

The Dynamics of the Exercises
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Lecture 6: The Contemplations of the Public Ministry of Jesus
Week II of the Exercises

Introduction. Following the fourth day of Week II where the one making the retreat focuses on the strategy of Jesus, a strategy characterized by spiritual and existential poverty, humiliations and humility, the one making the full Exercises walks with Jesus as he fulfills his call: “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also for I was sent for this purpose.’ So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea” [Luke: 4: 43-44]. This gospel saying and reflection **constitute the mission of Jesus: to proclaim and to become the proclamation of the kingdom of God.** Parallel to the mission of Jesus is **the accompaniment of the disciple**, a role that the one making the Exercises appropriates by knowing the Lord affectively, loving him more and more deeply, and following him more closely. The way of appropriation is called **Ignatian gospel contemplation.** This contemplative discipleship is dramatized in the first words that Jesus speaks in John’s Gospel.

“The next day John was again standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look here is the Lamb of God.’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, **‘What are you looking for?’** They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ [which translated means ‘Teacher’], ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, **‘Come and see.’** They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day” [John 1:35-39].

Thus the labor of Week II of the Exercises is **to establish a contemplative context** in which the one making the Exercises and his/her guide see the mission of Jesus as a continuing enterprise to which the Risen Lord invites this man or woman to join him. The enterprise is laid out in the gospel paradigm [Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John]. The context is psychological/spiritual/social; that is, it must come out of the inner life of the one making the Exercises [“What are you looking for?” = the Third Prelude of Week II, “to ask for what I want”]. The context is also relational; that is, the Risen Lord reveals within the living word of the gospel events where it is that the one making the Exercises is “to come” and what he or she is “to see” [cf. the First and Second Preludes of Week II, the narrative and the composition of place]. **In this graced process, the one who accompanies, guides, and helps the one making the retreat must be the servant not the master of the process (cf. annotations [2], [6] to [10], [14] to [18]).**

The text. From the fifth day of Week II on, Ignatius proposes one scripture passage [158] to [162] with the set of suggestions for days six to twelve. Why? “Since the Exercises have as a primary aim the choice of a state or way of life, the purpose in limiting the amount of new material to be considered in prayer is to keep the head less occupied with many thoughts. Within the free time of these days, retreatants may likely be doing much weighing of alternatives, trying to decide the lead of God in their lives. As a result, the director is encouraged to keep the prayer material itself simple and less demanding of much reasoning.” Cf. David Fleming, S.J in *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius/A Literal Translation and A Contemporary Reading*, p. 95].

To achieve this focused relational gospel contemplation, the structure for each day of Week II is made up of five hours of prayer [2 contemplations, 2 repetitions, and ending with the prayer called the Application of Senses]. To explain these prayer forms and how to help people move into them, let us look now at the theology and pastoral adaptation of Ignatian gospel adaptation.

Theology and pastoral adaptation. In Part II of the Jesuit Constitutions Ignatius presents what I believe is the process of contemplative viewing both in times of prayer and in times of apostolic action. Let me present his dictum and then apply it to gospel contemplation. In # [250] of the Constitutions Ignatius summarizes the ascetical and contemplative norms for Jesuit novices. Here is the contemplative section:

“In everything they should try and desire to give the advantage to the others, esteeming them all in their hearts as better than themselves [Phil. 2: 3] and showing exteriorly, in an unassuming and simple religious manner, **the respect and reverence** befitting each one’s state, in such a way that **by observing one another they grow in devotion** and praise God our Lord, whom each one should endeavor to recognize in his neighbor as in his image.”

Observing one another signifies attention, seeing into the depths of another reality [be that reality a person, a situation, a culture, a remembrance from the past; in short “creation”]. **Reverencing** is the embrace of the reality that I have observed, allowing it to be what it is, excluding those “exclusions,” which distance my acceptance of the other [again be that “other” a person, a situation, a culture, or a remembrance from the past; in short “creation”]. These psycho-religious movements progress to **devotion**, a term rich in Ignatian spirituality.

“[F]or Ignatius devotion was the actualization of the virtue of religion by means of affection for God which is prompt, compliant, warmly loving, and impelled by charity. Its goal is the worship of God which is accomplished in all things and all actions of oneself and one’s fellow men [and women], since it gives worship to God by finding and serving God in all things. In the Ignatian vocabulary ‘devotion’ is intimately linked to other key phrases. . .such as union with God, consolation, familiarity with God, charity, discreet charity. . .love, fervor, finding Go in all things. And the like” [Ganss translation and notes on *the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, cf. 155-56, note 5].

Attention, reverence, and devotion constitute the way Ignatius invites one making the Exercises to enter into the gospel scene. The two repetitions of each day of Week II are not merely repeating what one had already done but returning to where one experienced the fruit of attention, reverence, and devotion, where one was moved by consolation or desolation in this process, and finally, where one felt God was drawing him or her into more intimate engagement [Annotation 15]. Emerging from this process of attention, reverence, and devotion is the final prayer movement of each day, the Application of Senses. The Application of Senses is an affective resume of the evolving relationship between God and the man or woman making the Exercises and a more specific sense of his or her call, the election.