with Paul in weakness and persecution, with Jesus in crucifixion—with us in all the senseless accidents and ruptured relationships and interior brokenness of our lives.

—Richard Hauser, SJ, *Finding God in Troubled Times*

10.4 Day 4: The Way of the Cross

As you pray through the Passion and ask for the grace of compassion, consider how you are called to be more compassionate in the particulars of your own life. Ask: What invisible crosses do people bear? How can I help carry them? Who helps carry my own burdens? Who are the crucified peoples of our world today?

My attitude

Christ the Lord continues to labor in our world to save all men and women. He still follows the way of the cross toward Calvary. I ask the Father to place me with Christ crucified in the world today.

The grace I seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it is what is proper for the Passion: sorrow with Christ in sorrow; a broken spirit with Christ so broken; tears; and interior suffering because of the great suffering which Christ endured for me” (SE 203).

Reading

Luke 23: 26-32

Reflection

We experience various “dyings” losses of different kinds, and we must mourn them: the death of a loved one, the loss of a relationship, the change of a career or living situation, a physical infirmity or limitation. We unite these dyings with the suffering of Christ, knowing that God redeems all. Recall a line from the contemporary version of the Anima Christi: “On each of my dyings, shed your light and your love.”

—Kevin O’Brien, SJ

Anima Christi (Contemporary Translation)

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.
 May your body and blood be my food and drink.
 May your passion and death be my strength and life.
 Jesus, with you by my side, enough has been given.
 May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.
 Let me not run from the love which you offer,
 But hold me safe from the forces of evil.
 On each of my dyings shed your light and your love.
 Keep calling to me until that day comes, when, with your saints,
 I may praise you forever. Amen.^[20]

10.5 Day 5: The Beginning of the Passion

We will read Mark's account of Jesus' Passion over the next two days. Pray these Scriptures straight through or linger over them. Use imaginative prayer to immerse yourself in these events.

My attitude

Christ the Lord continues to labor in our world to save all men and women. He still follows the way of the cross toward Calvary. I ask the Father to place me with Christ crucified in the world today.

The grace I seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it is what is proper for the Passion: sorrow with Christ in sorrow; a broken spirit with Christ so broken; tears; and interior suffering because of the great suffering which Christ endured for me" (SE 203).

Reading

Mark 14: 12-72

Reflection: The Language of the Cross

Some suggestions given by Master Ignatius for praying on Jesus' passion help bring it into the ordinary days of our life. We begin, as in any other contemplation, by asking who is present, what they are saying, and what they are doing. But we go on to do three things: We consider what Jesus suffered in his humanity and "what he wanted to suffer." We consider how the divinity hid himself, not intervening. And then we beg to appreciate that Jesus did this for us.

The Human Part of Jesus' Suffering Jesus' brutal physical sufferings can be painted and sculpted, but it is not so easy to put the human part of what he suffered into words. Perhaps we have to start with this: Jesus was the victim of political and religious abuses. His murder was politically inane, because in the long run the abuse of political power with violence wipes out what it pretends to achieve: right order. Then again, his execution was religiously senseless, because right from the start violent religious persecution destroys the holiness of the persecutor, and holiness is what religion is about. So Jesus suffered an inane and senseless horror, an experience only too many of us are familiar with today. This is what he "wanted to suffer": to live to the very end in solidarity with humankind, familiar with inanity and meaninglessness.

Jesus suffered as we all suffer. Each one of us, when we suffer bitterly, can hardly believe that there exists any suffering like our own. But suffering is like language: my words are not merely mine; however much I have made them my own, they belong to all of us. Suffering is among us, and no suffering is any one person's possession. I can talk about "my" cancer, but many others around me are suffering with it, too.

None of us is at all likely to suffer the physical torture that Jesus suffered (God grant this freedom to us all). But each one of us inescapably suffers physical pains and decay. This human suffering that afflicts all of us is what Jesus wanted to suffer. He was no masochist. He chose to embrace even bitter suffering so that he could be like us in everything—except sin—and by his obedience turn the whole of human experience from its journey into death and onto the way of eternal life.

Jesus Refused to Suffer Despair Master Ignatius tells the one praying on Jesus' passion to "begin with great effort to strive to grieve, be sad, and weep." It is never easy to suffer, and it is particularly difficult to enter into another's suffering. We have to work to grasp that Jesus, on his cross, knew the terrifying vacuum of God's hiding and leaving him to the merciless experiences that scotch life. Most of us will sink into that dreadful feeling at some point in the chaos of our world.

Despair is a choice just as much as hope is a choice, and Jesus did not suffer despair because he refused to. He trusted that the Father would save him; he said more than once that he would die

and that he expected to rise from the dead. On the cross, he trusted that his suffering made some kind of sense, to be revealed when the Father chose. Every day of his human life, he wanted to do whatever he could to alleviate the suffering of those around him. But he was thwarted. He had to die in the hope that he would live again in our flesh.

Jesus' Passion Brings Us to Embrace the World as it Really Is Those who really do know and love him will suffer this way, his way. They will also see the suffering of all the people whom God puts in their life world and strive with great effort to grieve with them and do whatever they can to alleviate their suffering. Right here is the deepest spiritual root of the impulse to work for peace and justice. Anything less would be an unworthy motive for those who love Jesus Christ.

Jesus' passion brings us to embrace the world as it really is: full of violence and pain. We refuse to let religion and grace become an easy analgesic, buffering us from the real sufferings around us. Instead, we embrace whatever suffering comes into our lives as no longer senseless. Our suffering has a meaning in "the language of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18). We join the sufferings of the crucified Christ, the sufferings of humankind that he chose to embrace. We cling to Jesus, to "a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). When we do less, we are using our faith in Christ as a pain pill.

—Excerpt from *Making Choices in Christ* by Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ.

10.6 Day 6: The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus

My attitude

Christ the Lord continues to labor in our world to save all men and women. He still follows the way of the cross toward Calvary. I ask the Father to place me with Christ crucified in the world today.

The grace I seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it is what is proper for the Passion: sorrow with Christ in sorrow; a broken spirit with Christ so broken; tears; and interior suffering because of the great suffering which Christ endured for me” (SE 203).

Reading

Mark 15: 1-47

Reflection: Colloquy before Christ Crucified

I put myself before Jesus Christ our Lord, present before me on the cross.

I talk to him about how he creates because he loves and then he is born one like us out of love, so emptying himself as to pass from eternal life to death here in time, even death on a cross. By his response of love for God his Father, he dies for my sins.

I look to myself and ask—just letting the questions penetrate my being:

In the past, what response have I made to Christ?

How do I respond to Christ now?

What response should I make to Christ?

As I look upon Jesus as he hangs upon the cross, I ponder whatever God may bring to my attention (SE 53).

—Contemporary translation by David L. Fleming, SJ, Draw Me into Your Friendship

10.7 Day 7: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

We will read Mark's account of Jesus' Passion over the next two days. Pray these Scriptures straight through or linger over them. Use imaginative prayer to immerse yourself in these events.

My attitude

In this Holy Saturday moment, we wait in stillness, loss, and longing. Try to find stillness of soul today.

The grace I seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it is what is proper for the Passion: sorrow with Christ in sorrow; a broken spirit with Christ so broken; tears; and interior suffering because of the great suffering which Christ endured for me" (SE 203).

Reading

Luke 23: 50-56

Reflection

Read Philippians 2: 1-11 (one of the most ancient hymns to Jesus Christ in the Bible).

10.8 Additional Material for Week 7

Scripture Readings

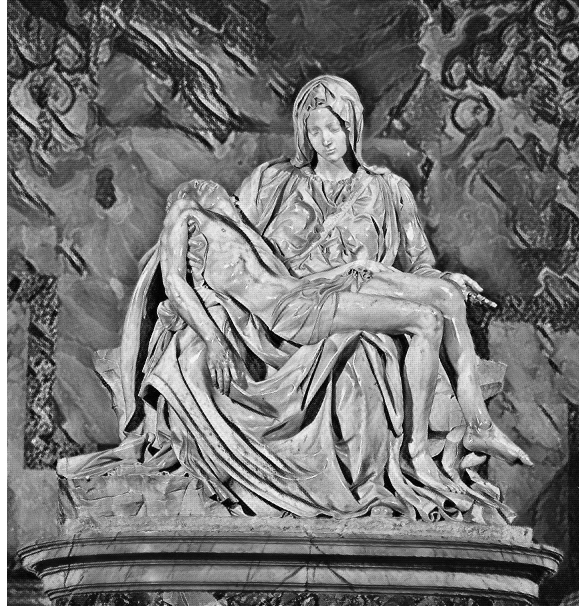
Select any passages from the Gospels that depict the Passion and suffering of Jesus and use them as your prayer. Try to use imaginative prayer and be with Jesus.

Prayers, Poems, and Other Resources

O King of the Friday
Whose limbs were stretched on the cross,
O Lord who did suffer
The bruises, the wounds, the loss,
We stretch ourselves
Beneath the shield of thy might,
Some fruit from the tree of thy passion
Fall on us this night!

O Cross, my sure salvation,
O Cross, which I ever adore,
O Cross of my Savior,
 be with me.
O Cross, my refuge
 is in thee.

—Attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas



The Stabat Mater is a Latin hymn/prayer that immerses one in the Blessed Mother's intense sorrow at seeing her beloved Son, Jesus, dying on the cross. It is attributed to a Franciscan monk, Jacopone da Todi, in the 13th century.

Stabat Mater

At the cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,
All His bitter anguish bearing,
Now at length the sword had passed.

Oh, how sad and sore distressed
Was that Mother highly blest,
Of the sole begotten One!

Christ above in torment hangs.
She beneath beholds the pangs
Of her dying glorious Son.

Is there one who would not weep,
Whelmed in miseries so deep,
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

Can the human heart refrain
From partaking in her pain,
In that Mother's pain untold?

Bruised, derided, cursed, defiled,
She beheld her tender Child,
All with bloody scourges rent.

For the sins of His own nation,

Saw Him hang in desolation
Till His spirit forth He sent.

O thou Mother: fount of love!
Touch my spirit from above,
Make my heart with thine accord.

Make me feel as thou hast felt;
Make my soul to glow and melt
With the love of Christ my Lord.

Holy Mother, pierce me through;
In my heart each wound renew
Of my Savior crucified.

Let me share with thee His pain,
Who for all my sins was slain,
Who for me in torment died.

Let me mingle tears with thee,
Mourning Him who mourned for me,
All the days that I may live.

By the Cross with thee to stay;
There with thee to weep and pray,
Is all I ask of thee to give.

Virgin of all virgins best,
Listen to my fond request:
Let me share thy grief divine.

Let me to my latest breath,
In my body bear the death
Of that dying Son of thine.

Wounded with His every wound,
Steep my soul till it hath swooned
In His very blood away.

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,
Lest in flames I burn and die,
In His awful Judgment day.

Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence,
Be Thy Mother my defense,
Be Thy Cross my victory.

While my body here decays,
May my soul Thy goodness praise,
Safe in Paradise with Thee. Amen.

Videos

- **Praying on the Passion and Death of Jesus:** A video by Kevin O'Brien, SJ.
<https://rb.gy/my4al>.
- **Praying with Your Feelings:** A video by Jim Manney.
<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/praying-with-your-feelings/>.
- **Good Friday Reflection:** A fairly lengthy poem by Vinita Hampton Wright.
<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/good-friday-reflection/>. There is a link to the text of the poem on the page. You can go right to the text if you wish:
<https://rb.gy/o9cjc>.

The Passion and Holy Week

The next two meditations by Vinita Hampton Wright that was written for Holy Week, but is appropriate for this phase, regardless of the time of year.

This is Holy Week, which is the subject of what the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises call the Third Week. During this week we accompany Jesus through the Last Supper, the agony in the garden, the betrayal and arrest, the scourging and trial, the Way of the Cross, the crucifixion, death, and burial.

That's a lot to take in, and I don't think it's possible to take in all of it during any one day or week, even if we attend all the special church services and read the extra Scripture readings and spend more time in prayer. There's only so much one heart can hold and feel and comprehend.

So listen to your own heart and allow it to land in a specific place this week—an event or one aspect of an event that takes place in Jesus' life during Holy Week. St. Ignatius encourages us to have conversational prayer with Jesus, walking alongside Jesus as a friend while he goes through his great Passion.

Imagine watching something horrific happening to a person you know and love. Some of us don't have to imagine—we have experienced this. Allow Jesus' experience of the Passion to be as close and human as the suffering you have witnessed in your life or another's. Take the time to consider details such as:

- Sharing with friends what you know will be a last meal.
- Being arrested and secreted away from loved ones.
- Going through a legal process without any advocate or legal representation.
- Being abused by law enforcement or other people with power over you.
- Having your words and actions skewed by others.
- Watching close companions scatter and disappear when you need them most.
- Being subjected to torture, whether private or public.
- Seeing your mother's face, as she watches you suffer and cannot help you.
- Meeting your death in a situation that is chaotic and painful, and one that misrepresents you to the whole world.

Grace to you, as you meditate on suffering, compassion, and love.

—Vinita Hampton Wright

Help My Hurting Heart

A second meditation written for the Lenten season, but again appropriate for this phase of the Exercises.

Consider Lent a time for tending wounds.

Consider Holy Week a container for your pain, your heartbreak, your disappointment, your anxiety, your grief.

Consider these days a time of special communion, in which you walk with Jesus.

Your prayers this week can be simple:

- “God, help my hurting heart.”
- “Lord, take all that’s unresolved in my life and please hold it tenderly, watchfully.”
- “Jesus, how can I be a friend to you when others run away?”
- “Christ, how can I help you carry this awful cross?”
- “Lord, what does it feel like to say, ‘Not my will, but yours be done’? How did you pray that?”
- “God of the universe, help me see, in Jesus’ suffering, the suffering of people all around me who need my love.”
- “Mary, I’m so sorry that you had to witness all that happened to your son. I wish I could have been there to hold you and cry with you.”
- “Jesus, help me watch with you, even if it’s just for a little while.”

Pray from the place in you that is honest and full of longing.

Pray with your own words. Pray with images, objects, settings that mean something to you.

Just, pray.

—Vinita Hampton Wright



11. Week 8: God's Love and Our Response

We come to the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises—the end of the Exercises and the final week of our retreat. We encounter the risen Lord as he consoles his friends and disciples, who were once scared, confused, and despairing. Accompanying the One we have walked with all along, we savor the distinctive grace of this final movement of the Exercises: **joy**.

Four days will be taken up with reflection on the resurrected Jesus. We contemplate the risen Christ consoling others. We notice how his friends both recognize and fail to recognize the One they have followed and loved. We marvel at how Jesus in the resurrected life—where his divinity is no longer hidden—does very human things: eating, talking, consoling, teaching, and enjoying the company of others.

We conclude the retreat with three days of reflection on the love of God and our response. For this we use St. Ignatius's Contemplation of the Love of God from the Spiritual Exercises.

Contemplation on Divine Love

Kevin O'Brien provides a video on this contemplation that you might want to look at before beginning the week.¹

11.1 Day 1: Resurrection

We do not contemplate the actual resurrection event, which is a mystery, beyond time and space. *Resurrection* refers to the event of God's transformation of life, making all things new, as in a new creation. Resurrection is a conquering of sin and death, once and for all.

My attitude

If we wish to be faithful to the special character of our Christian vocation as companions of Jesus, no matter what else that vocation entails, "we must 'contemplate' our world as Ignatius did his, that we may hear anew the call of Christ dying and rising in the anguish and aspirations of men and women" (*Documents of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, no. 68). The risen Lord is with us as He promised, to console us and to give us His gifts, so that we may console those who suffer in the world today.

The grace I seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord" (SE 221).

¹<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/the-contemplation-on-divine-love/>.

Reading

John 20: 1-18

Imagine finding the empty tomb with the disciples. Then notice how Mary at first does not recognize Jesus until he lovingly says her name. Imagine her confusion, her relief, her excitement, her joy! Hear and see how Jesus commissions her (and you).

Reflection: The Resurrection Brings Joy

Three significant truths rooted in the Resurrection open a window to the grace and virtues of the Fourth Week [of the Spiritual Exercises]. In particular, they highlight some of the reasons for our joy.

First, the Resurrection is a proclamation that Jesus is alive and present with us. In the Resurrection appearances, the disciples experienced Jesus in their midst. The same Jesus who had walked with them now again touched their lives, and spoke and ate with them. But Jesus was radically changed. Clearly, Jesus had not simply come back to life like Lazarus did. Jesus now lived the glorious life beyond death, but he was again with them. The Resurrection proclaims that Jesus is with us as well. Luke's story of the Ascension is not a declaration of Jesus' absence. Luke is announcing that Jesus is now present in every space and time. We encounter Jesus in the Scripture, in the sacraments, and in our brothers and sisters. As we recall the stories of the Resurrection appearances, Christ is once again with us, forgiving, feeding, and consoling.

Second, death has been conquered. Death opens the way to eternal life. Jesus gives witness to God's faithfulness even in death. We need not be afraid of death since it is not the end, but the beginning of eternal life. Jesus' Resurrection gives meaning to suffering and death as a way to salvation.

Third, Jesus' Resurrection affirms the value of the human person and the world in which we live. Jesus was raised as a whole person—body and soul. Jesus did not take on human flesh and then discard it. Jesus retained his whole humanity. Along with the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Eucharist, the Resurrection assures us that God has identified with matter. God has embraced the human condition. A profound unity forever exists between God and the world, between spirit and matter. As Christians, we do not believe simply in the immortality of the soul. We believe in the immortality of the human person. Jesus' Resurrection and ours speak of continuity between this life and the next. Jesus' Resurrection also acknowledges the value of creation.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:19-23)

As the Principle and Foundation says, this world is a gift of an all-loving God. Our faith in the Resurrection assures us that everything of beauty and love and creativity lasts forever. The Resurrection is the foundation of a holistic view of the human person and an incarnational and sacramental view of life.

Jesus is with us, death has been destroyed, and human life and activity have lasting value—these are all reasons to rejoice.

—Gerald M. Fagin, SJ

11.2 Day 2: Jesus Appears on the Road to Emmaus

The Fourth Week reminds us that death, despair, violence, and sadness will not have the last word: joy does. Walking with the risen Lord, we appreciate how Easter is happening all the time, with joy surprising us everywhere.

My attitude

If we wish to be faithful to the special character of our Christian vocation as companions of Jesus, no matter what else that vocation entails, “we must ‘contemplate’ our world as Ignatius did his, that we may hear anew the call of Christ dying and rising in the anguish and aspirations of men and women” (*Documents of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, no. 68). The risen Lord is with us as He promised, to console us and to give us His gifts, so that we may console those who suffer in the world today.

The grace I seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord” (SE 221).

Reading

Luke 24: 13-35

Notice how Jesus’ disciples do not recognize him at first. Notice too how Jesus just walks and listens to the disciples in their sadness and confusion. How has Jesus walked with you these weeks? How do the disciples—and how do you—recognize the risen Christ? How have you experienced your heart burning these weeks? What desires are stirring in your heart now?

Reflection: In the Breaking of Bread

The Mass can seem like an island of holiness, a time-out from daily life. When we enter Church, it's easy to think daily life should be left at the door and shouldered again when we leave. But that was never Jesus' intention. He asked us to break bread in memory of him, of what he did, and what he continues to do in our lives, not just in memory of his breaking bread.

Paragraph 901 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church invites us to bring our daily lives to the altar—to offer everything along with the gifts of bread and wine. When we do that, the Eucharist can transform daily life, our relationships, and even the world. It becomes the light by which we see more clearly our call to serve others.

Don't park your life at the church door. Bring it to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

This is a meditation in the *3 minute retreat* series. The meditation is a short series of Web pages and can be found at: <https://www.loyolapress.com/retreats/in-the-breaking-of-bread/>. This is the suggested way of doing this meditation; however, if you are not able to view it, the text of the meditation follows. Pause at each line:

Pause for a moment. Breathe slowly and deeply. Allow yourself to grow still. Be aware of the presence of God, who responds to you with love and compassion.

Luke 24:35. "Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

Hindsight is a beautiful thing. Only afterward did the two believers realize who had been walking with them. They were moved to turn back and share the good news with their friends. The Mass can offer us the same opportunity. We can reflect on the week past, which may have been hectic and overwhelming. Consecrated bread and wine, shared with a community of believers, can help us see Jesus' presence in our week. Perhaps he appeared in the companionship of a friend, the thoughtfulness of a family member, or the helpfulness of a stranger. Once we recognize Jesus' presence, we can turn back to our daily lives, assured of who walks with us.

Where have I noticed the presence of Christ in my encounters this past week?

What do I want to say to Jesus about this?

(Pray to Jesus, using these words or words of your own.)

Jesus, my companion and hope, thank you for your presence in my life. May I continue to grow in gratitude and be ever more attuned to the many ways you reveal yourself to me each day.

Amen.

11.3 Day 3: Jesus Appears to Thomas

In the reading today, notice how compassionately Jesus deals with doubts, which are a natural part of a faith journey. Periods of doubt and questioning can lead to a stronger, more deeply held faith. The key is to keep the conversation going with the Lord, as you have been doing throughout your retreat and as Thomas does with Jesus.

My attitude

If we wish to be faithful to the special character of our Christian vocation as companions of Jesus, no matter what else that vocation entails, “we must ‘contemplate’ our world as Ignatius did his, that we may hear anew the call of Christ dying and rising in the anguish and aspirations of men and women” (*Documents of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, no. 68). The risen Lord is with us as He promised, to console us and to give us His gifts, so that we may console those who suffer in the world today.

The grace I seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord” (SE 221).

Reading

John 20: 24-31

Can you relate to Thomas’s doubting? Can you say with him the great proclamation of faith that concludes this Gospel story: “My Lord and my God!”

Reflection: This is Your Easter, Thomas



The moniker “doubting Thomas” has always bothered me. Thomas did, after all, have great faith, enough faith to give up everything he knew—family, friends, homeland, and career—to follow Jesus. Yet we remember him for one fleeting moment of very understandable hesitation. In fact, I wonder how different his reaction to hearing the news that Jesus was alive might have been from my own? When I place myself in prayer next to Thomas in the Gospel passages, I see that Thomas, in his humanity, is a relatable figure.

Since Thomas was not with the rest of the disciples in the Upper Room when Jesus first appeared to them, his encounter with the Risen Christ was delayed. In a sense, his unique experience of the Risen Christ brought him to his own personal Easter.

In Thomas’s story, we witness the spiritual journey of a soul striving to accompany Jesus despite a very real and flawed humanity. In Thomas, we might also see the story of “the other” who has become separated from community, a figure with whom all who strive to accompany Jesus in faith and action can relate.

Thomas
Isolated
Confused
Afraid
Doubting

Sadness
Emptiness
Loneliness
Pain
Devastation
Alone
 without community
Alone
 what made sense then
 seems ridiculous now.

Desolation.
A dark night.
He asks,
How then shall I live?

Out of the darkness,
an optimistic note,
a ray of light.
There comes encounter.

A hand extended,
A side plunged into.
And with encounter,
An invitation.

To let go of
 disappointment
 anger
 shame
fear
 pain.
To be free of
 sadness
 emptiness
 loneliness
 guilt
And be reconciled.

An invitation to
 Mercy
 and to
 Trust.

To Thomas,
He says,
“Do not be afraid.
 I did not leave you!
 I still love you.
Do not be afraid.
 You are not alone.
 I am with you.
Do not fear
 opening your heart again.
 I am here.
 You are safe.
 You are forgiven.
 You are loved.”

In His hands, His side,
An invitation to Hope.
An invitation to Love.
An invitation to Joy.

This is your Easter, Thomas.

—Rebecca Ruiz

11.4 Day 4: Jesus Appears to Peter and the Apostles

Today's reading shows Jesus appearing to Peter and the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. Imagine yourself in this very dynamic and tender scene. Can you feel the disciples' excitement and wonder and Peter's enthusiasm? Listen to the intimate dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Imagine Jesus saying the same to you.

My attitude

If we wish to be faithful to the special character of our Christian vocation as companions of Jesus, no matter what else that vocation entails, "we must 'contemplate' our world as Ignatius did his, that we may hear anew the call of Christ dying and rising in the anguish and aspirations of men and women" (*Documents of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, no. 68). The risen Lord is with us as He promised, to console us and to give us His gifts, so that we may console those who suffer in the world today.

The grace I seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord" (SE 221).

Reading

John 21: 1-19

Notice the command that Jesus leaves Peter. How are you called to "feed" and "tend" to others?

Reflection: A Prayer by St. Teresa of Ávila

Christ has no body but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes
with which He looks compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet
with which He walks to do good.
Yours are the hands
with which He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands.
Yours are the feet.
Yours are the eyes.
You are His body.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

11.5 Day 5: The Contemplation of the Love of God, Part One

We conclude this retreat with three days of reflection on the Contemplation of the Love of God—the last meditation in the Spiritual Exercises. This is the culmination of the retreat. In this contemplation, we let God's overwhelming love empower our lives. We see that the whole movement of the retreat has been rooted in and oriented toward love.

Before he offers this contemplation, Ignatius says two things about love:

1. **"Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words"** (SE 230). Love must be put into action; words are not enough. Having been schooled as disciples these many weeks, we must now do something. Ignatian spirituality is one of mission.
2. **"Love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons"** (SE 231). Just as the love between two persons is marked by giving and receiving, the love we share with God enjoys a certain mutuality. God wants our friendship. God wants to be known by us. These divine desires are the source of our desire to know, love, and serve God.

My attitude

An idea whose realization will transform my life: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always at work sharing themselves with me. This sharing empowers me to become a contemplative-in-action, finding God in all things. It will be helpful for me "to be ever mindful of what Saint Ignatius says about love, that it consists in sharing what one has, what one is, with those one loves." (Documents of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, *Jesuits Today*, No. 28).

The grace I seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things" (SE 233).

Meditation: Thank God for So Many Gifts

The first point of the Contemplation of the Love of God: **thanking God for so many gifts.**

I will call back into my memory the gifts I have received—my creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to myself. I will ponder with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much he has given me of what he possesses, and consequently how he, the same Lord, desires to give me even his very self, in accordance with his divine design.

Then I will reflect on myself, and consider what I on my part ought in all reason and justice to offer and give to the Divine Majesty, namely, all my possessions, and myself along with them. I will speak as one making an offering with deep affection, and say:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord.

All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me love of yourself along with your grace, for that is enough for me. (SE 234)

The "Take, Lord, Receive" prayer is an offering made in freedom. We have been praying for indifference throughout the retreat: to become free of disordered loves. Now we focus on why this freedom is necessary: we become free from excessive attachments so that we can love and serve God and others more. Basking in the love of God, we are empowered to love as God loves.²

²The actual name of the "Take, Lord, Receive" prayer is the *Ssucipe*.

Reflection: Fall in Love

Nothing is more practical than
finding God, than
falling in Love
in a quite absolute, final way.
what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read, whom you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in Love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything.

—Attributed to Pedro Arrupe, SJ

11.6 Day 6: The Contemplation of the Love of God, Part Two

With the eyes of faith, we realize the infinite depth of reality. We begin to understand how much of heaven is here on earth. God is with us. Ask: How have I encountered God dwelling in me, in others, and in creation? Be very concrete. You may consider praying outdoors in nature.

My attitude

An idea whose realization will transform my life: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always at work sharing themselves with me. This sharing empowers me to become a contemplative-in-action, finding God in all things. It will be helpful for me "to be ever mindful of what Saint Ignatius says about love, that it consists in sharing what one has, what one is, with those one loves." (Documents of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Jesuits Today, No. 28).

The grace I seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things" (SE 233).

Meditation: Finding God in All Things

The second point of the contemplation: **finding God in all things, in all people, and in myself.**

I will consider how God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence; and finally, how in this way he dwells also in myself, giving me existence, life, sensation, and intelligence; and even further, making me his temple, since I am created as a likeness and image of the Divine Majesty. Then once again I will reflect on myself, in the manner described in the first point, or in any other way I feel to be better. (SE 235)

Use your senses and imagination to find God in all things and all people. Be attentive to the movements of grace within you. Conclude with the "Take, Lord, Receive" prayer. (See Meditation 11.5)

Reflection: How a Busy Person Finds God in All Things

Busy people generally don't stop being busy people. If they are spiritually aware, they will intentionally cease activity at regular intervals to be silent and still, to listen to the Divine, and to care for themselves. But then, they're off! Busy people use their energy for action. Their minds rarely pause, because there are always multiple projects and plans forming. I use "busy" to describe a person who is nearly always outwardly active—this is the person most of us see as busy. That doesn't mean that people who are not so outwardly active are not doing anything; some of us spend a lot of time not in motion, yet we are doing loads of interior work, such as prayer, meditation or focused thinking, or creative work. Such "quiet" people have their own form of busy.

We tend to view the quiet person as being intelligent or even more spiritual than outwardly busy people, and this is simply a perception. A quiet, "spiritual"-looking person may not have much going on inside. Or the interior work may be entirely self-centered.

We tend to view outwardly busy people as those who "get things done," and that, too, is simply a perception. You can be busy and not productive at all—if your activity is generated by restlessness or aimlessness or some obsessive need to be in motion.

Whether you are "busy" or not, it's critical that you find God in every day, no matter what you do or how you appear to others. For the person in motion, the one we call busy, finding God in all things requires freedom and attentiveness. Are you free to stop doing what you're doing? Are you free to appear un-busy to others? Are you free to change course? Are you paying attention to God's presence right in the middle of your work and motion? Do you allow the Holy Spirit to prompt you when you are going full force in one direction, working hard to get things done?

For the person who is not so obviously in motion, finding God in all things requires exactly the same spiritual qualities: freedom and attentiveness. Are you free from your own tangle of interior life—the events you keep replaying, the resentments that simmer, the desires that become shrill demands? Are you free to change course—even if that means giving up some of your quiet and solitude? Are you paying attention to God's voice within, allowing it to rise above any other voices you carry? Are you willing to recognize the Holy Spirit's communication as it comes through other people or in the middle of activity?

Not only does God reach out to people who are in the margins of society, but God also reaches out to us in our personal margins—those spaces between where we find comfort and familiarity and where we are invited to explore and become uncomfortable. Whether you are a busy person who gets things done or a quiet person who seems to live primarily within, God will invite you to upset your own status quo. Because stirring things up challenges our illusions that we are in control, that we can take care of ourselves, and that we're just fine, thank you.

How do you find God in all things? By cultivating the willingness to recognize the Divine. We'd like to think we are always willing, but so much of the time, we are too busy following our own limited vision.

—Vinita Hampton Wright

11.7 Day 7: The Contemplation of the Love of God, Part Three

German poet Rainer Maria Rilke captures the movement of this Contemplation (indeed the whole Exercises) perfectly: “We are cradled close in your hands—and lavishly flung forth.” We have answered the call to “come and see” (John 1:39), and at this point reach a critical juncture. Now we must take the love and grace that God has given us during this privileged time of retreat and incarnate it in our own lives.

My attitude

An idea whose realization will transform my life: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always at work sharing themselves with me. This sharing empowers me to become a contemplative-in-action, finding God in all things. It will be helpful for me “to be ever mindful of what Saint Ignatius says about love, that it consists in sharing what one has, what one is, with those one loves.” (Documents of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, *Jesuits Today*, No. 28).

The grace I seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things” (SE 233).

Meditation: Praise God

The third point of the contemplation: **praising God who constantly labors for me.**

I will consider how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth; that is, he acts in the manner of one who is laboring. For example, he is working in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest—giving them their existence, conserving them, concurring with their vegetative and sensitive activities. Then I will reflect on myself. (SE 236)

God is not static. God—revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is dynamic, alive, always stirring, and always laboring to bring life to God’s beloved creation. God is love overflowing. In your prayer, consider the activity of God in your life and your world. Marvel at how God creates in, through, and with us. Can you see and hear God laboring in the world around you? Can you appreciate how God has “labored” specifically in and through you? Can you recognize how the labor of others supports you in your living?

Continue with the fourth point of the contemplation: **praising God, who is the source of all goodness.**

I will consider how all good things and gifts descend from above; for example, my limited power from the Supreme and Infinite Power above; and so of justice, goodness, piety, mercy, and so forth—just as the rays come down from the sun, or the rains from their source. Then I will finish by reflecting on myself. (SE 237)

Love sees clearly into the depths of reality. With your vision sharpened by the Exercises, try to see in all things—in all creation and all people—the reflection of God’s very self. Recall specific occasions when you or someone else acted with justice, goodness, mercy, or another virtue. Appreciate how these actions were like “rays come down from the sun,” who is God. Conclude with the “Take, Lord, Receive” prayer. (See Meditation 11.5)

Reflection

Some journeys end so that others may begin. The risen Christ gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples, and the Spirit stirred up in them bold, holy desires and animated them to continue the mission that Jesus entrusted to them throughout his earthly life. The Spirit of Jesus is with us now, summoning us for the adventure ahead, as we respond ever more to the call of Christ to build a more just and gentle world where God's love reaches every nook and cranny.

—Kevin O'Brien, SJ

11.8 Additional Material for Week 8

Scripture Readings

No particular passages are suggested for this week. At this point, you should be able to find passages that speak to you and use them as prayer starters. Perhaps you might write in your journal or keep a table of prayers, noting how they speak to you specifically in prayer.

Prayers, Poems, and Other Resources

Racing to the Tomb

On a morning that felt like Easter,

in the spirit of Peter and John,
I raced to the tomb.

All those who have come to de-
pend on me
and I on them
seemed to be racing with me.

They got there first,
but waited,
too reverent to enter without
me.

Peering into my baptized heard,
my tomb
where my life is hidden
with Christ
in God
I entered
with resurrection on my mind.

Those who raced with me
followed me in
always waiting
for me to make the first move
Waiting and watching
for the dough of my life to rise
companioning me in the the
rising.

How Difficult it is to rise alone
And such a comfort
when someone waits with you
for the rising.

What is the sense
of Jesus having risen 20000
years ago
if I cannot put my linens aside
and claim resurrection
as my own
today!

The problem came
when my friends had to go
away
to race with someone else
to the tomb.

I began to doubt my rising
and started to cling
on the linens again.

But I was lucky enough
to run into the gardener,
and Mary's question
became my own
Where is the One I love?
(John 20:14-16)

My name, proclaimed
became my answer!

Now I, too, can race with the oth-
ers to the tomb
allow them to enter first
and wait with them
for the rising.

Rolling Stones Away

Where are my stones?
What are their names?
Would I know them
if I met them face to face?

And if the empty tomb
I stood in front of was *me*
would I call it death?
Or would I call it resurrection?

My heart beats out the answer
much clearer than I live it.
O happy emptiness!
It's what I need a lot of
to be full.

Rolling stones
is what it's all about
but Resurrection
is another name.

Be Patient with each other's stones
(Ephesians 4: 1-3)
Jesus was gentle with Thomas' stone
John 20: 24-29)
Peter had to roll away some stones in his life too
(John 13: 6-11).

The call continues.
We are called
to help others experience Resurrection
to help them break out of their tombs.
Of course, that means
we'll have to break forth
from our own tombs first.

We'd look kind of silly
preaching
from the inside of our tombs,
wouldn't we?

Personal Prayer of Pedro Arrupe

Grant me, O Lord, to see everything now with new eyes,
to discern and test the spirits
that help me read the signs of the times,
to relish the things that are yours, and to communicate them to others.
Give me the clarity of understanding that you gave Ignatius.

Videos

- **Joy Is a Decision:** Paul Brian Campbell, SJ talks about how we might look at the world and see it as God's world. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/joy-is-a-decision/>.
- **Suscipe:** A meditative reading of the Suscipe. <https://rb.gy/hgst8>.

James Martin on the Suscipe

James Martin, SJ discusses the Suscipe in his book *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*. His words may be helpful to you as you pray this, often difficult, prayer.

Within that final contemplation is one of the most famous, and perhaps most difficult, of all Ignatian prayers. It's often called the Suscipe, taken from the first word of the Latin prayer. Coming at the end of the Exercises, the Suscipe prayer is an offering to God. After the four weeks of the Exercises, after meditating on God's wholehearted love for you, people are often moved to respond wholeheartedly. Like many of the Ignatian ideals—including indifference, detachment, humility—this prayer is a goal.

...

Like I said, a tall order. It is a prayer of total surrender. I offer you everything, God. All I need is your love and grace. This is all I need to be "yes, alive." Why am I ending this book with such a "hard" prayer? To remind you that the spiritual life is a constant journey. *For me, I don't think I've ever been able to say that prayer and mean it completely.*³ That is, I still want to hold on to all those things. And I'm not sure that I can say yet that all I need is God's love and grace. I'm still too human for that. But as Ignatius said, it's enough to have the desire for the desire. It's enough to want that freedom. God will take care of the rest.[16]

³Emphasis is mine.

Five Ways to Find God in All Things

Finding God in all things is a big part of Ignatian spirituality. But finding God in the boring parts of life is easier said than done. Here are five ways (aside from the Examen) to find God in all things.

1. **Micro-Awareness**—This is not just trying to be aware of the present moment, but rather letting each small action you take become your primary purpose in the moment. If you let something as simple as pushing the power button on your computer or walking up the stairs be done with intention and awareness (rather than letting routine get the best of you), you'll find a new holiness in those mundane tasks.
2. **Journal**—Writing down the experiences of your day as well as your thoughts and feelings is a kind of Examen, but oftentimes the act of writing uncovers unseen moments of God's presence you initially missed.
3. **Do something the "old fashioned way"**—Technology and fast expectations can often close the door on our awareness of God. For a change, walk to someone's desk instead of calling, hand write a letter instead of e-mailing, walk to the store instead of driving, or take the train instead of flying. The change of pace may give you a more meaningful interaction or experience. And slowing down lets you acknowledge God's presence more easily.
4. **Listen**—When was the last time you really listened to someone without trying to think of what to say next? You'll be surprised what you hear if you actually listen—to a friend, to the natural sounds around you (try turning off the radio when you drive), or to your own conscience. God speaks when we pause long enough to listen.
5. **Say "God is here"**—This idea comes from UCC pastor Jane E. Vennard. She says:

Practice saying "God is here" the next time you are assaulted by your neighbors' quarreling, see someone carelessly toss trash from a car, get drenched in an unexpected rainstorm, or bite into a mealy and tasteless apple.

From his own experience, Saint Francis of Assisi learned that the deeper lessons of God came when one embraced all things, even that which isn't beautiful.

Sometimes saying "God is here" is the best way to snap into an awareness that God dwells not just within you but alongside you in every moment, mundane or grand.

Learning to Live Reverently⁴

Reverence is a virtue to be cultivated and practiced. It is a disposition of heart that leads us to the good in all things and draws us closer to God. Reverence brings us closer to other people and to the world around us. The reverent person notices and responds to the mystery of life and the sacredness of all things. Reverence is an attitude of dependence and humility, an appreciation of the splendor and beauty of all reality, and a longing for something greater. Reverence is a self-effacing virtue, but it implies as well a reverence for oneself as a person created and loved and chosen by God. Reverence gives voice to our desire for God, our desire to find fulfillment beyond ourselves in the mystery that embraces us.

Some will argue that contemporary life and culture have lost a sense of reverence. In an individualized and person-centered world, it is easy to domesticate God, trivialize relationships, and flee from the sacred. Reverence is not a virtue to be found only in traditional settings, formal titles, formal rituals, and attitudes. Each culture must discover its own way to foster reverence. Each of us must find reverence in the world in which we live.

In the end, we must tap into our own experience of reverence by reflecting on contemplative moments of awe. Descriptions of reverence are only helpful if they are measured against one's own recalled experience of transcending oneself and opening oneself to something greater. For example, I remember standing on the top of a mesa ten thousand feet high overlooking what seemed to be hundreds of miles of fertile land. I had an experience of amazement, of silence, of vastness, of expansiveness, of gift. I felt a sense of wonder that God had almost done too much and thus created out of the sheer joy of creating and sharing goodness.

We feel such things often—in the countless number of stars on a clear night, before a work of art, at the birth of a child, at the moment of dying of a loved one. These contemplative experiences draw us closer to God even as we feel small and unworthy. They are sacred moments that expand the landscapes of our hearts. Ignatius knew reverence when he prayed at night under the stars, but he knew it as well in the busyness of each day. He hoped to elicit that experience throughout the Exercises.

Ignatius believed that anyone who prayerfully considers the basic truth that we are created out of love by a transcendent God of holiness will grow in a sense of reverence. We will have a deepened sense of the sacredness of all things if we think of everything as continually being called and sustained in being by God. We will stand in awe not just before sunsets and mountains, flowers and trees, but also, and especially, before every person we meet. Reverence is a disposition of a heart that allows us to live before the beauty and goodness of every creature and the God who made them. In Ignatian terminology, reverence will enable us to find God in all things.

The first exercise of the Spiritual Exercises begins to transform us into a particular kind of person. Already there is an answer emerging to the questions asked by virtue ethics: Who am I? Who ought I to become? How am I to get there? Reverence is a foundational virtue for putting on the heart of Christ.

Reflecting on the Virtue of Reverence

Recall and reflect on an experience of reverence and awe in your life.

- Where and how do I experience God being present in my life?
- How can I grow in reverence for God, others, self, and life?
- How can I foster a contemplative heart?

Scripture Readings on Reverence

Psalm 104 God the Creator and Provider

Luke 8: 22-25 Jesus Calms a Storm

Luke 9: 28-36 The Transfiguration

⁴Excerpt from **Putting on the Heart of Christ: How the Spiritual Exercises Invite Us to a Virtuous Life** by Gerald M. Fagin, SJ. <https://rb.gy/nqelw>.

Glossary

colloquy Ignatius suggests that we include a “colloquy” in each of these meditations on sin and in later exercises as well (SE 053–054). A colloquy is an intimate conversation between you and God the Father, between you and Jesus, or between you and Mary or one of the saints. It often occurs at the end of a prayer period, but it can take place at any time. Let this conversation naturally develop in your prayer. In the colloquy, we speak and listen as the Spirit moves us: expressing ourselves, for example, as a friend speaks to a friend, or as a person speaks to one whom he or she has offended, or as a child speaks to a parent or mentor, or as a lover speaks to his or her beloved.

Whatever the context, be “real,” speaking from the heart. As in any meaningful conversation, make sure to leave times of silence for listening. [20]

consolation Ignatius provides three ways that the term *consolation* describes our interior life. (SE 316)

a) when we find ourselves so on fire with the love of God that neither anything nor anyone presents itself in competition with a total gift of self to God in love. Rather we begin to see everything and everyone in the context of God, the Creator and Lord.

b) When we are saddened, even to the point of tears, for our infidelity to God, but at the same time thankful to know God as Savior. Such consolation often comes in a deep realization of ourselves as sinner before a God who loves us, or in the face of Christ’s Passion when we see that Jesus loves his Father and his flock so much, or for any other reason which leads us to praise and thank and serve God better.

c) When we find our life of faith, hope, and love so strengthened and emboldened that the joy of serving God is foremost in our life. More simply said, consolation can be found in any increase of our faith, our hope, and our love. A deep down peace comes in just “being in my Father’s house.”

contemplation Contemplation is more about feeling than thinking. Contemplation often stirs the emotions and inspires deep, God-given desires. In contemplation, we rely on our imaginations to place ourselves in a setting from the Gospels or in a scene proposed by Ignatius. Scripture has a central place in the Exercises because it is the revelation of who God is, particularly in Jesus Christ, and of what God does in our world. [20]

desolation There are three ways of describing desolation in our interior life. (SE 317)

a) When we find ourselves enmeshed in a certain turmoil of spirit or feel ourselves weighted

down by a heavy darkness or weight.

b) When we experience a lack of faith or hope or love in the very distaste for prayer or for any spiritual activity and we know a certain restlessness in our carrying on in the service of God.

c) When we experience just the opposite effect of what has been described as spiritual consolation. For we will notice that the thoughts of rebelliousness, despair, or selfishness which arise at the time of desolation are in absolute contrast with the thoughts of the praise and service of God which flow during the time of consolation,

discernment of spirits Discernment of spirits is the interpretation of what St. Ignatius Loyola called the “motions of the soul.” These interior movements consist of thoughts, imaginings, emotions, inclinations, desires, feelings, repulsions, and attractions. Spiritual discernment of spirits involves becoming sensitive to these movements, reflecting on them, and understanding where they come from and where they lead us.

Examen The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern his direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God’s hand at work in our whole experience.[\[25\]](#)

indifference Indifference means being detached enough from things, people, or experiences to be able either to take them up or to leave them aside, depending on whether they help us to “to praise, reverence, and serve God.

magis The *magis* is a latin adverb that is commonly used as a noun to denote the essence of Ignatian spirituality. It literally means “more” or “to a greater degree.” It is often interpreted incorrectly. James Martin says that it is “an elusive word that can be taken to mean doing the more, the better, the greater for God.”

meditation In meditation, we use our intellect to wrestle with basic principles that guide our life. Reading Scripture, we pray over words, images, and ideas. We engage our memory to appreciate the activity of God in our life. Such insights into who God is and who we are before God allow our hearts to be moved.[\[20\]](#)

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