

Joy and friendship in the Fourth Week

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IN 1962 THOMAS MERTON RECEIVED A TOUCHING GIFT from one of his many admirers. Elbert R. Sisson forwarded Merton the drawing of a house which his young daughter had executed. Merton found Grace Sisson's drawing captivating and even wrote a poem about it. However, Merton noted that 'there was no road to Grace's house'. Five years later Grace Sisson sent Merton another drawing of the same house, this time with a road drawn in, which Grace titled 'The Road to Joy'. Merton used this later drawing to describe 'the unfathomable grace of friendship'.¹

This lovely reminiscence provides a frame for this reflection on the particular grace Ignatius Loyola suggests for the contemplations on the Risen Christ in the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises: 'to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord' (Exx 221).² This is a beautiful invitation to enter into the permanent dispositions of the Crucified and Risen Christ. However, those who have guided others through the Fourth Week of the Exercises know, too, that it is a difficult realization for many retreatants. Therefore, it may be helpful for both guides and retreatants of the Exercises to look afresh at this prelude and to consider the petition from these aspects: its character as a culminating grace within the movements of the Exercises, its scriptural analogues, and the pastoral adaptation necessary for its integration into the experience of making the Exercises.

Culminating grace

The preludes of petition that initiate each meditation of the First Week and contemplation of the succeeding three weeks of the Exercises are both general and specific. By general I mean that this is an overarching petition for grace, embracing the entire experience of the Exercises. By specific I mean that each of the psycho-religious movements of the four weeks of the Exercises focuses on a gift particular to the mystery or truth being considered. Thus, in the First Week the orientation is towards the realization of what it means to be both sinner and forgiven; in the Second Week the orientation is towards

the realization of what it means to be a disciple and a friend of Christ on mission; in the Third Week the orientation is towards the realization of what it means to be united to Christ in his passion and death; in the Fourth Week the orientation is towards the realization of what it means to be united with the Risen Christ in his glory and joy.

The general, overarching petition of the entire experience of the Exercises is to discover how God communicates to a retreatant in love and in truth. This overarching grace is immensely important in assessing the readiness of a person to undertake the Exercises and then in guiding that person towards the election of the Exercises. To understand better the importance of this overarching grace, we turn first to the twenty introductory annotations of the Exercises. The fifteenth of these is pivotal to the entire experience of the Ignatian spiritual enterprise.

The one giving the Exercises should not urge the one receiving them toward poverty or any other promise more than toward their opposites, or to one state or manner of living more than to another. Outside the Exercises it is lawful and meritorious for us to counsel those who are probably suitable for it, to choose continence, virginity, religious life, and all forms of evangelical perfection. But during these Spiritual Exercises when a person is seeking God's will, it is more appropriate and far better *that the Creator and Lord himself should communicate himself to the devout soul, embracing it in love and praise, and disposing it for the way which will enable the soul to serve him better in the future.* (Exx 15, italics mine)

The Exercises presume that one wants to find God within one's life. The goal of the Exercises is to find that love which will influence one towards serving God better. The thrust of the first twenty annotations of the Exercises is towards helping a person find God's direction in his or her life. Consequently, *prior* to the making of the Exercises, not within the Exercises, one should find within one's heart the spiritual freedom to search for God's self-communication, which is at once effective and affective. That is, God both leads forward and embraces in love the person who desires him. Rereading the other annotations with annotation 15 in focus, the one giving the Exercises looks for a prior orientation towards God within the experience of the one making the Exercises. This kind of predisposition *for God* in the Exercises parallels the Ignatian insistence that a candidate to the Society of Jesus possess a similar prior disposition to find God in his life. The Exercises clarify,

test and specify the desire for God just as Jesuit life will clarify, test and specify the candidate's desire to serve God.³ Thus, in the Exercises a person's prior religious history provides the best interior context for making the Exercises. The wise guide of the Ignatian experience should be alert to how history, as a pattern of God's prior communication to the one making the Exercises, defines the meaning of such terms as 'disordered affections', 'seeking and finding God's will', 'great spirit and generosity toward their Creator and Lord', and 'consolation, desolation and temptation'. These key phrases within the twenty introductory annotations point to experiences prior to as well as during the Exercises. Granted that the Exercises are not therapy and granted that Ignatius counsels reserve on the part of the one giving the Exercises,⁴ nonetheless, the history Ignatius invites the one making the Exercises to integrate presumes another history, the religious autobiographical text of one's earlier experiences of God. Ignatian history is not objective but inter-subjective, i.e., God's communication to the retreatant's communication, the history 'contained in the contemplation or meditation' (Exx 2). Thus, within the Exercises each scriptural event, each recollection of one's life, emerges within the consciousness of a retreatant as another episode in a lifelong narrative with God, a sustained dialogue, even when the person now making the Exercises had not previously realized God's presence: 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it' (Gen 28:16).

The reverence that Ignatius emphasizes (Exx 3) is less a sentiment that the retreatant invokes than a response to the discovery of God's communication, the finding of grace, the uncovering of mystery. That moment of epiphany – the discovery of God here and now – specifies what the person making the Exercises wanted from the outset, to find God in communion with him or her.

This general petition – to discover God – and its recurring fulfilment within the weeks of the Exercises emerge as a pattern of invitation and response. Consequently, the prayer repetitions of the Exercises are specifications of this overarching grace.⁵ The woman or man undergoing the Exercises finds her or his desire for God refined, honed and clarified by God's progressive self-communication. In effect, God is saying: 'This is what you desired – myself to yourself. I am here within mercy, within discipleship, within suffering and death, and within the glory and joy of my risen life'. In intercommunication, then, the one making the Exercises has progressively become more intimately part of God's self-communication. For that reason, the tears of contrition from the First Week become the tears of compassion in the Third Week.

If one sees the importance of discerning the desire for God as an essential condition for making the Exercises, then one can see how the reflections that open the climactic contemplation of the Exercises presume an evolution of grace. A man or woman who has made the four weeks understands exactly what Ignatius means when in the final contemplation of the Exercises he says: 'Love consists in a mutual communication between two persons' (Exx 231).

Against this exposition, then, the particular grace of the Fourth Week of the Exercises is also a culminating grace to find God *in God*. Only the individual retreatant – the man or woman making the Exercises – can tell you what the Risen Christ communicates to him or her of 'his great glory and joy'. Throughout the experience of the Exercises, the retreatant has come to know God within God's self-communication – a God who lives in creation, who moves in companionship on mission, who suffers and dies, and who rejoices in a creation redeemed, a mission fulfilled, a death transcended and a risen life shared. The petition of the Fourth Week contemplations is, then, both integral to the overarching petition to find God, and specific in its own meaning.

Scriptural analogues

I would suggest that the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises are grounded in a fundamental scriptural paradigm. This paradigm both explains the dynamics of the individual weeks and directs the prayer of the retreatant towards the election as an act of loving union with God. Thus, the First Week analogue is that of hospitality as a movement that locates grace in the finding of one's place at the table of the Lord. The Second Week analogue is that of friendship where service in the kingdom becomes intimacy with Christ. The Third Week analogue is that of union with Christ because he has unified himself with us in the suffering and death he underwent. The Fourth Week analogue is union with Christ who transforms his risen life into an eternal solidarity with all that is human. In this sequence, the scriptural paradigms are related to one another, and each develops out of the others so that the union of the Fourth Week represents the hospitality of Christ, the friend, who for me has undergone death only that I might undergo joy.

First Week

The following is an attempt to unpack this sequence. In the First Week there has been a variety of interpretations about the meaning of these words: 'to see in imagination and to consider my soul as imprisoned in this corruptible body, and my whole compound self as in

exile in this valley [of tears] among brutal animals. I mean my whole self as composed of soul and body' (Exx 47). I found this composition of place a key towards unlocking the Scripture that unifies the First Week experience.

The image Ignatius presents resonates with the situation of the prodigal son of Luke 15.⁶ This wayward son had separated himself from his father and 'took his journey into a far country' (Lk 15:13). After he has squandered all his resources and after a famine overtakes this alien land, the son attaches himself to work as a swineherd. Once the son of a prosperous Jew, the prodigal has exiled himself from all that made him human and now dwells 'among brute beasts'. The similarity between the Ignatian composition of place and the situation of the prodigal son is remarkable. The First Week experience of sin is like that of the prodigal who cried out: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants' (Lk 15:18-19).

When one revisits the context of the parable and attends to its setting,

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them'. (Lk 15:1-2)

one notes that the sign of forgiveness is the act of eating with sinners, of sharing food, drink and conversation. One also notes how often this table ministry of Jesus, especially in Luke's Gospel, becomes a sign of intimacy and new life.⁷ Moreover, there is a rich patristic tradition that sees creation itself as the inaugural act of hospitality. God, the Host, welcomes men and women into the banquet of creation.⁸ Once this possibility of reading the movement of the First Week in terms of biblical revelations about hospitality is employed, one discovers an organic unity to the week. The creation order outlined in the First Principle and Foundation, the welcoming of man and woman into the Garden (Gen 2:15-25), the sin against hospitality that Adam and Eve represent (Gen 3:1-19), and the recurring importance of hospitality as a symbol of God's care and love⁹ offer a plausible ground for interpreting the First Week. For example, the sequence of petitions in the second preludes: 'shame and confusion about myself' (Exx 48); 'growing and intense sorrow and tears for my sins' (Exx 55); 'an interior sense of the pain suffered by the damned' (Exx 65) – these are read differently when grounded in Luke 15. For what Ignatius offers is a sense of sin within the context of a loving and donating God and within the context of an

understanding and relentlessly available Christ who still chooses to eat with sinners. Thus, hospitality becomes a complex symbol of God's invitation to a place at the table, a place where reconciliation is celebrated, and where people are taught, too, to make room for others.¹⁰

The hospitality of Jesus leads to the centrality of this table ministry during his public ministry. The instruction of his disciples emerges frequently out of his conversation at table. The universality of his message, the depth of his forgiveness, and the insistent priority of people over laws emerge out of Jesus' table ministry or his dealings with food and nourishment. It is no wonder then that the meal forms a climactic moment in the instruction of the disciples: 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God' (Lk 22:15-16). This desire to be with his disciples, to use the meal as a way of remaining with them, indicates a level of relationship beyond that of host and guest. In this regard, the words of Jesus in John's Gospel are important: 'No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you . . .' (Jn 15:15-16).

Second Week

The Second Week of the Exercises is a movement from hospitality to friendship. In the petition of the Second Week, 'an interior knowledge of our Lord who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely' (Exx 104), one asks what John's gospel account also invites, to know Jesus as the intimate Word of God. Intimacy characterizes the graces of the Second Week. From entrance into the heart of the Trinity as they brood over the world's fate (Exx 102) to the quiet surrender of Mary to the concrete enfleshment of God within her (Exx 108), to the solidarity of Jesus' human life with my own - 'And all this for me!' (Exx 116) - the movement is one of union.

The election that comes as the climax of the Second Week is then less a decision than a surrender to the specific and intimate ways the Spirit of Christ leads me through my humanity to union with his humanity. The gospel emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus' relationship to his followers, for they learned not truths or principles but a person:

All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me all

who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Mt 11:27-29)

This is also the rhythm of the Second Week and the heart of an Ignatian election, i.e., where I find consolation in following Christ. Of course, this discipleship costs and the election can demand a level of self-surrender that is courageous and painful. But the norm is never the pain or the cost but the love for Christ that prompts this surrender and is its own reward. And while the world can cheapen the meaning of friendship to easy socializing or an amiable fusion of interests, Ignatius and the gospel present something more, the willingness to lay down one's life for another.¹¹

Third Week

The Third Week graces – 'to ask for sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his passion for my sins' (Exx 193) – are not a return to the First Week. The man or woman who enters the Third Week is a friend of the Lord and has chosen to be with him in a serious, personal commitment of love and fidelity (the election). But just as one's whole life stands before the wise compassion of God, so, too, the wise compassion of God invites the one making the retreat to see all of his or her life in terms of Christ's discipleship of the Father.

In Luke's passion narrative, Jesus prays in the garden, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done' (Lk 22:42). Much has been offered in exegesis of this petition.¹² Let me suggest that the cup represents all that the Father has revealed to Jesus about himself. The mercy Jesus preached, the availability of God to people, the universality of God's love, the priority of sharing with the poor – all these moments of compassion were not what God does but of who God is. Now Jesus lives in the light of his own message. To be the Son of such compassion is to be oneself compassion, to suffer with the Father the union of love and freedom. For only free women and men can really love; therefore, freedom represents choice. Men and women can choose with the Father and with Christ to be compassion or to reject being compassion. But Jesus long ago gave up the choice to reject being compassion. He could be only total compassion because he was his Father's Son. The excruciating summons to stand with a vulnerable God is the chalice. And Ignatius asks the retreatant-disciple to identify with this Christ as Christ looks on the retreatant's sins. It is a sweet sadness, for only one who loves

wants to be with Christ at this moment. But it is a sadness because that redemption emerges out of Christ's fidelity to God's compassion *for me*. The heavy interiority of the Third Week, the interior knowledge of the cost of Jesus' sonship, is grace, gift, not command and not commercial. Friends face their limitations or there is no real friendship. Friends transcend those limitations or there is no real friendship. The humanity of Jesus knows this, and the Third Week teaches this union in the suffering friendship can evoke.

Fourth Week

It is against this background that the Fourth Week grace must be understood: from hospitality to friendship to union in the suffering of the cross. There is an Ignatian hermeneutical device that unites the Third and Fourth weeks. This device is found in two parallel points from each of the weeks:

Consider how his divinity hides itself; that is, how he could destroy his enemies but does not, and how he allows his most holy humanity to suffer so cruelly. (Exx 196)

Consider how the divinity, which seemed hidden during the Passion, now appears and manifests itself so miraculously in this holy Resurrection, through its true and most holy effects. (Exx 223)

These two invitations to consider *how* demand that we look closely at Scripture. The passion and death of Jesus take on the narrative priorities of each gospel writer, but in each and in all the gospel narratives, Jesus really suffers; Jesus really dies. The divinity 'hides' in the humanity of Jesus: the divinity appears in the humanity of the Risen Christ.

All the gospel accounts emphasize his 'aliveness', different, yes, but alive. And the Risen Jesus repeatedly underscores his 'aliveness' by human gestures like eating, like hospitality, like friendship. Consequently, both the Third and Fourth Weeks of the Exercises are revelations about the Crucified and Risen Christ as human. Without the human gestures of the Risen Christ, we would not know what his life means for us now. Ignatius summarizes the meaning of the Risen Christ in these words: 'Consider the office of consoler which Christ our Lord carries out and compare it with the way friends console one another' (Exx 224).

The petition 'to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ, our Lord' is to be read in the light of the way Scripture presents episodes in the life of the Risen Lord. Jesus consoles.

He does not retaliate. He does not 'get even' or prove himself to his enemies. He returns to his friends as one now irrevocably united to them in their conversations (Lk 24:13–35), in their hesitancies and doubts (Jn 20:24–29), in their anguish (Jn 20:11–18), in their questioning about the future (Jn 21). He is united to them joyfully. His glory is within their ministry and the gift of his Spirit to them.

Consequently, the grace of the Fourth Week is a union with Christ as Christ is in union with me, i.e., in our shared humanity. Christ rejoices in this human solidarity and the retreatant's joy emerges out of this solidarity. For the one who makes the Exercises realizes that what he or she takes away is not notes or a programme or an academic degree but oneself. The end of the retreat is a consecration of oneself as an instrument of grace, as someone who has chosen to be united with Christ on mission, in the work of the kingdom.

The Contemplation to Attain Love focuses on the cyclical and embracing love of God that frames the life of the retreatant both during and after the experience of the Exercises.¹³ This love is *cyclic* because it passes throughout the stages of human existence again and again, creating a kind of divine and human liturgy of a life recurrently blessed by God's accompaniment. This love is *embracing* because it consoles with affection our births and deaths, our moments of contemplative response and our moments of active assertion. The retreatant who moves into this prayer knows that this is the joy of the Risen Christ who can move wherever his love carries him, unimpeded by time or space. But the retreatant also recognizes that the meaning of the Risen Christ is that for all eternity divine love is mediated through the human love Christ extends to us. And this is the fulfilment of the petition 'to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord' (Exx 221).

Necessary adaptation

There are three prominent reasons why a retreatant can find the grace of Christlike joy hard to experience. The first is fatigue as one nears the completion of an intense experience of prayer, reflection and examination. The second is the frequently unconscious, but still influential, desire to return to active life after a period of introspection and silence. The third is cultural; that is, we do not live in times that understand or easily practise spiritual joy. An experienced retreat director can suggest ways to handle the first of these three obstacles to joy. He or she can suggest a lighter schedule of prayer, a change of prayer time and places, a simpler approach to the gospel scene. Similarly, in facing the second

obstacle the experienced retreat director can suggest, for example, that the retreatant meet her or his return to active life now, in prayer and in reflection, asking to see how he or she will bring consolation to others or how he or she will do what Christ did at Emmaus, or praying explicitly for the people he or she will return to live with and work with, asking for the grace to bring the people outside the experiences of the Exercises the gifts Christ brought to her or him during the retreat. A director can deal with these contextual situations. What is more difficult is redeeming the psychological and religious inhibitions to joy, especially when these have been endorsed by a culture. Ignatian joy is not simply being happy, or sensual satisfaction, or easy hilarity. Ignatius describes joy as participation in the joy of the Risen Christ. Can we find satisfaction of mind and heart in the joy of Christ? What is the joy we ask to experience?

Ignatian joy is the psycho-religious energy that desires to bring others happiness, harmony of heart, insight, peace, reconciliation – whatever makes them experience a compatibility between their lives and what they see, or feel, or intuit as God's desires for them. The movement of the Exercises has been orientated to this moment – to want what God wants, only what will bring others goodness and life and love. In a culture of competition, problem-solving, TV manufactured laughter, addiction-induced 'highs', it is hard to appreciate that someone else could go through suffering and death, abandonment and betrayal, and emerge only to want to be the consoler of the people who did all this to him or her. But in the Fourth Week of the Exercises this is what we pray for, 'the unfathomable grace of friendship' with the God-man who has become eternal joy for us. The radical adaptation is to walk the road of joy with the human and glorified Christ.

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NOTES

1 Thomas Merton, *The road to joy, letters to old and new friends*, selected and ed Robert E. Daggy (San Diego and New York, 1989), pp xiii-xiv.

2 The citations from the Exercises come from *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, translation and commentary by George E. Ganss SJ (St Louis, 1992).

3 'The general examen and its declarations' in *The constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans George E. Ganss SJ (St Louis, 1970), cc 1–4. An excellent detailed treatment of this can be found in Michael J. Buckley SJ, 'Freedom, election, and self-transcendence: some reflections upon the Ignatian development of a life of ministry' in George P. Schnier (ed), *Ignatian spirituality in a secular age* (Waterloo, 1984), pp 65–90.

4 See Michael Ivens SJ, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Links View, 1998), p 17.

5 *Ibid.*, pp 58–59.

6 Most helpful is Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, 1991), pp 234–242.

7 Eugene Laverdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God* (Chicago, 1994).

8 Rowan A. Greer, 'Hospitality in the first five centuries of the Church', *Monastic Studies* no 10 (Easter, 1974), pp 29–48.

9 John Koenig, *New Testament hospitality* (Philadelphia, 1985); James F. Keenan SJ, 'Jesuit hospitality' in Martin R. Triploe SJ (ed), *Promise renewed, Jesuit education for a new millennium* (Chicago, 1999), pp 230–244.

10 Keenan, 'Jesuit hospitality'.

11 Graham Little, *Friendship* (Melbourne, 1993); Howard J. Gray SJ, 'Contemporary Jesuits, friends in the Lord', *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* vol xxix, no 89 (1998), pp 41–55.

12 Raymond E. Brown, *The death of the Messiah* vol 1 (New York, 1994), pp 168–172.

13 Michael J. Buckley SJ, 'The Contemplation to Attain Love', *The Way Supplement* 24 (Spring 1975), pp 92–104.