

The Dynamics of the Exercises

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Lecture 9: Week IV of the Exercises

**“To ask for grace to rejoice and be glad intensely
at so great glory and joy of Christ our Lord” [221]**

Introduction. Some years ago I wrote an article for *The Way Supplement: Resurrection and Beyond: The Fourth Week* (99 [2000]) in which I first suggested an approach that I continue to espouse.

“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 two 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, italics mine)

‘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, italics mine)

“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 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 hesitations 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 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 his kingdom. . . 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 that Christ extends to us. And this is the fulfillment of the petition ‘to be glad and to rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord’” (Exx 221) [from “Joy and Friendship in the Fourth Week,” 18-19].

What dynamic is operative in the Fourth Week? The dynamic is that of deeper love, **a grace not a personal attainment**. Last month we looked at the Passion from the perspective of the fourth gospel’s Beloved Disciple. It is this same disciple whom the evangelist of that gospel describes at the empty tomb as one who “saw and believed” (Jn 20:8). The Fourth Week is about “seeing” from the heart, that “interior knowledge” that constitutes a “key phrase for understanding the spirituality of the Exercises” (cf. Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, pp. 4, 91, 96, 173, and 223).

Why this opening contemplation [218]-[225] in the Fourth Week, focusing on a non-scriptural event? [1] The appearance to Mary is part of an ancient tradition [cf. Ivens note 6 on p. 164], which looks at the ties that bind Jesus to Mary; [2] this post-Resurrection conversation is in theological harmony with discipleship intimacy [cf. John 19:27: “And from the hour the disciple took her into his own house,”]; for in John’s Gospel, Mary has been handed over to the care of one formed, like her, by the word into a more intimate, and even intuitive, discipleship [cf. Lk 1:38; 2:19; 2:51; 11:27-28]; and [3] as a symbol of the community of discipleship.

Pastoral reflection about the difficulties in the Fourth Week. **Fatigue** as one nears the end of a demanding and focused experience in the 30-day retreat; **impatience** to return to the apostolically involved life; and the **inability** to enter into “spiritual joy.” The key to Fourth Week contemplation is to abnegate self-scrutiny and to seek for an understanding of how the Risen Jesus rejoices precisely in being totally the one who through his love unites the human and the divine. For in the Risen Jesus there is no competition but only profound and happy reconciliation. Thus the Fourth Week integrates being reconciled [Week One] in the fulfillment of discipleship [Week Two], especially by bearing testimony of human weakness transformed into the power of God [Week Three].

Reference. Consult the handout by Roberto Goizueta “From Calvary to Galilee,” *America* 4/17/06 for an example of theological spirituality & Week IV.

