



IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY IN DIALOGUE

“The greatest of these is love.”

1 Cor 13:13

- **The Journey Began**

*What do we do
when we go through
the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius?*



• The Journey Began

- What do we do through the Exercises of St. Ignatius?
- We go on a journey where we allow ourselves to be found by God.
- The Exercises offer us a way of looking critically and lovingly at ourselves, and offer us choices of how we wish to be present to our world.
- The illusions we accept to be ourselves are taken away in *the First Week*.
- We find our true life in *the Second Week*.
- In *the Third Week* this life stands the test of death.
- In *the Fourth Week* we are liberated from the power of death for the service of the Divine Mystery.



• The Importance of Reflection



LONDON
JESUIT
CENTRE

- For Ignatius, then, reflecting on what we do or have done is essential; it is the only way of keeping hold of the gift of our lives.
- *Prayer Preparation – Contemplation – Examination of Experience*
- These three stages are all part of Ignatian prayer, but each has its own style and mode of operating.
- Each builds on the previous stage, and the final stage completes the prayer experience. Avoiding that stage causes God's communication with us to be incomplete.
- The overview is a necessary part of the prayer experience, our encounter and communication with God.
- When we reflect on what we have been and are given, we discover how God communicates with us. This is individual personal, and intimate. No one else can teach us that language. It is the language of lovers.



• Our Personal Worlds

- God's mercy not only enters our human world, it enters each of our unique and personal worlds. We each live in a world that is shaped by our personal experiences, and no two people's experiences are alike.
- We live in imagined worlds, and the imagined is real. We may share a communal imagination, but each of us has a private imagination that is a unique composite of the diverse elements of the communal world.
- What we imagine is maintained by the stories we live out of. The imagined is a constructed world of texts. These are narratives that range from the genetic codes that name us through individual and family stories, to the cultural histories that situate us in the bigger world.



• Our Personal Worlds

- When we engage in an Ignatian retreat, the conversions we experience move us from one way of reading ourselves, others, God, and the world, to another way. This occurs through yet another text that we call *the Spiritual Exercises*.
- The Exercises enable us to examine the stories we tell ourselves and others to hold onto our imagined worlds, but they also help us see the lies and deceptions these stories embody. This is not to leave us without any stories. We need stories to live.
- The Exercises offer us a way of restoring our lives in such a way that the new stories we find free us and our imaginations.



• Our Personal Worlds

- These constructed worlds we live in are real to us. They affect how our energies and are manifested or repressed, known or unknown. The way we understand our very being has been informed by these stories.
- So how we read ourselves, the world and others, including God, is a constructed text that, being distorted, distorts our reading. God sees us as lovable and capable of even the most self-sacrificing love. This is the story given to us in the sacred texts of human history. The one Ignatius uses is the Bible.
- In the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises, these two stories meet. In the plot of the Exercises, the story changes as we journey through the Weeks.



• Our Personal Worlds

- The lies that we have accepted as real and that have shaped our lives are uncovered and their abusive power is broken ...
- ... so we can enter a new story in which we journey with Christ through his birth, life, death, resurrection and return to the Father.
- In that journey we discover that our story is a contemporary manifestation of the Gospel. Our personal story becomes symbolic of the larger story of salvation. To appreciate fully that almost unbelievable gift of salvation, we have to see what has happened to us in our spiritual journey.
- We do this by looking at the experience, the dynamics, and the way the graces we prayed for came to us during the Four Weeks of the Exercises.



• I: Discovering God

- *Understanding Ourselves*
- Ignatius asks us in the First Exercise of the First Week to meditate on a particular telling of creation history. We may not approve of the way the myth depicts creation history, but it does contain valuable insights into our self-understanding.
- *Exploring Our Blindness*
- Only when we see how trapped we are by forces that are larger than us and beyond our control can we begin to realize that we have not been destroyed by the malignant agencies in creation. We have been protected by a love that is even larger than cosmic and human evil.
- *Love Offered and Accepted*
- The dynamics of the First Week deconstruct the story of self and the illusions of that false self. Those illusions consist of the way we see ourselves, others, the world, creation and God. The deconstructions work by bringing to light what has previously been ignored or taken for granted in the false story.



• II: Discovering Ourselves

- *Looking at the World God's Way*
- In the First Week, we operated out of a limited context of fallen creation; in the Second Week, the story broadens. The movement is from the world perceived in worldly terms to that same world perceived from heaven; from the narcissistic projections of the ego to the humble service of one called to be an intimate companion of Christ.
- *Following God More Closely*
- The emerging story of those who engage in the Ignatian Exercises is one of service done out of such an intimacy with Christ that it overflows in acts of a contemplative love. Their actions in the world are read in the manifestations of the Divine Will. They embody in their particular ways the creativity of a God labouring in the world. This human labouring is modelled by the scriptural life of Christ.



• II: Discovering Ourselves



- *Choosing a Standard*
- When we enter areas of personal vulnerability we find ourselves tugged by conflicting feelings. These Ignatius describes as the Standard of Satan and the Standard of Christ. The Standard of Satan is to covet riches – by using our supposed strengths to overcome that vulnerable situation, the more easily to attain the empty honours of this world, [and so] come to overweening pride (#142). This approach reinforces our narcissism. The Standard of Christ, on the other hand, invites us to accept our poverty in the face of that vulnerability, knowing that such a position means rejecting – and being rejected by – the corrupt values of this world. From this approach springs humility (#146).



• II: Discovering Ourselves



- *The Three Classes*
- This process is reinforced by a self-awareness that emerges from the Two Standards and intensified by a reflection on the Three Classes of People and the Three Degrees of Humility. The latter two Exercises, which follow immediately after the one on the Two Standards, develop the stance of going against selfish desires. They promote a desire for poverty because Christ was poor and, from that identification with Christ, to a similar humble evangelical service in the world. Active entry into that servant poverty that the Scripture depicts as the Passion of Christ happens in the Third Week.



• III: Walking with God

- *The Ignatian Magis*
- In the Third Week we imagine the torture and death of the physical body of Christ, and enter into some kind of identification with him through our contemplation of the scripture texts that deal with his trials and death.
- What are we to do? How are we to describe the response of the those in the Third Week? Think of what happens to you when you are present at the dying of someone you love. After awhile there are no words, no story, even no feeling. Emotion does not necessarily have to express itself in feeling. Instead there is numbness, blankness, a growing sense of meaninglessness of what might be considered socially appropriate at that time. There is an erasure of all forms of human comfort and connection. There is simply the waiting in mystery. What remains is a radical simplicity oriented to the one Jesus calls “Abba.”



• III: Walking with God

- *Shame and Confusion*
- Those involved in the Third Week are instructed to beg for “shame and confusion,” which we experience when the self dissolves into mystery. This is not the shame and confusion that come in the First Week with a true awareness of ourselves as sinners. How, then, are we to understand this shame and confusion that is the grace of that Third Week? The shame and confusion occur because we are breaking taboo. When Christ broke taboos, the social texts of belonging – by not washing, breaking the Sabbath, consorting with the impure, calling himself the Son of God, cleansing the Temple – he is doing it in response to a higher value: his calling as the Beloved of the Father. But while this higher value radically relativizes the norms of the social and religious order and displaces their claim to legislate the Absolute, the “lower” powers assert their authority in destroying him physically.



• III: Walking with God

- *From Death to Life*
- The The Third Week, then, is the passage through the death of self. In that passage the understanding of death is inverted so that the implicate order becomes explicate. Death is revealed to be not the end of life but a transition to that mystery beyond its power that absorbs and transforms its meaning. Thus, the meaning of sacrifice we encounter here is both “to kill by offering up” and “to make holy” at the same time. In God’s merciful love for all of humanity, what has been laid waste by the powers of the world survives beyond that world. In that human passion we enter a love that risks death.



• IV: Celebrating Life

- *A New Way of Being*
- Resurrection is not something we can journey to; it is something that comes to us. We can choose the way we live, and thus create the way we approach death, but death defines the limits of human endeavour. It is only the power of God that transforms the meaning of death for us, and only the power of God that controls what happens after death. So resurrection remains a mystery. All we can do is reflect prayerfully on the stories of resurrection given to us. In doing so, we open ourselves to the power those stories point to and describe. That power breaks into our world to transform the way we imagine ourselves, others and God.



• IV: Celebrating Life

- *Renewing Creation*
- As we participate in the gifts of the Fourth Week by accepting the gift Christ shares with us, we become resurrection sites for others. We experience the power of God moving through our brokenness to create Incarnation in our lived world. This emptiness is the necessary condition for the power of resurrection to become manifest through us. Awareness of our emptiness never goes away; it shows us that the grace in action of the Fourth Week is pure gift, a manifestation of God's mercy and not our intrinsic right. We remain broken, even in our joy, just as the Christ, in his resurrection, still bears the scars of his passion.



- **IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY**
in Dialogue
with Film Industry



Can I see Ignatian Spirituality in dialogue with film?

If so, why?

If not, why not?

