

## WEEK EIGHT

### God's Love and Our Response

We come to the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises – the end of the Exercises and the final week of our retreat. We encounter the risen Lord as he consoles his friends and disciples, who were once scared, confused, and despairing. Accompanying the One we have walked with all along, we savor the distinctive grace of this final movement of the Exercises: joy.

Four days will be taken up with reflection on the resurrected Jesus. We contemplate the risen Christ consoling others. We notice how his friends both recognize and fail to recognize the One they have followed and loved. We marvel at how Jesus in the resurrected life – where his divinity is no longer hidden – does very human things: eating, talking, consoling, teaching, and enjoying the company of others.

We conclude the retreat with three days of reflection on the love of God and our response. For this we use St. Ignatius's Contemplation of the Love of God from the Spiritual Exercises.



## Day One: Resurrection

We do not contemplate the actual resurrection event, which is a mystery, beyond time and space. *Resurrection* refers to the event of God's transformation of life, making all things new, as in a new creation. Resurrection is a conquering of sin and death, once and for all.

### The Grace I Seek

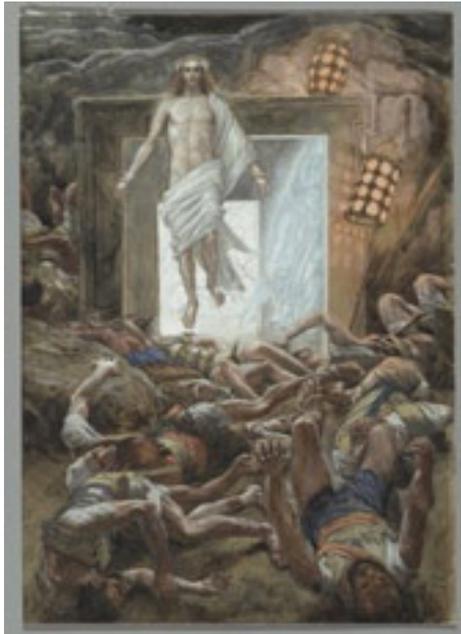
"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord." (SE 221)

### Read John 20:1-18

Imagine finding the empty tomb with the disciples. Then notice how Mary at first does not recognize Jesus until he lovingly says her name. Imagine her confusion, her relief, her excitement, her joy! Hear and see how Jesus commissions her (and you).

### For Reflection

#### The Resurrection Brings Joy



Three significant truths rooted in the Resurrection open a window to the grace and virtues of the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises. In particular, they highlight some of the reasons for our joy.

First, the Resurrection is a proclamation that Jesus is alive and present with us. In the Resurrection appearances, the disciples experienced Jesus in their midst. The same Jesus who had walked with them now again touched their lives, and spoke and ate with them. But Jesus was radically changed. Clearly, Jesus had not simply come back to life like Lazarus did. Jesus now lived the glorious life beyond death, but he was again with them. The Resurrection proclaims that Jesus is with us as well. Luke's story

of the Ascension is not a declaration of Jesus' absence. Luke is announcing that Jesus is now present in every space and time. We encounter Jesus in the Scripture, in the

sacraments, and in our brothers and sisters. As we recall the stories of the Resurrection appearances, Christ is once again with us, forgiving, feeding, and consoling.

Second, death has been conquered. Death opens the way to eternal life. Jesus gives witness to God's faithfulness even in death. We need not be afraid of death since it is not the end, but the beginning of eternal life. Jesus' Resurrection gives meaning to suffering and death as a way to salvation.

Third, Jesus' Resurrection affirms the value of the human person and the world in which we live. Jesus was raised as a whole person—body and soul. Jesus did not take on human flesh and then discard it. Jesus retained his whole humanity. Along with the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Eucharist, the Resurrection assures us that God has identified with matter. God has embraced the human condition. A profound unity forever exists between God and the world, between spirit and matter. As Christians, we do not believe simply in the immortality of the soul. We believe in the immortality of the human person. Jesus' Resurrection and ours speak of continuity between this life and the next. Jesus' Resurrection also acknowledges the value of creation.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:19-23)

As the Principle and Foundation says, this world is a gift of an all-loving God. Our faith in the Resurrection assures us that everything of beauty and love and creativity lasts forever. The Resurrection is the foundation of a holistic view of the human person and an incarnational and sacramental view of life.

Jesus is with us, death has been destroyed, and human life and activity have lasting value—these are all reasons to rejoice.

— Excerpt from *Putting on the Heart of Christ: How the Spiritual Exercises Invite Us to a Virtuous Life* by Gerald M. Fagin, SJ

## **Journal**

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.



## Day Two: Jesus Appears on the Road to Emmaus

The Fourth Week reminds us that death, despair, violence, and sadness will not have the last word: joy does. Walking with the risen Lord, we appreciate how Easter is happening all the time, with joy surprising us everywhere.

### The Grace I Seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord.” (SE 221)

### Read Luke 24:13-35

Notice how Jesus’ disciples do not recognize him at first. Notice too how Jesus just walks and listens to the disciples in their sadness and confusion. How has Jesus walked with you these weeks? How do the disciples – and how do you – recognize the risen Christ? How have you experienced your heart burning these weeks? What desires are stirring in your heart now?

### For Reflection

The Mass can seem like an island of holiness, a time-out from daily life. When we enter Church, it’s easy to think daily life should be left at the door and shouldered again when we leave. But that was never Jesus’ intention. He asked us to break bread in memory of him, of what he did, and what he continues to do in our lives, not just in memory of his breaking bread.

Paragraph 901 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* invites us to bring our daily lives to the altar – to offer everything along with the gifts of bread and wine. When we do that, the Eucharist can transform daily life, our relationships, and even the world. It becomes the light by which we see more clearly our call to serve others.

Don’t park your life at the church door. Bring it to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

– Joyce Donahue

### Journal

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## Day Three: Jesus Appears to Thomas

In the reading today, notice how compassionately Jesus deals with doubts, which are a natural part of a faith journey. Periods of doubt and questioning can lead to a stronger, more deeply held faith. The key is to keep the conversation going with the Lord, as you have been doing throughout your retreat and as Thomas does with Jesus.

### The Grace I Seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord.” (SE 221)

### Read John 20:24-31

Can you relate to Thomas’ doubting? Can you say with him the great proclamation of faith that concludes this Gospel story: *“My Lord and my God!”*?

### For Reflection

#### This is Your Easter



The moniker “doubting Thomas” has always bothered me. Thomas did, after all, have great faith, enough faith to give up everything he knew – family, friends, homeland, and career – to follow Jesus. Yet we remember him for one fleeting moment of very understandable hesitation. In fact, I wonder how different his reaction to hearing the news that Jesus was alive might have been from my own? When I place myself in

prayer next to Thomas in the Gospel passages, I see that Thomas, in his humanity, is a relatable figure.

Since Thomas was not with the rest of the disciples in the Upper Room when Jesus first appeared to them, his encounter with the Risen Christ was delayed. In a sense, his unique experience of the Risen Christ brought him to his own personal Easter.

In Thomas' story, we witness the spiritual journey of a soul striving to accompany Jesus despite a very real and flawed humanity. In Thomas, we might also see the story of "the other" who has become separated from community, a figure with whom all who strive to accompany Jesus in faith and action can relate.

**– Rebecca Ruiz**

## **Journal**

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## Day Four: Jesus Appears to Peter and the Disciples

Today's reading shows Jesus appearing to Peter and the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. Imagine yourself in this very dynamic and tender scene. Can you feel the disciples' excitement and wonder and Peter's enthusiasm? Listen to the intimate dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Imagine Jesus saying the same to you.

### The Grace I Seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for the grace to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord." (SE 221)

### Read John 21:1-19

### For Reflection

#### A Prayer by St. Teresa of Avila

Christ has no body but yours.  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.  
Yours are the eyes  
with which He looks with compassion on this world.  
Yours are the feet  
with which He walks to do good.  
Yours are the hands  
with which He blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands.  
Yours are the feet.  
Yours are the eyes.  
You are His body.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

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## Day Five: The Contemplation of the Love of God, Part One

We conclude this retreat with three days of reflection on the Contemplation of the Love of God – the last meditation in the Spiritual Exercises. This is the culmination of the retreat. In this contemplation, we let God’s overwhelming love empower our lives. We see that the whole movement of the retreat has been rooted in and oriented toward love.

Before he offers this contemplation, Ignatius says two things about love:

1. **“Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words.” (SE 230)** Love must be put into action; words are not enough. Having been schooled as disciples these many weeks, we must now do something. Ignatian spirituality is one of mission.
2. **“Love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons.” (SE 231)** Just as the love between two persons is marked by giving and receiving, the love we share with God enjoys a certain mutuality. God wants our friendship. God wants to be known by us. These divine desires are the source of our desire to know, love, and serve God.

### The Grace I Seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things.” (SE 233)

### Thank God for So Many Gifts

The first point of the Contemplation of the Love of God: **thanking God for so many gifts.**

I will call back into my memory the gifts I have received – my creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to myself. I will ponder with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much he has given me of what he possesses, and consequently how he, the same Lord, desires to give me even his very self, in accordance with his divine design.

Then I will reflect on myself, and consider what I on my part ought in all reason and justice to offer and give to the Divine Majesty, namely, all my

possessions, and myself along with them. I will speak as one making an offering with deep affection, and say:

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will – all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord.*

All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me love of yourself along with your grace, for that is enough for me. (SE 234)

The “Take, Lord, Receive” prayer is an offering made in freedom. We have been praying for indifference throughout the retreat: to become free of disordered loves. Now we focus on why this freedom is necessary: we become free from excessive attachments so that we can love and serve God and others *more*. Basking in the love of God, we are empowered to love as God loves.

## For Reflection

### Fall in Love

Nothing is more practical than  
finding God, than  
falling in Love  
in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.  
It will decide  
what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
what you do with your evenings,  
how you spend your weekends,  
what you read, whom you know,  
what breaks your heart,  
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
Fall in Love, stay in love,  
and it will decide everything.

– Attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907-1991)  
From *Finding God in All Things: A Marquette Prayer Book* © 2009 Marquette  
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## Day Six: The Contemplation of the Love of God, Part Two

With the eyes of faith, we realize the infinite depth of reality. We begin to understand how much of heaven is here on earth. God is with us. Ask: *How have I encountered God dwelling in me, in others, and in creation?* Be very concrete. You may consider praying outdoors in nature.

### The Grace I Seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things.” (SE 233)

### Finding God in All Things

The second point of the contemplation: **finding God in all things, in all people, and in myself.**

I will consider how God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence; and finally, how in this way he dwells also in myself, giving me existence, life, sensation, and intelligence; and even further, making me his temple, since I am created as a likeness and image of the Divine Majesty. Then once again I will reflect on myself, in the manner described in the first point, or in any other way I feel to be better. (SE 235)

Use your senses and imagination to find God in all things and all people. Be attentive to the movements of grace within you. Conclude with the “Take, Lord, Receive” prayer.

## For Reflection

### How a Busy Person Finds God in All Things



Busy people generally don't stop being busy people. If they are spiritually aware, they will intentionally cease activity at regular intervals to be silent and still, to listen to the Divine, and to care for themselves. But then, they're off! Busy people use their energy for action. Their minds rarely pause, because there are always multiple projects and plans forming.

I use "busy" to describe a person who is nearly always *outwardly* active – this is the person most of us see as busy. That doesn't mean that people who are not so outwardly active are not doing anything; some of us spend a lot of time not in motion, yet we are doing loads of interior work, such as prayer, meditation or focused thinking, or creative work. Such "quiet" people have their own form of busy.

We tend to view the quiet person as being intelligent or even more spiritual than outwardly busy people, and this is simply a perception. A quiet, "spiritual"-looking person may not have much going on inside. Or the interior work may be entirely self-centered.

We tend to view outwardly busy people as those who "get things done," and that, too, is simply a perception. You can be busy and not productive at all – if your activity is generated by restlessness or aimlessness or some obsessive need to be in motion.

Whether you are “busy” or not, it’s critical that you find God in every day, no matter what you do or how you appear to others. For the person in motion, the one we call busy, finding God in all things requires freedom and attentiveness. Are you free to stop doing what you’re doing? Are you free to appear un-busy to others? Are you free to change course? Are you **paying attention** to God’s presence right in the middle of your work and motion? Do you allow the Holy Spirit to prompt you when you are going full force in one direction, working hard to get things done?

For the person who is not so obviously in motion, finding God in all things requires exactly the same spiritual qualities: freedom and attentiveness. Are you free from your own tangle of interior life – the events you keep replaying, the resentments that simmer, the desires that become shrill demands? Are you free to change course – even if that means giving up some of your quiet and solitude? Are you paying attention to **God’s voice within**, allowing it to rise above any other voices you carry? Are you willing to recognize the Holy Spirit’s communication as it comes through other people or in the middle of activity?

Not only does God reach out to people who are in the margins of society, but God also reaches out to us in our personal margins – those spaces between where we find comfort and familiarity and where we are invited to explore and become uncomfortable. Whether you are a busy person who gets things done or a quiet person who seems to live primarily within, God will invite you to upset your own status quo. Because stirring things up challenges our illusions that we are in control, that we can take care of ourselves, and that we’re just fine, thank you.

How do **you find God in all things**? By cultivating the willingness to recognize the Divine. We’d like to think we are always willing, but so much of the time, we are too busy following our own limited vision.

– Vinita Hampton Wright

## Journal

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## Day Seven: The Contemplation of the Love of God, Part Three

German poet Rainer Maria Rilke captures the movement of this Contemplation (indeed the whole Exercises) perfectly: “We are cradled close in your hands – and lavishly flung forth.” We have answered the call to “come and see” (John 1:39), and at this point reach a critical juncture. Now we must take the love and grace that God has given us during this privileged time of retreat and incarnate it in our own lives.

### The Grace I Seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things.” (SE 233)

### Praise God

The third point of the contemplation: **praising God who constantly labors for me.**

I will consider how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth; that is, he acts in the manner of one who is laboring. For example, he is working in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest – giving them their existence, conserving them, concurring with their vegetative and sensitive activities. Then I will reflect on myself. (SE 236)

God is not static. God – revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is dynamic, alive, always stirring, and always laboring to bring life to God’s beloved creation. God is love overflowing. In your prayer, consider the activity of God in your life and your world. Marvel at how God creates in, through, and with us. Can you see and hear God laboring in the world around you? Can you appreciate how God has “labored” specifically in and through you? Can you recognize how the labor of others supports you in your living?

Continue with the fourth point of the contemplation: **praising God, who is the source of all goodness.**

I will consider how all good things and gifts descend from above; for example, my limited power from the Supreme and Infinite Power above;

and so of justice, goodness, piety, mercy, and so forth—just as the rays come down from the sun, or the rains from their source. Then I will finish by reflecting on myself. (SE 237)

Love sees clearly into the depths of reality. With your vision sharpened by the Exercises, try to see in all things—in all creation and all people—the reflection of God’s very self. Recall specific occasions when you or someone else acted with justice, goodness, mercy, or another virtue. Appreciate how these actions were like “rays come down from the sun,” who is God. Conclude with the “Take, Lord, Receive” prayer.

## **For Reflection**

Some journeys end so that others may begin. The risen Christ gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples, and the Spirit stirred up in them bold, holy desires and animated them to continue the mission that Jesus entrusted to them throughout his earthly life. The Spirit of Jesus is with us now, summoning us for the adventure ahead, as we respond ever more to the call of Christ to build a more just and gentle world where God’s love reaches every nook and cranny.

— Kevin O’Brien, SJ

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