

**The Dynamics of the Exercises**  
**Rev. Howard Gray, S.J.**  
**Lecture 8: Week III of the Exercises**  
**Companions and Compassion in the Passion and Death of Lord**

**Introduction.** Progress in the dynamics of the Exercises is through “a process of contemplative development” [Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, p. 146]. What this means-- understanding the pervasive spiritual environment of grace within the experience of the Exercises-- is that the one journeying through the Exercises and the one guiding him or her, both move in ways that deepen and widen the relationship with Jesus as the Christ and as the Lord [#1]. That is, in Weeks I and II the Crucified and Risen Lord opens himself both to the one who makes the Exercises and to the one who gives them as the Lord who confronts sin through mercy and also invites others to accompany him in the labor of the Kingdom. For the retreatant gratitude for being both a sinner redeemed and also called to discipleship gradually morphs into a deeper relationship with the Lord, what Ivens terms “contemplative development.” The one giving the Exercises grows in wisdom, charity, and self-understanding through these same sets of contemplative experiences.

This deeper relationship is friendship, the posture of the Beloved Disciple in John’s Gospel who sees and believes. It is this *affective insight* into the heart of the Lord [the beloved’s ability to see into] that constitutes the grace desired in Week II of the Exercises, “for inner knowledge of the Lord who became human for me so that I might the better love and follow him” [104]. In the light of this Beloved-Discipleship relationship the one making the Exercises has accepted the particular ways that she/he has been led to follow the Crucified and Risen Lord through the election [ e.g., in a deepening of a call already made, in the reformation of a call not lived well, in the acceptance of a new life direction]. On the significance of this relationship, let me quote Raymond E, Brown:

“Peter among the twelve is the spokesman in addressing Jesus; but at the Last Supper in John 13:22-26 Simon Peter cannot directly speak to Jesus, for he is at a distance from him. Rather Peter must speak to Jesus through the intermediary of the Beloved Disciple who is closest to Jesus, reclining on Jesus’ breast. In the Synoptic tradition Peter is the only one of the Twelve to follow the arrested Jesus into the court or palace of the high priest. In John 18:15-16 Simon Peter cannot follow Jesus into the courtyard until the Disciple arranges for admittance. In the Synoptic tradition even Peter ultimately abandons Jesus so that no follower of Jesus stands close by as he dies on the cross. In John one male follower never abandons Jesus, for at the foot of the cross stands the Beloved Disciple, as well as the mother of Jesus [19:26-27]. Indeed, by making his mother the mother of the Beloved Disciple [19:26-27], Jesus is adopting the Disciple as his brother. Thus, the scene at the cross supplies the Johannine answer to the traditional question, ‘Who are my mother and brothers?’ ” [*The Church the Apostles Left Behind*, p 92].

This is the interior dynamic of the Exercises leading up to and into Week III, which begins in Bethany [190] and ends on Calvary, the burial, and Mary's withdrawal [208]. The Ignatian distribution of the Exercises in Week III is straightforward, leading to what has sometimes been called Passion Day [208], the seventh day of Week III. But there is a complexity within Week III, which centers of the Ignatian meaning of compassion in Weeks III and IV and confirmation, as affective states of loving in the Lord who is abandoned, humiliated, and rejected.

**What is meant by confirmation in Week III of the Exercises?** Compassion “consists in a certain spiritual empathy, such that the contemplation of the Passion is itself a passion for the one contemplating, a suffering which is ours but in and through which Christ makes us sharers of his own. It can exist only as a mode of intense love. It transforms one's perceptions of every meaning of the Passion and the quality of every response to it, and it is the key to the contemplative union-in-action which through the apostles Christ continues to labor and suffer in the mission of the Church in the world” [Ivens, p. 147].

**What is meant by Week III as process of confirmation?** Throughout the Exercises the reality of the cross has constantly been a reference point. The Cross testifies to the depth of God's love through the donation of his Son [53], interpreted as a reconciliation of the seriousness of sin and the greater testimony to grace [61], the ultimate proof of how intensely and fully Jesus entered into our own humanity, as a companion in our suffering [116] Now the dramatic tableau of the Gospel narratives are laid out as CONFIRMATION of all this sustained love, mercy, reconciliation, and, especially of the intimate union Jesus has with us in our humanity, even into death and burial [196]. Now Jesus invites the man or woman making the Exercises to share in a covenant-confirmation symbolized by the election that the one making the Exercises has placed into Christ's hands at the close of Week II of the Exercises.

Richer still is the implication that how I prayed, how I have found the meaning of Christ as my way to God, the history that has borne me to this point in my life with God—the realities that the Exercises has embraced are now confirmed as bringing me into a companionship with the Lord. My retreat experience has opened me to understanding the sacrifice of Jesus as personal [for me] ail for the world of which I am part].

Finally, there is a dimension of confirmation that moves into the working out in time and space what is “wanting in the sufferings of Christ” [Col. 1:24], through those who throughout Christian history continue the Passion and Death of Christ in their lives.

There is richness in Week III that transcends the Ignatian text: in our scriptural scholarship about the Passion and Death of Jesus [e.g., the work of Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*], in our understanding of human suffering [e.g., John Paul II's 1984 Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (*Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*) and Ronald B. Miller's *Facing Human Suffering*], and in the challenge of social justice and solidarity [e.g., Dean Brackley's *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, especially chapters 18, 19, and 20]. These theological, psychological, and social realities should help us to appreciate *the still evolving ways* that confirmation can be understood.

Finally, a key hermeneutic within the Ignatian text is found in # [196], on the divinity “hiding itself” in the Passion and Death. In this regard cf. the handouts from Michael Himes' *The Mystery of Faith*, cc. 3 & 4.

