

Finding God in all things: An Ignatian Journey

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Course Overview

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Leader's Notes

Our churches are full of people who think that they're not very good at praying, and that includes the clergy! We so often approach prayer with a long list of shoulds and oughts, and end up berating ourselves that we should pray more, better, differently. There is a danger that any prayer course feeds this same sense of failure, leaving some feeling that the course hasn't 'worked' for them, and that everyone else is having prayerful experiences while they are missing out!

Against the background of so many Christians who feel like failures in the school of prayer, God continues to beckon us to come to Him, whispering his loving invitation into our hearts, encouraging us to let go of all of our shoulds and oughts, and to pray as we can and not as we can't. My hope is that this course leads participants into a greater freedom in prayer, a deeper confidence in God's love, and a renewed awareness of God's presence in the everyday things of life.

Everyone's journey will be different, and as unexpected twists and turns emerge, I would encourage you as leaders to try not to provide answers, but rather to direct people back to God, to dialogue with Him about the questions, worries or confusion. Each week has plenty of material, but please use it with freedom, taking longer over the discussions, or the prayer times, as seems appropriate for your group.

About the author

Revd Lisa Barnett is Vicar of Scaynes Hill, and was privileged to study Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises within an Ignatian Spirituality Course at the London Centre for Spirituality. The wisdom of St Ignatius continues to nurture her walk with God, and support her preaching, and she is delighted to be able to share some of the riches of Ignatian Spirituality within this course.

Lisa's ministry in Scaynes Hill is part-time, and she combines it with being mum to 3 young children, who offer her a constant source of challenge in what it means to 'find God in all things'.

Resources

- Bible
- Copies of the course notes for each participant
- Newspapers (week 2)
- Paper and pens (week 5)

Ignatian Course

Week 1 : Meeting St Ignatius

Opening Prayer

Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve You as You deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not ask for reward, save that of knowing I am doing your will.

(Prayer of Generosity – St Ignatius)

Introduction

What helps you to pray? Candles? Bible passages? Praying with others? Being in a particular place? Kneeling? Music?

Spend some time discussing this question as a group.

If St Ignatius was here, I think that he would add another word to our list of things that help us to pray: the word 'imagination'.

Given that Benedictines follow the ways of St Benedict, and Augustinians follow the ways of St Augustine, we would probably expect that those who follow the way of St Ignatius should be called Ignatians, but they're called Jesuits! The reason is that the early followers of Ignatius were called the Society of Jesus, hence the name Jesuits.

The Ignatius that we're talking about is St Ignatius of Loyola (15th/16th Century) – not to be confused with St Ignatius of Antioch (1st Century). Ignatius was a Spanish courtier and aristocrat who found his true calling after suffering near

fatal wounds on a battlefield. He gathered a small group of companions and established the Society of Jesus in 1539, united in a method of prayer patterned on his own experience of conversion.

Ignatian Spirituality is grounded in the conviction that God is active in our world, and offers a way of praying that encourages us to find God in all things. I first started exploring Ignatian Spirituality while I was studying for ordination at Ridley Hall and, supported by a prayer guide, I embarked on my own prayerful journey using Ignatian themes. I quickly grew to love the way that Ignatius encourages us to expect God to speak to us through the Bible, in a way that is personal and relevant to our individual situations. I found God bringing healing in surprising ways as I contemplated Bible stories in my imagination. Through the years, the insights that I've learnt from Ignatian

Spirituality have led me into a greater sense of freedom in prayer, and a deepening awareness of how God is at work in my own life, as well as in the world, and I'm enormously grateful for the ministry of this 16th Century saint of the church.

Discussion

- *Do you agree with Ignatius' assertion that God is at work everywhere in our world, and therefore that we can 'find God in all things'?*
- *What helps you to be aware of God in your everyday life?*
- *What things get in the way of this awareness?*

The story of St Ignatius

Iñigo López de Loyola, (1491-1556) who later took the name Ignatius, was the youngest son of a noble family in the mountainous Basque region of northern Spain. Trained at the court of King Ferdinand, Ignatius dreamed of the glories of knighthood and wore his sword and breastplate with great pride.

In an attempt to defend the border fortress of Pamplona against the superior French artillery in 1521, Ignatius' right leg was shattered by a cannon ball. His French captors, impressed by his courage, carried him across the mountains to his family home at Loyola. Doctors there broke and reset his leg, without much hope of saving his life. But he survived the trauma and began a long convalescence during which he was bedridden.

We sometimes talk about how difficult times can actually draw us closer to God, that when some of the external, superficial things that we rely on are stripped away, God is more able to speak to our hearts. That was certainly the case for Ignatius.

Ignatius whiled away the long hours in bed reading the few books his family was privileged to have. He asked for books about chivalry, and great triumphs in battle, but had to settle for biographies of the saints. In his convalescence, he had plenty of time for day-dreaming, and often he would dream of great feats of arms and winning the approval of the people at court. At other

times, inspired by the stories of the saints, he would daydream about doing great things for God. Gradually he began to notice that although he enjoyed both daydreams, the after effect of the two different daydreams was very different. When he dreamed about glory through worldly battles, he was left afterwards feeling empty, and discontented. But when he dreamed about doing great things for God, he felt a great peace and contentment afterwards.

This experience came to form one of the key aspects of Ignatian spirituality. It's referred to as the 'discernment of spirits' where one grows in awareness of the things that draw us towards God (bringing consolation) and the things that lead us away from God (bringing desolation). It's important to recognise that consolation is not the same as happiness. We may be facing a really challenging time, and yet be aware of being drawn towards God through it. Alternatively, we may be having lots of fun doing different things, and yet be aware that at a deeper level, all is not as it might be, and we are actually being drawn away from God.

Ignatius rejected all the trappings of his previous life as a courtier, leaving behind his fine clothing and sword, putting on the rough cloth of a pilgrim, and undertaking an intense time of prayer and self-examination. Over time he discovered that he had a particular gift for talking to others about prayer, and supporting them as they deepened their own life of faith. These conversations and his notes about his own experiences in prayer formed the foundation for what would eventually be known as the "Spiritual Exercises."

Discussion

- *Do any parts of the story of St Ignatius resonate with your own life story and faith story?*
- *Have you been aware of experiences which have drawn you closer to God (consolation)?*
- *Have difficult experiences sometimes brought you closer to God, as they did for St Ignatius?*

Ignatian Foundations : The Daily Examen

Each session, we will explore a particular aspect of Ignatian Spirituality, under the heading of 'Ignatian Foundations'. We begin with probably the most well-known and commonly used part of Ignatian prayer: the Examen.

The word 'Examen' derives from the Latin word for examination, and is usually used at the end of the day. The Examen is like having a movie of your day playing in your head, and noticing what made you happy, what made you stressed, what confused you, what helped you to be more loving. You are invited to recall everything: sights, sounds, feelings, tastes, textures, conversations, thoughts, words, and deeds. Each moment offers a window to where God has been in your day.

Ignatius encourages us that no experience is too trivial for spiritual investigation, nothing is so insignificant that it doesn't deserve God's attention. The mundane and the humdrum parts of our lives give depth and texture to our relationship with God. Doing the washing and cooking dinner are as much a part of the relationship as graduation day. If it's part of our human experience, then we can be confident that God is in it.

Ignatius wanted people to consider Jesus a friend. So he recommended ending the Examen with a conversation with Jesus, asking for help, forgiveness, encouragement, whatever we most need, as well as listening to what Jesus might want to say to us.

Ignatius was emphatic about the importance of the Examen. He told the early Jesuits that if they did no other forms of prayer during the day, they should do this one. Then as now, the Examen is a spiritual tool for sizing up our days — and planting the seeds for a more purposeful, God-filled life.

There are many versions of the Examen today, but all have five steps.

- 1. Place yourself in God's presence. Give thanks for God's great love for you.*
- 2. Pray for the grace to understand how God is acting in your life.*
- 3. Review your day — recall specific moments and your feelings at the time.*
- 4. Reflect on what you did, said, or thought in those instances. Were you drawing closer to God, or further away?*
- 5. Look toward tomorrow — think of how you might collaborate more effectively with God's plan. Be specific, and conclude with the Lord's Prayer.*

Prayer : The Examen

In your group, take some time now to have a go at the Examen exercise, reflecting prayerfully on your day so far. In silence, follow the journey of the five steps that are explained above, and see what emerges in your mind, bringing each part to God, and trusting that He is with you and is leading you. Allow about five minutes of silence for this prayer, and then conclude by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

If time allows, you may want to spend a few minutes reflecting together on how you found this time of prayer.

Homework

Over the next 4 weeks, we will be exploring the 4 'weeks' that St Ignatius lays out in his spiritual exercises. We will go on a prayerful journey in which we will explore the nature of sin, the life of Jesus, the suffering of the cross, and the resurrection life. But Ignatius is very clear that before we embark on this journey, we must take time first to let ourselves rest in the unconditional love of God, finding our grounding and our identity in this love.

This week, take some time to pray with some of the following Bible passages, perhaps using a different passage each day. Read each passage slowly, and carefully, inviting God to make each truth real in your own heart and experience. Imagine that each Bible passage is like a luxury chocolate, for you to taste slowly, and savour. If you come across stumbling blocks in your times of prayer, whether doubts, distractions, or anxieties, offer them to God, and ask him to free you from them.

You might also take the opportunity this week to try using the Examen at the end of the day. You might want to use a journal, or notebook, to record your experiences of praying this way.

Don't worry if you find this difficult, because of the busyness of life, or because this way of praying feels alien and uncomfortable. Prayer is always in response to God's loving, gracious invitation, and God invites us to explore new ways of praying with a sense of openness and adventure, without fear of failure. Ignatius would

want to remind us that each experience, whether good or difficult, becomes an opportunity for us to deepen in our life with God, and in our experience of His love.

Possible Bible Passages to pray with:

*"Be still, and know that I am God." **Psalm 46:10***

*"Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine." **Isaiah 43:1***

*"It was not because you were more numerous than any other people's that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you." **Deuteronomy 7:7-8***

*"For I am convinced, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." **Romans 8:38-39***

*"Zacchaeus, hurry down, for I must stay at our house today." So he came down at once, and gladly welcomed him. **Luke 19:5-6***

*"I always give thanks to God for you, because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus." **1 Corinthians 1:4***

Ignatian Course

Week 2 : Loved sinners

Opening Prayer

Teach me to listen, O God, to those nearest me, my family, my friends, my co-workers. Help me to be aware that no matter what words I hear, the message is, "Accept the person I am. Listen to me."

Teach me to listen, my caring God, to those far from me – the whisper of the hopeless, the plea of the forgotten, the cry of the anguished.

Teach me to listen, O God my Mother, to myself. Help me to be less afraid to trust the voice inside – in the deepest part of me.

*Teach me to listen, Holy Spirit, for your voice – in busyness and in boredom, in certainty and doubt, in noise and in silence.
Teach me, Lord, to listen.*

Amen.

(John Veltri, SJ)

Opening Discussion

- *What parts of the last session have stayed with you during the intervening time?*
- *Have you tried using the examen prayer at the end of the day – how has it been?*
- *Have you tried praying with any of the suggested Bible passages – how have you found that experience?*

A Gospel Journey

St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises are divided into 4 parts, which are referred to as 'weeks'. When completed in full, it involves embarking on a month long silent retreat, using the different themes and Bible passages that Ignatius offers to inspire the prayer and meditation for each day, and being guided by a daily meeting with a prayer guide, or spiritual director. Many Christians undertake this prayerful adventure each year, and find it to be an enormously profound and life-changing experience. But Ignatius also anticipates that some people will not be able to commit themselves to a month in solitude. 'The Spiritual Exercises must be adapted' he says, and 'Each one should be given those exercises that would be more helpful and profitable.' We therefore embark, with a sense of St Ignatius' blessing, on our own journey through the Spiritual Exercises. We will really only be dipping our toes in the water of all the wisdom that St Ignatius has to share. But we trust that as we tread the path that Ignatius has marked out for us, God will lead us into new ways of prayer, and new depths of discipleship.

The journey of the Spiritual Exercises is a Gospel shaped journey. Our introduction is an opportunity to remember that we are deeply and completely loved by God. With this foundation laid, we move into week 1, reflecting on the nature of sin, and on ourselves as sinners. In week 2, we journey alongside Jesus in the Gospels, listening to His teaching and delighting in His miracles. In week

3, we are invited to stay with Jesus as He journeys to the cross, through the agony and desolation that it brings. Finally, in week 4, we join with the disciples in joyfully celebrating the resurrection, and we hear Jesus commissioning us to play our part in sharing His love with the world.

During a month long retreat, there is no rush to move through the 'weeks', and sometimes we may be led to spend significantly more time meditating on the themes of a particular week, before moving onward. Each person's journey is completely individual, because God knows us individually and speaks to each of us in unique and personal ways. As a group, you may also feel that you want to spend more than one session exploring the material of a particular 'week'. St Ignatius would want to remind us that there is immense value in the journey, and not just the destination. The journey should not always be expected to be comfortable, either, but if we are willing to stay a while in the places of discomfort, they will often become the places of the most spiritual growth, and the most profound encounters with God.

So God, through the wisdom of St Ignatius, invites us to embark on a spiritual journey in the weeks ahead. This journey is in response to God's invitation. We don't need to be experts in anything in particular, neither do we need to have achieved any particular kind of prayerfulness before we take part. All we bring is ourselves, and our openness to journey with God.

Discussion

- *What experience have you had of Ignatian Spirituality?*
- *What are you hoping for as you embark on this journey?*
- *Do you have any concerns about what it might involve?*

Prayer

Take some time in silence to offer to God any concerns that you have as you embark on this journey together. In your hearts ask Him to lead you and guide you, that you may be drawn to see Him more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly.

Loved Sinners

"You know that you are not as good as you have worked hard for years to make yourself seem, but you are much more loved than you could ever have imagined." - (from Aschenbrenner: Stretched for greater glory)

Read **Luke 18:9-14**

Jesus frequently affirms and encourages those who recognise that they are sinners, and therefore know their complete and utter need of God. This is a foundational truth for us as Christians, but for most of us it remains a challenging and uncomfortable aspect of our discipleship.

Sin touches our self-image, and therefore our sense of self-worth, and can sometimes leave us feeling like failures. Consequently, we often have defence mechanisms so that we don't have to face up to the reality of sin and its consequences.

St Ignatius is clear that he does not want us to end up in a place of despair and self-loathing, and so he invites us to explore the concept of sin in a particular way:

1) We are invited first to remember that we are beloved children of God, that there is nothing that we can do to make God love us more, and nothing that we could do that would make God love us less. This vital foundation must be in place before we embark on the rest of the journey, and this place of absolute safety and security in the love of God must be our bedrock as we journey forward.

Discussion

- How would you define sin? What images and words might you use to describe it?
- What evidence would you point to, of the reality of sin and evil in the world?
- How do you relate to the idea that you are a loved sinner?

2) The first aspect of sin that Ignatius invites us to contemplate is sin 'out there', from a global perspective. We are invited to imagine that we are looking with God, down at the world that He created, and seeing the whole creation 'groaning' with the impact of sin and rebellion. We are invited to take time to notice the impact of sin on the whole world; conflict, suffering, apathy.

3) Only having journeyed through 1) & 2) does Ignatius encourage us to consider sin 'in here', personal sin, the particular ways that we have chosen to turn away from God, and one another, and the consequences of these choices.

We are loved sinners. And the more we are drawn closer to the love of God, the more we become aware of the things that are not of God, and the things that take us away from God's love. The example is sometimes used of a dirty window, which doesn't show the dirt on cloudy days. But when the sun comes out and shines through it, suddenly we become aware of just how dirty the window is. Ignatius teaches us that as the light of God increasingly shines into our lives, so we become more aware of our sin.

Sin for St Ignatius is not just about a list of particular words and deeds. He talks about sin as 'disordered' priorities and attachments, things that have become more important to us than they should be, and have therefore prevented us from responding with freedom to Christ's loving invitation to us. Taking time to focus on sin is not to make us feel bad about ourselves, but rather to lead us into deeper gratitude at all that God has done for us, as well as growing our awareness of how we might live differently in the future, by the grace of God.

Prayer

In prayerful silence, look through some national newspapers together, exploring the presence of sin and its consequences. Notice the diversity of situations of suffering and need across the world. Consider your own reactions to what you're seeing, and ask God to show you how He feels about these people and situations.

You may also want to spend some time praying with the following quotation, drawn from the painful depths of many years of suffering in the Gulag:

"Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either - but right through every human heart - and through all human hearts." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Ignatian Foundations : Biblical Meditation

Our Ignatian Foundation this session is an opportunity to consider in more detail the particular method of praying with Bible passages that Ignatius commends to us. As we make our way through the Gospel journey of the Spiritual Exercises, we are also invited to grow in confidence in reading Bible passages prayerfully and reflectively, and allowing God to speak to us through them. The following are some guidelines for how we might read the Bible this way, following the method of St Ignatius. They are particularly appropriate for Gospel passages, but can be used for other Bible passages too.

Read through these guidelines as a group, and then discuss your responses to them. Have you ever tried praying with Biblical stories in this way? How have you found it? Does the idea of praying this way appeal to you?

- Read the text slowly and carefully; recall what it is about; then let it come alive for you!

- Place yourself inside the story, using your imagination; become one of the characters in the scene.

- Participate in the dynamics of the scene, dialoguing & interacting with Jesus and the other characters.

- Observe what is going on around you in the scene: What do you see, hear, feel, smell, taste, touch?

- Dialogue with the other characters: What do they say or ask you? What do you say or ask them in reply?

- Notice what is going on inside you as you pray: joy, sorrow, peace, confusion, love, anger, etc.

- If you get distracted or your mind wanders, gently return to the biblical text and re-enter the scene.

- Conclude with a short personal conversation with Jesus (or God the Father, or the Holy Spirit); speak heart-to-heart, as if conversing with a close friend.

- Afterwards, briefly review what you experienced during this time of prayer (maybe journal about what happened), and look forward to your next prayerful encounter with God (when? where? which biblical text will you use?).

- Ignatius also places a lot of emphasis on repetition, and therefore the possibility of returning to the same scene again, and exploring it further with God. If something has been particularly surprising, or difficult, or confusing, it's worth returning to the passage again within your next prayer time, and asking God to show you more of what it means for you.

Homework

This week's homework involves prayerful reflection on the nature of sin; in our world, and in our own lives. From the foundation of God's complete love for you, take some time to become aware during the week of sin in all its forms. As you make your way through the week:

- Pray that you might grow in awareness of the sin and injustice in our world, to which God has responded with mercy and love.

- Pray that you might become aware of your own blindness and insensitivity to sin and evil around you.

- Pray that you might become aware of your own sinfulness, and in doing so, grow in gratitude at God's merciful love for you.

Some Bible passages to support your prayer:

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another - "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."
Isaiah 6:1-5

*"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said - 'Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.'" **Nehemiah 1:4-5***

*"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles." **Romans 1: 20-23***

*"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power." **2 Timothy 3:1-5***

Ignatian Course

Week 3 : Called to Follow

Introduction

Recap what you remember of last week's material, and share a little bit with one another (in pairs or with the wider group) about how you have found the homework this week.

Read **Isaiah 6:1-8**

We move into the second week of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, conscious that we are forgiven sinners. We have faced up to the reality of sin, in the world, and in our own lives, and in facing it we have received once again the grace and forgiveness of God.

Like Isaiah, as the coal touches his lips, and his sins are atoned for, we find ourselves responding, 'Here I am, Lord, send me.'

Prayer : A Gospel Meditation

Ignatian spirituality has become particularly well known for its method of meditating on Gospel stories. In our imaginations, guided by the Holy Spirit, we are invited to experience Jesus during his life and ministry, and in doing so, be drawn deeper into what it means to love Him and to follow Him.

One of my first experiences of praying with Gospel scenes involved the story of Zacchaeus. Slightly to my surprise, it became for me a very profound experience of initially trying to 'hide' from Jesus as well as from the crowds in a tree, to then being willing to come down, in response to Jesus' invitation. I used this story in my prayer time over several days, sensing that there was much that God wanted to say to me through it, and aware of His gentle healing in the process. I wrote the following reflection as a way of marking God's work in me through praying with Zacchaeus' story.

Take some time to sit comfortably, and in a moment of silence, invite God to speak to you in this time, and to bless each of you through it. One member of the group should read the story of Zacchaeus, from **Luke 19:1-10**. Another member of the group should then read the following reflection.

"He's coming, he's coming!" I peer through the leafy branches to where the excited crowd is thronging below. "He's coming!" Perched precariously on my branch, I see him approaching, surrounded by

eager, expectant faces. I'm grateful that they don't notice me, in my lofty hiding place.

But then, coming towards the tree, he stops for a moment, looks up at me and says, "Come down Zacchaeus. I want to stay at your house today."

Suddenly all eyes are fixed on me. Hostile, resentful eyes. Eyes that carry stories of the money I've swindled, the people I've used for my own gain. Eyes that don't forget. Eyes that demand justice. But Jesus' eyes too are fixed on me. His eyes see the guilt and shame, the searing pain and embarrassment of the crowd's rejection. He knows that I deserve their anger and scorn, but in his eyes there is only love. Undeserved grace.

And so, still looking at me, he asks again, "Come down, Zacchaeus." And in that moment, looking into Jesus' eyes, I know that I can come down. In the warmth of his gaze I discover a new strength, strength to offer recompense to those that I've wronged, strength to make a new start.

"I'm coming down, Lord, I'm coming!"

After the reflection, take a few moments of quiet to consider your own responses to the Bible story and reflection.

Talk to the person next to you about how you found the reflection.

A Salvation Plan

Ignatius' second week begins with inviting us to contemplate the Trinity, looking down in love on the world in its fallenness, and choosing to enact a plan of salvation. We are invited to spend time in our imaginations with Mary, as she is visited by the angel Gabriel. We join them on the long journey to Bethlehem, and then take our place in the stable, alongside the animals, as Jesus is born.

As we prayerfully enter into different Gospel scenes, we are invited to grow in understanding of and love for, Christ. We hear Him speaking to individuals and crowds. We watch Him perform miracles and healings. We notice Him taking time in quiet to seek His heavenly father, and be strengthened for the journey. As we prayerfully contemplate the different Gospel scenes, we do so asking Jesus to draw closer to us.

Over time, we increasingly engage not just our heads, but our hearts and our wills, in seeing, loving, and following Jesus.

The second week of the Exercises invites us to journey with Christ through the Gospels, in expectation that as we contemplate the life of Christ, we will ourselves become more Christlike. However,

we are not expected to become clones of Christ or of one another. Ignatius reminds us that God has made us all infinitely different, and that the ways in which we are called to serve Christ are just as individual. The question for each of us as we continue to journey through the exercises is, 'What is Christ-like-ness going to look like in me?'

But we also focus in the second week on the area of choice. We hear Christ calling us to follow Him, and become aware that our faith and discipleship is always a choice. Jesus never forces us to do anything, though His love is constantly beckoning to us. This week of the Exercises invites us to reflect on our own choice to follow Christ, and what it means for us today to live our lives for Him and with Him.

As we grow in love for Christ, we are also challenged towards something that Ignatius calls 'Indifference'. For Ignatius, this indifference is an example of the deep freedom that we are called towards as disciples of Christ. It is a freedom which enables us to choose the way of Christ, without distractions or unhelpful affections. It is about our desire for Christ putting all other desires into perspective.

Discussion

- *Have you had particular moments when you have consciously made a commitment to following Christ? What did that choice mean for you then and now?*
- *What might it mean to you to follow Christ with both your head and your heart?*
- *How do you relate to the question, 'What is Christ-like-ness going to look like in me?'*

Ignatian Foundations : Discernment

This week's Ignatian Foundation is about discernment – an area which Ignatius gives a considerable amount of time to in the Spiritual Exercises.

Many of us find it hard to make decisions, and sometimes small decisions can be as hard as bigger ones. We can find ourselves crippled by the pressure of trying to make a decision, such that we end up not doing anything!

As Christians, we have an added layer of complication, as we ask ourselves: 'What does God want me to do? Am I hearing God correctly in relation to this decision?

Ignatius challenges us to cultivate a life of openness and dependency on God. While we may naturally invite God to lead us in relation to big decisions, Ignatius encourages us to seek God in relation to the small things too, to be consciously listening to the Spirit of God in each moment, so that we might choose the way of love and the way of God in each thought, word and action.

At certain times in church history, there has been an unspoken rule for discernment that the more unpalatable of two choices was the one to lean towards, since it was more likely in accordance with God's will. Ignatius, based very much on his own experience, argues for the opposite. But Ignatius doesn't offer us any kind of 'prosperity Gospel'. Ignatius lived a life of simplicity and poverty, and faced times of significant opposition from the Church leadership of the time who didn't always value his ideas.

However, Ignatius taught his followers that if we are trying to live a life in accordance with God's will, then the best criterion for deciding whether a choice or a way of acting is of God or not is to ask whether we find ourselves 'blessed' in the thought of doing it. This sense of being 'blessed' is about having "courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and peace."

This rule echoes Paul's words to the Galatians: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (5:22-23). Ignatius also notes that "it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict

Discussion

- *What helps you to make decisions? How do you try to listen to God's call as you consider the decision?*
- *Have you had experiences of having a sense of peace which has confirmed a particular decision for you?*

Homework

The focus of this week's homework is using our Ignatian tools of praying with Gospel stories to see Jesus more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly. You might start by asking yourself: What events in the public life of Jesus draw me to Him? and using these events as the starting point for your times of prayer. Below are some other suggestions of Gospel stories that you might want to use.

You may stay with the same story in each prayer time, if you are conscious of it having particular resonances for you, or you may prefer to use a different one each day. Once again, hold in mind that these times of prayer aren't about 'success' or 'failure' but rather about exploring a different pattern of prayer, and growing in openness to God, and in expectation that He is at work in our lives, and within our prayer.

*"Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" **Luke 12:22-25***

"As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

*When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him." **Mark 1:16-20***

*"The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!' When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38 Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?'" **John 1:35-38***

*"Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" **Luke 9:23-25***

*"Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." **Mark 7:31-37***

Ignatian Course

Week 4 : The Suffering Saviour

Opening Prayer

*Thanks be to Thee, by Lord Jesus Christ,
For all the benefits that Thou hast won for us
For all the pains and insults that Thou hast borne for us.
Most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
May we see Thee more clearly,
Love Thee more dearly,
And follow Thee more nearly.
Amen.*

Opening Discussion

- *Recap what you remember of the journey so far. What aspects of what we've explored about Ignatian Spirituality have stuck with you?*
- *What have you found the most significant?*
- *What have you found the most challenging?*

Journeying to the cross

Last week, we took time to journey with Jesus in the Gospels, praying that we would become more Christlike through our time in prayer alongside Jesus as He walked on earth. We became aware that following Jesus is a choice, and reflected on our own experiences of choosing to be Christians, and choosing to follow Christ in our everyday lives.

In this, the 3rd week of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, we continue our Gospel journey of following Jesus, and this following now takes us to the cross. We have made a decision to follow Christ, but as we explore the stories of the passion, we face up to the implications of this decision. We hear ourselves echo Peter's words, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' (Matthew 26:25) and we wonder if we can make or really mean this promise. Are we willing to journey with Jesus even into places of despair? Are we prepared to stick with our decision to follow, when it all looks dark and hopeless?

We are confronted with the reality that any decision to follow Christ will be costly; that at times there will be suffering involved, and as we watch the suffering of Christ, we may become aware of our own suffering too. This week of the Spiritual Exercises is often an intensely emotional and painful one, with our own grief and Jesus' grief becoming intertwined. We reflect not merely on the physical pain that Jesus endured but also on the emotional suffering of a person who is misunderstood, isolated, rejected, and alone.

Anyone who has spent time alongside a loved one during their last days knows the over-whelming emotions of this time, the strange sense of time standing still, everything focussing on the bedside

vigil, and the gradual blurring of life and death as the person slips away. In the same way, as we journey with Jesus through His last days, it can feel like we enter into a strange parallel reality, which is full of pain and yet a beautiful privilege.

In this week of the Exercises, we watch Jesus at the Last Supper, washing His disciples' feet, sharing bread and wine, teaching them the way of love, and the cost of discipleship. We take our place alongside Simon of Cyrene, as he carries Jesus' cross, watching Jesus' exhausted figure, trudging through the streets of Jerusalem. We stand alongside the women at the foot of the cross, hearing their desperate tears and overwhelming grief.

Some people find this week of the Spiritual Exercises to be a time of deep desolation. They don't feel close to Christ precisely during this time that they long to. This desolation mirrors Christ's own desolation as he cries out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' It can be precisely in these moments when we feel far from God that we are actually closest to Him.

And so, in this 3rd week, we watch Jesus making his choice, to follow His heavenly father, even when it involves enormous suffering, and we reflect again on the choices that we each face. As we choose to stand alongside Jesus during his time of suffering, so we choose not to turn our faces away from situations of suffering in our world today. We choose the way of 'compassion' – literally meaning 'to suffer with', conscious that in standing alongside those who suffer, we share something of their pain too.

But we also become conscious that Jesus chooses to suffer with us, and we find in our suffering saviour One who understands our own experiences of suffering, and who cares.

Discussion

- *Talk together about all the different parts of Jesus' last few days leading to the cross, often referred to as His 'Passion'. Perhaps look them up in your Bibles, and remind yourselves of all the different characters and moments.*
- *Which parts of Jesus' last days have particular resonances for you? Which characters do you particularly relate to?*
- *Which moments and conversations have the most significance in your own faith journey? Which do you find the most difficult and why?*

Prayer

For our prayer activity this week, take some time in quiet to contemplate one of these stories of Jesus' passion, which has a particular resonance for you. Take some time in your imagination to build up the scene, noticing what you can see, hear, and smell around you. Notice the different characters; take time to watch them, noticing their motives, their concerns, their decisions. Take time to watch Jesus, seeing how He responds to all that is going on around him, and perhaps even to talk with Him.

Do your best to not have any preconceived ideas about what might happen in this time of prayer, simply trust that God will lead you, as you explore this part of Jesus' life.

Ignatian Foundations : Balance

Today's foundation comes from Margaret Silf, who has written several books which help to make Ignatian Spirituality accessible for us today.

"Ignatius urges us to seek the freedom of detachment or indifference. Neither of these words carries weight in today's language or culture. Both sound cold and uncaring, which is far from the spirit in which Ignatius used them. A better word might be balance.

Ignatius talks about "making use of those things that help to bring us closer to God and leaving aside those things that don't."

At first this notion seemed rather exploitative to me, as if the whole of creation were only there for us to select from it the bits that seem to serve our purpose. It didn't come to life for me until one day when I was sitting on a bench in a quiet, sunny courtyard, looking at a fuchsia bush. It was late August, and the bees were constantly visiting the fuchsia. They would land very gently on those flowers that were fully open to receive them. They made no attempt to enter a closed flower or to force the petals in any way. When they found an open flower they crept into its depths to extract the nectar. In doing so, of course, they also carried the pollen from flower to flower, bush to bush, thus ensuring further fruitfulness.

As I watched them, I realized that although the bees were choosing the fuchsia flowers and disregarding other plants growing in the courtyard, other insects were seeking their nourishment from different sources. In choosing what was exactly right for them, they were not only receiving their own nourishment but were also playing an essential role in the fruitfulness of their environment. And in choosing one plant rather than another, they were in no way rejecting or denigrating the others. The secret of this harmonious, cooperative life seemed to lie in each creature's being true to its own essential nature. Each gained what it needed for survival and growth from the source that was right for it, and it did so without harm either to itself or to the flowers. In fact, after each encounter, both insect and flower were left in a richer state than before: the insect had been nourished and the flower had been pollinated.

I found this picture to be a very vivid illustration of what it might mean to "make use of what leads to life" and to leave aside what, for each individual, does not lead to life. It was a truly creative kind of "detachment." It helped me to understand what God might be calling us to when he asks us to let go of our attachments. The bees, I noticed, made no attempt to "possess" the flowers, nor did the flowers attempt to trap and hold the bees. This was a free interchange, perfectly fulfilling the needs of the bees, the fuchsia, and the wider circle of creation around them."

(From Inner Compass, by Margaret Silf)

Discussion

- *What might it mean for you to 'make use of what leads to life'?*
- *How do you relate to the Ignatian idea of being called to be 'true to our own essential nature' or our 'deepest selves'?*

Homework

As we make our way through the Spiritual Exercises, we notice that St Ignatius provides less material and guidelines for prayer as we journey on. We have grown in confidence in the ways of praying that St Ignatius has opened up to us, and we have learnt to trust the inner work of the Holy Spirit in leading and prompting us.

In this week of focussing on the cross and passion of Christ, you are invited to take time in prayer with any parts of the story of Jesus' last days which seem to have particular resonance for you. As with

previous prayer material, use your imagination to place yourself in particular scenes and encounters with Jesus, based on the material that we find in the Gospels. Take time to notice conversations or moments that seem to be particularly important for you, and stay with them in your imagination. Talk to God about what you are seeing and feeling, bringing Him your questions, as well as your observations. You may be led to spend each time of prayer with the same story, or you may move from story to story as the week goes on. Don't feel bound by any sense of the 'right' way to do this. Trust in the gentle nudges of the Holy Spirit as you enter into each time of prayer.

Ignatian Course

Week 5 : Commissioned

Opening Prayer

*Christ has no body but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which He looks 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.*

(Teresa of Avila)

Opening Discussion

- *Share something of your experience of the prayer material from the last week, as you journeyed in prayer with Jesus to the cross*
- *Which stories of Jesus' passion did you spend time praying with? Were you conscious of it being a time of consolation or desolation?*

Joy

Read John **20:1-18**

We enter now into the final week of St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, and the final week of our course. This week is characterised by joy. We share with Jesus' first disciples their sense of joy as they meet the Risen Christ, and their grief is transformed into joy. This final week of the Exercises 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.

We have faced the worst of ourselves, and come to recognise that what matters is who we are in Christ. We discover an inner strength that is who we really are, as God strengthens and nurtures our souls. Renewed by having journeyed with Jesus through each stage of his life and death, we now have a greater confidence in our

friendship with Jesus, and reassurance that Jesus will go with us into each stage of our own journey.

We have a growing confidence that God is indeed in all things, and in all things we are invited to respond to God's call, to choose life, and freedom, and love.

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 corner.

Here, our prayer journey also leads us to look outwards, to God's world and its needs. As Jesus' friends, we share in the apostolic task with Him, collaborating with God's activity in the world.

Discussion

- *If you feel able to, you may want to share a little of how you found the prayer time.*
- *How do you relate to the idea of Jesus commissioning you to share in His work in the world?*
- *Have you had times when you have felt that God has particularly called you to do something/say something? What happened?*
- *Are you aware of particular ways that God might be calling you to 'feed' and 'tend' others today?*

Prayer : Commissioned

Inspired by joy, a focus of this final week of the Spiritual Exercises is God commissioning us to share with him in the apostolic task of revealing to the world the love of God, in Christ.

Read **John 21:15-19** out loud several times through, ideally with different people reading each time. As you listen, allow yourself to imagine that it is you who are responding to Jesus as Peter does, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Then allow yourself to listen to Jesus commissioning you, 'Feed my sheep. Tend my lambs'. As you have this dialogue with Jesus, you may find Jesus saying something else to you, or that you have something further to say to Him. Allow yourself to explore this freely in your imagination, trusting the work of the Holy Spirit in you.

Keep a couple of minutes of silence at the end of the exercise, to reflect on what it means for each of you to speak these words to Jesus, and hear his words to you.

Take, Lord, receive

The 4th week of the Spiritual Exercises moves into a beautiful contemplation, in which Ignatius lays before us the challenge of learning to love like God. We are reminded that love must involve deeds and not just words, as we see in Jesus' offering on the cross. We are reminded that in a loving relationship there is always self-giving, and sharing; God's self-giving to us and to the world, prompts our response of self-giving to God and to one another.

Final Discussion

- *As you reflect on the journey that you have undertaken as a group through this course, take some time to consider the following questions together, and share with one another as much as you feel happy to:*
- *What has been the most significant part of this Ignatian journey for me?*
- *What has God shown me that I want to keep hold of as this journey comes to an end?*
- *Have any challenges emerged that I'd like to speak to someone about: my Priest, Spiritual Director, or Christian friend?*
- *How can I remain grounded in the truth of God's love for me, and focused on serving God and God's people?*

In this final contemplation, we are invited to let God's overwhelming love empower our lives. We see that the whole movement of this journey has been rooted in and oriented towards love. We have come full circle, and return again to a place of reflecting on the love of God. But God's loving embrace now encourages us to look outwards, to be vehicles of God's love in a world of need. Basking in the love of God, we are empowered to love as God loves.

Prayer: Self-offering

In a final time of prayer, Ignatius asks us to reflect on the love of God, and on the many blessings that we've received. We are invited in this time to give thanks for our creation and redemption, as well as for the many blessings that are specific to our own lives and circumstances.

So, filled with gratitude, we are invited to make our own prayer of self-offering that in all things we might love and serve God. Ignatius suggests the following prayer:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours. Do with it what you will. Give me only your love and grace. That is enough for me. (Spiritual Exercises 234 – translation by Fleming)

Take some time to read through this prayer in your own hearts in a time of silence. Consider whether you feel able to pray this prayer for yourself? If you become aware of certain things that might stop you from making this kind of self-offering, offer them to God in the silence, for His gentle healing.

Have a go at creating your own prayer of self-offering and writing it down. Consider what the particular things are in your own life that you want to dedicate to God, and how you might want to articulate your own sense of gratitude leading to self-offering.

As you make this prayer, you may want to use movement to show the intention of your heart, perhaps by kneeling down, or by holding your hands out open in front of you.

Moving Forward

This taste of Ignatian Spirituality and the Ignatian Spirituality Exercises may have whetted your appetite for more of this prayerful wisdom. There are several options open to you if you would like to continue on this journey.

- Find a Spiritual Director who has experience in using Ignatian methods, and can act as a prayer guide for you as you continue to explore Ignatian themes in your own prayer life. The Diocesan Advisor for Spirituality, Canon Andrew Mayes, will be able to help you to find the right person.
- Explore some of the books on the booklist at the end of the course. There are all sorts of books which make Ignatian ideas accessible and applicable in everyday life.

- The Society of the Jesuits produce a daily podcast called 'Pray as you go.' This is a 15 minute audio program, which includes music and a Bible passage to listen to, and questions to ponder prayerfully. It can be found at pray-as-you-go.org/home

- The Jesuits offer further information about Ignatian Spirituality, and a suggestion of prayer themes around the Spiritual Exercises over 8 weeks. These can be found at ignatianspirituality.com

- Consider going on an Ignatian retreat. St Beuno's, in North Wales is a particularly popular location for undertaking some of all of the Spiritual Exercises during a time of retreat. Closer to home, the Chemin Neuf community in Storrington offers Ignatian retreats, or spiritual direction. www.chemin-neuf.org.uk

Booklist

- **Draw Me Into Your Friendship** by David L Fleming, SJ.
A modern translation of the Spiritual Exercises.
- **Sleeping With Bread** by Dennis, Sheila & Matthew Linn.
A gentle exploration of the gift of the examen.
- **Landmarks** by Margaret Silf.
A contemporary exploration of the Spiritual Exercises.
- **Moment by Moment : A retreat in everyday life** by Smith & Merz.
Provides prayer ideas and material to allow you to make your own journey through the Spiritual Exercises.
- **Stretched for Greater Glory** by Aschenbrenner.
This offers an opportunity to dig a little deeper into the theology and journey of the Exercises.
- **The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything** by James Martin.
A practical guidebook on applying Ignatian Spirituality to real life

