

JOURNEY OF PRAYER

AN 8 WEEK GUIDED
PRAYER JOURNAL



GRAHAM CLIFFORD

A Journey of Prayer

Getting Started:

This will be an eight week journey in prayer. The challenge is to commit to spending 30 to 40 minutes everyday in private, personal prayer. You need an extended period of time to engage the prayer material deeply and savor the readings being offered. If you are not in the habit of praying that long in one sitting, then slowly build up to that time. To help you establish a habit of praying, try it at the same time each day.

Find a regular prayer space: a quiet room in your home with a comfortable chair, even a secluded place outside. It is often helpful to keep the same prayer space throughout the next 8 weeks. Consistency will help you focus and commit. We also need to ensure that this time and space is sacred. Turn your phone on do not disturb, remove any distractions that may break your focus, and quiet yourself.

Each day you will have material to pray over: Scripture passages, Ignatius's meditations and contemplations, or other exercises. Look over these materials before you formally begin your prayer period—either the evening or morning before. This preparation allows you to sort through any questions or confusion about the prayer material itself, thus removing unnecessary mental clutter from your prayer time. That way you can dive right in when you go to your prayer space.

Pray for the Grace:

At the beginning of each prayer period, Ignatius advises that we pray for a certain grace, or gift from God. Simply naming what we deeply desire opens us to receive the gift God wants to give us.

Each week we will suggest specific graces to pray for. Always feel free to articulate a different grace or to use different words if the Spirit is moving you in that direction. Imagine God asking you, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Although grace is revealed in the particular gifts God gives you, grace above all is God's presence in your life, and ultimately, the Giver is the gift!

Doing the Daily Prayer:

Having taken some time to compose yourself and center your mind; also having engaged the material presented for prayer, now is the time to pray with focus and intention. Once our time of prayer is complete, take time to reflect on your experience. Keeping a journal is most helpful during this adventure. Now this exercise can be challenging because we are trying to put into words our encounter with God, who is a Mystery. Although it is challenging, trying to articulate such experiences can help us discern how God is meeting us or leading us in our prayer. The journal is for your eyes only. 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 - A way of going deeper - as you sift through the graces God has given you.

LOVE

freedom

Purpose

Week 1

Day One

Love – We begin this journey 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 child: this is the core of our identity. We are first and foremost a child of God

Prayer focus – Pray that you will be more aware of how near God really is to us day in and day out; Pray for the ability to trust in His personal care and love.

Read 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?

Reflect: “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*

Day Two

The Grace I Seek: Intimacy with God is available to you. It is as accessible to you as God's promises. And His invitation to you, to enjoy an intimate fellowship with Him, is that thing that is putting your faith to the test more than anything else

Prayer Focus: Pray that you will be more aware of how near God really is to us day in and day out; Pray for the ability to trust in His personal care and love.

Read: Psalm 139:1-18.

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

Reflect: "As we enter into intentional times of spiritual development and growth, we find ourselves sometimes doing much thinking and reasoning things out. At other times however, we will 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."

–Kevin O'Brien, SJ

Day Three

Spiritual Freedom: Spiritual freedom is 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. However, we have numerous preoccupations that get in the way of our hearing and responding to God's call: fears, prejudices, greed, the need to control, perfectionism, jealousies, resentments, and excessive self-doubts. These tendencies bind us and hold us back from loving God, ourselves, and others as we ought to. They create chaos in our souls and lead us to make poor choices. Lacking spiritual freedom, we become excessively attached to persons, places, material possessions, titles, occupations, honors, and the acclaim of others. These things are good in themselves when ordered and directed by the love of God. But they become disordered attachments when they push God out of the center of our lives and become key to our identity.

Prayer Focus: Pray that you grow in freedom of the concerns of the heart and mind; to become more aware of disordered attachments that get in the way of loving God, others, or myself.

Read: Luke 1:26-38 – 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.

Reflect: "Mary models faith in an incredible way for us. She shows us that faith is more than an agreement, 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. She surrendered to the mystery of God that was before her, and committed herself to be part of God's plan of salvation.

Now it is easy to romanticize this story. Mary is at prayer, an angel appears, and she says yes with faith-filled yes. But the gospel 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 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."

– Gerald M. Fagin, SJ

Day Four

Interior Freedom: Finding interior freedom (spiritual freedom in the heart and mind) leads us to discover, that even in the most unfavorable outward circumstances, we possess within ourselves a space of freedom that nobody can take away, because God is source and guarantor of that freedom

Prayer Focus: Pray for growth in interior freedom; to become more aware of disordered attachments that get in the way of loving God, others, or myself.

Read: Philippians 3:7-16 – Paul had a single-minded and single-hearted focus on Christ. Ask God: When have I experienced or witnessed such focus, and such freedom in my life? Then ask God to develop Paul's single-minded and single-hearted focus in you.

Reflect: "We gain possession of our interior freedom in exact proportion to our growth in faith, hope, and love. The dynamism between these three theological virtues is the heart of spiritual life."

– Jacques Philippe

Day Five

The Principle and Foundation: Today let's focus on creating a holy desire by practicing meditation. In your sacred place of prayer, meditate and repeatedly say "I am created to praise, love, and serve God." After you feel centered and focus, think about what it will take to live out of this vocation. When we allow disordered loves and self-preoccupations to clutter our lives, we find ourselves out of balance; we are ultimately unhappy, and discontented. But with having a holy desire, we are hold all of God's gifts reverently and gratefully; but also lightly. We embrace them or letting them go, all depending on how they help us fulfill our vocation to love, praise and serve God in everyday, concrete ways.

Prayer Focus: Pray for 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.

Read: Prayerfully read 1 John 4 and ask –How do I concretely praise, love, and serve God? What activities, people, or material things help me achieve this end?

Reflect: "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 unconditional love and grace. For me to be a holy means to be my true self. 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*

Day Six

The Purpose of My Life: Indifference from God's perspective is another way of describing spiritual freedom. It is a stance of openness to God. In it, we are looking 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 it by developing good habits of thinking, choosing, and acting. In all reality this is an invitation to experience God and to all of God's creation (including persons, other creatures, and the natural world) in a more intimate way. And in so doing, certain fundamental truths about our existence come alive. We all of a sudden understand that God created me out of love, in a particular time and place, with particular talents and temperaments, strengths and limitations. The best way to praise God is to be who God made me to be and to honor the uniqueness of other people .

Prayer Focus: Pray for a deepened 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.

Read – The First Principal and Foundation by St. Ignatius of Loyola

The Goal of our life is to live with God forever.

God, who loves us, gave us life.

Our own response of love allows God's life
to flow into us without limit.

All the things in this world are gifts from God,
Presented to us so that we can know God more easily
and make a return of love more readily.

As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God
Insofar as they help us to develop as loving persons.
But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives,

They displace God

And so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance
Before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice

And are not bound by some obligation.

We should not fix our desires on health or sickness,
Wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.

For everything has the potential of calling forth in us

A deeper response to our life in God.

Our only desire and our one choice should be this:

I want and I choose what better leads

To God's deepening his life in me.

Reflect: 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.

Day Seven

Purpose: What's my purpose? To grow into my God-created potential to love. That happens as I make decisions, but it involves more than that. I become my best self as I become more intimately engaged with God.

Pray Focus: Pray for a deepening awareness of your 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.

Read: 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 you partnered with God to help build a more just and gentle world, to care for creation?

Reflect: There is a phrase often used in the church: “God has begun a work in me.” Have you heard this before? I want to believe, but I hope God is better about finishing what he starts than I am. 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



*Finding
God
in all
things*

Week 2

Day 8

Praying for God's Help: There is 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.

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.

Prayer Focus: Pray for the wonder of God's ongoing creation; gratitude for the gift of God creating me and creating the world. 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.

Read: Psalm 121 – Pray the psalm slowly. Open your heart to God. Consider: What is God like? How can God help me?

Reflect: "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, 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*

Day 9

Give Thanks for the Gifts of This Day: 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.

Prayer Focus: Pray about the wonder at God’s ongoing creation. Pray with gratitude for the gift of God creating us and creating the world. 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.

Read: Psalm 100, Read it slowly and prayerfully. Ask yourself: What am I thankful for?

Reflection: Exploring the Examen Step-by-Step: Give Thanks by Rebecca Ruiz

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.** This is a gratitude steeped in the Ignatian concept of magis—gratitude and more. 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.** Our response to that love. 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 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.
- **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.

Day 10

Pray over Significant Feelings: 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.

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

Read: Psalm 117.

Reflection: 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 Hipkind, SJ,

Day 11

Rejoice and Seek Forgiveness: The fourth step of the Examen is reflecting on what you can do better. As you go through your day, think about all the things you do, particular with regards to living our you faith. What areas can be improved

Pray: Continue praying about to wonder of God's ongoing creation; gratitude for the gift of God creating me and creating the world. Rejoice in those times that you were brought closer to God, and ask forgiveness for those times today when you resisted God's presence in your life. Praise God for the grace of awareness given to you during this time of prayer, even if you became aware of things you are not proud of. This awareness is the beginning of healing and conversion.

Read: Psalm 51 (a psalm of contrition) and Pray the psalm slowly in a spirit of confidence.

Reflect: Read through this poem and reflect on your own following of Christ

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*

Day 12

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.

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

Read: Luke 11:1-13 and invite God to be a part of your future. What do you need God's help with?

Reflection: Read this passage from The Examen

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. —Excerpted from *Heroic Living* by Chris Lowney

Day 13

“Do Not Be Afraid”: Our reflections for the next two days focus on listening to God. God is always trying to get our attention in ways both obvious and subtle. We are 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). We can find God in the busyness of our lives and in the silence of our prayer.

Pray: Pray for a grateful awareness of the many ways in which God calls you.

Read: Luke 5:1-11 (call of the disciples by the shore). 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?

Reflect: A Poem by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

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 excerpted from Hearts on Fire

Day 14

“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.

Pray: Pray for a grateful awareness of the many ways in which God calls you.

Read: John 1:35-39. Listen to Jesus say to the disciples, and to you: "What are you looking for?" How do you respond?

Reflect: A Prayer by Blessed John Henry Newman

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 may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.
...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.
...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;
in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.
...He does nothing in vain.
...He knows what He is about.



Some
thing
is
WRONG

Week 3

Day 15

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.

Pray: Pray for a healthy sense of shame and confusion before God as you consider the effects of sin in your life, your community, and your world.

Read: Prayerfully read the Story of Adam and Eve (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.

Reflect: 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.

–Kevin O'Brien, SJ

Day 16

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.

Pray: Pray for a healthy sense of shame and confusion before God as you consider the effects of sin in your life, your community, and your world.

Read: Prayerfully read Luke 16:19-31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. 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?

Reflect: A colloquy is an intimate conversation in prayer. Read this translation of one from Saint Ignatius

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. – Contemporary translation by David L. Fleming, SJ

Day 17

What Have I Done for Christ?: Today we turn from our reflection on sin to reflection on Jesus, who restored us from our lowliness to eternal life in His presence. So today we consider the cost of our sin and the suffering Jesus on the cross.

Pray: Continue to pray for a healthy sense of shame and confusion before God as I consider the effects of sin in your life, your community, and your world.

Read: Romans 5:1-11 ("God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us").

Reflect: A Meditation Before the Cross

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.

Day 18

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.

Pray: Pray for a deepened awareness and sorrow for your sins and a heartfelt experience of God's merciful love for you

Read: Luke 15:11-32 (The parable of the prodigal son and his brother). 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?

Reflect: This Addict Is a Saint by Jim Manney

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 Manney, *This Addict Is a Saint* by

Day 19

My Own History of Sin: For the next two days you will reflect on your own history of sin. 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. 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.

Pray: Continue to pray for a deepened awareness and sorrow for your sins and a heartfelt experience of God's merciful love for you.

Reflect: A Meditation on Our Own Sins

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. 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.

Pray: End your time of prayer 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.

Day 20

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.

Pray: Continue a deepened awareness and sorrow for your sins and a heartfelt experience of God's merciful love for you.

Read: 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?

Reflect: 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. Think, journal and pray about the following.

- 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

Day 21

“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.

Pray: Today pray for a growing awareness of the hidden, sinful tendencies that influence your decisions and actions; heartfelt sorrow for your sins; and sincere gratitude for God’s mercy and faithfulness to you.

Read: Pray slowly while Romans 7:14-25.

Reflect: The God of My Beginning and End, a prayer by Karl Rahner, SJ

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?



Knowing

of Jesus

Week 4

Day 22

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.

Pray: Today pray for a deeply felt knowledge of God’s dream for the world; awe and wonder at the mystery of the Incarnation. Contemplate the Incarnation. Begin the contemplation by imagining the three Divine Persons gazing on “the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people.”

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

Reflect: Contemplation on the Incarnation:

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. 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.), you are 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.

(All quotations of the text of the meditation used here are from David L. Fleming, SJ, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises*, St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.)

If you try this at home—and I heartily encourage it during this Advent season—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.

Grab 15 or 20 minutes this week and 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.

The Trinity Looks Down from Heaven by Daniel Ruff, SJ

Day 23

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”.

Pray: Continue to pray for a deeply felt knowledge of God’s dream for the world; awe and wonder at the mystery of the Incarnation.

Read: Luke 1:26-38. (The Annunciation). 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.

Reflect: Mary’s Magnificat

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.

Day 24

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 know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.” 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.

Pray: Continue to pray that you might come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Luke 2:1-7. (The Birth of Jesus). Contemplate the scene of Jesus’ birth. Ignatius suggests placing yourself directly in the scene: See the people of this scene, that is, see Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus after his birth. Think about the sacrifice God made in coming to earth. He was willing to make himself a poor, little, created being, gazing and depending on his human parents for every need. Think about the commitment Mary and Joseph made to being parents to God incarnate.

Reflect: 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 Borrows, *Essence of Prayer*

Day 25

"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.

Pray: Today continue to pray that you come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Luke 2:8-20. (The Shepherds Visit Jesus). Try and accompany the shepherds as they hear the good news and visit the baby Jesus.

Reflect: Excerpt from *Jesus Approaches*

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.

—Excerpted from *Jesus Approaches* by Elizabeth M. Kelly

Day 26

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.

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

Read: Luke 2:21-38. (The Presentation in the Temple). 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?

Reflect: 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

Day 27

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?

Pray: Continue praying that you come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Matthew 2:13-23. (The Flight into Egypt). 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 by Gary Smith, A reflection 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.”

Day 28

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.

Pray: Once again, continue to pray that you can come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Luke 2:41-50. (Jesus Teaches in the Temple). 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.

Reflect: 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.

—Joseph Tetlow, SJ, Hearts on Fire

What do
Really
Want?

Week 5

Day 29

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.

Pray: Pray for the ability to listen more attentively to Christ's call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

Read: 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.
- 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.”

- 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 94)
- 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.

Reflect: 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.

–Kevin O’Brien, SJ

Day 30

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.

Pray: Continue to pray that you can listen more attentively to Christ’s call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

Respond: 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.”

Ignatius suggests two responses. Both are loving responses of a generous disciple.

1. The first response is the offering of a disciple who commits him- or herself wholeheartedly to the work of the kingdom of God: all those who have judgment and reason will offer themselves wholeheartedly for this labor.

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.

2. The second offering suggests an even more generous, more heartfelt response.

The disciple devotes themselves 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 pray:

“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.”

Reflect: What desires, dreams, concerns, fears, or hopes does Christ’s invitation stir in you? How are you moved to respond now?

Reflect: Better Than Your Best? by Jim Manney

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 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.

Better Than Your Best? by Jim Manney

Day 31

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. 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.

Pray: Continue to pray that God will bless you with the ability to listen more attentively to Christ's call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

Read: Matthew 4:18-25 (call of the disciples). Consider Jesus' call and the response of the disciples. Use the techniques of imaginative prayer to reflect on this passage.

Reflect: Why God Makes Us Wait, from St. Augustine's homily on the first letter of John

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.

Day 32

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.

Pray: Pray for 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. Stand with Jesus or with the Way of the World

Meditate: Begin this time of 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. 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.

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.

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

Reflect: The Two Standards by Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ

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.

Day 33

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.

Pray: Pray that you will grow in 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.

Listen: 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.

Consider how Christ our Lord takes his place in that great plain near Jerusalem, in an area which is lowly, beautiful, and attractive. 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. 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.

Reflect: Poverty of Spirit by Kevin O'Brien, SJ

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.

Day 34

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? 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.

Pray: Pray that you may grow in interior freedom so that I'm able to respond wholeheartedly to Christ's invitation in my life.

Read: 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.

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

Reflect: 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).

Day 35

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.

Pray: Pray that you may grow in interior freedom so that I'm able to respond wholeheartedly to Christ's invitation in my life.

Read: Mark 10:17-31 (Jesus calls the rich man to follow him). 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?

Read: 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



Messianic
Ministry

Week 6

Day 36

Join Jesus on a Busy Day: It 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. 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.

Pray: Pray that you come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Mark 1:21-39 (Join Jesus on a busy day)

Reflect: 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*

Day 37

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.

Pray: Pray that you come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes). The beatitudes express the standard of Christ. Imagine that you are present in the crowd or with the disciples, watching and listening to Jesus. Allow his manner and words to affect you.

Reflect: 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.

Day 38

The Wedding Feast at Cana: The story about the wedding at Cana is important because it was the first miraculous sign that Jesus gave. It was the first time that Jesus revealed his glory when he walked this earth. It is also when the disciples began to believe in him. When he called them, they knew something was different about him, but this first miracle helped them to really see. Even though they would see much more later!

Turning water into wine is a miracle. Jesus used miracles to help his followers see, but they weren't meant to make them believe. Miracles are awe-inducing in the moment but often fade from our thoughts when they are over. There were a lot of guests at the wedding at Cana. Human nature can vary extremely. Some of them were astonished at the sudden reappearance of wine. Some of them were cynical and probably thought that there was a secret stash of wine. The bride, groom, and the master of ceremonies were glad that their celebration wasn't ruined. Some saw a miracle. Some probably didn't pay attention. But Mary and the disciples, and probably some of the servants, took note.

Pray: Continue to pray that you come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: John 2:1-11 (wedding feast at Cana).

Reflect: 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

Day 39

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.

Pray: Continue to pray that you come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Mark 8:22-26 (healing of blind man at Bethsaida).

Reflect: 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?

Day 40

The Grateful Leper: Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. As he enters a village, he is met by ten lepers. Leprosy, a skin disease, led not only to physical pain, sickness, and mortality—it also meant the sufferers were social outcasts. They are in a desperate situation. So they cry out to Jesus for mercy. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

Jesus gives them simple instruction. They are to go and show themselves to the priest. This was the appropriate action when someone was better to prove that they had really been released from their disease. They go, and they are cleansed. Jesus has performed an extraordinary miracle at the mere command of his word.

Now, surely they would come back and at least thank him. How could you be healed and not even return to thank the one who has healed you? But in any event, only one person returns to say thanks. And who is he? He is a Samaritan. The Samaritans were a despised group of people, despised by the Jewish leaders, because they were inbred with other racial groups and had adopted a version of Judaism that had an alternative center of worship. But, it is this “foreigner” who has returned to give thanks to Jesus.

Why is this Samaritan healed? His faith has made him well. Let us be the kind of people who give thanks. It is easy to take for granted what Jesus has done for us. Very often it is the kind of person, the “Samaritan,” who is least religious, or least likely, who ends up being so grateful to God for all that God has done for them.

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.

Pray: Continue to pray that you come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Luke 17:11-19 (the grateful leper).

Reflect: 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*

Day 41

Martha and Mary: Mary and Martha were close friends with and followers of Jesus. Together with their brother Lazarus, they hosted Jesus in their home on more than one occasion. Yet, on one such visit from Jesus, they chose two very different actions, and the way that Jesus reacted to their choices is a very valuable lesson for us today. Martha was rushing around, serving and doing her best to make everything good for their beloved guest. And where was Mary when Martha needed a hand? She chose to sit at Jesus' feet, listening as He spoke. It's pretty easy to imagine how that made Martha feel. Irritated, frustrated, resentful. Why should she be doing all the work? Wasn't it only righteous for Mary to be helping out? In fact, Martha felt so justified in

her indignation that she went and talked to Jesus about it. "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me," she said to Him. But, instead of backing her up in her demand, Jesus rebuked her! "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." This must have felt like a slap in the face for Martha. Here she was, doing everything in her power to be hospitable and make it good. And Mary just sat there, and what she was doing was the right thing?

It can become so easy for us to get wrapped up in all the things we need to do and the things that need to be accomplished that we lose sight of what the most important thing is. Isn't it possible that we can get too wrapped up in the cares of life? Jesus makes this even more clear in the parable He told about the sower. "He who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful." Matthew 13:22.

The highest priority in our lives needs to be choosing the good part, as Mary did: to learn of Jesus so that we can become like Him. It's a love and devotion to Him that makes everything else of secondary importance. It is to seek the riches of wisdom and understanding that are in Him. If we don't do this, how can we follow Him, how can we be His disciples? A disciple learns of the Master. This is not an excuse to be lazy, and not take responsibility for anything. That is another trap entirely. We are to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only! (James 1:22) But what we do has to be led by the Spirit, whose voice we learn to hear by choosing the good part. There is no blessing in running our own lives based on our human understanding of what is important. Mary understood that she needed to learn more of her Master and to seek the things that have eternal value. It's when we do that that we can be a blessing, because then all of our works are Spirit-driven. Love causes us to listen, to learn, and to keep His commandments. (1 John 5:3)

Pray: Pray to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely..

Reflect: Reflect on this prayer by St. Teresa of Ávila: Let nothing disturb you; nothing frighten you, for all things are passing. God never changes. Patient endurance attains all things. Whoever possesses God is wanting in nothing, for God alone suffices.

Day 42

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.

Pray: Pray that you can come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read: Mark 10:13-16 (Jesus and children).

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

–Pedro Arrupe, SJ



Suffering Servant + King
Week 7

Day 43

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.

Pray: Pray for a greater understanding of the suffering Jesus experienced in the last few days of His Earthly life. Also pray for this new understanding to draw you closer to our suffering Servant and King

Read: Matthew 26:36-46 (agony in the garden).

Reflect: 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. May 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, Hearts on Fire

Day 44

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.

Pray: Pray for a greater understanding of the suffering Jesus experienced in the last few days of His Earthly life. Also pray for this new understanding to draw you closer to our suffering Servant and King

Read: Matthew 26:57-75

Reflect: 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

Day 45

Crowning with Thorns: In the Third Week of the Exercises, Ignatius invites us to consider how Jesus' divinity "hides itself". 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.

Pray: Continue praying for a greater understanding of the suffering Jesus experienced in the last few days of His Earthly life. Also pray for this new understanding to draw you closer to our suffering Servant and King

Read: Matthew 27:26-31

Reflect: Finding God in Troubled Times

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

Day 46

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?

Pray: Prayerfully consider this thought put forth by Saint Ignatius: "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"

Read: Luke 23:26-32

Reflect: 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

Day 47

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.

Pray: Continue to prayerfully consider this thought put forth by Saint Ignatius: "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"

Read: Mark 14:12-72.

Reflect: 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.

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.

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.

Day 48

The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus: "They crucified him"! These few words describe one of the most awesome events in history: the crucifixion of the Son of God. According to historians, crucifixion was one of the most brutal, degrading, and humiliating ways to be put to death. It was Rome's favorite method, intended for the worst criminals.

The sinless Son of God was crucified between two criminals. It's far beyond our human comprehension to understand how God the Father allowed his Son to be crucified, for death on a cross was cursed by God himself (Deuteronomy 21:23). But this was God's way of saying to each of us, "The curse you deserve is placed on my Son."

Jesus was crucified at "the place called the Skull," also known as Calvary (from Latin), or Golgotha (Aramaic), a place of many executions, to let us know that his cross stood in the midst of human suffering and misery. Through the cross of Christ, God himself entered into our broken lives in this world.

For those who wonder whether God cares about our suffering, here is God's answer. Look at the cross and reflect on the words "they crucified him there." Be assured that God cares more than we will ever know. He cared enough to let his Son be crucified, taking our place. How will you respond to this love today?

Pray: Continue to prayerfully consider this thought put forth by Saint Ignatius: "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"

Read: Mark 15:1-47.

Reflect: 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.

—Contemporary translation by David L. Fleming, SJ, Draw Me into Your Friendship

Day 49

Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb: On this day, intentionally find time wait in stillness, loss, and longing. Seek out stillness for your soul today.

Pray: Continue to prayerfully consider this thought put forth by Saint Ignatius: “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”

Read: Luke 23:50-56

Reflect: Paul writes one of the most beautiful and earliest hymns to Jesus Christ in Philippians

Your life in Christ makes you strong, and his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another. I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind. Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own. The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had:

He always had the nature of God,
but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God.

Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had,
and took the nature of a servant.

He became like a human being
and appeared in human likeness.

He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—
his death on the cross.

For this reason God raised him to the highest place above
and gave him the name that is greater than any other name.

And so, in honor of the name of Jesus
all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below
will fall on their knees,

and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11

St. Ignace
Love

and our responses

Week 8

Day 50

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.

Pray: Pray for your ability to be joyful. Prayerfully rejoice with intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord.

Read: 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).

Reflect: 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.

– Excerpt from *Putting on the Heart of Christ* by Gerald M. Fagin, SJ.

Day 51

Jesus Appears on the Road to Emmaus: The Passion 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 resurrection is happening all the time, with joy surprising us everywhere.

Pray: Continue to pray for your ability to be joyful. Prayerfully rejoice with intensity because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord.

Read: 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?

Reflect: In the Breaking of Bread

The Sunday worship 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. In Christ we are invited 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.

Day 52

Jesus Appears to Thomas: 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.

Pray: Continue to pray for your ability to be joyful. Prayerfully rejoice with intensity because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord.

Read: 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!"

Reflect: This Is Your Easter, Thomas

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.

Day 53

Jesus Appears to Peter and the Disciples: In today's reading shows Jesus appearing to Peter and the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius. 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.

Pray: Continue to pray for your ability to be joyful. Prayerfully rejoice with intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord.

Read: John 21:1-19 – Notice the command that Jesus leaves Peter. How are you called to "feed" and "tend" to others?

Reflect: 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.

Day 54

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.

Pray: 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.

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.

Reflect: Fall in Love

Nothing is more practical than
finding God, than
falling in Love
in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.
It will decide
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.

– From Finding God in All Things: A Marquette Prayer Book

Day 55

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.

Pray: "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).

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.

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.

Reflect: 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.

Day 56

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.

Pray: “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”

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.

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.

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.

Reflect: 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