

A Dream Confirmed



An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality

Five Lectures by the Rev. Gerald Fagin, S.J.

This booklet contains the transcribed tapes of a series of five lectures on Ignatian spirituality given by the Rev. Gerald Fagin, S.J., in the spring of 2003. The lectures were sponsored by the Jesuit Center at Loyola University New Orleans for the Loyola community of faculty, staff, and administrators. Although the transcribed tapes have been edited by the author to make them more readable, they retain the informal, conversational style of lectures, rather than the style of a written essay. Each chapter begins with an outline of the talk. At the end of each lecture there are resources for further information, as well as reflection or discussion questions.

Three Key Moments in the Life of St. Ignatius:
Loyola, Cardoner, La Storta

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A DREAM BORN, PURIFIED, AND CONFIRMED

I'm really happy that you all could be here today and happy to see so many people interested in Ignatius and Ignatian spirituality. What I'd like to do in the five-week series is tell you about Ignatius and his spiritual vision, in other words, talk about Ignatian spirituality.

Today I want to talk about the life of Ignatius because you can't understand Ignatian spirituality without understanding his own life experience. His spirituality really flows out of his life experience. The next three sessions will be on the spirituality of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius' own journal. It's a journal of his journey to God, and it's a road map for our own journeys toward God. It lays out the movement of graces, the key exercises that bring us toward God, and the key insights and attitudes. So we're going to spend the major part of our time on the *Spiritual Exercises*. In the final session I will do something on Ignatian discernment and decision-making because I really believe that is one of the great gifts that Ignatius gave to the Church. He took the tradition of discernment and put it into rules and guidelines in a way that makes it accessible to people.

I teach a course on Ignatius to undergraduates in the Common Curriculum; so you're going to get three semester credits in five weeks. It's going to be kind of condensed, so I'm going to stay close to notes because otherwise I can just wander off and you'll miss dinner tonight. Right now I'm going through the Ignatian rules of discernment with some undergraduates, and it's really fun to do it with people of that age group to see how it applies to their own life experience. I have a lot of seniors trying to decide what to do with their lives.

I'm going to start today with the life of Ignatius. As I said, the spirituality of Ignatius is really rooted in his own experience of God. He didn't learn about spirituality in a book; no one told him about it. It would have been a lot quicker if someone had told him about it because he made a lot of mistakes along the way; but he grew from his own experience and his reflection on his experiences, especially in what were called his pilgrim years, the time from his conversion up until he landed in Rome and founded the Society of Jesus. That's important because the spirituality of Ignatius is not a spirituality for Jesuits. It's a spirituality for lay people. He experienced all of this, wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*, did all of this before he even thought of founding a religious community. He did it as a lay person. The *Exercises*, as they were originally given in his school years,

were given to lay people. Some of them decided to band together with him and form the Society of Jesus, but many people chose other ways of life. So it's important to see that it is a spirituality for people who are trying to find God in their life experience in their world around them. It's not a spirituality for fleeing the world. It's a spirituality for people like us today. It later got institutionalized in a group called the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, and it later took its own shape in that context.

What I want to do today is focus on what I call the three key moments, or key experiences, that really shaped his life and shaped his spirituality. You can't understand the *Spiritual Exercises* if you don't understand these three key moments in his life because they get embodied in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

The Pre-conversion Ignatius

But first, I have to say a word about the time before his conversion. Ignatius was born in 1491, as far as we can tell. He was born in Spain to a very noble Basque family that prided itself on great military exploits. One of his brothers sailed with Christopher Columbus. He was the youngest of 13 children. They were a family that had a great sense of the dramatic, of doing great military deeds. They had a great fidelity toward the king. They were an aristocratic family but remained very close to the common people. And for them what was really important, the values that were important, were being loyal, being faithful, and being courageous.

Don't think of Ignatius as one of these people who came out of the womb with his hands folded praising God. He was a very normal Basque young man at the time. His faith was pretty mediocre. As he said himself, he inherited the faith as kind of part of his identity. He had certain devotions he did; but, as he admits, he had no real interiority, nothing very much going on inside, not very much personal appropriation. And he loved the good life. He loved the sensuous life. He loved singing and dancing and parties. And we know that at least once he and his brothers were arrested and brought to trial for causing a riot in their little town.

So he was a person very tenacious and very courageous and with a great desire to do great deeds and to be famous and well-known. He said all of his life the great temptation he had was vanity. He wanted to be well-esteemed and admired. So he was a vain person who wanted to live the good life and really wanted to become a great knight and win the hand of a lady.

At age 15 he was sent to the court of the treasurer of King Ferdinand. This was a world of etiquette and courtly manners, a very superficial kind of world into which he entered. It was to train him to be a diplomat, a

sportsman, an officer, and a gentleman. That's unfortunate, because when later he decided to go to school, when they asked for his transcript, all that was on there was fencing, dancing, and singing. That's all he had to transfer because that's all they learned at the court. He read a lot of romance novels. He loved romance novels about knights and ladies. So he probably would today have been watching soaps.

At any rate, this court broke up because the treasurer died. Ignatius put himself in the service of a duke and a viceroy to become something of a soldier. We think of Ignatius as military, but he was a very disorganized soldier. As the story goes, and I'm abbreviating obviously, the most famous place he was stationed was Pamplona where he was with a group of soldiers—they think about 500—and 10,000 French were attacking. He was trying to defend it for the viceroy and the duke. All the other soldiers wisely said, "Give up. Let's just call it quits." But he got everybody all stirred up and kept fighting. He kept fighting until he was hit in the leg with a cannonball, and it smashed his knee. So everybody lost heart, gave up, and surrendered.

But the French were impressed with his great courage; so they carried him on a stretcher back to Loyola, the castle where he had grown up. Think of a castle about the size of Thomas Hall. And there his sister-in-law, Magdalena, who had actually raised him from five years old, nursed him back to health over a period of a year. He had thought at Pamplona, "This is my big chance. I'm going to defeat 10,000 soldiers. I'm going to be on the cover of *People* magazine or *Knights* magazine or whatever. And everybody will be hearing about Ignatius Loyola." Obviously it didn't work. So he wound up back home recuperating, and that's the place where he had his first key experience. I call it a "dream born."

The Dream Born: Loyola

Ignatius was a great dreamer. He had a great fantasy life. He was a very imaginative person. I mean he could break the Guinness world record on daydreaming. He said he could go for hours and hours and hours imagining himself being a knight and winning the hand of a lady. There was, by the way, a real lady who was above his station; and the only way to get her attention was to do something really dramatic. That was the hope of his life.

But he dreamed. He had a dream, and it was a very adolescent dream, much as adolescents would have today, about being a great knight or being an astronaut or playing in the NFL, whatever it happens to be. For him it was to be a knight and win the hand of a lady. It was such a passion in his life that he was willing to suffer almost anything for it. I will spare you the

details in his healing process; but when they got back to the castle, they found out that they had set his leg wrong, so they had to reset it. So they broke it again and set it again, without any anesthetic. And then there was a bone sticking out, and he said that would look terrible with tights. He said just saw it off, and so they did.

This was a person who was very committed to carrying out his dream. So here he was for a year. He couldn't even walk. He was in this one room; he was being taken care of. What is he going to do? No cable TV, no Internet. So he said, "Bring me romance novels, and I'll have this wonderful time reading romance novels." Well, the reason the Society of Jesus is here today is because they had a bad library at Loyola. They only had two books. One was the *Life of Christ* and the other was the *Lives of the Saints*. And they brought him these two books and told him this is all that there is in the Loyola library.

So, he's got two books to read. He said, "I'll just daydream; that will be better than reading these books." But after a few months he was getting tired of just daydreaming, so he picked up these books and started reading.

The two books were very significant for shaping his whole vision of the world. The first was Ludolf of Saxony's *Life of Christ*. It took him through the events of Christ's life with pictures, and it appealed to his imagination. It invited him to reflect and pray. Ignatian contemplation, which we will talk about in later sessions, grew out of reading this book. And what did he do? He started daydreaming about being with Jesus and doing great things with Jesus. It fit right in with his way of approaching things. God knew how to get hold of him. This book stirred up his desire to love and imitate Jesus.

It also laid out the whole plan of salvation that God had for people. It left him with a fascination with the historical Jesus. He wanted to know Jesus better, and he wanted to contemplate his life and think about the events in his life. It was part of his passion to go to Jerusalem. He always wanted to go to Jerusalem, and he wanted to stay in Jerusalem; but God had other plans for him. So, that was one thing he was reading, and he became fascinated with Jesus, and the historical Jesus, and what Jesus did.

But then he picked up the *Lives of the Saints*, and he opened the book and the prologue said these saints are the knights of God. "Oh, wow! Knights of God. I can identify with that." I mean God is so clever. The knights of God did great deeds, and they had this lady Mary. And so Ignatius read about Dominic and he said, "I could do better than that." He read about Francis of Assisi. "I can do better than that. I can beat everybody in this book. The next time this book comes out, I'm going to be on the cover. *Lives of the Saints* with Ignatius Loyola on the cover."

So, it caught his imagination; it caught his energy; it caught his passion. And what he began to notice was that when he would daydream all day about being a knight and winning the hand of a lady, at the end of it he was kind of sad, empty, frustrated. When he contemplated the life of Christ and thought about being a great saint, he was filled with peace, a sense of wholeness, a sense of harmony and joy. He said, "What's going on here? Why are these two different things happening? I want to go where the peace is. I want to go where the joy is. I want to follow that dream."

What happened was a new dream was born. From being a great knight and winning the hand of a lady, he was to become a great saint, a knight of God, and do great things for God and be extraordinary and win the hand of the lady Mary. He had a new dream.

It was still very adolescent. He was going to be the great saint; he was going to do all these things. He was going to outdo Dominic, outdo Francis, outdo everybody. He was going to be the best-known saint of all.

Part of that desire was a desire to go to Jerusalem, to make a pilgrimage so he could be where the historical Jesus was. That was the dream that was born at Loyola. It was very immature, but that's how God spoke to him. The only way God could have spoken to him was to go through his own experience of daydreaming of being a great knight and of God saying there is another way of being a great knight.

The Dream Purified: Cardoner

So he set out. He went to a place called Montserrat, with a great Benedictine monastery, to begin his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He made a confession of his life; and at the altar of Our Lady he laid his sword down and said, "I will now become your knight." As he was leaving he took his rich clothes off and gave them to a beggar. He switched clothes with the beggar so he could live a poor life.

Montserrat is where he made that first commitment. He decided to stop for a few days in a little town called Manresa and just spend a short while there, sort of jotting some notes down about what he had experienced. He took notes when he was at Loyola, too, and he used to write down what Mary said in blue and what Jesus said in red.

As it turns out, instead of a few days, he spent almost a year in Manresa. This is the place where the dream was purified. At Manresa, God took this adolescent dream and worked with Ignatius. Ignatius said, "God dealt with me the way a schoolmaster deals with a child. I didn't know anything about the spiritual life; I didn't know anything about how to relate to God. God had to slowly, gradually teach me." And it was that

experience that shaped his life, and it was out of that experience that the *Spiritual Exercises* were born.

He went through three periods at Manresa. The first was the period that we often have when we start something, filled with enthusiasm. He was praying seven hours a day, he said, and loving every minute of it. He would go around town and grab people and sit with them in the square and tell them about God. He was helping out in the hospital. He was doing all these wonderful things, and he was experiencing God in profound ways. He did great penances, too many penances. He did things that harmed his health, and later on he realized it was imprudent.

But then after about three months, suddenly the bottom fell out. He was filled with darkness and desolation. He said he didn't want to pray anymore. He went to the Eucharist, and he said it meant nothing. Suddenly God seemed very distant. He got very discouraged. He said, "I can't keep doing this." A little voice in his head said, "Who do you think you are? Look at the first 30 years of your life. You're not going to be a great saint. You can't keep this up. Sure you can keep this up for a few weeks, a few months; but you know, you've got another 30 or 40 years to go. You are not going to be able to keep doing this." He got more and more discouraged. He got so depressed at what was going on that he became suicidal.

He made his way through that period to a final period in Manresa, which was a mystical period. He went through the purification that many of the great saints went through to get to that moment of the mystical experience. He said at that time he had visions of creation, of the Trinity, of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. But one in particular I want to focus on because it is the center of the dream purified, and it is the heart of understanding the *Exercises*.

One day he was at the river Cardoner. I remember when I first got a chance to go to the river Cardoner, I had this image that it was going to be like the Mississippi because this was such a profound experience. I come from Texas; we would call it a creek. At Ignatius' time perhaps it was a bigger river.

He was sitting there one day, and he had an experience of God. He said it was more of an intellectual understanding than something you could see. He said he came to a profound clarity about God as one and three, the Trinity of God. But above all he had this experience that the world was a gift from God coming down from above, and it was on its way back to God. That was the sweep of human history: God coming down, and everything returning to God.

The two great moments of that, of course, were creation, when God created the world, and the incarnation, when God took on human flesh. He said for the rest of his life that was the only way he could look at life and the world around him, as a gift coming from a loving God that is on its way back to God. We want to be in that process. We want to be part of it. We want to help that process along. And we'll see next time, when we talk about the *Principle and Foundation*, how that really shaped his vision of the purpose of life and the meaning of life. It was a gift from God.

There were three things that came from that experience that were very important for understanding Ignatius. The first was he surrendered to God's grace. He realized he wasn't going to be a great saint on his own. He wasn't going to pull this off through his efforts alone. Somehow it would have to be God working within him, God leading him, guiding him, sustaining him, strengthening him. It was no longer his efforts. The interesting thing is after this experience he didn't ever talk again about being a great saint. He realized he couldn't do that on his own. He had to let God do within him what God wanted to do within him. He recognized that it was God's work, and he would have to surrender to that.

The second thing that was very important was he realized he was thinking of himself as a solitary pilgrim. He was going to make his way to the Holy Land, and his idea was to spend the rest of his life there. He would try to convert people in the Holy Land, which means he probably would have been killed. But he was going to the Holy Land, and that's where he was going to be the rest of his life and be kind of a wandering pilgrim.

What he realized at the river Cardoner was that God was calling him to something more. He was calling him to be a person of the Church, of the whole Christian community. And he was calling him, and this was Ignatius' phrase, "to help souls," to help people, to share the vision with them, to be of service to other people.

He began to think of Christ in a new way. Up until this moment he thought of Christ as a king that he was going to imitate and follow, but now he saw Christ as a leader. Christ was part of this process of bringing the world back to God, and Christ was in the world laboring now to make that happen. It was the risen Christ in our midst struggling to bring the world back to God. He was to follow that Christ. He was to labor alongside that Christ to bring the world back to God. He was to be part of this great plan, the work of salvation. He had a place in it.

But to do that he had to know what his role was, and so God gave him the grace at the river Cardoner of discernment. The gift of discernment is the ability to discover God's will in the movements within our own hearts and the events of our lives. What is God calling me to? Where is God leading me? And where is God not leading me? He said from then on he had the gift of knowing what was of God and what was not of God, not with complete clarity because he would continue to struggle and work it out and make mistakes; but he realized that up until that point he didn't have that gift. And the story that's always told of Ignatius, that he told of himself in his autobiography, was that right after his conversion at Loyola he set out for Montserrat. He was riding along on his little donkey, and this guy came up next to him on a donkey, and they were talking back and forth. The man was a Moor. And of course, from his tradition, Mary was a virgin, but didn't stay a virgin. So they got in this big discussion, and Ignatius got very upset because this guy was insulting his lady, his new lady Mary. So the Moor got tired of it and just rode off. Ignatius had this moment when he was sitting on his donkey saying, "What am I supposed to do? As a great knight I should go kill the guy because he insulted my lady. But I'm now kind of a Christian, and Christians probably don't do things like that. So I'm not sure what I should do."

So he made a decision. "I'll leave it up to the donkey." He did this because the road split and the big road went into the city where he would follow the Moor and kill him. The other fork of the road kept down the highway. So he said, "I'll just leave it up to the donkey. God can lead the donkey." So he let go of the reins, and the donkey took him away from the Moor. So he didn't kill the Moor.

Now, you know, I have to always tell students this is not good discernment: Do not leave it up to the donkey. Don't get on a donkey on St. Charles Avenue in front of Loyola and kick it once. If it goes to the education building, you're an education major. If it goes to the science building, you're a science major. That's not good discernment.

Ignatius told that story to show how immature he was at that stage. Although he was committed to follow the Lord and to be part of this great plan, he didn't know how to do it. At the Cardoner he got that gift which would later shape the rules of discernment which we will talk about later.

So that's the dream. The dream is now purified. It's a more mature dream. It's an apostolic dream. He is going to work now with Jesus and help other people, be of service to other people.

We have to skip about 15 years of Ignatius' life to get to the third moment; but just to tell you what happened, he went to Jerusalem with a pilgrimage. He said he wanted to stay there the rest of his life. The Franciscans were in charge there; they were sort of overseeing the Holy Land. They told him he could not stay because pilgrims wander around, they get captured, and then they have to be ransomed. They're all sorts of trouble. But Ignatius said that he just spent a year at Manresa, and God said go to Jerusalem. That is what God wanted him to do. But the Franciscan superior told him, "If you don't leave, I'm going to excommunicate you from the Church." Ignatius quickly had second thoughts. "Perhaps God is not calling me to stay in Jerusalem."

So for the second time in his life, he moved to Plan B. He spent most of his life on Plan B. Plan A seldom worked out.

Ignatius began to think, "I want to help people. I want to be of great service." But he went back and looked at his transcript and said, "Uh, oh! What have I got? I need some credentials. They're not going to let me preach; they're not going to let me talk about God if I don't know something."

So he had to go back to school and start at the beginning. He went with little kids to learn Latin because you had to learn Latin to go to the university. He first went through the Spanish system which was very disorganized at the time.

He finally made his way to the University of Paris. There he went through the curriculum in a very ordered way which would later shape the way he would tell Jesuits to set up schools.

He went through the program and finally graduated with a master's degree from the University of Paris. While he was there something very significant happened. He met some other students who at this time were much younger than he was. His roommates when he went to the University of Paris were Francis Xavier, later St. Francis Xavier, and Peter Faber, later Blessed Peter Faber. I always tell students, don't underestimate your roommate. You never know who your roommate will turn out to be.

So he began to tell the other students about God and his experience of God, and he had these little exercises that you could go through for 30 days. So he started guiding students through the *Exercises*. And out of that experience seven of these people, including himself, decided that they wanted to stay together. They had a common vision; they shared his vision, his experience. So they took vows of poverty, chastity, and a vow to go to Jerusalem. They still didn't think of themselves as a religious order or religious community, but they were going to go as a group to Jerusalem.

The Dream Confirmed: La Storta

As the story unfolds of course, they never got to Jerusalem because the boats wouldn't sail because of the ongoing wars. They had a Plan B: If the boat did not go to the Holy Land, they would present themselves to the Pope and let him use them as he wished. So they went to the Pope and said, "Make use of us any way you want. Send us anywhere you would like us to go. Send us around the world. We'll go anywhere."

But when the pope said yes, they began to reflect: "The Pope is going to send us all over the world. We may never see each other again. We want to stay bound together." So they went through a year of discernment and came to the conclusion they wanted to be a religious order, a religious community, like the Franciscans, like the Dominicans. So they went back to the pope and said, "We would like to remain a religious community." But I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

When they were making their way towards Rome, after they discovered they couldn't get a boat to the Holy Land, Ignatius and two of his companions stopped at a little chapel called La Storta, a wayside chapel, which was common in those days because there were a lot of pilgrims. It was just a small place to stop and pray. He stopped there, prayed for a while, and had again an extraordinary experience of God.

He sensed God saying that God was going to be good to Ignatius in Rome. He kept hearing that, and when he got to this little chapel, he said he had a vision. The vision was the Father and Jesus, and Jesus was carrying his cross. The Father said to Jesus, "Son, I want you to take this man, Ignatius, to work with you." Jesus turned to Ignatius and said, "I want you to come and labor alongside me." That was the call Ignatius wanted all his life. This was the confirmation that he was on the right path, that he was following what God wanted him to do.

Let's talk about discernment. One of the most important things for discernment is confirmation. You make a decision, then you bring it to God and live with that decision and see if your life circumstances and the movements of your heart say, "Yes, this is right." This is what Ignatius felt at La Storta: God saying, "Yes, this is right." What he heard from Jesus was, "I want you to serve us," meaning Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "I want you to help people. I want you to labor alongside me." It was the grace that he had been praying for the last 15 years. "Am I on the right path? Is this what God wants me to do?" And it was God saying, "Yes, go to Rome. This is the right path."

Some very important things came out of that. The first was a profound sense of the Father placing him at the side of the Son. The Father placed

him at the side of Jesus to labor with Jesus to bring the world back to the Father. That was the whole vision of his life, the value of his life, the driving force in his life. The passion of his life was to labor with Jesus to bring the world back to God.

From this vision at La Storta, there was a sense of the Trinity accepting him, saying, “Yes, we want you to work with us.” It was very significant to him that Christ was carrying his cross because he realized that it was not going to be easy laboring alongside Jesus. It would not be just the risen Christ going along having a great time. This is Christ carrying His cross. He would serve, but it would be in poverty, it would be in humility, and it would be with a lot of opposition. There would be a lot of suffering along the way. That made him even more convinced that this really was of God.

He said of that experience, too, that there was a sense of community. What he had discovered at the river Cardoner was confirmed here. He was to serve with others, not alone. Many people would say that that was the grace of the decision to found the Society of Jesus.

He also said that the name of Jesus became very important to him at La Storta. When it came time to name the Society of Jesus, everybody said that the Dominicans were named after St. Dominic and the Franciscans after St. Francis. What should we call ourselves? The Ignatians? The Loyoleans? And he said, “No, we’re the Society of Jesus.” They said, “You can’t be the Society of Jesus; everybody is a follower of Jesus. How are you going to take that title?” Ignatius said, “God told me at La Storta that we are the Society of Jesus.”

Now Ignatius was a Basque, and he was very hardheaded. Whenever they would push him on anything, he would say after a while that he saw it at the river Cardoner. And then they said they just gave up. There was no more arguing. There was no more discussion. There was no more input. He would say, “I saw it at the Cardoner” or “I saw it at La Storta,” and then they knew it was over with. So the name would be the Society of Jesus. It was his own devotion and commitment to Jesus.

Finally at La Storta, he had a deep sense of a connection to Rome, that he would be connected to Rome, connected to the Church, and in service to the Church. That became, of course, very important to him and the history of the Society of Jesus.

I have been trying to isolate three moments in Ignatius’ life, which were moments of experiencing God, each in very different ways. The first at Loyola was through the reading of books. Gradually God led him to let go of his dream of being a great knight and winning the hand of a lady and

to embrace what he was able to embrace at that moment, which was just another adolescent dream to follow God and do great things. Ignatius had a phrase that he used later: “Always go in their door and come out your own.” He learned that from God because God went in his door and led Ignatius out God’s door. God went in the door of imagining being a knight and winning the hand of a lady and led Ignatius to a whole new dream, a whole new vision. Then that dream had to get purified. He had to let go of the adolescent part, the immature part, the sense of I-can-do-it-all-on-my-own part, and to let go of “it’s just me.” He had to embrace that it was for others. It was a vision to share. He had to help souls. He had to bring other people to the same vision of God. And then finally there was that moment in his life when God in a special way confirmed the decision and told Ignatius, “This is what I want you to do, this is who you are.”

Now poor Ignatius, as I said, always lived Plan B. He wanted to go to Jerusalem. That didn’t work out. He got sent back. He wanted to go to Jerusalem the second time. That didn’t work. He got sent to Rome. Then he wanted to go to Rome and be sent all over the world and do great, exciting things. And they made him the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, and he spent the last 15 years of his life sitting at a desk writing letters and writing the Constitutions. That was not his plan. It was God’s plan. He was always following Plan B. The grace was that he was open to that and found God in that.

In conclusion, as I reflect on his life, there’s a lot of funny and interesting stories. We have his autobiography. It’s not very long, and it just covers from his conversion to about the time he got to Rome. It tells more of the stories of his travels which were quite exciting at times. He was a pilgrim, literally a pilgrim. There are little places in there that will say, “Then I walked from Barcelona to Paris.” That is 700 miles! And remember he still had a bad leg. He limped all of his life because of what had happened at Pamplona. He would just sort of limp along. So, he was a pilgrim literally, but even more a pilgrim within.

What I want to leave with you today is that the main catalyst of change in his life was experience. It was not people telling him things. Yes, the first two books he read had input into his conversion, but it is what he experienced in reading those books and reflecting on those books that made the difference. Experience is what brought about change in his life. God really dealt with him in a very direct, personal way. He experienced God at work in his life and in all of the events of his life. His wisdom came not from textbooks. His wisdom came from his reflection on his

experience. The gift that he had was to notice, to notice how God was working in his heart and to understand that so that he could follow Him. And that's the gift he tries to leave for us in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

God's Dream for Us

Ignatian spirituality leads us to notice and to reflect on our own experience, our personal common experience, because we believe that God is present in our story as well. God touches each one of us. At the heart of Ignatian spirituality, and we'll see it when we look at the *Spiritual Exercises*, is Ignatius' belief that God touches the individual soul, that God touches each one of us if we but notice it, listen for it, and follow it. That's at the heart of his belief because it was his own experience of God and his experience of guiding all these other people through the *Spiritual Exercises*.

And finally, Ignatius was a man with a dream. A dream that was born at Loyola, purified at the river Cardoner, and confirmed at La Storta. But Ignatius also believed that God has a dream for each one of us and that God has a dream for the whole world. God's will is a series of hopes and desires for the world, which we call the reign of God. He has a dream for each one of us. Ignatius believed that God planted that dream in the depths of our hearts. It's a passion within us that will allow no substitute. It's a restlessness that will find rest only in God. It is the deepest desires of our heart, the desires that will give shape and meaning to our lives. That's Ignatius' vision from his own experience. The *Spiritual Exercises* that we'll look at in the next three weeks are simply a way for us to discover that dream inside our own hearts, to discover our own deepest desires, and to live out of them in integrity. They are a way to come to freedom, to hear God's call as Ignatius did, and to respond in generosity and love.

But that is for next time. Thank you.

Discussion Questions:

What did you find inspiring or challenging or puzzling about Ignatius' conversion?

How would you summarize Ignatius' spirituality in light of his conversion?

Does Ignatius' conversion relate in any way to your own experience?

Other Resources:

Norman O'Neal, S.J. *The Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*. Private printing.

A very brief narration of the events in the life of Ignatius.

Candido de Dalmases, S.J. *Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Jesuits*. Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis, 1985. A scholarly biography of Ignatius.

Jose Ignacio Tellechea Idigoras. *Ignatius of Loyola*. The Pilgrim Saint. Loyola University Press: Chicago, 1994. A long but engaging life of Ignatius that is written from a Basque viewpoint.

www.ignatiushistory.info A brief biography of Ignatius with more than 200 pictures of the places in his life.

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THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Today I want to talk about the *Spiritual Exercises*. If you hang around Jesuits very long, you keep hearing this phrase “*Spiritual Exercises*.”

Last week we talked about the life of Ignatius because his spirituality is rooted in his life experience and his experience of God. We looked at three key moments that shaped the way he related to God, the way he experienced God in his life. The *Exercises* really flow out of that experience. Today we are going to be talking of the *Exercises* as a way of understanding more fully the spirituality of Ignatius.

The Spiritual Exercises

So what are these *Exercises*? The first thing to remember is that the *Spiritual Exercises* are an experience. In their full form, they are an experience of 30 days of solitude, praying four or five hours a day.

The *Exercises* are a way to encounter God. They are a process that is intended to lead someone to freedom, the freedom that allows him or her to hear God’s call in his or her life and then to follow that call in faith, the freedom to follow Jesus and share the work of redemption.

The *Spiritual Exercises* are a journey, a journey of transformation and a journey of conversion. They help us get in touch with the desires of our heart which really are, as I said last week, God’s desires within us. So it is always important to remember that when we mention the *Spiritual Exercises*, the first thing we are talking about is an experience that people go through.

But it is also a book, a very brief book that could be read very quickly. What will you find in this book? It outlines a series of exercises; call them a kind of spiritual aerobics. They are exercises that you go through, things that you do, like prayers, meditations, contemplations, methods of self-examination, guidelines for discerning God’s movements in our hearts. They are exercises for discovering God’s will in our life and making a decision. In one sense you say, “What’s the content of this book?” The content is those exercises that are laid out for us. But the content of the *Spiritual Exercises* is really what God does within each individual person. This is an exercise book to help you get in touch with those experiences of God in your life, to experience God and be sensitive to that experience and see how God is working within you. So when the director who is directing you through the exercises meets with you, the first thing he or

she wants to know is what God is doing in your heart because that's the content of the *Spiritual Exercises*, what God does within your heart. You can't find that in the book. You find that in prayer and reflection in your own life.

It is a book for the director. When one makes the *Spiritual Exercises* and goes through the *Spiritual Exercises*, you need a guide to help you, someone who's knowledgeable of the *Exercises* and of the spiritual life, because the *Exercises* are an art form, not a science. It's a collection of exercises that is to be adapted to each individual person and how God is working in the heart of that individual person. It's not just a handbook or a textbook that you can go read like you go check out a book on ascetical theology and read it. It's for a director.

The book was first printed in 1548. There were 500 copies made. Ignatius kept all of them. He only gave them to people who had already made the *Exercises*. He told them they could use it to direct someone else once they had the experience themselves. But he didn't take it to Barnes and Noble and have a big book signing and sell all the books. It was not a book for the one making the *Exercises*. It was a handbook, a guideline for the person who is directing the *Exercises*. That is very important in understanding them. It would miss the meaning of the book just to go home and read it and say, "I've done that already. Now what's the next book I'm supposed to read?"

The fourth thing is that this book is a record, if you want, of the journal of Ignatius' own experience of God. It really started at Manresa. Last time we talked about his year-long experience at Manresa, in which he experienced God really purifying his dream and making clear that his call was to help souls. He was called to be an apostolic person, to be a person of the Church, and to carry on the work of Jesus. During that year he kept notes; he kept a journal. That's really the basis of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He refined it. He adapted it over 25 years after that. By directing other people through the *Exercises*, he learned things that he should put in the book to help the director. But basically it's the journal of his own conversion experience. It's a journal about God moving in his heart. As he talked to other people and led them through the *Exercises*, he discovered that his journey was really a model for everyone's journey, the way God works with souls, and the way we respond to God. There is a certain pattern. There is a certain movement. In the next session, we're going to talk about that movement, that pattern that he discovered in the spiritual life and in our relationship with God. He discovered that this was

not just God dealing with him, but the way God dealt with everyone, even though in each case it was very personal and very different. That's why the exercises had to be adapted for each individual person. They are a paradigm, a model, a pattern for God's dealing with people.

The *Exercises* take God's story, especially as we will see in the life of Jesus, and relate it to our own personal story, our life experience. We discover there is really one story. We find our own story in Jesus' story.

So, this is not a book to be read or studied. It's a book to be prayed. So if you go home and read it in one night, don't expect to be a mystic by morning. It doesn't work that way. Unfortunately, it takes a little longer.

It is not a book to be read. It would be like someone going out and buying a book on jogging and reading it. And at the end of it saying, "Why am I not in better shape?" Or you go out and buy a Sugar Busters diet book, and you read the book. And at the end of it you haven't lost any weight at all. "What happened? I want my money back." That's the kind of book it is. It is a book of exercises, of things to be done.

And so, I should make clear that even if you're heroic and come to all five of these sessions, at the end of them you cannot say that you have made the *Spiritual Exercises*. You can say that you've been to five talks about the *Spiritual Exercises*. But to make the *Spiritual Exercises*, one needs to go apart and spend some time in prayer and reflection under the guidance of a spiritual director.

This book, as I mentioned last time in talking about Ignatius' experience, is a book written by a lay person for lay people. The experience that is recorded here at Manresa took place long before Ignatius had any idea of founding a religious community. He was a lay person trying to figure out a way to follow God. All of the people he first directed through the *Spiritual Exercises*, most of whom were faculty and students at the University of Paris, were lay people. Some of them may have decided to enter religious life or go into priesthood, but many didn't. So it is important to realize that this is not a book just for Jesuits, or just for monks, or just for priests, or just for religious. It's a book that lays out the pattern of life of every Christian, everyone called to discipleship.

To let you know that it's a book for the instructor, when you open the book and start to read it, the first thing you come upon is a series of guidelines or explanations which are for the director. There's a couple in there that are important for understanding the *Spiritual Exercises*. First of all, it begins with a description of a "spiritual exercise." He says a spiritual exercise is any means that helps us come into contact with God, anything

that will dispose our hearts and set us free so we can find God's will in our life—a prayer, a meditation, a reflection, self-examination. He gives the example: just as there are exercises that you do for your physical health, there are exercises you do for your spiritual health. This book gives you those kinds of exercises in a very ordered, progressive way.

The second thing he talks about is what he hopes people will get from these experiences. He says he hopes you will get knowledge, but not just head knowledge. What he is interested in is felt knowledge or interior knowledge, the intimate understanding of a truth. It's the difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus. It's the difference between knowing in your head that God loves you and experiencing that love in your heart. As we all know, sometimes the longest journey of life is from our head to our heart. We will look at that when we look at the *Principle and Foundation*. We can say, "Yes. I know that. I know God loves me." But do we really know it? Do we really experience it in our hearts? The kind of knowledge that he wants is the kind of knowledge that touches the heart and transforms us, that motivates us to act in a whole new way. He is looking for an intimate interior felt knowledge.

Another thing he says in these opening directives is that in order to do these exercises you need magnanimity. You need a big soul. You need openness. You need generosity. You have to have great desires. That's what he looked for in people. When he went around looking for those students who were going to make the *Exercises*, he looked for people with big desires who wanted to do great things, who wanted to do more. He wanted people who were not content where they were, who were restless, and who were looking to give something more. That's what is necessary to make these exercises. If you're content where you are and you want to stay where you are and you don't want to be bothered, then don't make these exercises. They will challenge you always to do more, to open your heart more fully to God.

One other thing he mentions at the beginning of the *Exercises* is very important for understanding Ignatius. Ignatius reminds the director that God is the director. The first time I ever directed a retreat myself, I was very nervous. As I was sitting waiting to get a ride to the retreat, this very wise spiritual director walked by and said, "You look nervous." And I said, "I'm really nervous. I've made the *Exercises* twice, I've done them, but I'm going to direct them." And he said, "It's really pretty simple. You pray for two things. Pray for the person you're directing, and then pray to stay out of the way. It's God's work; it's not yours. Stay out of the way. God will do great things."

I've always remembered that because Ignatius says in the beginning of the *Exercises* that he believed the creator and Lord would communicate directly with the soul, that God touches the individual soul. That's the heart of the *Exercises* and at the heart of Ignatius' spirituality. God does touch the individual soul. Through our thoughts, through our desires, through our imaginings, through all the feelings that go on inside of us, through all sorts of ways, God touches the individual soul.

The director is there only to facilitate that conversation between God and the person, not to tell the person something, not to teach them in that sense, but only to guide them and facilitate the encounter of that person with God. The *Spiritual Exercises* are about that encounter with God, that meeting of God in a very personal way.

When we talk about the *Spiritual Exercises*, we talk about the authentic and integral *Exercises*. Ignatius envisioned 30 days for the full *Exercises*. He also intended that they be given one-on-one by an experienced director. Ignatius also thought you should only do the *Exercises* once in your lifetime. Now, I guess it shows that Jesuits are a little slow because we all make them twice in our lifetime. We make them when we enter the Jesuits in the novitiate; and then we make them again after all our studies are over and we have been in ministry for awhile, maybe 15 or 20 years later.

The first time I made the *Spiritual Exercises* I was 18. You can imagine the impact they had on me at 18 years old. There is nothing wrong with being 18, but I wasn't quite ready for the *Exercises*. The next time I made them I was 38. It was a very different experience. It would be very different if I made them today.

But Ignatius thought this was a once-in-a-lifetime sort of thing, and he didn't have the idea that people would keep repeating them. But since Ignatius's time, and actually during his time, they started adapting the *Exercises*. First of all they started repeating them; some people made them more than once. But also, people made them for shorter lengths of time. They would do them in eight days. Eight days became the kind of standard shortened version of the *Exercises*. You can't really make the full *Exercises* in eight days, but you can do some of the exercises and experience the graces of the *Exercises*. Every Jesuit, by rule, makes an eight-day retreat every year. It's part of our own spiritual practice. Many other people now also make eight-day retreats, some annually, others on occasion.

Another adaptation was to preach the *Exercises*. For instance, you go somewhere like the Cenacle Retreat House, or you go to Manresa Retreat House, and you listen to talks. If you go to Manresa on the weekend, you

get 11 talks about the *Exercises* and the themes of the *Exercises* with a group of 110 men. Then there's quiet time to pray and time to meet with someone who will guide you and direct you.

That's just the reality about giving the *Spiritual Exercises*. They are very labor-intensive. If you do one-on-one, you can't do 300 people. And so, to spread the news, they started giving them to large groups. And different things happened, wonderful experiences and wonderful adaptations; and people who make them find it a rich, spiritual experience.

So there are many ways to do the *Exercises*. The other way is a way Ignatius envisioned in his own life. Some people made the *Exercises* in the midst of everyday life. That's called a 19th Annotation retreat, or a retreat in everyday life. In that context you pray for an hour every morning, meet with a spiritual director once a week, and go through the *Spiritual Exercises*. It takes you six to nine months to do it. It's an adaptation for people in the midst of their life, and it's a very rich experience of integrating your prayer with your everyday life. You don't go away, but you stay in the midst of your everyday life and do the *Exercises*. There are many versions and adaptations of the *Spiritual Exercises*, many ways in which people have adapted them to meet the circumstances in people's lives.

The Purpose of the *Exercises*

What is the purpose of the *Exercises*? There are two schools of thought. One is that the purpose of the *Exercises* is to make a life decision; the other is that the purpose is to draw close to God. Now, there were great debates among Ignatian scholars about what is the real purpose of the *Exercises*. As usual the truth is on both sides. Ignatius envisioned them originally as exercises to overcome oneself, to order one's life, so one could reach an ordered decision in one's life. He saw it as a process of coming to a major life decision. But obviously, for many people, they make them now to enrich their own spiritual life, their own relationship with God. They've already made a commitment to their life in priesthood or marriage or religious life. They've chosen a profession, they're in that profession, and so they would normally try to discover how to live out the gospel more faithfully in those circumstances.

So, how would I summarize the purposes of the *Spiritual Exercises*? The first would be to come to freedom so that I can make a decision. I'm going to talk more about freedom when I get to the *Principle and Foundation*. They help one to order one's life. Ignatius believed that there was a lot of

disorder in our lives. We need to order our life and focus our life in terms of a goal and purpose and where we're going with our life. So the *Exercises* are to help bring order into our lives.

They help us discover our role in the plan of salvation, to discover God's will for us. What is God calling me to do in my life and how do I fit in God's plan of salvation of the world? It's a series of exercises that help me discover what my call in life is and where God is asking me to go.

Finally, I would say, the purpose of the *Exercises* is to develop and deepen our own relationship with God, to come closer to God, to become more intimate with God, to let God work more deeply within our hearts so that we can draw closer to God. All of those things come out of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

The *Exercises* really are about making decisions, but making decisions out of freedom, not out of disordered ideas, not out of pleasure, power, or prestige. They are about making a decision that really comes out of a sense of freedom. We'll see where that freedom comes from when we look at the *Principle and Foundation*.

The Principle and Foundation

In order to make a free decision, Ignatius says you first have to get some basic things straight: Who is God in your own experience? Who are you? How do you relate to God? And what's the meaning and value of the world in which we live? To get at that, Ignatius offers a consideration at the beginning of the *Exercises* which he calls the *Principle and Foundation*. It's called that because it truly is the principle and foundation that answers the basic question of the purpose of our life and why we are here. I want to mention two renditions of the *Principle and Foundation*. The first is the more literal translation:

Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God, our Lord. The purpose of life is to praise, reverence, and serve God and by this means to save our soul.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created. From this it follows we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from the end.

To attain this, it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our free will and is not forbidden.

Consequently, on our own part, we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so in all other matters.

Rather we ought to desire and chose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we were created.

As you can see, Ignatius was big on making the distinction between means and ends. The purpose and goal of life is to praise, reverence, and serve God, to come to eternal life. That's the purpose. Everything else helps us to that purpose. But what most of us do, of course, is pick out our favorite means, chose that, and then try to work the end around to the means. When Ignatius comes to help you make decisions he says the first thing to keep clear is what the end is, and then you chose the means that is most conducive to reach the end. Your goal is to praise, reverence, and serve God, and come to eternal life. Marriage, religious life, priesthood, single life are all means to get there. You choose one of those which is more conducive to getting to the goal. You don't choose one of the means and then try to work the goal around to it.

But before I proceed any further, I want to offer this second version of the *Principle and Foundation* by a contemporary Jesuit, Dave Fleming. It's a little bit easier translation for us to read.

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

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

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

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

in the east or the west (living in New Orleans or outside New Orleans), becoming an accountant or a lawyer.

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

I think his translation of it captures the flavor a little bit better in our contemporary context.

So, what are we dealing with? For Ignatius, this is the starting point of the *Exercises*. As I said, you have to get straight what God's plan is and who you are before God. What is the plan that God is creating within us and the purpose of our lives that God has given us? Ignatius offered this as a consideration. For some people it's not even clear how he used it. Some people think he would get into a conversation with someone, spend some time with them, perhaps days, weeks, months, talking about the purpose of life and where's life going. When they got some clarity, then he would take them into the *Exercises*. But now it exists as an independent consideration at the beginning. But let me break it down in terms of the basic truths and the basic attitudes of heart that it calls us to.

The first premise here is that we are created by God. We are creatures. We can tend to forget that sometimes. Ignatius wants to remind us that whatever you do in the rest of these exercises, you do it as someone created by God. And you're created to praise, reverence, and serve God. Therefore, we're dependent on God, not just for our original creation, but for every moment of our existence. We are continually being created by God. We are pure gift. We are totally dependent on God every moment of existence in our lives. And he says we have to hold to that truth very firmly as we begin.

We are created out of love. We are loved by God. I think we have become more aware of this in contemporary reflection on the *Principle and Foundation*. This is the fundamental Christian grace, the experience of being loved by God. Without that experience, without some belief in that, without some realization of that, one's Christian life is going to go astray. Our life will become this frantic attempt to win God's love. We don't have to do that. We don't have to win God's love. We are loved by God, unconditionally, from the moment of our conception. We can say that in our heads, but do we believe it in our hearts? My experience in giving the *Exercises* and giving people direction is that it is very difficult for some people to really believe that they are deeply, intimately, even passionately, loved by God. That is the foundational grace out of which the rest of the

Exercises flow. Without that, to go into the First Week of sin can be very destructive. We have to know we are loved by God. And I think that's very important as we begin the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Peter Faber, who is now Blessed Peter Faber, was one of the students with Ignatius at the University of Paris. Everybody was going to make these *Exercises*, and they all got in line. Faber said he wanted to do the *Exercises*, and Ignatius talked with him for a while and said, "You can't do them. You are not ready." Faber had a terrible image of God. He was terrified of God; he thought God was a judge. Ignatius told Faber he should not make the *Exercises* if that was his image of God. He made him wait four years and made him pray on the experience of being loved by God until he had a really profound sense that he was loved by God. Ignatius said, "Now you can make the *Exercises*. Now you have the attitude of heart, now you have that basic foundational grace for doing the *Spiritual Exercises*."

In a way the *Exercises* are simply a series of ways of experiencing God's love. We experience God's love in creation; we experience God's love in forgiveness; we experience God's love calling us; we experience God's love inviting us into the Paschal Mystery; we experience God's love calling us to eternal life. It's one long love story. That's what the *Exercises* are about. So this foundational grace is very important.

The second grace of the *Principle and Foundation* is to see everything we experience as a gift from God. Everything is a gift to be used to praise God, to reverence God, to serve God, to serve one another, to love other people. Ignatius uses the word "indifferent," but it is not the best of words for us because indifferent means "I don't care. I'm indifferent...Which restaurant do you want to go to? You want Chinese tonight or you want Italian? Oh, I don't care. I'm indifferent." That's not what Ignatius means by indifferent. He means you are so passionately committed to God and to following God and God's plan that everything else is relativized, everything else is secondary to that one goal and that one purpose. I will put anything else aside. I'm indifferent. I'm at balance and equilibrium. I don't decide now exactly what I'm going to do. I ask if something is going to bring me closer to God or not bring me closer to God. Ignatius talks about the director and the directee being at equilibrium so that they can choose what is more conducive to God's will. It's a preference for God and God's plan that embraces everything we do. The better word for indifference is freedom. We need to be free. There are many things that capture our heart, many things that hold our heart, many things that can keep us from being free

enough to hear God's call in our life. We say to God we are willing to do anything but this one thing. "God, I will do anything as long as I don't have to let go of this. God, I will go anywhere in the world for you as long as I don't have to move out of New Orleans." That's what Ignatius would call an attachment. That's something my heart is wrapped around and something that is wrapped around my heart. I'm not free to hear the call to something new or something different in my life.

The *Exercises* are all about bringing someone to freedom. Ignatius believed that once you get to freedom, the rest is simple. The decisions become clear. You know what to do. The challenge is to get to freedom, to get to that equilibrium, to get to that place of balance where you say, "Wherever you call me, God, I will go. I'm willing to go. I'm ready to go. That's where I want to go."

The goal is freedom to hear God's call, freedom to respond to that call in faith and love, and freedom to let go of anything that gets in the way. Teilhard de Chardin used to refer to "passionate indifference." You need to have passionate indifference, meaning that you're so committed to God and God's project, God's plan for the world, that everything else you are willing to take or leave, depending on whether it brings you to that goal. It is the freedom to make a commitment.

The *Principle and Foundation* invites us to see the world as a product of love. We have to affirm the goodness of the world. The first grace is to know I am a product of God's love. So we read Isaiah 43 which says, "God loves us from our mother's womb." We read Isaiah 49 that says, "We are written on the palm of his hand. Even if a mother forgets her child, God will never forget us." It's that experience of God's fidelity, God's love, and God's care for us that assures us that we are loved by God and that the world is a product of love. The world is a gift from the hands of a loving God.

The temptation, of course, is always to take things for granted, to lose a sense of giftedness. How do we keep a sense of giftedness? By staying in touch with the giver. Something ceases to be a gift when we make it our own, when we claim it, when we wrap our hands around it and say "This is mine."

I'll give you a humbling example from my own life. About 15 years ago, I had to move. I had been one place a long time, and so I had a lot of stuff to pack. I wanted to throw some things away. I was ordained in 1969, and in the '70s, whenever you gave a retreat or a talk, somebody would always give you a candle, or a stole, or a statue. They were all very

meaningful at the time. When I came to move, I had all these things I had collected that tied me to wonderful experiences over my life. But then I had this sort of sinking feeling. I realized I didn't know where this particular candle came from. I'm sure at the moment it was a very significant and touching moment and that God was there, but now I don't know where that candle came from. Then I went to the next one. Oh, that candle. I remember where that candle came from. I remember that retreat, the person that gave it to me. (Whenever I tell this story, I assure myself that I will never be given a candle again because people say he's going to forget my candle.)

I started making two piles: stoles and candles and things in one pile that I couldn't remember who gave them to me. Candles and stoles in another pile that I could remember who gave them to me. I sat down and looked at them and said, "The things in the first pile are possessions, and the things in the second pile are gifts." They are still connected to a giver. I still know who gave them to me. I still experience them as a gift. The things in the first pile are now just possessions. So I threw away the possessions and kept the gifts.

One of the things the *Principle and Foundation* is trying to remind us of is that everything in our life is a gift from the hands of a loving God. Everything is given to us; and when we start taking something for granted, when we start making it a possession, we lose touch with the giver.

So what is the call then of the *Principle and Foundation*? It first calls us to gratitude, to live lives filled with gratitude. Ignatius said in writing to someone once, "The greatest sin you can commit is ingratitude." As a matter of fact, it is the source of all sin because when we take something and misuse it, when we take something and claim it as our own, when we don't cherish something and don't recognize the giver, then we destroy it as a gift. Because the world is a gift around us, we always need to be grateful.

The second call of the *Principle and Foundation* is to trust. If you believe there's a giver that's going to keep giving, then you don't have to clutch at this thing because you are going to get another gift. But if this is the last gift I'm ever going to get, I'm going to hold real tight. We are called to open our hands and trust the giver because the giver is faithful. Share the gift because the giver will give you more. That sense of trust, that sense that God cares for us, leads to freedom. And finally, the *Principle and Foundation* is a call to stewardship. If these are all gifts, they are given to us to nourish, to cherish, and to share. That's why God gives us our

gifts. The moment we start hoarding them, and not sharing them, the moment we neglect them, we are no longer seeing them as gifts from the hands of a giver.

The *Principle and Foundation* tells us of the wonders of creation and the giftedness of life. It calls us to gratitude, it calls us to freedom, so we can make love-filled and life-filled decisions. That's where the freedom comes from, the freedom of knowing you're loved and gifted. That's what sets one's heart free. It is the freedom to find God in our experience and in the world around us. It is the freedom that comes from experiencing at a very deep personal level that we are loved by God.

To go back to the last talk, we spoke about the second great moment of Ignatius's life at the river Cardoner. There he saw the whole world coming down as a gift from God and on its way back to God. He said that vision stayed with him all of his life. The world coming down from God and returning to God. It's an image of the giftedness of the world and the giftedness of our lives, and it's a vision that invites us to respond freely in love.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe the purpose of life? Why did God create us?

What does freedom mean in our personal lives and what are the obstacles to freedom?

How do we grow in a deeper appreciation of and responsibility for our world?

Other Resources:

William A. Barry, S.J. *Finding God in All Things*. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, 1991.

David Lonsdale. *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear. An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*. Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 2000.

The Dynamics and Graces of the Spiritual Exercises

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LIBERATION, DISCIPLESHIP, AND BEING WITH JESUS IN SUFFERING AND JOY

Introduction

Today we are going to talk about the flow and dynamic of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Three of these five talks are focused on the *Spiritual Exercises* because that's the way you really get the feel for Ignatian spirituality. It's a lived spirituality. It's a spirituality of action and prayer. And the *Spiritual Exercises* really touch on the basic themes and graces of Ignatian spirituality. Last time we looked at what the *Spiritual Exercises* are. They are the journal of Ignatius. They are a book for a director to guide someone through a series of exercises. We also looked at the *Principle and Foundation*. Last week I explained that the purpose of the *Exercises* is to lead one to freedom. The whole thing with Ignatius is to bring us to freedom, freedom so we discover God's will in our own life and join with Jesus in the work of salvation. He said the purpose of the *Exercises* is to bring us to that moment of freedom where we are at balance and we can hear God's call and respond to it. I spoke about the *Principle and Foundation* that articulates the basic purpose of our life: We are created, we are dependent, we are loved by God. It's an affirmation that we are created by God and that we are created out of love. It's a wonderful affirmation of the giftedness of our lives and the giftedness of the world around us that calls us to gratitude.

What I'd like to do today is outline the basic flow and dynamic of the *Spiritual Exercises* suggested by Ignatius. Remember it is a handbook for a director to guide someone. Really the contents of the *Spiritual Exercises*, as I mentioned last week, is what happens in you. It's the movement of God within you. The *Exercises* are merely a paradigm which the director can follow in helping the person come to a deeper experience of God in his or her life. They lead us basically from an experience of being loved by God unconditionally to an experience of being forgiven by God, then to an experience of being called by God to be a disciple of Jesus, and then to an experience of entering into the Christian mystery of the dying and rising of Jesus.

The *Exercises* are divided into four weeks. These are not seven-day weeks. They are moments or stages in growth in our relationship with God, the way in which people grow in their intimacy with God. The four weeks outline for you the stages and the process of growth into a deeper relationship with God. They invite a person to experience a conversion,

a sense of vocation, a sense of being called through an experience first of purification, then to a deeper understanding and commitment, and finally to a deeper union with God.

One can ask, why are we still using this book? It's 450 years old. Has nobody come up with a better book in 450 years? Look at the literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of books. Why are we sticking with this little book? In a sense, I think it falls into the realm of what they call a classic. It's something that transcends time. It transcends culture because what he outlines for us is the basic movement of salvation history, the basic movement of how all Christians experience God through an experience of being loved, of being forgiven, of being called, and of being invited to a deeper union with God. This is what God desires for all of us. This is our personal salvation history that God desires for each one of us. It's a call from liberation to discipleship to a shared experience of the dying and rising of Jesus. That is Christian life. That is Christian salvation.

Now, 450 years later, we're using this book as a handbook because it guides us through that process. It was the road map of Ignatius' own experience of God, but it is also a road map for each one of us that draws us closer to God.

What Ignatius does in the *Exercises* is give a series of exercises or of meditations, of considerations, of contemplations. Some are more rational. Some are more affective. Some are very imaginative because what he wants to do is elicit very deep desires about God, about who we are, and about who God is. He calls it a felt knowledge of God and a felt knowledge of our own great and generous desires. He does not want to impose anything on anyone. He believes the desires are there. They are in our hearts. Our desire for God, our desire for forgiveness, our desire to follow Jesus is already within us. What he wants to do through these exercises is elicit these desires. He wants to help us get in touch with them, notice them, cut through all the other desires that engage us throughout each day, and get to that deeper desire in our hearts that God planted there. He wants to call forth those desires within us.

Now there are some key meditations, or considerations, that Ignatius gives; and I'm going to be looking at those in the next lecture. To understand them, we need first to look at the basic journey that he outlines for us. The journey of the *Exercises* is a process that moves us from a person that is loved by God to someone forgiven by God to someone who is called by God.

Now just a couple of words of introduction. First of all, as I mentioned, a week is not a seven-day week. It's a stage or process that may take more or less days to complete, depending on the individual person. It is up to the director to say when is it time to move to the next stage, the next week. That's part of the discernment of the director.

Also, at the beginning of each exercise, Ignatius names a grace for you, something that he wants you to pray for and ask of God. That is what we are going to look at today: the graces of the four weeks of the *Exercises*. That's what is important.

Ignatius says if this exercise helps you get that grace, use it. If it doesn't, throw it away. The purpose is not to do these exercises. It's to elicit these graces and these experiences. And so at the beginning of each exercise there is a grace he invites you to pray for.

The second thing he does is that, at the end of every exercise, he invites you to a conversation with God, what he calls a colloquy, a conversation. When looking at the *Spiritual Exercises*, those two elements are really the heart of it. That really names the process and names the dynamic: the grace you pray for and the kind of conversation that you are invited to. We'll see that as we go through the *Exercises*.

We are going to start walking through the four weeks of the *Exercises*. As you know, to do this properly would take 30 days, four to five hours of prayer a day in solitude. So we're going to do it in 30 minutes. We are not going to do the *Exercises*. We're actually going to hear about the basic themes that shape the *Exercises*.

Remember we began last week with the *Principle and Foundation*, the consideration, the experience that we are profoundly loved by God, unconditionally loved by God. Ignatius says, "If you don't have that experience to some extent, don't go any further." Because if you don't, when you move into the First Week, which is about sinfulness, it can really be destructive. It can turn us in on ourselves in self-rejection.

The First Week: Being Forgiven

It's out of that sense of being loved that we move into the First Week of the *Exercises*. As a matter of fact, in the *Principle and Foundation* as we come in touch with God's love and the giftedness of our lives, we become aware of the great debt that we owe to God for our very existence, for the invitation to eternal life and salvation. We know that our response to that should be praise, reverence, thanksgiving, and great trust in God. What happens with most people when they reflect on the *Principle and*

Foundation is that they have this wonderful experience of being loved and cherished by God, and they are filled with gratitude and trust. Then at some stage, even if you don't suggest it to them, at some stage people begin to say, "I haven't responded very well to that, have I? I haven't been very generous in return. I haven't been very loving in return. What have I done in response to this great love of God?" People get in touch with the inadequacies of their responses, their lack of gratitude, their rejection of God's love, their sinfulness, their own brokenness, the way they have taken the gifts and made them possessions, their own infidelity.

Sin for Ignatius is disorder. It's the disorder that we introduce into our relationship with God and with one another. What he prayed for was that we would live an ordered life in relationship to God, to the world around us, to each other, and even to ourselves.

Sin then is disorder. It's not following the plan. It's getting things out of synch and things out of place. Sin for him is ingratitude. I mentioned that startling statement previously when he wrote to someone in one of his letters and told the person the greatest sin one could commit is ingratitude. Ultimately, that is what every sin is. It's taking the gift for granted. It's taking the gift and misusing it. It's taking the gift and throwing it away. It's taking the gift and not sharing it.

Sin for him is not just some action that we do. He is not that concerned with all the particulars of it. Sin is ingratitude. Sin for him is unfreedom. It's the disordered attachments that we hang on to, the things that get in the way of our service of God and our love of God and one another, the things that enslave us.

Ignatius invites us first of all to reflect on the history of sin. He takes us back to look at the fall of the angels, to look at the Adam and Eve story and our own story, to consider some person who has fallen away from God. He wants you to get a sense that this is not just me. I'm not the first one to sin. I didn't make up sin. I was born into a history of sin.

He takes us through the history of sin so we have a sense of sin as a whole. There is a salvation history, but there is also a history of sinfulness that we are born into. He wants you to reflect on that and then to realize that we are a part of that history. We ourselves share in that history by the sinfulness of our own lives.

He also has a second theme that's very important. He doesn't want you just to focus on sin. He wants you to focus on the mercy of God, on God's forgiveness, on God's forgiving love in Jesus. So the grace that we pray for in this first stage, this first week of the *Exercises*, is the grace to experience

ourselves as loved sinners. We are sinners. We are broken. We are at times ungrateful. We are at times selfish. But we are loved. As Paul says in the letter to the Romans, "He loved us even when we were sinners." It is to get in touch with that profound experience that, even though we have not responded, God continues to love us. We are loved sinners.

It's the awareness that we need a savior, but that we have a savior in Jesus. It is the grace to see ourselves as God sees us, and that's hard to do. Often people are very hard on themselves. How can we see ourselves through God's eyes? That's what Ignatius wants us to do, to see the mercy and love of God. So we pray for sorrow. We pray for a profound gratitude for God's mercy and God's forgiveness.

The *Principle and Foundation* led us to gratitude because we are created and we are loved. The First Week leads us to an awareness that we are loved sinners. We are confronted with our sinfulness, our helplessness, our need for God, our need for salvation, but even more with the overwhelming goodness and mercy of God. And so once again we are called to gratitude, the gratitude of knowing we are a loved sinner.

Ignatius then invites us to have a conversation with Jesus at the foot of the cross. He says, "Imagine Christ our Lord suspended on the cross before you, and converse with Him. Speak with Him. On a very open, intimate level, speak with Him. And ask Him how, even though He is the creator, He has become a human being. How did that happen? Why did He do that? How is it that He passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for *my sins*?" Ignatius won't let you off the hook. It's very personalized. Jesus didn't die for sins, He died for *my sins*. We are astonished and filled with wonder at the realization that He died for *my sins*.

In a similar way, Ignatius wants us to reflect on ourselves and ask three questions: "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?" In light of this love that created me, that forgives me, that calls me to life, what have I done, what am I doing, and what ought I to do? Ignatius always asked the question: "What do I do?" It is not enough to have a wonderful experience. The question is what am I called to do? It's a spirituality of action, of going forth to do something. That question is going to stay with us all throughout the *Exercises*. What ought I to do? What is my call? What is my vocation? What is God asking me to do?

Ignatius then invites us to gaze on Jesus hanging on the cross and to speak out whatever comes to our minds. He doesn't tell you what to say.

He says, “You are there. It’s you and the Lord. Speak whatever comes to your mind. Say whatever you want to say, and then listen to what the Lord wants to say to you.”

At the end of the second meditation on our own personal sin, Ignatius invites us to another conversation in which we are to converse with God our Lord and to thank Him for all that He has done for us. Even at the end of the final meditation on hell, he encourages us to go back to this idea of gratitude. “I will also thank the Lord because He has shown me through all my life so much mercy.” The grace of the First Week is someone filled with gratitude because of God’s faithful love even before our infidelity.

That’s the First Week. It’s not an easy week. It is challenging, but ultimately very consoling.

The Second Week: Being Called

The sense of being loved, or being forgiven, opens our hearts and sets us free to hear God’s call. There’s a connection. Gratitude expands our hearts. Gratitude fills us with a desire to share this good news. We want to tell other people that God loves us and that God forgives us. Gratitude is contagious. It opens us to service.

There are two wonderful examples from the Scripture of this connection between forgiveness and service. They both involve St. Peter. The first story is about the time Peter and Jesus and the other disciples were fishing. As usually happens in the Scripture, Peter catches nothing. (Someone once commented that it is never recorded in Scripture that Peter ever caught a fish without it being a miracle.) Jesus tells Peter to cast the net on the other side, and suddenly the boat is filled with fish.

How does Peter respond? He realizes there’s something extraordinary about Jesus. So he falls down in the middle of the boat, as they’re about to sink, and says, “Depart from me; I’m a sinner.” This is not recorded in Scripture, but I suspect what Jesus wanted to say was, “Not now, Peter. You can be converted later. Let’s get the boat to shore. We’re about to sink.”

What Jesus does say in the Scripture is: “I want you now to be a fisher of people. Save men and women.” The experience of Peter was, “Depart from me; I am a sinner.” It was a profound sense of his unworthiness before Jesus, and it is at that moment that Jesus commissions Peter to go forth and share the good news. Out of the sense of forgiveness comes the call to go forth and to share it.

The other very touching scene is on the lakeshore after the resurrection. Peter had denied Jesus three times. Now Jesus takes Peter aside. Jesus doesn’t ask him if he is sorry or why he did it. He asks him

three times, “Do you love me?” And each time Peter says, “Yes Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus allowed Peter to say “I’m sorry” through saying “I love you” three times; and each time he said it, Jesus said, “Then feed my lambs; feed my sheep.” Once you know you’re forgiven, you have the power to go forth and share it.

The experience of being loved and forgiven expands our hearts so that we want to share it with other people. That experience of forgiveness moves us into the Second Week of the *Exercises*. The Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks of the *Exercises* are really a process of leading us to a decision and confirmation of that decision of what it means for me to follow Jesus and to share the good news. Ignatius invites the person to hear the call of Christ, to discern what it means for each one of us as individuals to follow Jesus.

So in the Second Week Ignatius invites you to contemplate the life of Jesus. He starts with the Annunciation and goes all the way through the life of Jesus through the Third and Fourth Weeks. Contemplate Jesus, contemplate His mission as portrayed in the Gospels. Enter into the Gospel scenes in a way that helps you grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus. What is the grace, and that’s what’s so important, what is the grace to pray for? Every time you pray in this Second Week, you pray for the same grace: to know Christ more intimately, to love Him more intensely, and to follow Him more closely. Or as *Godspell* puts it: “To see Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly, day by day.” I’ll spare you the singing of that. That’s the grace. It’s the grace to know, to love, and to follow. The Second Week of the *Exercises* is about discipleship, which is what Christianity is all about. It is the call to walk with Jesus, to labor with Jesus, and to bring the world back to God.

The heart of the Second Week is contemplating the Gospel stories, entering into them. Ignatius invites us into a kind of imaginative prayer where we actually enter into the scene, where we become part of it. We’re there. We’re experiencing with Jesus, and we’re experiencing with the disciples. We become the people in the Gospel story—so we’re the people healed, we’re the people forgiven, we’re the people fed, and we’re the disciples feeding people. It engages us in the life of Jesus.

It’s the desire to follow Jesus and follow Him in a very specific and concrete way. At the heart of this week is making a decision about how we will live out our lives as disciples. How is God calling me in my life, in my circumstances, to be of service to others, to be a disciple with Jesus? We want to discover our own involvement in the ongoing rhythm of salvation history that is still going on. God is still saving people; the process is still

going on. The world came down from God, and it's going back. We're right in the middle of it. We ask ourselves: How can I labor with Jesus in the work of salvation that is being carried on today? Where am I to be inserted into today's unfolding of God's plan?

It's the same experience Ignatius had at La Storta to be placed at the side of Christ, to labor with Him to bring the world back to God. That's what this week is all about. It's to have your own little La Storta. It's to have your own sense of where God is placing you in following Jesus. This week is really at the heart of the experience of the *Exercises*. It engages our freedom. It challenges us to move from prayer to action to a lived discipleship. It challenges us to know and love Jesus and, ultimately, to follow Jesus.

The Third Week: Sharing in the Suffering and Death of Jesus

The third week of the *Exercises* is to continue the life of Jesus, but to enter into His passion and His death. It's an invitation to be with Christ in His passion. This is a call to move out of myself. I've been reflecting on myself and my sinfulness. I have been reflecting on God's love for me, on what God is calling me to do. I have grown to know Jesus better. Now there is an invitation to go out to the beloved, to go out to Jesus, to be with Him in His passion, to move out of ourselves to be united with Him. It's a grace of union to be with Him in His suffering.

And so we pray for the grace of sorrow. We pray for the grace of compassion because the Lord is going to His death for my sins. That's how much He loves me. We enter into the mystery of the passion and death of Jesus which is at the heart of the Christian message.

It's also what Ignatius calls a time of confirmation. We made a decision in the Second Week. You've made your life decision about how you are going to follow Jesus. Now Ignatius invites you to take that decision before Christ on the cross. Stand before the crucified Christ and say, "This is my decision." The crucified Christ reveals our sinfulness. We see our sins before us. Can we bring our decision and stand before the cross of Christ? I bring the decision I've made to the foot of the cross and ask, "Can I be, am I going to be, a suffering servant the way Jesus is a suffering servant?"

The Third Week is also a time to ask for strength to be faithful to the decision that I've made. You've made this decision about your life, but now you may be having second thoughts. The next day you may say, "Wait a minute. What did I do? Wow, what have I gotten myself into?" What

Ignatius does is put you in the garden with Jesus struggling with the Father. Jesus asks that the cup of suffering might pass; but in the end, he surrenders to God's will. It is the human Jesus struggling with his decision.

It is in the Third Week that we find the strength to live out the decision we've made and to overcome the temptation to lose courage and to go back on a difficult decision.

The Third Week is also a time to deepen our knowledge of Jesus. It's only in the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising that we fully understand who Jesus is. It's only when facing that dying and rising that we understand His mission. It's only in the midst of His dying and rising that we know the depth of our sin and the depth of His love, that He totally emptied Himself and gave of Himself. We can't know Jesus until we stand before the cross because the cross reveals who He is, reveals the love of Jesus that is the love that saves us, the love that challenges us to be disciples, which means to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We have to die to self, die to unfreedom, die to a divided heart, so that we can follow Jesus. We find the strength for that at the foot of the cross. But above all, at the foot of the cross, we are suddenly overwhelmed with the fact of how much we are loved by God, that as Paul says in Romans, it is amazing if a friend gives his or her life for us, but He gave His life for us even when we were sinners. That's how much He loves us. It is to let that sink in. That's what's the Third Week is about.

The Fourth Week: Sharing in the Joy of the Risen Christ

But, as you all know, the story of Jesus has a happy ending in the Resurrection. In the Fourth Week of the *Exercises* we are called to be united with Christ in His Resurrection. Ignatius invites us to pray on the Resurrection appearances, to encounter the risen Christ.

Again, an interesting footnote gives you a sense of Ignatius. He gives you a whole list of resurrection appearances to pray with, all the ones we're all familiar with and know; but the first one he says to pray on is Jesus appearing to His mother. He adds a little note in the back. He acknowledges that it does not appear anywhere in Scripture that Jesus ever appeared to his mother; but he adds that if you think Jesus rose from the dead and didn't go first to His mother, you are lacking in understanding. In other words, if you think that this good Jewish boy didn't go home to mother and say, "Mom, I'm risen," you don't know Jesus very well. So, he has us pray on this wonderful scene of Jesus appearing to Mary and then on all the other Resurrection appearances.

And what do we ask for? The grace we pray for is to rejoice, to be glad at the joy of Jesus. The one we love is now beyond suffering. The one we love is risen. The one we love has been lifted up. And we rejoice with that. We rejoice that Jesus is now beyond the suffering, beyond death, and is once again living the fullness of life in that sense. Again, it is a grace that takes us out of ourselves. You know how hard it is sometimes to be happy with someone else. Sometimes it's almost easier to be sad with somebody if they come up and say I've had this terrible day. And you say, "I understand." You start to empathize. But when you're having a terrible day and somebody walks in and says, "I had the greatest day today! Everything is going wonderful!," you want to say, "I'm not up to being happy with you. I don't want to be happy right now." It takes a lot of selflessness and going out of ourselves to say, "That's wonderful. Let's talk about all the wonderful things that happened to you," while you are down in the pits somewhere.

The Fourth Week is about rejoicing with Jesus, but it is also a time to experience Jesus as the consoler. That's what Jesus does in all the Resurrection appearances. The stories always begin with someone sad and depressed. Jesus appears to people and consoles them. Ignatius says that's what Jesus wants to do for us. He wants to be the consoler. He wants to touch our lives and fill them with joy, fill them with the spirit, fill them with that sense of expansiveness. But there's also something else. It is in these experiences of the risen Christ that we get a renewed sense of mission because the one thing about good news is that you want to share it. If something wonderful happens to you, you don't just sit there and say, "That was nice," and go on about your work. You find someone and say, "You can't imagine. I just won the lottery, or whatever." You want to share the joy. Ignatius is aware that you are coming to the end of these *Exercises*. You are praying the Resurrection and experiencing the joy that has happened to Jesus and the disciples, but you are also experiencing the movement to go out and share it with people. The disciples on the road to Emmaus did not check into the Holiday Inn. After they meet Jesus and knew Him in the breaking of the bread, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem and said, "You can't imagine what happened to us. We met Jesus along the way. We want to share it." There's a sense of mission, a movement to service.

The dynamic of the *Exercises* is to set us free so we can respond in generosity and love to the call of Christ in our lives, to enter more deeply into that mystery of His dying and rising that is our salvation and the

salvation of the world. In the Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks, we enter into the story of Jesus so that His stories will touch our stories and transform our stories. We are the people in the Gospels. We are the people who are blind and deaf and hungry and in need of consolation, and Jesus wants to heal and feed and console us.

Conclusion

The *Exercises*, why are they still here after 450 years? Because somehow Ignatius caught the paradigm, the archetype, the model of Christian conversion and of the Christian life that we are all called to share. The *Exercises* help people experience that conversion and call to life in a structured way so that they come to that profound sense of being loved, forgiven, called, and in union with God. This is the journey to God that is the journey of every Christian; it is the journey of all people ultimately, though for each one of us it's a personal journey with its own little paths and unique experiences. It's an individual journey. It includes our gifts, our life circumstances, and the graced movement of God. But we share this journey together; and that's why these *Exercises* speak, and have spoken, and will probably be speaking to people for hundreds of years to come.

The *Spiritual Exercises* are all about God's love: God's love that creates us, God's love that forgives us, God's love that dies for us and rises for us, God's love that saves us, and God's love that calls us to eternal life. That's the journey that we're invited to through the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Discussion Questions:

What do I understand by sin? How do I experience forgiveness?

What does it mean to be a disciple in my life circumstances?

What are the sources of suffering and joy in my life and how does Jesus' death and resurrection give meaning to them?

Other Resources:

www.jesuit.ie/prayer

A website that offers a brief daily exercise in prayer that you can do right at your computer.

The Call of the King, Incarnation, Two Standards,
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KEY MEDITATIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Introduction

Today I want to talk about some of the key meditations of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Last time we examined the movement, the dynamic, of the *Exercises*. We reflected on the graces that move us through the *Exercises*, from God's love creating us, to God's love forgiving us, to God's love calling us, to God's love inviting us to a deeper union by sharing in the dying and rising of Jesus.

I want to return to that same movement but now in the context of what have been called the key meditations of the *Exercises*. These are exercises that Ignatius gives to elicit and call forth from us those graces that we talked about last week. We certainly can't do all the meditations and contemplations, but I would like to highlight several meditations that are distinctively Ignatian. They will lead us a little more deeply into the vision and values of Ignatian spirituality.

The Call of the King

You remember two weeks ago when we talked about the *Principle and Foundation*, we discussed in that context the experience of being loved by God. Then last week we talked about some of the meditations in the First Week which were about sin and mercy. Ignatius offers a consideration as a transition between that First Week about sin and forgiveness to the Second Week about the discipleship we are called to in the Gospel. The consideration leads us from an experience of purification and forgiveness to a series of contemplations on the Gospel scenes. To understand this consideration, we have to do a little flashback to the life of Ignatius. In reflecting on his life, I mentioned three key moments. The third of those was an experience he had at La Storta. As you remember the story, it was some 15 years after his conversion. On his way to Rome, he stopped at a little wayside chapel, La Storta, and there had a profound experience of God. He saw Jesus carrying His cross. Ignatius heard the Father say to Jesus, "Take this man (Ignatius) to labor with you." And Jesus turned to Ignatius and said, "Come labor with us." That was a profound experience in his life of God confirming what God was calling him to do and confirming the direction in his life. He was placed at the side of the Son, next to Jesus. He was received under the standard of Christ, which was a standard of poverty and humility and self-abdication. He was to serve Jesus carrying the cross.

That vision informed Ignatius' call to discipleship and fostered a very deep, personal relationship with Jesus and a relationship with Jesus in service. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius offers us a consideration. It is not quite a meditation, not quite a contemplation. It is just something to think about, something to consider. It invites us to a similar vision of discipleship. It invites us to our own little La Storta experience wherever we are. Ignatius calls the consideration the Call of the King. The Call of the King consideration portrays Jesus as a leader, as a leader who invites us to share in his lot, to labor alongside him in suffering and glory, and to share in the work of redemption. Ignatius, of course, was big on the power of the imagination. Remember all the daydreaming he used to do, dreaming about being a knight and then the knight of God. So what he does in this consideration is first tell a parable about an earthly king. The earthly king comes before the people and says, "I want to go out and create a better world and bring peace and bring justice, and I want you all to follow me. It's going to be hard, but in the end we are going to triumph." Ignatius asks us to reflect on that parable and then get in touch with what happens inside of us. What if you, or someone, were to walk into this room right now and say to all of us, "I can assure you, if you work with me for the next six months, we can eradicate poverty in the city of New Orleans. We can change this city and make something happen." If you really believe this person can do this, what happens inside? Is there some, "Yes, yes I'll do that. I know it's going to be hard, but I'm willing to do that."

Ignatius wants us to get in touch with what he believes is the spontaneous generosity and openness and readiness to serve that is in the heart of everyone. He realized it wasn't in the heart of everyone, and sometimes it was buried too deeply. So sometimes he told people after the First Week of the *Exercises* not to go any further. The Call of the King is diagnostic. If you do this consideration and you have no desire to serve, no desire to be generous, no desire to do anything further, Ignatius thanks you very much and says you can go home now. The rest of the *Exercises* only make sense in the context of openness, generosity, and the desire to serve.

So, the Call of the King is to stir up, to elicit from us, that generosity, that readiness to serve. It's a call to a commitment. Then what does Ignatius tell you after he's got you hooked on this king you are going to rush off and follow? He tells you that this king actually exists. His name is Jesus, and He's inviting you to bring about the reign of God. When I do this with undergraduates, even though it's a little dated for our undergraduates now, I let them watch Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* speech which was

the same sort of thing. Martin Luther King spoke about having a dream; and hundreds of thousands of people responded that they would do anything to follow, if he could make this dream come true. That's what Ignatius wants to capture in this consideration, that passion within all of us. He tells us we have that king, we have that leader, which is Jesus; and He has work to do to bring about the reign of God. It presumes a certain level of freedom which you prayed for in the First Week.

This is the answer to the question "What should I do for Christ?" that was asked at the foot of the cross in the First Week of the *Exercises*. What ought I to do for Christ? It's the call of the rich young man in the Gospel. Sell everything and come follow me if you want to be perfect. Some people call this the second *Principle and Foundation*, but now the *Principle and Foundation* is much more clearly focused on Jesus and on following Jesus.

In the Call of the King, the grace you pray for is not to be deaf to the Lord's call, but to be ready and diligent to accomplish the Lord's most holy will. I pray not to be deaf, to be open, to be ready, and to be generous. That's what I ask of God. Give me that generous heart so that I can follow you. I want to be part of this plan. I want to bring about this great work that you're involved in.

At this point, Ignatius does not want you to make a decision. You don't know what you're going to do yet. That's really going to be worked out in the rest of the Second Week of the *Exercises* when you discern what it means for you to walk alongside Jesus. All Ignatius hopes for at this time is for you to get in touch with your desire to go wherever the Lord invites you to go and invites you to follow.

The Call of the King is a consideration that mobilizes our energy. It invites us to get in touch with our dream and to see how Jesus is the fulfillment of our dream. The dream in all of us is to make a better world, a world of peace and justice, a place in which people are honored and respected. Can we share in God's dream for the universe by following Jesus?

For Ignatius, Jesus, who is creator, Lord, and the savior, is also a leader. Jesus is a living king who is actively at work in the world around us. He is now seeking to bring about the reign of God and is asking us to labor alongside Him. It's a call to commitment to the person of Jesus and to the mission of Jesus.

Ignatius envisioned his own relationship with Jesus in the context of the feudal world of earlier centuries. Ignatius thought of himself as a vassal and Jesus as the Lord. It was a personal relationship of love and friendship,

of entering into and sharing the experience of the other person. It was mutual service. It was fidelity. It was that kind of personal bond that Ignatius had with Jesus and that he invites us to have as well. Jesus for him was his provider, his protector, his leader, and his friend; and he invites us to relate to Jesus as provider, protector, leader, and friend.

Contemplation on the Incarnation

The Call of the King is the transition exercise from the First Week about sin and forgiveness to the Second Week about discipleship. I was going to talk about three key meditations, but I decided to add one more. No extra charge for this one. I think it is important to reflect briefly on this additional contemplation on the Incarnation, the enfleshment of God. This is the first contemplation of the Second Week. Ignatius imagines the three persons of the Trinity up in heaven looking down on the world, and the world is a mess. There's evil, there's destruction, everybody's killing one another, it's darkness; and the three of them are looking down and saying, "What are we going to do? What are we going to do about this?" They have a little conference, and finally they say, "Somebody ought to go down and straighten it out." So Jesus says, "I'll go down there." There is a sense of the Trinity looking down on the world and seeing the need for redemption, and then the decision is that the Son will go to become incarnate to save the world.

The final scene he gives is the Annunciation. It's Mary saying yes to God's plan that Jesus will become flesh through her and will come to bring salvation. Why do I focus on this contemplation? It's a wonderful image of the way Ignatius looked at the world. It came down from above. Remember the experience at the Cardoner. Everything comes down from above. It's created, and then there's the Incarnation. God's grace comes down from above; and we see a world in need of salvation, in need of redemption. Then we see one person, Mary, and the importance of her word and her response to God's plan. This is God's plan. Mary is the model for all of us: To say yes to whatever God invites us to do to be part of that plan.

The contemplation on the Incarnation really captures, I think, Ignatius' whole vision of the world as a gift from God, the world on its way back to God, the process of salvation, how important each person's response is to that plan. Will I say "yes" the way Mary said yes? Will I be open to God's plan in my life, whatever that plan might be?

The Two Standards

But to be part of that plan, to be a disciple of Jesus, we have to put on the mind and heart of Jesus. We have to put on his values. We have to put on his attitudes. And that brings us to the third of the key meditations.

It's called the meditation on the Two Standards. Again it's a wonderful example of Ignatius' imagination. Remember he had all these images of being a great soldier. So he asks us to imagine two great armies: the army of Christ and the army of Satan. In front of each army there is someone carrying a banner or a standard identifying the group. What he wants us to do is to look at the two standards or two banners and to meditate on them. In the context of this Second Week of the *Exercises*, you have to make a life choice, a significant choice, of how you're going to reform the life in which you're living or enter into it more deeply. This meditation is to dispose us to recognize God's will, but also to discover what keeps us from recognizing it. What gets in the way? What are our resistances?

The Two Standards are the standard of Christ and the standard of Satan. It's the struggle between good and evil in the world around us and within our own hearts. It's between the forces that lead us towards God and the forces that lead us away from God.

Ignatius in this contemplation, or consideration, wants us to understand the strategies and the tactics of the forces of good and the forces of evil in the world around us but also within our own hearts. So he paints this wonderful, dramatic scene. On one side he has Satan seated on a throne of fire and smoke, and it's terrifying. It's an image of the fear that takes away our freedom. We're terrified of what's going on here. In the way Ignatius imagines it, Satan sends out all these little devils and all these forces of evil to enslave the world. He says the tactic of the evil spirit is to enslave us, to take away our freedom, to capture our hearts so that they are not open to God. He does that by enticing us to possessions, to great honor, and ultimately to pride.

On the other side, you have Christ sitting in a lowly place: humble, gentle, attractive. Christ sends out disciples to lead people to freedom, to live with detachment, to live in humility. So the grace that you pray for in this context is to know what keeps me from being free. What captures my heart? How am I led to unfreedom in my life? I also pray to know what sets me free. The grace is to see everything as a gift, so I can be humble and open to God's call.

Ignatius doesn't expect you to say, "Oh, I think I'll go with Satan. I like that vision much more." You've already made a decision. What he

wants you to do is to understand the contrasting values and how they may be still struggling in your heart when you come to make your life choice. It's a contrast between the values of Jesus and the values of darkness or the forces of evil. Jesus stands, of course, for the values of the Gospel, the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount. He calls us to simplicity, poverty of spirit, compassion, selflessness, the value of life, family, and concern for the needy. We can contrast Jesus' values with the values of consumerism, the individualism that is often within our society, the world of manufactured needs, a world of competition that encourages getting ahead at any cost, a world that can disregard the weak, the unattractive, the oppressed, a world of growing narcissism that puts growth, openness, independence, and self-fulfillment ahead of faith and commitment and sacrifice and responsibility.

These self-centered values are in conflict with the Gospel values of Jesus, who emptied Himself, who came to serve us, who came to lay down His life. Jesus is the person for others, the person of compassion who went about helping the poor and the broken. Jesus' values are the values of the good Samaritan who stops on the road and reaches out in compassion to the man in the ditch. They are the values in the final judgment scene in Matthew when people are asked, "When I was hungry, did you give me something to eat?" It's those values that Ignatius is talking about. He wants us to remember those, to call those to our mind. In following Jesus we are invited to live out of these values, to put on the mind and heart of Jesus. It's the call to compassion. It's a call to a community of sharing rather than greed, of service rather than exploitation, of compassion rather than competition. These are the contrasting world views he wants you to look at. Keep that in mind as you go to make your decision. Where is your heart? What are the things in the values of darkness that are still pulling at you, that take away your freedom, that lead you away from God?

The *Spiritual Exercises* are about making decisions, human decisions in our lives. We can make those decisions based on the values of Jesus and the Gospel, or we can make them based on the values of darkness. We desire to follow Jesus; and the commitment that one made in the Call of the King is "Yes Lord, I want to follow you. I want to labor beside you." To do that you have to know the mind and heart of Jesus. You have to know what Jesus values. It's only then that you can make decisions that can carry on Jesus' mission and bring about the reign of God, to share in that mission of Jesus in bringing the world back to God.

So each one of us, Ignatius says, must discover in our own lives how to live out those Gospel values in our concrete life circumstances. What does it mean for me to share in that mission of Jesus? What does it mean for me to be a disciple? What does it mean for me to walk with Jesus carrying the cross? That's the challenge he puts before us. And it's not easy. It's very challenging. It's very demanding. Then throughout the rest of the Second Week, he has you make a decision. In the Third Week, he invites you to stand before Jesus with your decision, to really ask yourself how the decision you have made with your life stands up against the love of Jesus, the love that was willing to go to death. Can I go before the cross with my decision and say, "Yes, I've embraced the values of Jesus, and I want to live out that decision"? That's the confirmation that we seek before the cross. Finally in the Fourth Week, we are assured that if we embrace these values and follow Him, we will also share in His victory.

To summarize the three meditations we have been considering, the Call of the King comes out of the experience of our being forgiven and loved by God. We hear the call; we ask for the grace not to be deaf to that call. Ignatius then invites us to go to the Incarnation and to see God's plan unfold before us, how God comes down, how Mary is part of that plan, and how we are invited to be part of that plan. Finally, in the Two Standards, Ignatius puts before us the contrasting values of Satan and Christ so we can rightly discern our own call from God.

Contemplation on the Love of God

I want to conclude with a brief description of the final meditation of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the Contemplation on the Love of God. I think this final contemplation really captures the Ignatian vision and articulates the heart of Ignatian spirituality.

The Contemplation on the Love of God is first of all about God's love for us. This final contemplation is a call to an intimate knowledge and love and service of God. It tries to bring us to a place where we can love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things. The grace you pray for is the grace to ask for an interior knowledge, a felt knowledge that is deep in our heart. We ask for interior knowledge of all the great good that we have received. This knowledge elicits profound gratitude. When I really grasp the gifts of God in my life, I am moved to gratitude. Stirred by this gratitude, I am able to serve and love the Divine Majesty in all things, to love and serve God in all things. That's the grace we pray for in this final contemplation.

Then he leads us through a series of steps. First of all, he has two pre-notes. First, love is expressed in deeds not just in words. It's not enough just to say nice things to God. The call is to be lived out in action. If anything captures Ignatius, it's that sense of always asking, "What do I have to do?" It's an experience of God that always leads to service, to action.

The second pre-note given by Ignatius is that love consists of a mutual giving and sharing of what one possesses. There is mutuality. As God has given all this to us, we are to give it all to God and share it with God and share it with those around us. It is in mutual sharing that the unity of the lover and the beloved comes about.

Ignatius then offers four points for our consideration. He invites us first of all to call to mind the blessings and favors we have received. I reflect on how much God has done for me and how much God has given me and how much God desires to give God's very self to me. So first reflect on that, and obviously that is going to move us to a profound sense of gratitude.

But that is not the end. Next consider how God dwells in what God gives us. It's not just that God dumps all these gifts on us and says you're on your own. God actually dwells in creation, is alive in creation. God is present there. Above all, God is dwelling in me as a temple. We are the temple of God. God actually dwells within us. It's not that God just gives us all these gifts, but God actually dwells in our hearts. There's that wonderful image throughout the Scripture of the temple as the place where God resides. It is obviously in the Hebrew Scriptures. Then Jesus in the New Testament says that He is the temple where God resides. In the early church the community was acknowledged as the temple of God. You find God in the community. Paul finally says that every Christian is the temple of God because God dwells in our hearts. But even more, and this is Ignatius' third point, God doesn't just sit there like some inert object. God does not just dwell in creation. God works and labors in creation for me, bringing the world back to God, moving people's hearts, trying to move the world toward the reign of God. So it's God in the world, active in the world, engaged in the world. Finally, in the fourth point, Ignatius says: Consider all the gifts and blessings as coming down from above, so that I will be led back to the source of all good. If I consider everything coming down from God, from above, my heart will go back to the giver. We talked about that when we talked about the *Principle and Foundation*. If it's all a gift, the gift will lead us back to the giver. And that's where our hearts should finally reside, in the giver.

All of this is not speculation for Ignatius. The purpose of this contemplation is not just speculation, it's surrender. It's to give our hearts back to God. And finally it's a call to service.

The *Principle and Foundation* was about the transcendence of God. God is above us sending things down. This final contemplation focuses on the imminence of God, God in our midst, in our presence, in creation. And we are called to service and gratitude. If there are two words you remember from Ignatius, they are service and gratitude. Gratitude leads us to service.

Ignatius invites us to pray for that deep interior knowledge of the giftedness of creation that moves us to love in return and to render service. It's a movement from thanksgiving to thankfully giving, from thanksgiving to thankfully giving ourselves in service. If Jesus labors for us, and Jesus labors with us, we are invited to share with Him in His labor and bring the reign of God to completion.

Conclusion

This contemplation, I think, captures the heart of Ignatian spirituality because it is telling us to find God in all things. Where is God? God is in the midst of everything. God is dwelling here. God is laboring here. God is in everything about us, including our own hearts. That's where we find God. What is Ignatian spirituality about? It's about finding God in all things. That's what this contemplation is trying to let sink deep into our hearts.

The other phrase that is often used about Ignatius was first used by Jerome Nadal, one of the early Jesuits who knew Ignatius extremely well. In fact, Ignatius said Nadal knew him better than he knew himself. Somebody said to Nadal, "How do you sum up Ignatius?" Nadal's response was, "He is a contemplative in action." That phrase is so much rooted in this contemplation on the love of God. It's not that you pray a lot and go out and do something. No. It's in the very midst of doing things that you're praying. You're a contemplative in the midst of the activity. In the very things you're doing you're finding God, relating to God, you're in touch with God.

The Contemplation on the Love of God sums up all that has gone before; but it is also a transition out of retreat, out of your 30 days of solitude back to your everyday life. Where's God? You're going to find God out there. The temptation is to build three tents and stay on top of the mountain. This was wonderful, and it's great that you came, and it's great

that you found God here, and it's great that you have experienced all these wonderful graces. But now, go do something. It is Jesus' voice at the Ascension saying, "Why are you standing here idly looking up to heaven? Go do something." In this contemplation, he gives us the mission and the energy to go forth to find God in our everyday lives and to be of service to one another.

There are two prayers often associated with Ignatius. One is the prayer for generosity that is given at the end of the chapter. The other is perhaps Ignatius' most famous prayer which he invites us to say in the Contemplation on the Love of God. It is called the *Suscipe*.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. You have given all to me. Now I return it. Everything is yours. Do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace and that is enough for me.

That's a tough prayer. That's the prayer of surrender. It says, "You have given everything to me. I give it back. Just give me your love and your grace and that's enough for me." It is the total freedom of surrendering everything so you can follow Jesus and live out the call of the Gospel.

This prayer of total surrender completes the cycle of creation and redemption. All things come from God, and all things go back to God. We give them back. As God has gifted the world in creation and in the incarnation, so the person desires to share in the work of returning that gift, both on the level of personal surrender and on the level of laboring with Christ to bring all things back to God. We want to bring everything back to the Giver of all Gifts.

The meditations I've talked about today are about a call to follow Jesus that's embodied in the concrete life circumstances that we live each day. These meditations are about decisions that are shaped by certain values, the Gospel values of Jesus. They are decisions that enable us to find God in the world, to love and serve God, and to labor with Jesus to bring the world back to God. For Ignatius this was the movement of the *Exercises* to bring us from love to forgiveness to vocation to surrender. When we come to that moment of surrender, we will find the God that we are searching for. Ignatius says you will find God in your everyday lives and you will find Him in your heart. That's where God dwells, that's where God labors; and you're called to be a part of this great plan. That's the call of the *Exercises*, and that's the heart of Ignatian spirituality.

Discussion Questions:

What is my own sense of call or vocation? How do I respond?

What are the competing values of our culture and our Christian commitment?

How do we find God in all things in our everyday experience?

Other Resources:

William Barry, S.J., and Robert G. Doherty, S.J. *Contemplatives in Action. The Jesuit Way*. New York: Paulist Press, 2002.

A brief book on the creative tensions that characterize Jesuit spirituality.

Prayer for Generosity

Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous;
teach me to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to ask for reward,
except that of knowing that I do your most holy will.
Amen.

Ignatian Discernment and Decision-Making

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IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT AND DECISION-MAKING

Introduction

In the last three weeks in our reflections here, we have talked about the flow and dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* and the graces and insights that define Ignatian spirituality and our Christian journey. What I'd like to do in this final reflection is look at a more practical element of Ignatian spirituality: the guidelines that Ignatius gives for making life decisions and decisions each day in a Christian context.

Now all of us, of course, make decisions all the time. Some are very simple decisions; some are very important decisions. Sometimes the decisions are very clear to us. We know exactly what to do. We have a certain confidence about them. But often decisions can be difficult. There are conflicting values. There are conflicting responsibilities, and the right path is not perfectly clear to us. I'm not going to be speaking today about decisions between right and wrong, not moral decisions. You know if you're trying to discern whether to be an accountant or a hit man for the mafia, that's a moral question. Ignatius is not concerned about those kinds of moral decisions, even though moral decisions are not always clear, and sometimes we need discernment to make a good choice.

We are concerned here with decisions between things that are good. You have to choose between two different things in your life, for example, one vocation or another vocation. You are trying to decide where God is calling you and where God fits into your life. There are also the day-to-day decisions that we make. Some are very important decisions, for instance, a family deciding whether to take an elderly parent into the family home or to place him or her in a retirement home, whether to change a career to something that would be less financially rewarding but more personally fulfilling. It may be a hard decision, given all the conflicting values and responsibilities.

How do we make these decisions? How do we make these choices? Ignatius says you don't do it just by certain laws and structures and principles from which you can deduce things. People's history, their experience, their gifts, their desires, their feelings, their understandings, their ideas, their inspirations—all of that is part of the work of the spirit within them. The spirit is present and at work in our hearts, and we have to reflect on all that is going on inside us and in the world around us and allow the spirit to shape the decisions that we make.

Ignatius offers, in the *Exercises*, a rather systematic approach to making life decisions. If you make the full 30-day retreat, one of the purposes of the *Exercises* is for people to make life decisions about whether they are going to be a priest or get married or which career they are going to follow.

So Ignatius offers us guidelines and methods for life decisions and for everyday decisions. I think that is one of the most important contributions to Christian spirituality and Christian living that Ignatius made. The question is: How do I follow Jesus? What kind of decisions should I make in my life? The guidelines he gives in the *Exercises* are really for someone trying to make a decision in that context, but they are obviously guidelines that fit our experience in our everyday lives.

Discernment

Discernment is one of those words that people throw around like “spirituality.” Discernment is an art and a gift. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift we pray for. I think God gives the gift to everyone, but in some cases people have it in an extraordinary degree. Discernment is the art of discovering God’s will for us in the concrete circumstances of our lives. Or put in another way, it is discovering God’s hopes and dreams for us, which I like much better than God’s will. God’s will sounds rigid and set, written in concrete. God has hopes and dreams for us like a parent does for a child or we do for our friends, and we discover God’s hopes in conversation with God.

Discernment is a way of discovering what it means for me, in particular circumstances, to be a disciple, what it means for me to follow Jesus in my own concrete life situation. Discernment is the art of appreciating the gifts God has given me and discovering how I can best use those gifts to live out my Christian life. Discernment is always in the context of Christian love and seeking for truth within that. It helps us choose that course of action which most authentically answers the deepest desires and longings of our hearts and the movement of the spirit that God has placed within us. God has hopes for us. God has dreams for all of us. How do we know that? How are they revealed? They are revealed in creation. They are revealed in the gifts we have. They are revealed in God’s word that is spoken to us. They’re revealed in our life circumstances. We have to use our freedom to accept God’s invitation, to cooperate with God in creating a world that enables us to become the people we want to become and to create ultimately the reign of God, a world of peace and justice.

Discernment presupposes that life is a mystery to be worked out, not a problem to be solved. It is a mystery that we try to live out. And it is the promptings of the spirit that help us explore that mystery. But it will always remain a mystery. Discernment also presupposes that life is a process. It is growing in a relationship with God, with the world around us, with the people around us, and ultimately with ourselves.

At the base of Ignatius' approach to discernment is the belief that God touches the individual soul. This is absolutely foundational to Ignatian spirituality and to Ignatian discernment. God touches the individual soul. God does not talk in broad generalities. God is at work in the heart of each person. That's a startling statement. But it is at the heart at what Ignatius means by discernment. There's not one size that fits all. There's not one plan that fits all. There's not some principle that I can give everyone in this room and then you can deduce whatever you are supposed to do. God is moving in your hearts. God is moving in your life circumstances, and you have to listen to that.

Some distinguish between discernment of spirits and discernment of God's will. Discernment of spirits is the discernment of the interior motions of my heart, the thoughts, the feelings, the imaginings, all the different affections that go on in my heart. It means trying to interpret these, trying to evaluate them so we can discover what leads us to God and what leads us away from God. We will come back to this when we talk about the Rules for Discernment that Ignatius gives us.

Discernment of God's will is something bigger. It includes the discernment of interior emotions of our hearts, but it also includes the life circumstances around us, certain objective things we can look at, like the teaching of the Church, the word of God, the consequences that may flow from our actions. It is concerned with the responsibilities and states of life that we may have. Someone may go on a retreat and pray and listen to God's spirit in his heart and come to this profound sense of peace that he is supposed to go to Bora Bora and spend the rest of his life working with the poor. The person then says to his spiritual director, "I'm at peace. This is of God. I know it is of God." And the director says, "What are you going to do with your wife and six kids?" The person says, "Oh, that's not important. I'm at peace." The discernment of God's will includes our life circumstances. It includes the decisions we have already made. It includes our gifts. I can discern tomorrow and feel at great peace that I should be a concert pianist, but I don't have that gift. Or I'm going to sing at the Met, but I can't carry a tune. There are certain things, objective things, which go into the discernment of God's will.

What Ignatius gives us is a set of rules or guidelines for discerning the movements of God within our hearts, the movements within us. Discernment is not original with Ignatius. It goes back to the New Testament, and then to the early desert monks. Ignatius' original contribution was to give us a set of organized, practical guidelines for discernment. He presented them in a way that we could understand and communicate them to others. He offers guidelines. They're not strict rules that you can apply absolutely. They are helps. They are suggestions.

What do the rules help us do? They first help us notice what God is doing within us. Most of what God does within us, we don't notice because we are busy about many things. We don't reflect on what's going on inside ourselves. So the rules help us notice. What are we noticing? We are noticing the interior movements or motions of our heart, our thoughts, the reasonings that we have, our images that go through our head, the kinds of feelings that we have: peace, sadness, openness. We want to notice these and understand these movements so we can accept the good ones, the ones that lead us to God, and reject the bad ones, the ones that lead us away from God.

Where did Ignatius get these guidelines? Did he find them in a book somewhere? No. He got them by reflecting on himself. And that's the amazing thing. The genius of Ignatius was that he had an incredible self-knowledge and self-awareness and the ability to articulate what happened inside him. His understanding of discernment was born in the castle of Loyola. While he was recovering from his wounds, he only had two books to read. He had the *Lives of the Saints* and the *Life of Christ*. He used to daydream all day long of being a great knight and winning the hand of a lady. Then he read the *Life of Christ* and imagined being with Christ and being a knight of God. After several months he began to notice something. Whenever he reflected on being a great knight and winning the hand of a lady, he felt terrific. But when it was over, he felt sad and empty. When he read the *Life of Christ* or the *Lives of the Saints* and thought about being Francis or Dominic and following Jesus, he felt at peace when he stopped. He was filled with joy and enthusiasm. Finally he noticed that one thing led to sadness, and the other led to joy. What's the difference? What's going on? He began to notice and understand. The same thing happened at Manresa and finally in Rome when he was trying to make decisions about the Society of Jesus. Discernment is about noticing patterns in ourselves and the movements within our hearts.

Ignatius speaks of the promptings of the good spirit and the evil spirit. The good spirit is God, working within us. It is the Holy Spirit moving within us. It is the healthy affections that we have in our lives. But he also talks of an evil spirit. Now what is that? We could go into a long theological discourse on the evil spirit, but what he is talking about is any force within us that takes us away from God. It may be what we interiorize from the environment. It may be our sub-conscious. It may be a personal force of evil. It's that voice inside us that says, "Just roll over Sunday morning. You need a little more rest. You don't need to go to church today." You hear those voices sometimes saying, "Go ahead and take the sixth Krispy Kreme donut. Five is okay; six isn't going to make a difference." We have those voices inside us that can lead us astray. That's the evil spirit, whatever source you want to give to it.

There is a lot of discussion of the theological underpinnings of these guidelines. But the guidelines he gives us, and he gave them 450 years ago, really describe what happens in people's experience. Why are people still using these rules 450 years later? For a simple reason: they work. Whatever the theological underpinnings, they work. They describe something inside us that goes on. As you read them, and we don't have time now obviously to go through all his rules for discernment, on one level they are just good common sense. On another level they give us wise guidance for following God's call.

Let me give you a few examples. Ignatius says, for example, that when we are trying to draw closer to God and become more holy, prayerful, and loving, the good spirit is going to encourage us to keep going. That little voice inside of us says we are doing a great job.

On the other hand, the voice of evil will try to discourage us, will raise objections, and tell us it is too hard. Ignatius had the wonderful example when he was at Manresa. He was praying seven hours a day, he was going to church, he was talking about God with everybody, and he was just feeling wonderful about his new life. Then this little voice came into his head and said, "This is really pride. You think you're holier than everybody else. Do you really think you can keep doing this for the rest of your life? Do you really think 10 years from now you're going to be doing this? This is crazy. Give it all up. Throw it over. Go back and be a knight." He kept hearing this voice inside him, this pull inside him to say this is crazy. But he finally realized that this voice was not from God. So he finally stood up and said: "I can't promise I'll do this 10 years from now. All I can promise is that I'll do it tomorrow and the next day and the next day." When he stood up to the voice, it would sort of dissipate.

So he knew that there were movements in our hearts that would try to turn us from God if we are moving toward God. On the other hand, if we are going away from God and doing things that are not very loving and caring of other people, the evil spirit is going to encourage that. “Go ahead, take the next donut.” The evil spirit is going to keep encouraging us to move away from God. The good spirit is going to encourage us to move toward God and stir up our conscience when we move away from God. So Ignatius says you have to notice the direction of your life. If you’re moving toward God, the good spirit is going to encourage it. The evil spirit is going to try and divert you from that. If you’re going away from God, then the evil spirit is going to try and encourage that; and the good spirit is going to try to turn you around and get you going the other way.

That’s where he begins. You’ve got to figure out where your life is moving to know how the good and evil spirits work within you. Ignatius then gives us a whole set of rules for what to do when we are in desolation. Desolation is sadness, a sense that God is far away, a lack of hope. It is a time when we’re kind of at the bottom of the barrel. We’re not at peace. We’re filled with doubts. We begin to say, “I wonder if this makes any sense.” Ignatius says that’s going to happen. Anybody who is trying to move towards God is going to experience that at moments in his or her life. Don’t be surprised. He was never surprised when it happened to someone making the *Exercises*.

Ignatius gives advice or guidelines for when we are in desolation. The first advice is: Don’t make a major life change. Don’t set a new direction for your life, because when you are in the bottom of the pit, the voice you’re going to hear is the voice of the evil spirit, not the good spirit; and it will lead you astray. That’s why people sometimes make bad decisions in their life. They are in that sort of depressed or desolate state, and out of that they make a choice. And it’s a bad choice.

I have to tell this story because I love this story of how the rules work. I was teaching these rules to undergraduates years ago, and we went through the rules in much more detail. I explained the rule about not making a major decision in a time of desolation. I assured the students that everyone in the room would break this rule at some time in his or her life, perhaps many times. Why do we make decisions when we are at the bottom of the barrel? Because we don’t like that feeling. So we figure we have got to change something radically, and then we will feel better. As the story goes, I taught this class on a Friday, and on Monday this student bounds into my office. Susan was her name. She came bounding into my

office and said, "They work! They work! They work, Fr. Fagin. They work!" I said, "Calm yourself. What works?" She said, "Those rules you gave us. They work!" I said, "Could you say a little more about this?" She said, "You know after class, after we had those rules about desolation, I went back to my dorm room; and my roommate was packing. She was packing everything. This was the middle of the semester. She's packing everything. I said, 'What are you doing?' She said, 'I'm dropping out of the university. I'm leaving.' I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'I want to be a doctor. I've always wanted to be a doctor. All my life I've wanted to be a doctor. And I just flunked, I mean really badly flunked, organic chemistry. I'm never going to be a doctor. It's never going to happen. And then I'm walking back and feeling terrible, and my boyfriend walks up to me. We've been going together for six months. He walks up to me and says right in the middle of everybody, 'You know I think we should take some time off. There's this other girl I like.' He dumped the girl right there. So she says, 'I've lost my career. I've lost my boyfriend. I'm leaving.'" So Susan, in her great wisdom, said to her, "Don't! Don't do that!" She said, "Don't make a decision in time of desolation." She actually said that to her. Her roommate said, "What are you talking about?" She says, "Here's my advice. Go to Destin for the weekend. Sit on the beach. Enjoy yourself. Relax. Come back on Monday, and then you can make a decision. But don't make it now. Don't make it now. Promise me you won't make it now. You won't drop out of school right now." She said, "Oh, okay." Susan said, "I have a couple of friends who are going to Destin. You can go with them and have a good time."

So she comes back Sunday night from Destin, and there's Susan waiting. She says to Susan, "You know, you were right. First of all, I never really wanted to be a doctor. That was kind of my parents' idea anyways. I really want to study English literature. That's really what I'd like to do. I might change my major." She said, "You know that guy? He was a jerk. I am so glad to be rid of that guy." So she said, "I'm staying at Loyola." And Susan came in and said, "They work! I told her don't make a decision in times of desolation, and she took my advice. It would have been a terrible mistake for her to leave."

Ignatius gave very particular rules. They even work in situations like that. Don't make a decision in the time of desolation. But he says you should try to act against it by praying more, by being more open, by talking to people, by reaching out. There are things you should do when you are in that kind of desolation. Most of all you just have to be patient

because when you're in the pits, there's this feeling, isn't there, that you're never going to get out of this. It's like when you have the flu. You figure, "I'm going to have this the rest of my life. I'm going to die with the flu. It will last forever." There's no sense of the light at the end of the tunnel.

Ignatius also has wonderful images of the evil spirit in our lives. He says the evil spirit is like a military commander. It searches out our weakness, the places that we're most vulnerable; and that is where it attacks. That is where it leads us astray. So we've got to be vigilant. We've got to know what our weakness is because the evil spirit will exploit it.

Another very important rule is that we need to stand up to temptation when it happens. I use this example with the students. You're studying on Friday night, and you say you're really going to work on this paper or prepare for this exam. Then somebody knocks on your door and says, "Let's go down to Fat Harry's and have a good time." And you say: "No. I'm not going to do that. I'm going to work on my paper." They say, "You've got to take some time off. So, come on!" And you say, "No, I'm not. Leave." And so they leave. They say, "The heck with you. I'll find someone else to go to Fat Harry's with."

But if you say, "I don't know. Maybe. Maybe I could take a little time off." Well the next thing you know, the person is in your room, sitting next to you, and saying, "Yeah, that's right. Come on." Before you know it, you're out the door. So when the evil spirit comes, you have to be very strong at the beginning. Otherwise, you're going to lose the battle. So don't be wishy-washy in the beginning.

Finally, another piece of important advice: Ignatius says the evil spirit will always tell you to keep things a secret. Don't tell anyone. If you're in the pits and feeling bad and difficult things are going on, don't talk to anybody. That's not the voice of God. The moment you hear the voice telling you not to tell anyone, you can be sure that is not God's voice. God will always say, "Go to your friends; go to somebody you trust. Talk about things."

These are the kinds of guidelines he gives. And there are some that are much more subtle than that. But all of it is to help us listen to what is going on inside us, to listen to our feelings, to listen to how God is moving in our hearts, and to begin to interpret that. I can assure you that after years of trying to use these rules myself and direct other people with these rules, they work. It is just that simple. They don't work automatically. They don't work with absolute clarity. You can't solve every problem with these rules. But they are helpful guidelines for noticing the movement of

God within our hearts and for interpreting the movements within our hearts to know what leads us towards God.

The Rules for Discernment are one of the great gifts that Ignatius has given to the Christian community for the last 450 years. He was able to articulate his own experience; and then, as he began to direct others, what he found was the same pattern going on in them. He saw the evil and the good spirits working in the same way so that he could name it, so he could point it out, so that others could begin to see it themselves.

Ignatian Methods of Decision-Making

Ignatius saw the discernment of spirits as part of a much broader process of making a decision that would include both objective elements and the more subjective elements of the movements of God within us. So when a person came to a point in the *Exercises* where he or she wanted to make a life choice, a significant life choice, Ignatius suggested certain procedures, certain methods for making a decision. Again he is not concerned with good and evil. He's concerned with a way of making a choice among alternatives that are both good, that both can be in praise and service to God. The question is: What is God calling me to? Is He calling me to be a priest or religious? Is He calling me to married life? Is He calling me to single life? Is He calling me to be a doctor? Is He calling me to be a teacher? He's concerned with those kinds of decisions.

First of all, Ignatius reminds us that we must make all of these decisions in the light of the end for which we were created. He goes back to the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He goes back to what he calls the *Principle and Foundation*. What is the purpose of our life? Why are we here? What is the goal of our life? As I mentioned in the second talk, if you're going to make a decision, it's very important that you put the goal first and then the means. The goal is to praise, reverence, and serve God. The goal is to be a disciple of Jesus. The goal is to live out the Christian life. The question is how I will do that.

Ignatius says that often, when people make decisions, they do it backwards. They say, "I want to do this. Now how can I do this and somehow praise, reverence, and serve God? How can I work the means around to the end?" Ignatius says you have got to start with the end. The end is the purpose of my life, the goal of my life. What does it mean for me to be a disciple? What does it mean for me to love as Jesus loved? That is the most challenging line, I think, in all of Scripture. "Love one another as I have loved you." Jesus said that to the disciples. "Love one another as

I have loved you.” What could be more challenging? That makes the Golden Rule look like a piece of cake. That is a love of altruism and self-sacrifice. That’s my goal. That’s my norm for Christian choice. Ignatius wants us to reflect first on why I am here and what is the purpose of my life. Then in the context of that, I choose the best means to get there.

Ignatius then talks about three times when you can make a decision. These are not completely separate. They overlap, and they double back and forth; but he presents them separately.

The first, and this is wonderful when it happens, is when you’re trying to make a decision, and it’s just very clear. You don’t have any doubt. This is what you’re supposed to do. This is what God is calling you to do. I know this. I have real clarity about it. I have real peace about it. I’m very confident that this is what I’m supposed to do. This is Matthew sitting at his little tax table, and Jesus walks up and says, “Come follow me.” Matthew doesn’t need to discern that. When Jesus says, “Come follow me,” it’s very clear. Paul gets knocked to the ground, and the voice comes from heaven, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He didn’t have to discern that. This is pretty clear. So there are moments when decisions are clear, and we just know in our deepest hearts this is the right thing. This is what I should do. There’s a certain clarity, a certitude about it. There’s a sense that this is what I’m called to do at this moment in my life. We are always hoping for and looking for that kind of clarity.

But Ignatius says that what happens more often is that we find ourselves conflicted. We find ourselves pulled in different directions. Something sounds like a good idea, and then it does not. First one choice seems better and then another. We feel pulled back and forth. That’s when we need the rules for discernment. That’s when we need some guidelines to help us listen to what is going on in our hearts so that we can discover what’s taking us to God and what’s taking us away from God.

Ignatius expected that most people making significant life decisions would be in some conflict. He says to the director of the *Exercises*, “If someone is bouncing off the walls, first in consolation, and then in desolation, don’t worry about it. Just work with them. The only people you have to worry about are the people in whom nothing is happening. They’re just dead in the water.” He expected us to move from consolation to desolation. When we are trying to make a significant decision, the good and evil spirits will be at work. I think of a man who went on a retreat; and, during the retreat, he felt a call to be a permanent deacon. The seed was planted in his heart at that time. He spent months going back and

forth with it. One moment saying, “Yes, that is what God wants me to do.” Then questions arose about what this would do to his family. How much time he would be away from his home. Back and forth. He was at peace at one moment about it, and then doubts would arise. It took him a long time to sift through what was going on in his heart so he could finally come to some peace.

So the first time is absolute clarity. The second time is when all of the conflicting feelings are going on. The third time Ignatius talks about making a decision is when we are basically at peace, basically tranquil. It’s not that nothing is happening. It’s just that there are no strong movements one way or the other. When that happens, we’re thinking more clearly; and we can use our reason and our imagination. We are at balance. We’re open. We can honestly ask God, “Where do you want me to go? What are you asking me to do?”

If you are in that state, Ignatius gives two suggestions. One is a more rational approach. First ask God to help you. Bring the decision before God. Try to be at equilibrium. And then you simply write down the pros and cons. You write down what are the reasons for one option and what are the reasons against it. Then you consider the other alternative. What are the reasons for it, and what are the reasons against it? Sit there and look at it rationally. It’s amazing how that can clarify things. I’m sure many of you have done that when you were trying to make a decision. We are always bouncing from one reason to another. Write them down, and then look at them. Then pray with them. What is the thing that decides where I should go? But it’s much more a case of using our head.

The other thing he suggests is to use your imagination. He gives you a couple of techniques to do that. These are just techniques. They are not written in stone. Just pick the one that helps you. First, Ignatius asks, “If you have to make a very serious decision, imagine your friend coming to you with that same decision and saying, ‘Gee, I don’t know what to do. Should I do this or should I do that?’ What advice would you give to your friend?” It’s to get you to step back and be more objective. “I’d tell my friend that this is the right choice.” Ignatius suggests maybe that’s the right choice for you, too. Often we are great at giving advice to other people. We give good advice, but we’re terrible at giving it to ourselves. So Ignatius says, “Imagine someone else coming to you, and what advice would you give them? Listen to that.” That is one technique.

Another one which is a little more sobering is to imagine yourself on your deathbed or at the day of judgment when you are standing before

God. Which choice would you wish you had made? He is trying to take you away from just the satisfaction of the moment so you can look at the big picture and ask, Where is God calling me? When I come to my deathbed and look back at my life, I'm probably going to say I wish I had made that choice. It seems to be the more loving, the more giving, the more caring choice. I'm going to feel much better if I have made that decision. That's another important thing to look at in terms of making your decision.

Now any important decision has to include, in a sense, all of these methods. The genius of Ignatius was that, in giving all these different methods, he is calling on your feelings, all these movements going on inside your heart. He calls on your reason in asking you to reflect on the pros and cons. He calls on your imagination: you imagine all these different scenarios. Ignatius believes that if you want to make a good decision, you do it as a whole person. You don't just do a head trip, figure it out rationally and go about it. You don't just follow your feelings, and you don't just follow your imagination. All of them need to work together. Without even being conscious of it himself, what he was saying was, "Use every part of yourself to make a good decision and use wherever you are at that moment. Use what's most effective for you."

He gives these methods to a director and says, "These are your tools. Share them with the person in the way that will help that person." So with some people, you may really want to focus on the imagination. To other people, the reason is much more important. They are thinkers who really need to look at the pros and cons. Other people really need the affective side. In the end, we all need all parts of ourselves.

The one thing he then says, and this is the important thing, is that once you have made a decision, bring the decision to God. It's what he calls confirmation. This is the step that most people skip. You make a decision. You feel so relieved that you have made a decision that you don't want anybody to question it. You don't want to tell anybody about it. You just want to do it. If you go to your friend, your friend might say you made a dumb decision. You don't want to hear that. I've made a decision. I feel much better. I hate this state of indecision. I've made a decision.

Ignatius invites us to take our decision to God. He even says, take it to the foot of the cross and say, "Lord this is what I've decided to do. How do you feel about it?" Can you be at peace presenting this decision to God? Can you feel that this was the loving thing to do? This is what I'm really happy with? Can I look at the infinite love of God and say this is the

decision that I'm comfortable with? Confirmation is a very important part of the decision-making process. It is asking God to really affirm the decision I've made in prayer. Can I be at peace with this, now that I've made this decision? Can I walk with this in faith and feel good about it?

Let me briefly lay out what I think are the elements of a good decision, and then one final reflection before we leave these five weeks.

To make a good decision, Ignatius would say, and this is kind of pulling together all the methods into one, the first thing you need to do is pray. Listen. By prayer I don't mean, "God help me. God help me. God help me." But listen. Bring an open heart before God. Listen to the spirit. Ask for the grace to be open and hear God's call in your life.

Secondly, if you want to make a good decision, get good information about the various options. Know the facts and implications of these facts. Also, know what the alternatives are. Sometimes we're torn between two things, and there is a third way that somehow has the values of both. So gather the information.

The third thing, and this is where the discernment of spirits comes in, reflect on your own affective responses in relationship to God. Notice, interpret, reflect on the feelings of peace, the lack of peace, the feeling of joy, the lack of joy, the feelings that increase our faith, the ones that darken our faith. Reflect on all that, and then weigh the options, the pros and cons. We have Ignatius' diary when he was trying to make a decision about something about the Jesuits. Every morning he was having extraordinary mystical experiences, but he also sat down and wrote all the pros and cons. He saw that as part of the decision. It is necessary to balance our heads and our hearts. It's not just the feelings. It's not just the thoughts. But it's somehow all of them put together.

Then the final step is what we just talked about: confirmation, bringing the decision to God. So pray, get good information, listen to the spirit moving in your heart, use your head to decide the pros and cons, make a decision, and bring it to God for confirmation. An easy six-step process on how to make a decision.

It is not automatic. It's not like you put it in one end and turn the crank and out comes a decision. It's a process. There is a lot that goes into that process, and we may not come to absolute certitude. There's still mystery in it. We make the best decision we can make given the time we have. Ignatius was concerned about action. He was concerned about how to live out of the experience of being loved, of being forgiven, of being called by God. He does not have a magic method. There is no method

that leads to absolute certitude. What Ignatius offers us is the wisdom of his own experience, what he learned from his own life and from dealing with others: the way that God shapes the human heart, the way that God reveals to us God's hopes and dreams for us, the belief and the trust that God will finally lead us the way that God wants us to go, and that we will finally discover, and, this is important, that the deepest desires of our hearts are the deepest desires of God's heart. We will not get to our deepest desires and discover that God has radically different desires. The struggle is to get to those deepest desires and live them out. Because if we do, that's when we find peace; and we know that we've heard God's call.

So that's a little bit about Ignatian discernment and decision making. I hope it is some help in reflecting on how we do make Christian decisions.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this lecture series with one final reflection. Last week, I was talking to a few people after the talk, and they raised a question. I think it is a really important question, so I wanted to end on this.

A few people commented that Ignatius puts before us a daunting task. He wants us to come to freedom so we can hear God's call and respond to it in total generosity. He wants us to surrender to God in everything in absolute trust. He wants us to find God in our lives each day. He wants us to follow Christ in His suffering and death. That seems pretty daunting, doesn't it? I mean, Ignatian spirituality is supposed to be for people who live in the world each day in the midst of human demands of family, work, and everyday responsibilities. Is what Ignatius asks realistic? Is this some ideal that is so far beyond us that we'll never be able to understand it or achieve it? You have the feeling sometimes that you are asked to do a pole vault, and Ignatius has put the bar at 12 feet when you have a six-foot pole. You say, "I'm sorry. I just can't do that. It's impossible. It's a nice ideal, but what does it have to do with my life?" My answer would be that it has everything to do with our lives. Ignatius does offer an ideal, one that we will never fully achieve in this life; but more important, he offers us a direction. He offers us a process. What he describes is a Christian journey that leads to life and to happiness. It is a call to freedom. It is a call to discipleship. It is a call to share in the saving event of the dying and rising of Jesus. It's a call to mission in the midst of the world.

What Ignatius describes for us is God's desire for us, God's hope for us, God's dreams for us, a dream to lead us from freedom to love to life. What Ignatius describes is what our hearts long for, the deepest desires of our

hearts, the fulfillment of the restlessness of our hearts, a restlessness that leaves us always wanting more.

No one can ever say, “I have finished the *Spiritual Exercises*.” If you have any doubt about that, think of the Jesuits you know. All the Jesuits have made the *Exercises* twice for 30 days in solitude. So the *Exercises* do not work perfectly, as you can see. They are a work in process in everyone’s life. We’re always struggling to be free, to love, and to follow Jesus more closely. We’re always struggling to let go. We’re struggling to surrender to God. That’s the story of our lives. What Ignatius describes shouldn’t discourage us. Our temptation is to lose heart. The *Exercises* are an invitation to grow into who we are called to be. We walk this journey in humility and hope because we know in the end it’s not going to be our achievement. It is going to be the work of God’s grace within us. It is God’s work, and that’s where we put the trust. We walk the journey of humility and hope because no matter how halting our steps or how many detours we take or side roads we travel, we know that this is the road that leads to the goal of our lives and the deepest desires of our hearts.

What Ignatius offers is not so much an ideal. It’s an invitation. The invitation of Jesus to follow, to always strive for what Ignatius called *magis*, always striving for more, always trying to grow more. We need not worry about an impossible ideal put before us, if each day we strive with God’s help to be more free, more grateful, more generous, more loving, more in tune with the heart of Jesus. If we strive each day to be more attentive and more responsive to God in our lives, that’s what he invites us to. That’s God’s hope for us, and I truly believe that it is the deepest desire of our hearts.

Discussion Questions:

What have I learned through these five talks that I can apply to my life?

How do I discover God’s hopes and dreams for me?

How do I make decisions rooted in faith?

Other Resources:

Maureen Conroy. *The Discerning Heart*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1993.

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The Rev. Gerald M. Fagin, S.J.

The Rev. Gerald Fagin, S.J., holds the position of associate professor of systematic theology in the Institute for Ministry at Loyola University New Orleans. He is also the co-director of the Institute for Spiritual Direction for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. He holds a licentiate in theology from St. Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and a doctorate in systematic theology from St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto, in Toronto, Ontario. Fr. Fagin has a deep understanding of the *Spiritual Exercises* and of Ignatian spirituality, gained from years of study and teaching, providing spiritual direction for people, and personal prayer and reflection. He is extremely fond of chocolate chip cookies and chocolate ice cream, although now he eats mostly the sugar-free variety.



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