



Exploring Ignatian Spirituality: Live, Work, Love the Ignatian Way

Week 9 Consoling Joy

**In preparation for this session, please read:
David Fleming SJ, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?*
recap Chapter 15 (Seeking the grace of compassion) and read Chapter 17
(Working with Others) & - pp. 83-87,95-99.**

Love is stronger than death. How can we offer the consolation of Christ to others?

Death is not the end of the journey

In last week's session we journeyed with Jesus through His Passion and death. We saw him laid in the tomb and the entrance secured with a large rock. We have experienced compassion for Jesus and perhaps a greater awareness of the many ways we have failed to show love. While this may be very uncomfortable for us these feelings speak of a refining of our sensitivity to God's love. We hold Jesus' ultimate gift of love, the giving up of his life for us and at the same time his forgiveness for all our sins, shortcomings and failings.

Q. As I ponder Jesus limitless love for me, how do I desire to respond?

We can try to imagine how Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and the disciples felt after the death and burial of Jesus. After the burial, perhaps we stayed with them as they pondered his death. We may have sensed all was lost on Good Friday, but the empty tomb signals something extraordinary has happened and speaks to us of hope and that hope gives way to joy in the resurrected Jesus, who lives again. Jesus appears many times to his disciples and in various different situations. We can imagine their joy at the presence of Jesus in their midst.

Q. What do I do with feelings of emptiness and loss?

Q. What does being powerless in a situation lead me to do? Who do I turn to?

The empty tomb John 20: 1-18

We see Mary Magdalene and the disciples visit the tomb and find it empty, but on seeing the rolled cloth they come to an understanding of Christ's teaching that he must rise from the dead. While the disciples return to their homes Mary Magdalene waits and looks again for Jesus. We notice Mary's persistence in the face of the empty tomb and her deepest desire to find Jesus. While Mary Magdalene exhibits great faith and persistence in seeking Jesus, we are struck by the fact that Jesus calls her by name. This is a personal encounter with the Risen Christ. "They left the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell the disciples". We notice that the joy the women experience is shared with the disciples. It is a joy that is outward looking and we too are called to be part of and share in this joy. We are called to be with and console others who face the empty tomb and await the consolation of Jesus.

Q. How does it feel to be invited to participate in and share this joy?

Q. Jesus appeared many times, can you name them? Do you have a favourite appearance of Jesus? Does it speak to you?

The Road to Emmaus Luke 24: 13-28

Jesus' appearance to his other disciples evokes emotions of deep-felt joy. As Jesus joined the disciples walking towards Emmaus, they share with him all that has happened in Jerusalem and though they have heard from the women that he was alive, they are sad and despondent. We notice Jesus' unhurried presence illuminating the scriptures for them. It is as they gather that evening, when they are at table and he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them that they recognise him. But he has vanished from their sight. The disciples move from a place of sadness to one of "did not our hearts burn within us", and they respond in action by immediately returning to Jerusalem.

Q. How do I respond when I am in consolation?

The appearance on the shores of Galilee John 21: 1-19

The apostles went back to their work of fishing following the death and burial of Jesus. We can imagine their tiredness after a night of fishing and failing to catch anything. Jesus is on the shore and calls to them to put out their net to the other side where they receive a large catch. We notice Peter's response when 'the disciple Jesus loved' said to Peter, "It is the Lord", Peter's instant response is to jump into the water and hasten to the shore to meet Jesus. We sense Peter's love of Jesus in this action of joy.

Q. How does it feel to find Jesus waiting for you?

Imagine how Peter felt after denying Jesus three times and yet it is to Peter and the disciples that Jesus returns to console them. We notice that Jesus returns to console rather than remind Peter of his denial. Three times he asks Peter, "Do you love me?" We witness Peter's reply 'yes' and Jesus entrusts his people to Peter to look after and shepherd and to follow Jesus. Jesus consoles. Peter is fully aware that he is forgiven and has a deeper awareness or a 'sharpening sensitivity' to God's love for him. Peter is called to live out this joy of consolation and service in and for others. It is a consolation that is outward looking and a joy that seeks expression in actions as well as words.

Q. Do I feel called to console and serve Jesus in serving others?

Doubting Thomas John 20: 19-29

Again and again we see Jesus returning to console his friends. We may feel sympathy for Thomas who was absent when Jesus visited the eleven disciples. Thomas finds it difficult to believe. Jesus understands this human frailty and appears again to the disciples when Thomas is present. Jesus invites Thomas to see his hands and place his finger in his side and to believe. We see this meeting as a very personal and consoling encounter, Jesus meeting Thomas in his doubt. Thomas is moved to respond "My Lord and my God". This is a joy that makes the love of the risen Christ the core of our existence. It is this love that orientates us to the service of others, to be a true follower of Jesus.

Q. Are there areas in my life where I am called to console others and bring to them the joy of life in Jesus?

Death is not the end of the journey

You may have your own favourite scripture encounter between Jesus and the disciples following the resurrection. We seek to enter into the joy and consolation of Jesus in the victory of his risen life. This is an unselfish joy we ask for, a joy because Christ our risen Lord has come through terrible suffering and death to rise again with new more abundant, more extraordinary life. We notice how in the resurrection passages the divine nature of Jesus which in the passion seemed to go into hiding, now in the resurrection appearance is there to be rejoiced in. Also, we notice that in these appearances we meet Jesus the consoler, consoling his friends. In meeting the grieving, weeping Mary Magdalene Jesus gives her joy, a joy that is active. She is to pass on the good news to the disciples. From now on Jesus is to be present to them but he will be 'sitting at the right hand of the father, interceding for them and for us.'

Q. Jesus the consoler is there for me. How do I desire to respond to the consoling presence of Jesus?

The joy of the resurrection

The joy of the resurrection brings courage and strength. There is something in the experience of encounter with the risen Christ that changes the disciples. There is a movement out of themselves which will lead to the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth and the formation and growth of the Church. It is the same for us. We too are called to live the joy and consolation of the resurrection. If we allow it, Christ can console us, free us, so that we can collaborate in the building of his Kingdom.

Q. Is my faith and hope in the risen Christ the foundation of my peace and happiness even though my life continues to have struggle and suffering as part of it?

Q. How does my faith and hope in the resurrection help me to be more compassionate and understanding of the struggles of people within the Church?

Praying with Resurrection Poems

The Flower

Who would have thought my shrivelled heart
Could have recovered greenness? It was gone
Quite underground, as flowers depart
To feed their mother-root when they have blown;
where they together
All the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of Power,
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell
And up to heaven in an hour;
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.
We say amiss,
This or that is;
Thy word is all, if we could but spell.
George Herbert (1593-1633)

Thou shalt know him when he comes,
not by any din of drums –
nor the vantage of airs-
nor by anything he wears,
Neither by his crown-
nor his gown.
For his presence known shall be
by the holy harmony
that his coming makes in you
Fifteenth Century, Anon.