

Ignatian Spirituality and Spiritual Direction

by

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Introduction

The term ‘spiritual direction’ has many meanings today. For the purpose of this paper, I will see spiritual direction as an attempt to help a person to grow in prayerful response to the Spirit. Barry and Connolly offer the following definition in their book *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* :

“We define Christian spiritual direction as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God and to live out the consequences of the relationship”¹.

The role of the director may involve at different times each of the following: prayerful presence, teaching, counsel, waiting with and even challenging. In the process of spiritual direction, the person being directed (the directee) may come to some resolution of life issues or even greater commitment to Christian service. But the primary goal of spiritual direction is first of all the development of a lived relationship with the Lord. The growth desired is an inner one, where the *questions* “*Who is the Lord to me? Who am I to the Lord?*” come to be experienced by the directee, and from this inner knowing comes the living out of the relationship with the Lord. Understanding spiritual direction in this way, my paper seeks to discover how Ignatian spirituality informs the contemporary practice of spiritual direction.

The foundations of Ignatian spirituality are preserved for us in the book of *Spiritual Exercises*, which was completed in 1540. St. Ignatius of Loyola spent some 20 years constructing the book out of his own experience of growing in relationship with the Lord.²

The Exercises embody a forward as well as an inward movement towards the deepening of a person’s relationship with the Lord. Several core elements of the Ignatian tradition, found in the *Spiritual Exercises* can enhance our practice of spiritual direction today. In this paper I will discuss several of these: Ignatius’ rules for directors, the Principle and Foundation, the role of desires in prayer, Ignatian contemplation (as a way to encounter the Lord), the discernment of spirits (including the role of feelings in prayer), and finally what it means to be contemplatives in action.

Ignatius’ Rules for Directors

The Introductory Guidelines to the *Spiritual Exercises* (also called annotations) provide some ground rules for the director of an Ignatian retreat, but I have found these to be just as valuable for ongoing spiritual direction. Ignatius says in the SE

¹ Barry, William A., S.J. and Connolly, William A., S.J., *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (Harper SanFrancisco: 1986) p. 8

² The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius is referred to as *Spiritual Exercises* or SE in this essay. The paragraph numberings and quotations are from the translation by Luis J. Puhl, S.J.

(#15) that a director should be like the balance on a scale, not inclining to one side or the other. This underlines for us the importance of allowing the Spirit to be the true director. The tendency of directors to give answers or opinions before sufficiently exploring the experience of the directee may provide temporary comfort, but will delay the process which Ignatius describes as allowing “*the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature with his Creator and Lord*” (SE # 15). Applying this principle today, we understand that our role as directors is to foster the relationship between the directee and God, not the relationship between the director and directee. In spiritual direction the ‘raw’ material is the directee’s experience (how she encounters God) rather than ideas. Ignatius reminds us that spiritual direction differs from other forms of soul care in which the relationship between the two persons involved plays a more central part. His guidelines also stress flexibility and adaptation to the personal needs and situation of the directee (SE # 6-16). This is good advice for directors today. The *Spiritual Exercises* are not intended to be a rigid project into which every retreatant must fit. Similarly, as directors we should remember that our accompaniment should be sensitive to the directee's concrete experiences.

Principle and Foundation

Ignatius gives us a Principle and Foundation (SE #23) which captures the truth about human existence. The truth of this first principle and foundation however, cannot be experienced merely by the directee reading about it. Several contemporary spiritual directors who work within the Ignatian tradition have written about how this foundational principle can be appropriated in the work of direction. William Barry, S.J. says that,

“As it stands in the *Spiritual Exercises*, the Principle and Foundation is a rather dry theological statement of the reality of the human situation. People often fail to recognise that this set of truths is based not so much on deductions from theological premises as on reflections on lived experience in the light of theology”³

He describes an experience he calls the ‘affective principle and foundation’ for those who are ready to make the *Spiritual Exercises*⁴. By this, he refers to a positive spiritual identity, the experience of being beloved of God. Only when this experience is firmly established will it lead persons to desire to further develop and deepen their relationship with God and to attain the “*end for which we are created, that is to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord*”⁵ SE#23 states in full :

Man is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created.

³ Barry, William A., S.J. *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001) p. 57

⁴ Ibid., p. 72

⁵ SE#23

Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him. Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things. Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.

There are several things we can learn from this. Directees, when they first come to direction, usually come with some desire to grow in their relationship with the Lord, but many a time, they also come without a solid foundation of trust in God's love. Some directees begin without a real trust in God's loving care and providence perhaps due to poor self-image or an image of God as harsh and judgmental. This basic lack can lurk even in people who live fairly committed Christian lives. For example, a directee who comes from a tradition where the intellect is emphasised may be able to say that he knows God loves him, yet, the director may notice that his prayer experiences are somewhat superficial and perhaps overly rational. Just as a retreat director will spend time with a retreatant until this foundation is in place, a director outside the retreat setting would also need to help the directee develop a strong positive spiritual identity. Barry says, "*We have to be willing to take the time and to use our ingenuity to help ourselves and others to have confidence in such experiences of a loving, creative God who invites us into community with the Trinity. These experiences are the firm foundation upon which a developing relationship with God is built*"⁶.

Another contemporary author and director, Thomas Green S.J., gives us a way for directees to appropriate the foundational principle put forward by Ignatius. In the book *A Vacation with the Lord*, Father Green suggests that the foundation can be achieved by seeking, in prayer, "*an experiential knowledge of God's personal love for me as that has been revealed in countless ways throughout my life*"⁷. He also suggests Scripture passages that a person might meditate on in order to experience this grace. In my experience as a director, this is a very useful way to help a directee seek "*knowledge by connaturality*" (a term used by St. Thomas Aquinas), one which touches not only the head but also the heart and will. Ignatian spirituality is a spirituality of the heart – it focuses more on the will and on love than on the intellect and understanding. Ignatius himself says, "*It is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the intimate understanding and relish of the truth*" (SE # 2). Here again we find an emphasis on the experiential aspect of Ignatian spirituality.

⁶ Ibid., p. 73

⁷ Green, Thomas H., S.J. *A Vacation with the Lord*, Revised Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000) p. 31

The Role of Desires in Prayer

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, among the preludes to every meditation or contemplation is the instruction “to ask God our Lord for what I want and desire”. Ignatius was able to see that in any growing relationship, there needs to be honesty and openness. Directees may have a basic trust in the Lord – but may come with complex and ambivalent desires that are hidden behind ‘what I should desire’. If a person becomes aware of his true desires (and even ambivalence) and is able to articulate these to the Lord openly and honestly, we have the makings of an authentic relationship. Barry points out that

“if we do suppress our desires without being satisfied that God has heard us, then, in effect, we pull back from honesty with God... for the sake of the continued development of the relationship, we need to keep letting God know our real desires until we are satisfied or have heard or felt some response”⁸.

He stresses that we cannot use the hard-won wisdom of someone else’s experience to short circuit a similar transparency in our own relationship with the Lord. We find that Ignatius returns to his emphasis on the personal relationship between the directee and the Lord time and again.

Ignatian Contemplation

William Connolly, S.J. has written about the contemplative attitude as the kind of prayerful attitude which directors try to encourage in those who seek direction. “*Since the goal of spiritual direction is a developing and deepening union with God, then the primary task of the director is to facilitate contemplation*”⁹. He uses the word ‘contemplation’ in its etymological sense; the act of looking at or listening to something. William Barry, S.J. also writes about the contemplative attitude. He says,

“To try to contemplate means to try to let the other be himself or herself or itself, to try to be open to surprise and newness. To begin this process means to open oneself to mystery, ultimately to the Lordship of the Other. It is to let oneself be controlled by the Other; paradoxically one finds oneself free”¹⁰.

Giving priority to the contemplative attitude in the directee is not easy. Very often directees who have some religious background pray in ways that are self-absorbed or are focused on obtaining insights. The contemplative attitude is on the other hand a

⁸ Barry, William A., S.J. *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001) p. 34

⁹ Connolly, William A., S.J., *Contemporary Spiritual Direction: Scope and Principles* in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Volume VII, No. 3 (June, 1975), p. 114

¹⁰ Barry, William A., S.J. *The Contemplative Attitude in Spiritual Direction* in *Review for Religious* Volume 35, 1976, p. 822

move from self-absorption to absorption in the Lord. Ignatian spirituality gives us a privileged way to put ourselves before the Lord. This is what we find in Ignatian contemplation of Scripture.

In the Ignatian tradition, imagination plays an important role in prayer. Ignatius did not have a speculative mind; he was not given to abstract thought. Instead, his mind worked more easily with the concrete; with stories, pictures and images. Ignatius learnt from personal experience that God could make use of man's imaginative powers in His encounter with man. Today, the term 'Ignatian prayer' refers to the particular form of imaginative contemplation outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In this form of prayer, the person is asked to contemplate Gospel stories in order to be drawn via the imagination into the world of Jesus. All the senses are brought into play – seeing, hearing, even tasting, touching and smelling, in order to be part of the Gospel story. This is done, not for the sake of the vividness of the imaginative exercise, but in order to meet Jesus – in order that Jesus becomes personally real to the one praying. It is important to note that Ignatius leaves us this method not as an end in itself, but as a way for a person to encounter the Lord in an authentic way. A description of this method can be found in Appendix A together with two examples, which provide a guide for directees.

Ignatius expects that in this form of prayer different levels of feeling and commitment are touched and moved through the imagination. This prayer is not meant to be a form of discursive meditation on abstract truths, but rather a movement of the whole person, and especially of the heart, towards God. Ignatius is particularly concerned that through the imagination a person should be drawn to God in love. In fact, he recommends that the contemplation should include a conversation with the Lord in which the one praying expresses freely the feelings that have been aroused by the contemplation, "*as one friend speaks to another*" (SE # 54). A directee has entered into a contemplative attitude when, "*the Lord readily becomes real for him and he lets himself be completely real with the Lord*"¹¹. This is the crucial turning point in a directee's growth in prayer.

What has this to offer to the ministry of spiritual direction today? I believe that as directors we should be as creative as Ignatius was in supporting people in their use of whatever helps them to meet the Lord in a personal way. Directors can introduce imaginative contemplation to their directees as a way of facilitating the encounter with God (or what Connolly calls the contemplative attitude). The purpose of the prayer is to hear the risen Christ "*address me....as I am, in my own context....and to know that it is the Lord talking to me.*" Ignatius wants the person praying to look at the Lord, to speak with Him. Contemplation for Ignatius is not a technique but a relationship. This form of prayer may be especially helpful for those who come from a tradition that emphasises intellectual knowledge, and whose prayer tends to be formal and overly rational. It would also be helpful for those whose traditions lay much emphasis on Scripture and who would therefore be uncomfortable with trying to contemplate nature, for example. In my experience, Ignatian contemplation also helps to bring to consciousness emotions that have long been buried and even hidden from the person himself. In such cases, the person may be surprised by his reaction to a

¹¹ Connolly, William A., S.J., *Contemporary Spiritual Direction: Scope and Principles* in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Volume VII, No. 3 (June, 1975), p. 114

Gospel scene. The directee is encouraged to speak to the Lord right from where he finds himself emotionally. He speaks out of the joy or pain or sorrow that has surfaced. He articulates whatever need has become conscious. As in any human relationship, honest self-disclosure is essential if growth is sought. At times too, the Lord may use this prayer method to bring about the healing of emotions in a person's life or to deepen some previous healing.

Discernment of Spirits

Another term we find very central to Ignatian spirituality is '*discernment of spirits*'. It has a rich history and was in use long before Ignatius' time, but received new impetus with its re-introduction as part of the *Spiritual Exercises*. '*Discernment of spirits*' may sound like an esoteric and mysterious spiritual discipline but in fact, by exploring the Ignatian '*Rules for the Discernment of Spirits*' (SE #313-336), one realises that it has a wide and helpful application in daily life. These writings on discernment, brief though they are, form one of Ignatius' most valuable contributions to the ministry of spiritual direction. According to Barry, "*His (Ignatius') genius lay in realizing that God can be found in all things, that every human experience has a religious dimension, a religious meaning, for those who want to discover it*"¹². Careful attention to inner experience is a hallmark of Ignatian spirituality. Such attention is necessary if a person wants to recognise and respond to the Spirit's leading.

In this area of discernment of spirits, Thomas Green S.J. reminds directors that "*A good director must be sensitive to her own religious feelings, and have some experience in discerning their origin and meaning*"¹³. In fact, it was in his ordinary life situations that Ignatius began to notice the interior movements in himself, and after reflecting on them was later able to construct his rules for discernment. The earliest of these happened when he was on his sickbed recuperating from surgery on his leg. He discovered that God's Spirit was working in both his sets of daydreams; in the worldly one to cause sadness and discouragement and in the other set (the desire to imitate the saints) to bring joy and encouragement. From noting the direction the two sets of feelings seemed to be leading him, the way God wanted him to follow became clear to him. This and his other discernment experiences are described in his *Autobiography*, which he dictated to Goncalves da Camara.

Knowledge of and personal experience of Ignatius' rules for discernment give directors an important means for helping directees make some sense of their inner experiences (Who is speaking? Is it the Lord or some contrary spirit? What does this mean? How should I respond?). In the course of everyday life we experience a mixture of different affective states: desires, attractions, revulsions - feelings of varying intensity and depth. These are evoked by events and people in the external

¹² Barry, William A., S.J. *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001) p. 115

¹³ Green, Thomas H., S.J. *The Friend of the Bridegroom: Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with Christ* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2000) p. 63 Here Green also emphasizes the importance for a good director to be able to listen to the feelings that is, how the experiences shared in direction affect the directee since it is the feelings of the directee which are discerned.

world or by a person's own thoughts and imagination – the inner world. Ignatius refers to the two movements in a person's inner experience by the terms '*consolation*' and '*desolation*'. His own descriptions of consolation and desolation are found in SE # 316-317. In brief, consolation is any affective movement that draws a person to God, towards greater faith, hope and love while desolation draws a person away from God, towards self-centredness.

How can directors make use of the principles of Ignatian discernment to help directees grow more attentive to the Spirit? The most basic way would be to encourage directees to take note of the feelings that surface either during prayer or that are evoked by external events. In the review of his experiences, the directee asks himself, "*What were my inner experiences (feelings)?*" These are often very subtle and it takes some practice for a person to learn to get in touch with them. One of the tasks of directors is to encourage the directee to acknowledge his true feelings even when these run counter to what he thinks he '*should feel*' or what religious teaching says he should feel. In my experience, this is often slow work, because there is a tendency for committed people to put on their '*best selves*' and deny the seemingly '*unspiritual*' (or shadow) parts. With regard to these inner experiences, Ignatius points out the importance of the directee's openness to the director for he says,

"It will be very helpful if he (the director) is kept faithfully informed about the various disturbances and thoughts caused by the action of different spirits. This will enable him to propose some spiritual exercisesuited and adapted to the needs of a soul disturbed in this way" (SE # 17).

Thomas Green S.J. gives some helpful advice to directors:

"It is important to listen to the feelings. Ideas are important but even more important is the way the ideas (or experiences) affect us. The heart of discernment is in the feelings. It is the feelings of the directee which are discerned"¹⁴.

I might add that in practice the director would need to be very sensitive to non-verbal cues as well, especially if the directee has difficulty initially in accepting his true inner state and disclosing this. In my experience, this may take time for some directees, particularly those who come from a tradition where faith begins with intellectual assent to certain truths, rather than personal relationship with the Lord. For them, inner experiences that do not fit into the system of faith are to be pushed out of consciousness. Such directees have to have enough trust in the director to be able to disclose their true inner experiences.

Although Ignatius did not have psychological training as we know it today, he was certainly astute when it came to the human tendency for self-deception. In his second set of guidelines for discernment (SE # 329-336), he highlights the fact that feelings of consolation can be deceptive and this deception is often subtle. The harmfulness is only recognised after some time, from the end result (or by its '*serpent's tail*', as Ignatius says in SE # 334). Of course by then harm may have been done (for example,

¹⁴ Ibid., p.62, 63

poor choices made based on the deceptive consoling feelings). Ignatius points out that even this can become a learning experience. By tracing back the whole chain of thoughts and feelings, the person will be able to avoid such deception in the future. To summarise then, the work of the director in the area of Ignatian '*discernment of spirits*' is to help the directee note all the inner movements and then to sift out those that come from the Holy Spirit, so that these might be responded to positively.

In Ignatian spirituality, this whole area of discernment is closely linked to making choices or an '*Election*' (as it is called in the *Spiritual Exercises*). The *Exercises* contain sections (SE # 169-188) that, when taken in conjunction with the rules of discernment, provide the spiritual director with a step-by-step approach to helping a person make an important decision. Ignatius has indeed left us an extraordinarily thorough guide to Christian decision-making. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into this whole area of Election, but there are several books on discernment and making choices written by contemporary spiritual directors, which I mention in the bibliography and these are worth referring to.

Looking at the whole area of Ignatian discernment, I would say that it makes a valuable contribution to the ministry of spiritual direction today. Growth in discernment of the action of God's Spirit is the thing that truly matures the faith of a person seeking to grow in relationship with God. Discernment is not something one does intermittently, in order to make an important decision. Instead, the aim is a growth in habitual discernment, or a '*discerning heart*' as described by some authors. I would also like to note that the process of discernment actually leads to a personal encounter with the Lord. The ability to note one's experiences and to honestly and openly bring these before the Lord, and listen to His communication, would be the desired outcome. Here we recall the contemplative attitude mentioned earlier and note that the ability to bring one's true inner state before the Lord also fosters this attitude. Openness with the director while important, is merely an aid and support for persons who are seeking this kind of relationship with the Lord.

Contemplatives in Action

'*Contemplative in action*' is a phrase that has long been associated with the name of St. Ignatius of Loyola and might be regarded as the best expression of the ideal presented by Ignatian spirituality. The *Spiritual Exercises* is an instrument for achieving, with God's grace, the inner conversion that is fundamental for living this ideal. For Ignatius, the spiritual life is a constant interplay between experience, reflection, decision and action. In living this interplay, one finds that not only can contemplation lead to and support action, but action can play the same role towards contemplation. In the ideal situation, "*The relationship with God, since it is established at the core of one's being, not only leads to activity, but transforms all activity and the whole person. All action not only springs from contact with God but is itself a deepening of that contact, is contemplation*"¹⁵. The ideal of becoming a contemplative in action is to arrive at a point where every human experience is an experience of God in Christ; that is, in everything that happens, the person will be

¹⁵ Parmananda, R. Divarkar, S.J., *Alive to God* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1979) p. 7

aware of God reaching out to him and in his response to what happens he will himself be responding to God. To arrive at this point is the very essence of being a Christian. As directors we know that this ideal is blocked in many ways in most Christians, and spiritual direction is a means of helping a person gain freedom to live the ideal.

Ignatius leaves us the '*Contemplation to attain the love of God*' (SE # 230-237) as the concluding meditation for retreatants making the *Spiritual Exercises*. This is a useful meditation and can be adapted for use by spiritual directors. In brief, the person is to see God at work everywhere and become grateful for and sensitive to God's presence and action. The whole world becomes transparent – revealing the face of God. Human experience becomes an experience of God, something to be accepted and welcomed with joy and thanksgiving. This leads the person towards the ideal of becoming a contemplative in action, sensitive to God's presence and activity in all that he is and does. For such a person, there is the growing belief that '*all is grace*'. This brings the person back to the start of the *Exercises* (the Principle and Foundation), that is, the deep, felt knowledge of the personal love of God is here made clear in His gifts of creation and redemption.

I believe this exercise is an aid to healthy growth for those who seek to deepen their relationship with the Lord. There is always the temptation for humans to grow self-centred, and this sin remains deeply rooted even in the midst of spiritual activity. Ignatius was well aware that the desire to know the Lord intimately and follow Him is often resisted because of attachments. The *Spiritual Exercises* provide ways for a person to recognise and deal with these resistances to growth. What emerges from the profound dynamics of the *Exercises* is that one must have a growing inner freedom in order to really allow the Lord to become the centre of one's life. This final exercise summarises who, for Ignatius (and for all of us), is the centre of all our spirituality – the Lord, around whom our lives revolve, and not the other way round. Spiritual maturity is really total surrender to God. Of course this does not come all at once but is a process - of gradually allowing God to take greater and greater possession of us. The prayer "*Take, Lord, and Accept*" (SE # 234) is the prayer of offering which sums up what this surrender involves.

The aspects of Ignatian spirituality that have been discussed in this paper help to lay a good foundation for those who are beginners in prayer. Thomas Green S.J. reminds us that Ignatius, in his *Spiritual Exercises* writes for generous beginners in the life of prayer. He states, "*The Exercises, in fact, began with the notes he (Ignatius) made on his own initial experience as a convert to a life committed to Christ*"¹⁶. The expression of desires, laying of the affective foundation and the use of Ignatian contemplation are important means by which beginners come to know God, or as was mentioned earlier, come to a '*contemplative attitude*'. As directors, we will find them valuable in helping directees who have just begun their life of prayer. Discernment of spirits continues to be useful whatever stage of prayer a person is in.

For Those More Advanced in their Prayer Life

¹⁶ Green, Thomas H., S.J. *The Friend of the Bridegroom: Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with Christ* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2000) p. 78

For those who are more advanced in their prayer life, the former methods are not as helpful. As directors we have to be sensitive to the time when a directee's prayer becomes less active and such techniques fail to bear fruit. At such times, which are called 'dry well' or 'dark night' experiences, the Lord's transforming work occurs at a much deeper level, not at the level of the senses, as it does for beginners. However, even at such times, Ignatian spirituality has a contribution to make. This is discussed by Thomas Green S.J. in his book *Drinking from a Dry Well*. He tells us that although the Ignatian tradition is an apostolic one, it is one where prayer and action are integrated, or to borrow a phrase used by Jesuit Karl Rahner, it is a 'mysticism of everyday life'. Service is important for Ignatius, but only if it springs from deep knowledge and love of Jesus – "what matters in the end is not deeds but love – not how much I accomplish for God but the fact that it is done for him, out of love for him who has loved me unto death"¹⁷. For persons who are maturing in prayer, Green adds,

"The darkness is not only in prayer but also 'in the marketplace' of our active lives. Since Ignatian spirituality is apostolic, it is to be expected that the action dimension of his 'contemplative in action' ideal should loom large, not only in the sense that active involvement in the world is valued, but also in the deeper sense that this very involvement becomes the 'sandpaper' of our sanctification."¹⁸.

This idea will be very helpful for directors of those whose prayer has grown much more passive, and who are called to grow through the marketplace darkness as well. The spiritual challenge here is to recognise God always present in the marketplace and to respond with openness and gratitude even when circumstances are tough.

Conclusion

This paper has set out to study Ignatian spirituality and its contribution to the ministry of spiritual direction today. I have drawn my key points from Ignatius' writings in his *Spiritual Exercises* which is a rich compendium of Christian spirituality. I have shown that several of Ignatius' teachings on prayer can be used very fruitfully by spiritual directors in helping their directees (particularly beginners) to grow in intimacy with the Lord.

There is also much to learn from Ignatius for those whose prayer has moved into the dry well stage. Ignatian spirituality leads a person to ever greater freedom before the Lord. For beginners, this means an openness to the Lord, a growth of intimacy in prayer. For those who already know the Lord in love, this means the freedom to allow the Lord to continue the work of sanctification in the marketplace of their lives. Ignatian spirituality embodies an abiding attitude of freedom in all aspects of a person's life. It brings one to the ideal of becoming 'contemplative in action', an expression which describes aptly the goal of all spiritual direction.

¹⁷ Green, Thomas H., S.J. *Drinking from a Dry Well* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1991) p. 75

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82

Appendix A

Ignatian Contemplation

“*Contemplative prayer*” very simply, for St. Ignatius of Loyola, is a special way of praying where we use *our imagination* and *our feelings*, that is, our sense of sight, our hearing, our smell, our taste and our touch.

During this prayer, we *reconstruct and recreate graphically* Gospel scenes of our Lord’s life in our imagination and participate in the scenes as though we are *personally present* in the actual event itself. We could be there as an apostle, as Jesus, as the crowd, as Pilate, as the thief crucified on the right of Jesus, as an observer etc. *Do not choose* beforehand which character you wish to play before the prayer. Allow the Spirit to do the work for you. You will just find yourself in one of the roles. Your *roles may even switch* during the same prayer period.

In this Ignatian prayer or ‘*imaginative contemplation*’ we are fully and consciously *present with Jesus in a very real way*. This means that during the prayer, we would naturally want to talk to Him, listen to Him, observe Him, consult Him or even complain to Him about any of our concerns, worries or about anything we wish, and listen to His response.

Below are two examples you can follow as you learn to pray this way.

Contemplation: The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes – John 6:1-14

Imagine yourself walking with a crowd of people in the countryside near a hillside.

As you walk, feel the soft grass beneath your feet . . . smell the fresh air of the countryside . . . feel the cool afternoon wind on your face.

As you walk, hear the people around you, talking about this Jesus who is a great teacher and healer.

What do you feel within as you walk with these people towards Jesus?

You now arrive close to where Jesus is sitting. He begins to teach about the truth of God. What do you feel within you? Are you touched or disturbed or guilty about what you hear?

When Jesus finishes preaching, it gets dark and cold.

You feel hungry . . . and wish you were at home for dinner.

Just then, you see a young boy bringing his two fish and five barley loaves to Jesus.

Jesus' disciples ask everyone to sit on the ground.

Jesus takes the fish and loaves and blesses them.

You see how Jesus prays over the fish and bread. He then passes what He has blessed to His disciples to distribute to everyone.

To your great surprise, the baskets are now all full of fish and bread. Jesus has just performed a miracle to feed the large crowd present.

To your surprise Jesus gets up and begins distributing the fish and bread.

You see Jesus come to you to offer you the fish and bread.

You are simply dumbfounded by the care and compassion He has for you and for everyone.

As you ponder this event, . . . notice what you are feeling within.

Speak to Jesus as He comes to offer you the fish and bread.

Contemplation: Bartimaeus the Blind man – Mark 10:46-52

Imagine yourself walking alone in the streets of Jericho . . .

you are in a place that you have not been before . . . it is around 10.00 in the morning . . . and the sun is shining; it is a hot dry day . . . you feel the heat and you begin to perspire . . . the road is dusty . . . you do not know anyone . . .

Just then you notice a crowd is gathering along the road . . . young and old, mothers carrying their babies . . . there is excitement in the air . . . everyone is murmuring and talking to one another about Jesus of Nazareth who is to come along this way.

The crowds get bigger.

Just then there is a commotion. Jesus and His disciples have arrived . . . they are walking towards you . . . you feel excitement within you as Jesus approaches.

Just as Jesus reaches you, someone close to you suddenly shouts out, “Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me” . . . “Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me” . . .

To your surprise, Jesus immediately stops walking . . .

He turns towards your direction and says, “Call him here.”

The person pleading to Jesus is Bartimaeus, the blind man. . . he is just beside you in the crowd . . . Bartimaeus then jumps up with excitement, and gropes his way towards Jesus.

I want to help Bartimaeus, but again I hesitate . . . what would people think of me? . . . so I hold back and allow others to help him (Is this typical of me? I want to help and do good, but I always find reasons not to make the first move)

Jesus looks at Bartimaeus with so much compassion and asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” . . .

Bartimaeus replies, “Rabboni, Master, let me see again”

Jesus looks at Bartimaeus for a few moments and says, “Go, your faith has saved you.”

At that instant, Bartimaeus could see again.

Bartimaeus, falls on his feet in front of Jesus, clasps Jesus’ cloak, kisses His feet and sobs bitterly for he was filled with deep gratitude to Jesus who has given back his sight . . .

the crowd was astonished and lost for words . . . they have just seen a miracle . . . there is a deep silence . . . you feel the awe of God’s power and mystery . . .

Just as Jesus was turning from Bartimaeus to leave . . . He suddenly looks in your direction . . .

What does His look seem to say?

Dialogue with Jesus about any of your concerns. . . .listen to His response.

What does he say to you about your concerns. . . .

Acknowledgement:

Notes from a series of talks, "*Discovering Your Direction in Life through Ignatian Discernment Methods*" given by Philip Heng S.J. in February 2003 at the Ignatian Spirituality Centre Singapore. Adapted and used with permission.

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Ignatian spirituality is also famous for its guided meditations and its examination of conscience. This post is designed to consolidate our offerings on Ignatian spirituality in one place (and if we missed one, please let us know). This grouping together of posts makes for a handy reference for those who may be delving more deeply into this spirituality. If you are interested in any of the posts below, just click on the link to access it!