

Online Retreat

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The Collaborative Ministry Office - Creighton University

Printer Friendly Version: Week 17a

Guide

Pausing to Review the Graces We Have Received.



[A Hidden Life for 30 Years](#)



[Two Ways of Desiring](#)

We pause again to let the graces we have received penetrate our hearts more deeply. We are making this retreat "in the midst of our everyday lives." We let these reflections become "everyday" for us - more "familiar" and "comfort-able." We prepare to move into the contemplations that Jesus will show us, about his own life's journey.

This week doesn't take us into "new territory." It just takes us deeper. We begin this week with our desires. I renew my desire, my passion, my choice, to be with Jesus - to want to know him more intimately, to love him more deeply, to follow him with more of my heart. This week is not one of deeper struggle or more intense "thinking." This is a week of affirmation. All week, in many very concrete ways, in the background experience of the in-between times, I say, "Yes, this is what I want. This is what I choose. To be with you, Jesus."

This is a week to deepen these graces by enjoying them. I know that this deepening relationship with Jesus is changing me, freeing me, moving me to learn even more about him, all because I love this person who loves me so completely, so unconditionally. I just feel it all week. And enjoy it. I like the way I'm becoming. I like what is opening up in me.

All week I will pause, perhaps especially in the most difficult moments, and smile with a deepening inner smile. The "riches" and the "honors" just don't have such a hold on me. The "poverty" experiences, even moments of "humiliation," don't terrify me as much. I smile because I understand and am becoming more and more attracted to Jesus' way of living his life - moving away from the path to pride and toward the path to humility before God.

Each night this week, I let my words of gratitude come from deeper and deeper in my heart. The messiness or difficulties - even the failures or sin of my day - don't take away my gratitude. They deepen it. I'm grateful because Jesus is drawing me into a joy I hadn't known before. It is a joy that is not dependent on my successes, but upon my life being placed with Jesus, in God's hands.

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week.

We recall that a week of review is very different from the other weeks of this retreat. Here we are just staying where we find fruit. We are savoring and enjoying the gifts that have been given us, the way we savor and enjoy some very special time we have spent with a loved one. It stays with us for a while. Not moving on to something else too quickly really deepens the love we have in our hearts.

We use the same "methods" that we have been using in the weeks so far. Very brief, but focused times throughout our day make this retreat happen. Perhaps this week we will pay more attention to our feelings, particularly what seems to give us deep joy - often beneath lots of conflict - and what seems deeply disturbing - often seeming to push the joy away.

The movements in our hearts help us become more attentive to how the Lord is working in us. We become more attuned to the language of God within us by paying attention to which of these movements seem to come from God and which seem to come from something much more base (indecent, nasty, cowardly), much more intent on our not growing. When we are moving away from the Lord, the movement from God will often be the one that disturb us or confront us. The base movements tend to keep us comfortable and lazy and come up with all kinds of excuses why this way of living is actually good.

When we are moving toward the Lord, the way we are in this part of the retreat, we can trust that the Lord is offering us deep joy, a sense of liberation, courage and peace. The Lord is offering us something that stirs inside of us that will be saying, "This is good. This is right. This is from me. Trust it." And when we are experiencing the desire to know Jesus, to love him, and to follow him, we can expect that there will be conflicting base desires that will raise doubts, confusion, even an unexplainable sadness. They tend to reinforce old habits which seem to become unreasonably more powerful, just now. We can chase these movements away so easily just by saying, with a smile, "I know what's going on here. I don't need this. I'm going to choose life and the peace that is being offered me. Good bye."

The Triple Prayer

As our devotion grows, we might again use this very simple exercise to dramatize the seriousness of our desire and the depth of our sincerity. It's as if we say to ourselves, "I really do want these graces."

We might first turn to Mary, Jesus' dear mother, whom we spent time imagining these past weeks. We can ask her to beg her son, on our behalf, to give us these graces. We can name them. We can say we want to understand these ways of desiring and to be given spiritual poverty, and even actual poverty, if that would help us serve God more and help us save our souls. If it helps, our prayer to Mary could end with the [*Hail Mary*](#).

Then we might turn to Jesus, and ask him to beg his God and Father, on our behalf, for the same graces. And, if it helps, our prayer to Jesus could end with the [*Soul of Christ*](#).

Finally, we might turn to Our God and beg on our own behalf, for these graces. And, our prayer to God could end with the [*Lord's Prayer*](#).

We remember that our progress is by God's gift. And one gift opens the way for our receiving another. We have seen how these graces prepare us for new graces. All we need to do is stay open and trusting that the One who brought us this far along our journey, will graciously remain faithful in bringing us to its conclusion.

For the Journey

There is an old puzzle, "How far does one have to go into a forest, before that person begins coming out?" In the Spiritual Exercises there is no real middle which one passes through and begins exiting. Now that we have come this far, we might have realized that there is no exiting. We are not in a trap or maze, rather by making the Exercises we have entered the life-process of slowly becoming aware of our need for a savior and then who this savior is for us.

This week we are called to consider the realness, the humanness, of Christ's on-going out into our life's struggles.

Here is the man, born of woman, a man like us in every way, growing, maturing through His life's events to embrace our lives and their realnesses.

When was the middle of Jesus' life? Here is the mystery. Once Jesus entered His life, each of us became the center of His ever-lasting life. He has entered our human struggles and there is no end, so there is no point at which He begins exiting. We pray these days with the constancy, the fixed-commitment of His love for our life's journey.

The basic human fear of our being abandoned, our fears of being alone, become the entering-place for His being for and with us. We will watch Him meet the weak, sick, poor, rejectable, contemptible and basically sinful representatives of our fallen selves. Each of us knows how repulsive certain people can be by their selfishness, their anger and their greed. We can pray with our feelings towards these people and with those feelings watch Jesus embrace, touch and bless those very same kinds of persons. We are beginning to pray with how His ways and our ways are so different, but with intimacy and familiarity, those ways of viewing and acting do change.

What is so hard these weeks of the Exercises is our being so comfortable and accustomed to what seems naturally good and right. It is not that Jesus has come to be an example; He is what life is suppose to be and He lived it as invitation.

We pray with our reluctances, our "you got to be kidding," our own weaknesses in responding. We know our pasts, but we have grown. We fear our inadequacies in completing promises or intentions for the future. What we have is only the present and the grace to look within and around at ourselves and the world which continues needing the unabandoning touch and embrace of Jesus.

We pray with good will this week and consider how radical, how differently Jesus lived and desires to live through us. Our conversions are not moral, but now, more relational and attitudinal. Most of the great saints of history have had to live in the presence of their pasts. They had to face how fragile their sense of fidelity might be. They also faced what Jesus faced, the personal and faithful love of God. With God, even our conversions are not impossible. God's love is perfect, our responses are good enough for God to bless and continue to redeem this world.

In These or Similar Words

Dear Jesus,

As I review the retreat from the last few weeks, I am attracted so strongly to one thought from last week's guide: "When all is gift, we can no longer measure ourselves by what we've accumulated." What surprises me, Jesus, is that the thought attracts me. I'm not frightened by it, I'm drawn to it. It sounds so different than the way I live my life, and yet there seems such freedom in it.

I want to embrace the poverty of spirit you are calling me to - I want to embrace this yearning I feel in my heart. That feeling is an invitation from you to join in the kind of life you live because you know I will be happier in it. You know better than anyone, the emptiness I so often face when another success stares blankly back at me from a mirror. It's the kind of success that means so little and yet it means way too much.

I want to embrace the poverty that leads to humiliation. Humiliation isn't something I ordinarily look for, but in this context I see where it is totally opposite the honors and success, the things and riches I often use to fill the dark and vacant spots in my heart.

I stare at the retreat photo from last week. The two women who are landmine victims lean up against the cracked

wall. What evil forces cost them their legs? How many family members have they lost in this struggle for power, greed, riches, honor? And then I see the scripture quote below the photo: "God blesses those people who depend only on him. They belong to the kingdom of heaven!"

That, more than anything, is what I long for in my life. Please God, teach me to depend on you. Show me how to give my life away to you, for you. Guide me in the path of life you chose for yourself.

Like a New Year's resolution, I want this right now, at this moment... but can I sustain this longing? This week's For the Journey says it so well, "They had to face how fragile their sense of fidelity might be." Please, Jesus. I can't continue to want this on my own. I need to recognize your call in this and I don't always want to listen.

I know my faithfulness is flawed and I don't always recognize that "all is gift" in my life. Please help me to understand from someplace deeper than I often want to go, that this call to simpler, humbler, poorer, is the way you are leading me to happiness.

