

Week 4

A Picture of Harmony—Living in Balance

Guide: Models of Freedom



This week we move from giving thanks and praise to God—from the big picture of ordered, purposeful creation—to the concrete picture of living in that harmony of purpose, in balance.

Throughout this week, we desire to be *inspired* by women and men who seem to be in harmony with the end for which we are created and who seem to use all of creation with this freedom.

St. Ignatius put it so simply:

We should use God's gifts of creation however they help us in achieving the end for which we were created, and we ought to rid ourselves of whatever gets in the way of our purpose.

In order to do this we must make ourselves indifferent to all creation, to the extent that we do not desire health more than sickness, riches more than poverty, honor more than dishonor, a long life more than a short life, or anything at all in and of itself. We should desire and choose only what helps us attain the end for which we were created.

We all know what a handicap it is to lack the indifference, or balance, in our lives that Ignatius talks about. When my *desire and choice* moves in the direction of “I want my health; I want success; I want to take care of myself; I crave honor and attention,” I know I’m not in much balance and I’m becoming too self-absorbed.

However, when we see someone who seems to be carefree in loving, in giving of themselves, in living freely for others, we are *inspired*. That person seems to have gotten it right.

Let this week be one of naming and being inspired by people who seem to be models of freedom for me. As always, make use of the photo and the resources for this week. Look back at past resources if you’d like. But, in the everyday busyness of our week, we can let ourselves be conscious of the ways people live lives of praise, reverence, and service, perhaps heroically, perhaps in profound simplicity. Who are the people who show us the way to getting it right ourselves?

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

Who are the people who show us the way to getting it right ourselves?

A very practical way to get started this week is to get out a piece of paper and make a list of the people who inspire me. Start with people I don’t know. They can be people in history—a St. Ignatius or St. Teresa of Ávila or Martin Luther King Jr. They can be people I’ve at some time been inspired by—that

guy who owned the textile plant out east, who, when his plant burned down, kept all his employees on the payroll until he could rebuild the plant. Then name the people I know personally who inspire me—it could be that great-aunt who lived a heroic life or my pastor or someone I love.

Once we've come up with this list of people, we can spend our week reflecting on *what qualities in each of them* inspire us. How is their life in balance? What is it that they seem to be *free from*? What is it that they are *free for*? What were or are their *choices and desires*?

The young woman in the photo for this week was one of our students here at Creighton University. She is in one of our mountain-village *campo* clinics in the Dominican Republic. Just look at her face this week. What is she feeling in her heart? It took only a little freedom to go down there, but we can see how in her service she is receiving far more than she is giving.

This is not a week for judging ourselves. We may become more aware of the unfreedoms in our lives, but it is not a time to become self-focused. There will be time later to let all these graces work together for our own spiritual freedom. This is simply the next step in our journey. Admiration precedes imitation. This is a week to walk around with a growing gallery of images of inspiring people, with qualities and dedication that show us the power of freedom.

Remember to let this process fill the background of our lives this week. Upon waking, putting on my slippers or my robe—for the briefest of moments—I can say a simple prayer of desire: “Lord, I want to be inspired this week. Let this day draw me closer to how people live their lives in great freedom.” When I’m driving or walking down the hall or preparing dinner or perhaps as I’m reading the paper, someone on my list is in my mind, and some part of their grace-filled way of living is touching me. When I go to bed, perhaps as I’m turning out lights in the house, I can say, “Thank you, Lord, for those moments that stirred my heart today.”

Check in with our progress throughout the week. How many people on my list have I reflected on? Do new names come to me? It will be difficult to keep focused this week. It is easier for us to be negative than to give ourselves over to sustained admiration. If I find myself losing focus this week, just return to these pages and refocus. Act against any negativity by returning to the photo.

Remember to say “thank you” throughout this week.

For the Journey: True Freedom

We are facing a prelude or overture this week, which follows the pattern of the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is like the opening section of a musical play, which gets us familiar and comfortable with the score that will be developed later in the work.

The difficulty with what we hear as openers this week can make us a bit uncomfortable and question whether we want to continue. Near the beginning of the Exercises, Ignatius displays what he means by freedom. I know that each of us wants a long life, health, a good name, and sufficient wealth. It may appear that right here, after such gentle prayer, the other shoe has finally dropped. To continue making these exercises, we must already have complete detachment from such natural desires and from life, health, and wealth.

In truth, Ignatius points to the universal human inclinations, which, if not tended to, can drive, dominate, imprison, and destroy our experience of life. We are invited in this overture simply to look at the areas that most commonly take us out of harmony. For the first time in this retreat we are asked to check

whether we are free enough to face our unfreedoms. It is only when we do this that the rest of the symphony of the Exercises will make any sense.

We must be very clear about this, then; Ignatius assumes that as human beings we will experience disordering tendencies. Can I be honest and gentle with the uncovering of what plays such a loud part in my personal orchestra—that there is disorder in my life’s symphony? Later, Ignatius will be inviting us to watch Jesus as the conductor of our own, and the world’s, musical play. When Ignatius uses the term *indifference*, he does not mean “not caring.” He is literally *up front* about where we are all going by making this retreat. Here, he indicates the areas of “over-caring” that will take us away from trusting in the God-caring that is true freedom. Will we, in time, be freed to watch, listen to, and follow the Divine Conductor?

This week we are guided toward a freedom that will be the result of honest reflection and prayerful surrender, but that takes time and God’s good grace. The basic freedom of this week is the simple recognition of our human tendencies, which, when softened by our contact with Jesus and God’s ways, become elements of harmony and balance. “Be not afraid”; the God who calls is faithful, and that God is constantly inviting us into the symphony of life.

In These or Similar Words . . .

Dear Lord,

It was easier last week. I looked at the balance and harmony in the world. I could see it in the changing of the seasons and the sunrise and in lots of wonderful things that didn’t risk anything from me.

But now—now I’m being invited to look at the harmony, or lack of it, in my own life. I was so struck by the words in the guidepost: “Can I be honest and gentle with the uncovering of what plays such a loud part in my personal orchestra—that there is disorder in my life’s symphony?” Something in me is stirred by that, Lord. There are parts of me that are too loud in the symphony of my life. I hear the horns too loudly as I worry about failing or about being seen as a failure. Drums are banging as I am too attached to the admiration of others, and it feels shallow because all I want is to somehow give my life to you.

Please, Lord, I beg you. Give me the grace to see how to balance my life. How can I have the kind of calm and peace that the woman in the photo this week has? She is sitting in a poor clinic and laughing in the midst of the tragedy around her. The peace she has doesn’t have anything to do with money, pride, or how other people see her. She has given her life to you. Help me find that kind of peace in my own life.

But then I get afraid. What are you asking of me, Lord? How much do I have to give up? Can I do this? I am so torn between wanting my life to be in balance and in harmony with you and not wanting to give up anything that I now have. I’m just afraid. In my fear I turn to you and open my arms, asking for the help I need.

Please, God, help me live my life in a way that draws me closer to you. Help me give up anything that doesn’t do that. Thank you so much for your love and your care for me. Thank you for creating me and desiring me to be in harmony with you.

Scripture Readings

Ephesians 2

Romans 8

Matthew 10:29–31