

Review Week

Pausing to Review the Graces We Have Received

Guide: The Graces Take Us Deeper



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 comfortable. 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 dependent not on my successes but on my life being placed with Jesus, in God’s hands.

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

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 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 disturbs us or confronts us. The base movements tend to keep us comfortable and lazy and make us come up with all kinds of excuses for 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. Goodbye."

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: The Human Christ

There is an old puzzle that goes, "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 that 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 a maze; rather, 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 living 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 everlasting 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 toward these people and with those feelings watch Jesus embrace, touch, and bless those very same kinds of people. 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 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 supposed to be and he lived it as invitation. We pray with our reluctances, our “You’ve 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 goodwill this week and consider how radically, 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, and 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 past 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 from the way I live my life, and yet there seems to be 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 to 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 land-mine 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 that 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.