

Online Retreat

<http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html>

The Collaborative Ministry Office - Creighton University

Printer Friendly Version: Week 33

Guide

Let us reflect on God's love for us
and our response.

Next week is the final week of retreat. This week we look back, to contemplate what we have received in this retreat - **God's love itself**. And we consider **our response**. Our desire for this week is **to be filled with a deep sense of the gifts we have received**, and so filled with profound gratitude, we will be moved **to love and serve God, in all things**, in our everyday lives.



Two convictions guide our reflections:

- **Love expresses itself in deeds, rather than mere words.**
Love is the gift of self for the other.
- **Love that is reciprocal grows.**
Lovers give of themselves to each other, with each deep gift leading to a deeper response.

This week we will recall all of the gifts of love we have received during this retreat. We will remember all the ways God has given us graces that were the gift of self. We want to grow in gratitude for the activity of God's love for us, especially in the gift of Jesus for us, and the ways in which we have been blessed to know, love and serve with Jesus.

This week we want to open our hearts to the broadest sense of God's love that we can imagine. Using images like the rays of the sun's warm light or the overwhelming power of a constant waterfall, we will consider how God's life giving presence and love flow in and through all of creation, given to and for us.

Use the helps for getting started, to the right, to enter into these exercises of appreciation in detail.

With each level of gratitude, we want to express our love. Our response, and our offering of self in love, is what seals and strengthens the bonds of love between us and God. We will grow in a sense that all we have is gift. As we have grown in freedom, we can surrender ourselves in love more and more completely.

All week, with growing gratitude and deepening affection, I will make offerings of myself in these or similar words, until they become mine:

*Take, Lord, and receive
all my liberty, my memory,
my understanding, my entire will -
all that I am and possess.
You have given all this to me.
I now return it all to you.
It is yours now.*

*Use these gifts according to your will.
Give me only your love and your grace.
That is enough for me, and all that I desire.*

If you haven't done so already, please fill out the anonymous form to the right, to give us feedback on the retreat. Thank you.

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week.

Our contemplation on the love of God for us, and our response, can be done both in several prayer periods and in the background times throughout our week.

What we are considering:

For all these months, we have considered our relationship with God. We now draw it all together in order to understand and appreciate all that God has given us in this retreat, in our lives, and what God continues to give us.

- **The blessings of creation, redemption and the special graces I have received.**
- **God dwelling in every part of creation, especially in me.**
- **How God labors for me in all of creation, giving and sustaining life.**
- **How all blessings and gifts descend - as the sun's light, and water flowing from a fountain.**

And we will consider our response.

The grace we ask for:

Our desire for this week is to be filled with a deep sense of the gifts we have received, and so filled with profound gratitude, we will be moved to love and serve God, in all things, in our everyday lives. The [prayer](#) for this week, helps us ask for this grace.

Our Daily Life Contemplation:

It is very important to try to focus our attention this week on gratitude for God's love. The two "convictions about love" from our guide are critical: love consists more in deeds than in words, and love involves the mutual exchange of gifts between the lovers. It would be very helpful to set aside some brief prayer times, using this simple help:

- **Begin by feeling the presence of God.**
- **Ask for the grace I desire - an intimate sense of God's love for me.**
- **Reflect upon God's love:**
 - **What has God done for me?**
 - **What has God given me?**
 - **How does God sustain me?**
 - **What is God offering me?**
- **Speak, lover to lover, with words, feelings of gratitude.**
- **Write down what I wish to remember.**

These are not just "intellectual" reflections. We are asking for "intimacy" here and our goal is that our memory and our "accounting" of God's gifts will fill us with deep and moving gratitude and stir our hearts to a response of love and service.

The daily means:

These reflections will become a part of the movements of our everyday lives this week if we can make use of

the means we've been practicing for so long. It involves how we **focus** at the beginning and end of each day. If we get up each day and "capture" a moment to focus our consciousness and desire for the day, at the time we do something very routine (like putting on our slippers or robe), we develop a "pattern" that will serve us very well this week and all our lives. It changes the way we experience our busy days. That brief moment is **there** every morning. We just need to use it. And if we take a similar moment each night, before we go to bed, at a routine time, we can end each day "receiving" and giving thanks for the graces we receive. In that brief, nightly moment we can grow in awareness of God's activity in our busy days and become more and more grateful, even in the most difficult of times.

There are opportunities throughout the day, in all the **background** times we have. Driving, walking from one place to another, pausing to think, transitioning from one thing to another. Those times are **there**, no matter how brief. They are usually filled with something - some worry or planning or "daydreaming." We can use them - even if they are 30 seconds long - to focus our attention, to return to the thought and desire of the morning, to note how **this upcoming event of my day** fits into this desire I have. Some examples might help.

I am taking a shower. My mind is already zooming about the day ahead. Can I focus, for just a minute, for even a simple prayer? "Lord, help me to know you are with me today. I need you. Help me to stay open to discover ways you love me."

I am driving to work. My mind is perhaps filled with what I need to do today. Perhaps I have others in the car with me. Perhaps it's my habit to listen to the radio. Can I take just a moment to return my focus to the Lord's presence? It will change how I listen to the radio or deal with the people I'm with in the car. Perhaps I am alone and can turn the radio off and give myself 20-30 minutes of time to focus and reflect. I could look at each of the events in my upcoming day and prepare to enter into them in the way I desire.

There will inevitably be some challenges in my day, perhaps even some conflicts. As I become more and more reflective, I will become more and more familiar with the "patterns" I display. In the "approach" to those situations and people, I can take just a moment and let the *background* reflection prepare me. Perhaps I can take a slow, deep breath and in 15 seconds pray: "Lord, I know you love me. Let me experience your sustaining love and care here." Or, "Lord, you have forgiven me so many times for this pattern. Thank you for your love and mercy. Fill me with your peace now." Or, "Lord, you have let me desire to be *with you* before. Let me be *with you* here, so that your love can flow through me." Or, "Take, Lord, receive. I offer myself to you in this. Give me only your love and your grace. I ask for nothing more."

Whether I find time for prayer periods this week or do my reflections throughout the week in the background times, it can be very profitable to keep repeating the "Take, Lord, receive" prayer. Perhaps to memorize it, or find my own words for it.

Make use of the various resources provided for this week. The [For the Journey](#), the [Readings](#), the [Prayers](#), and sample words for our attempts at expression, in ["In these or similar words."](#) And please take time to fill out the [response form](#) for us.

The whole retreat comes together this week. The Lord who brought us along this path will continue to bless us with his love and with the grace for our response.

There is an irony imbedded in this, the final Exercise of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Though it is the final exercise, the making of the Exercises never ends. God does not send us a certificate proclaiming that "You have successfully finished the course." Paul himself, wrote that he had not reached the finish-line, but presses on. So we finish our beginning and continue our being created and recreated by the love of God. Two points for Ignatius were very important during these last exercises: love consists more in deeds than in words, and love is a mutual handing over to the other of all that one has. In the first For the Journey we are encouraged not to look for progress or lack of it during our journeys. Instead, we have been encouraged to watch Love at work, manifesting that love in deeds and in the handing over to us all the gifts of grace and life which we have been offered.

This week we pray with the receptivity of children who sense how deeply they are loved. Ignatius wrote these Exercises to be very personal and so we move from the general, "we" to the very particular, "I."

There are the children in our culture, who at the end of opening all their Christmas presents might have a feeling of "Is this all there is?" Maybe after evaluating his or her siblings' gifts, he or she might feel cheated or less-loved. This is very human and understandable.

I am encouraged to be the Christmas-presented child who after seeing my gifts and those of others, wants to look at my parents and relatives and wonder, "Why are they so good and loving to me?"

It is in this spirit of grateful wonder that Ignatius asks me to make some response of love freely. "All I have, You have given me. You do not want them back, but that I receive them well and what I can give You back is my selfish, possessive and exclusive possession and use of them. I ask only that You bless and grace me in our future together. That would be enough for me and a beginning for You."

I walk through a world of created gifts. Trees, flowers, birds of all sizes and kinds, amazingly diverse and all these presents given to me.

I look up at the moon, the stars, I marvel at the changes of the weather as the sun moves back and forth keeping this world at the proper temperatures for life and growth. All this God hands over to me.

I return to the child-like puzzling at the littlest things and muse that God has always and is always at work to hand things to me. God is laboring to attract me, but not force me to see the Divine finger and hand and arm and Self, creating me and all else for me as well. This exercise increases my awareness of how everything is a gift and at the same time an invitation. I am both the recipient and the responder. Once I am aware of how God exists in everything and everything exists in God, how can I keep from singing, from watching and listening, from sharing and from wanting to know what is being offered at any one moment of my life? The River of God's love flows on whether I am attentive to its presents and presence or not. I want to be less unavailable to the Giver of love Who works and does things in my life so as to reduce me to the wondering-child of God that I am. The "Child of God" is a mature human who knows what things are, where they have come from and where they are taking me. All things which come from God return to God, including me.

We do not leave the Exercises, we leave to live with them as ways to constantly recover sight and sensitivity to the goodness of God and the goodness of this God-love self that I am.

In These or Similar Words

Dearest Friend Jesus,

My heart is so full. I feel loved and honored and graced and flawed and loved all over again. I am full of wonder for the love I feel from you and for you. Yes, I am so aware of my flaws and how they sometimes keep me from feeling the love you are pouring on me at every moment. But right now I also feel your deep love and care for me especially right there, in my weaknesses, those parts of me I want to hide in the dark. Your love brings it out into the light of your warmth and suddenly, I seem to be freer from it.

Now, after these many months of talking with you, loving you and accepting your love in a whole new way, I realize that you will always, always be with me, even in - or especially in - my weaknesses.

And the gifts! So many gifts you have lavished on me over my lifetime. I feel so deeply your love for me. I see the many ways you love me each day, in the world around me, in the many people you put into my life to love me each day.

The line from scripture returns to me over and over as I ponder this joyful puzzle: what return can I make for all that the Lord has given me? What is it, Jesus? How can I ever show you the kind of love I feel for you or thank you for all you have given me? I want to give you everything I have.

I want to respond to these many gifts in some way that comes from the deepest part of my being and every time I think of the many ways you have loved me and given me gifts, I know I want to give you everything I have.

Jesus, you have given me so much, just as the prayer says: my mind, my liberty, memory, understanding, my entire will and my being. Everything I am in this life, I am because of what you have given me. What can I ever do to thank you? Please, dear friend, may I present these gifts back to you? Can I ask you to use them in this world, for your world, in any way you would like? I want to be free enough to offer you my life. What would you like to do with it? How can I use my life to serve you in this world? How can I love others, as you would like me to?

I look forward with great joy to the weeks and months ahead, dear Jesus, so that together, as we continue to talk, I will discover the answers to these questions.

I thank you for my life. I thank you with my life.

Prayer to Begin Each Day:

**May all that I am today,
all that I try to do today,
may all my encounters, reflections,
even the frustrations and failings
all place my life in your hands.**

**Lord, my life is in your hands.
Please, let this day give you praise.**

Readings:

Suscipe - Take, Lord, Receive

First Point. This is to recall to mind the blessings of creation and redemption, and the special favors I have received.

I will ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and finally, how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me according to His divine decrees.

Then I will reflect upon myself, and consider, according to all reason and justice, what I ought to offer the Divine

Majesty, that is, all I possess and myself with it. Thus, as one would who is moved by great feeling, I will make this offering of myself:

Receive, O Lord, all my liberty.
Take my memory, my understanding, and my entire will.
Whatsoever I have or hold, You have given me;
I give it all back to You
and surrender it wholly to be governed by your will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
and I am rich enough and ask for nothing more.

(Spiritual Exercises, #234)

"I ask God to give me an intimate knowledge
of the many gifts I have received,
that filled with gratitude for all,
I may in all things
love and serve the Divine Majesty."
(Spiritual Exercises, #233)

Intimate knowledge.
That's what I ask you for, Lord.
I want that *insight*, that *understanding*, that *knowledge*
that will be about our intimacy.

Many gifts.
Let me count the ways you have loved me.
The gifts of your love.
All that you have given me.
All that I am.
I so often look at my shortcomings.
Let me see the gifts.
All of them.

Filled with gratitude.
Fill me, Lord, with gratitude.
Let my heart,
sometimes filled with so much else,
be filled with thanksgiving.
Give me the feelings of gratitude,
of a grateful heart.
Joy, freedom, peace, generosity.

In all things love and serve.
Let the overflowing gratitude in my heart
touch *all* the things and people in my life.
Every thought, word and deed.
Every hurt, every slight, every loss.
Every reaction and response.
Every opportunity and choice.
Every offering of myself.

**In all,
let me love and serve you.**

Amen.