

### The Fourth Week [218-237]

In his book *Becoming Who You Are*, Fr. James Martin makes an observation that I believe is pertinent as we make the transition from the Third to the Fourth Week:

“I’ve always wondered if Jesus knew for certain that he would be raised from the dead. Now, I may be completely wrong, but I think that while Jesus lived his life in perfect faith, and trusted that something wonderful would come from his acceptance of his mission and his obedience to his Father – as it always had in the past – he did not know precisely what this would mean.

“There are indications of this in the Gospels. Even while he hung on the cross, though freely giving himself to his mission, he cried out in pain and confusion, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matthew 27:46).

“For me, this possible ignorance of his own future makes his acceptance of the reality of his human life more meaningful. He trusted God so completely that he knew that by becoming his true self, even in the midst of unimaginable suffering, he would somehow bring new life to others. And perhaps even Jesus didn’t know what this new life would be, until the morning of that first Easter, when his true self was finally revealed in all its splendor and glory. It’s wonderful to think that even he was surprised at the new life given him by God. Perhaps it was only then that in Elizabeth Johnson’s beautiful phrase, ‘his ultimate identity burst upon him with all clarity.’” (p. 69)

Perhaps Jesus was surprised – by Joy! – on Easter morning.

The focus of the Fourth Week is the Risen Jesus (Jesus’ resurrection is presumed but not contemplated).

Grace: to be united with the Risen Jesus in his joy: a joy he wishes to share. Note: This is not a joy the retreatant tries to make happen; it is a grace for which she should ardently ask. This joy is meant to be more than emotional exhilaration; it is ultimately meant to engage the retreatant’s whole person and draw her out of herself and into God’s service.

#### Risen Jesus:

the ‘consoler’ who strengthens, encourages, comforts and lightens with joy. Note: In the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Risen Jesus vanished when the two disciples recognized him. As he spoke to them on the road, he strengthened them, encouraged them, comforted them, and brought them joy (“Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us on the way?” – Luke 24:32). The Risen Jesus had fulfilled his “mission.”

Note: The Risen Jesus is alive, not with a resuscitated human life such as Lazarus experienced, but with a radically transformed human life: a supernatural reality which does not belong to this world, and in which death no longer has any power over him.

Note: This is not the Jesus who was, but rather the Jesus who is: the Jesus who has entered into an entirely new way of being. Thus, some witnesses do not recognize the Risen Jesus (Luke 24:16; John 20:14; 21:4): “their eyes were prevented from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16). The use of the passive voice indicates that the active agent here is God. Jesus has been radically transformed. The “human” Jesus died on Calvary.

“Do not cling to me” (John 20:17): it is not uncommon for a retreatant to want to “cling” to the Jesus of the Second and Third Weeks and resist encountering the radically transformed Jesus of the Fourth Week.

Suggestion for Prayer: Many of the scripture passages describing a witness’ encounter with the Risen Jesus begin by describing her sorrow and sense of loss over the death of her beloved Jesus – e.g.,

Mary Magdalene in the garden (John 20:11-18), the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), etc. In order to imaginatively contemplate such a passage, it can be particularly helpful for the retreatant to imagine herself as one of these individuals. But, in order to do so, she should first “get into character” by prayerfully immersing herself in that person’s sense of sorrow and loss at Jesus’ death, and only then imaginatively encounter the Risen Jesus and the joy that he wishes to share.

### Contemplation to Attain Divine Love [230-237]

Note: The entire Spiritual Exercises outlines a developmental process to prepare and dispose us to open ourselves to God so that God may act in us and through us, but this is particularly true of the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love. It aims to promote in us an elevation of consciousness (‘interior knowledge’) of how loved we are by God in everything. In realizing this, we can then respond to God in love and service in everything (see pre-notes [230-231]).

The retreat began with our prayerfully immersing ourselves in the truth that we are profoundly loved by God. This, we may realize, has been one of the greatest graces of our entire retreat. The retreat will soon end, but before it does so, Ignatius proposes returning to the subject matter with which it began with the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love. He invites us to observe closely the manner in which God loves so that we might love God in a similarly unconditional and generous way. This is what we should strive for and seek to attain: to love as God loves.

‘to attain divine love’: Our goal is not to obtain or get God’s love – as if we did not already possess it – but rather to attain it: to strive for and reach being able to love in the manner in which God loves us. Some have suggested calling this contemplation, “Loving the Way God Loves.”

The contemplation describes the manner in which God loves.

Goal: to observe closely the way God loves us and then respond by loving God and all creation in a similarly unconditional and generous way.

Contemplation to Attain Divine Love: a contemplation (not a consideration or a meditation, which emphasize thinking). In fact, we should avoid thinking. To contemplate something – a sunset, a star-filled sky, a great work of art, a spider spinning its web – is to see and feel and understand it as God might see and feel and understand it. It is to look upon it with an attitude of openness, acceptance, respect, and reverence. Then after perceiving it in this manner, it is to allow the emotions associated with the experience to gradually rise within us and touch the depths of our person. Contemplation is a simple form of prayer that is meant to:

engage our affections;

arouse in us a sense of wonder and awe, just as we might savor a magnificent sunset;

and ultimately enflame our heart with a greater love of God.

### Pre-Notes [230-231]:

[230]: Love is active: Love is best expressed, not simply in words, but in deeds. It is ultimately revealed, not by what we say, but by what we do. We will thus come to understand and appreciate God’s love for us by being attentive to what God does and to how God acts in our life.

[231]: Love is interpersonal: In love, we give of what we are and of what we have to the beloved.

Love is both active and interpersonal: This mutual sharing reflects the eternal ‘to and fro’ of divine love within the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. O Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi” offers a beautiful example of such love:

Two young people, Jim and Della, are deeply in love with one another. Christmas is approaching and each wants to give a gift to the other that expresses his or her love – but both are very poor. Jim has nothing, except a beautiful gold watch that had been his father’s and grand-

father's. Della has nothing, except her beautiful long hair. As the two meet on Christmas Day to exchange presents, we are surprised that Della's hair is now short, for she has sold her hair to buy a chain for Jim's gold watch. But Jim is without his prized watch, for he has sold it to buy Della a set of combs for her beautiful hair.

The story of Jim and Della tells us, as Ignatius Loyola tells us, that love is both active and interpersonal: love must be expressed in deeds, not simply in words, and in love one gives of what one is and has to the beloved.

First Prelude [232]: "Composition: To see ourselves standing before God our Lord, and also before ["the great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1)] who are interceding for us." We need to approach this majestic prayer, this encounter with God, with great reverence and awe.

Second Prelude [233]: Grace: a deeply personal, heartfelt awareness of how gifted we are by God in everything, so that, stirred by profound gratitude, we may be able to love and serve God in everything.

"everything": not simply the happy and pleasant things of our life, but the painful and difficult things as well, so that we may truly appreciate that "everything works together unto good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

First Point [234]

All creation is a gift from our loving God.

All creation – the sun, the moon, and the stars; the earth, mountains, seas, and plains; plants, trees, fish, animals, and all living creatures; people everywhere and those who comprise every facet of our lives; our body, personality, and intellect; our ability to see, hear, speak, and walk; our food, shelter, clothing, and all that sustains us; and everything that comprises our life and life experience – everything speaks not only of God's great love for us, but of God's desire to give us his very self.

We should not think about these gifts; we should contemplate them just as we might contemplate a magnificent sunset: with the understanding that any word or thought would compromise our experience of the beauty before us. In other words, our contemplation should engage our affections, arouse a sense of wonder, awe, and delight, and enflame our heart with a greater love of God.

As we ponder this, we ask: "What return shall I make to the Lord for all that he has done for me?" (Psalm 116:12), and Ignatius helps us respond by suggesting a prayer of self-offering, the *Suscipe* (pronounced "SUE-she-pay"):

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will – all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all to me. I now return it to you. All is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me only love of you and your grace, for that is enough for me."

"Take, Lord, and receive" involves both:

what we do: we make an offering to God and ask God to take it, and...

what God does: God receives it.

Note: The Lover and the beloved are brought together.

"liberty": our interior freedom: the fullness of our humanity: our offering to God is a total self-offering.

"my memory, my understanding, and my entire will" speak of our past (memory), present (understanding) and future (will or desires); from another perspective, they also speak of all that we are: it is a total self-offering.

“dispose of it according to your will” speaks of our desire to surrender ourselves completely to God: to put ourselves entirely into God’s hands.

“Give me only love of you and your grace” speaks of the mutuality of love: our love for God and God’s love for us, by which we are empowered (by God’s grace) to love God.

Second Point [235]:

God not only gives us everything; God enters into everything and dwells within everything.

In giving us everything, God gives us his very self.

We are thus immersed in a “divine milieu.”

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*Suscipe.*

Third Point [236]:

God is not only present in everything; God is actively laboring in everything to bring us into the fullness of life for which God created us.

In other words, God is actively ‘at work’ in everything for us. Thus, everything is caught up in the redemptive workings of God.

We should not think about these gifts; we should contemplate them just as we might contemplate a magnificent sunset: with the understanding that any word or thought would compromise our experience of the beauty before us. In other words, our contemplation should engage our affections, arouse a sense of wonder, awe and delight, and enflame our heart with a greater love of God.

*Suscipe.*

Fourth Point [237]:

All creation expresses not simply God’s love for us, but God’s very self.

Everything speaks of God and even radiates God because everything flows out of God as “waters stream out of a fountain or rays of light pour out of the sun.”

The object of our contemplation now shifts from the goodness of God toward us to God’s very self, who must be loved and surrendered to simply for who God is. *Suscipe*

Note: Michael J. Buckley, S.J., has pointed out that the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love can be understood as synthesizing the dynamic of the entire Spiritual Exercises.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, it can be viewed as a ‘repetition’ of the entire Spiritual Exercises within a single period of prayer.

First Week vis-à-vis First Point: The First Week opens with creation and human destiny, and then moves through sin (misuse of creation) viewed against God’s great love (Preparation Weeks), and ultimately recognition of our forgiveness. The First Point opens with everything (creation) seen as gifts (of a loving God). We are gifted by God in everything.

Second Week vis-à-vis Second Point: In the Second Week, God does not remain outside what he has created; God enters it. Moreover, in becoming human, the Eternal Son did not cling to his equality with God “something to be grasped; rather, he emptied himself” (Philippians 2:6-7), accepting poverty, insults, and foolishness. The Second Point speaks of God entering into and dwelling within all creation, effecting it to be what it is by his presence.

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1 Michael J. Buckley, “The Contemplation to Attain Love,” *The Way Supplement*, 24 (Spring 1975), 92-104

Third Week vis-à-vis Third Point: In the Third Week, Jesus is depicted in what Ignatius called his “labors,” that suffering which would lead to glory. The Third Point speaks of God laboring in everything, a particularly Ignatian image because it is the foundation of Ignatian discernment.

Fourth Week vis-à-vis Fourth Point: The Fourth Week moves from the Jesus of history to the Jesus who is now Lord and Christ. Jesus is depicted in his personal glory and fulfilment. The Fourth Point moves from the acts of God to their source. What is depicted is not simply an indication of God’s love, but God’s very self.

The first three points of the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love focus on God who is good to us. The fourth point focuses on God who is good in God’s very self: good with the goodness of God’s own reality. The first three points foster gratitude grounded in what God does. The fourth point fosters Joy grounded in who God is.

#### Some Very Helpful Books:

- George A. Aschenbrenner, *Stretched for Greater Glory: What to Expect from the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004)
- William A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1991)
- Anthony de Mello, *Seek God Everywhere: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (New York: Doubleday, 2010)
- John J. English, *Spiritual Freedom: From an Experience of the Ignatian Exercises to the Art of Spiritual Guidance* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1995)
- David L. Fleming, *Like the Lightning: The Dynamics of the Ignatian Exercises* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004; <http://jesuitsources.bc.edu/>)

#### Some Books on the Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life:

- Michael Campbell-Johnson, *In the Midst of Noise: An Ignatian Retreat in Everyday Life* (Barnhart, MO: Liguori, 2010)
- Kevin O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011)
- Carol Ann Smith and Eugene F. Merz, *Moment by Moment: A Retreat in Everyday Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2000)

#### Ignatian Retreats and Prayer Online:

- An Online Retreat: A 34-Week Retreat for Everyday Life (a ministry of Creighton University) <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html>
- Sacred Space: Your Daily Prayer Online (a ministry of the Jesuits of the Irish Province) <http://www.sacredspace.ie/>
- Pray-As-You-Go (a ministry of the Jesuits of the British Province) <http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/home/>
- 3-Minute Retreat (produced by Loyola Press) <http://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer.htm>
- Dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises: a series of ten lectures given by Howard Gray, S.J., at Holy Trinity Parish in Georgetown, Washington, D.C. The lectures provide advanced reflection on the classic text of the Exercises for men and women who serve as guides for men and women making the Exercises. <http://president.georgetown.edu/initiatives/spiritual-exercises.html>