

Contemplation to Attain the Love of God

Grace: *Ask for the grace to have an intimate knowledge of the many blessings I have received so that I might be filled with great gratitude and be given the courage to love and serve God joyfully.*

Introduction:

Before beginning the reflection on the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God, Saint Ignatius Loyola suggests that you recall that “love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words.” Such love encourages and supports your generous response.

With respect to your experience of the Spiritual Exercises it is good to look back on your journey. What progress have you made? What insights has God shared with you? What are the highlights of that journey?

How is your relationship with Jesus different now than it was before you started the Spiritual Exercises? Which memories stand out to you as the strongest and most significant? As you recall those moments, identify the feelings that are still within you. What is your response to God’s action in your prayer life?

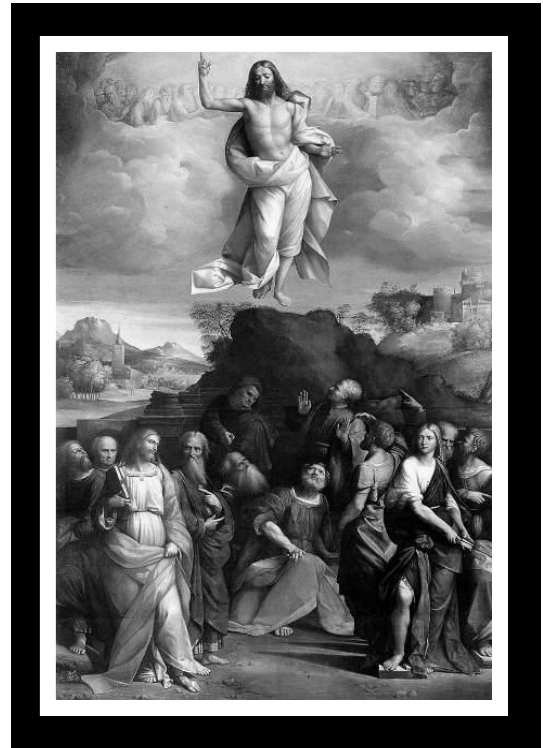
Ignatius encourages you to “ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me.” As you consider this, what ought you in turn offer to God. Can you pray the words of Ignatius’ *Suscipe* from your heart?

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding, and all my will
all that I have and possess.
You, Lord, have given all to me.
I now give it back to you. O Lord.
All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will.
Give me your love and your grace, for that is enough for me.*

Can you accept the challenge to live your life based entirely on an attitude of love and gratitude for all the blessings that God shares with you? Have you discovered and are you convinced in the deepest part of your heart that Jesus’ way of acting is the way that you want to act? If so, what are the implications of that commitment to live more like Jesus?

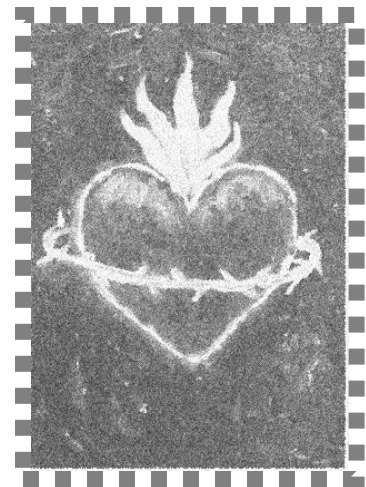
Dare you pray for that *sensus Christi* that you may feel with the feelings of Jesus, with the sentiments of Jesus’ heart to love God the Father and to love all persons. To whom are you called to share that love? Dare you pray to Jesus to teach you His way so that it becomes your way? Dare you become a true companion of Jesus, living and working with Jesus by your side everyday?

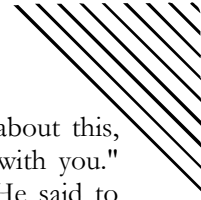
The real challenge of the Spiritual Exercises is to live in God’s love, to be transformed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and to gradually allow yourself to become more like Jesus every day. How do you respond to Jesus’ mission as He sends you forth to share the Good News?



John 21: 1-25 Peter Reinstated - Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" - "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" - "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.



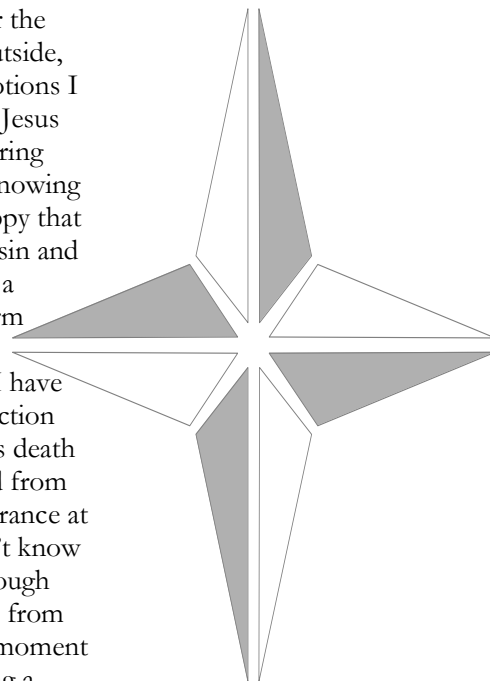


Luke 24:36-53 The Ascension - While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.



Matthew 28: 16-20 The Commissioning of the Disciples - Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

In these or similar words ... It had been a few days since Jesus had first revealed himself to me at Emmaus after his resurrection, and I was sitting alone near the sea, contemplating the recent events that had happened. It was still dark outside, and I was watching the sea, deep in thought. I was confused about the emotions I was feeling now, for I had gone from great joy at celebrating Passover with Jesus and all of the disciples, to great sorrow at his death, to confusion at discovering that his body was missing, and now to bittersweet happiness and peace at knowing that Jesus was risen again to new life. I was obviously and undoubtedly happy that Jesus wasn't committed to death as his fate, but had rather triumphed over sin and evil to be reunited with God. But another somewhat selfish part of me felt a certain sadness at knowing that Jesus would never be with me in human form again that caused this joy to be bittersweet. Even though through all my experiences with Jesus from his birth to his appearance to me at Emmaus, I have felt a strong and indescribably intimate connection to his presence, a connection which transcended our human relationship to one another, I still felt like his death put a certain distance between us, one that altered the way in which I would from this point on experience his presence. I felt overjoyed because Jesus' appearance at Emmaus convinced me of his immortality, but at the same time as if I didn't know how to maintain the connection that each of my experiences with Jesus through his lifetime brought for me. Since I had known Jesus through all of his life, from the moment Mary trustingly let me hold the baby Jesus in the stable to the moment Jesus revealed his disguised presence to me at Emmaus, I was used to feeling a connection to him while in his physical presence. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to keep a connection with him now that he was gone. My thoughts wandered back to the moment early in the morning one Sunday when I walked to the tomb of the deceased Jesus to anoint his body. Upon discovering his body missing, I was filled with a confusion similar to the one I was experiencing now; I didn't know whether it was a moment of great joy at his triumph over death or if there was some other explanation for his missing body. I remembered the strong feeling of his presence that overcame me at that moment, and encouraged me that he had risen. At that moment, I knew that even though Jesus was not human anymore, he was still there encouraging me with the same connection we had always shared. As I was recalling this, at that moment, the sun suddenly peeked over the horizon, and I was reminded of the same sunrise I experienced the morning of Jesus' resurrection. Upon recalling this, I became filled with the same feeling of closeness to him. Before I knew it, I looked over to my right and Jesus sat right beside me, looking out over the sea, just as he had done when we were on the way back to Jerusalem one morning. He looked over at me this time, however, not with a worried expression, but rather a warm smile and asked "Do you love me?" I responded immediately: "Yes". He said "then go and follow me. And remember that I am with you. Always", and disappeared. At that moment I knew that I would be able to weather any troubles ahead, because I had enjoyed a lifetime with Jesus, a lifetime of memories and experiences that had all brought me closer to Jesus and had all helped me experience his love and his intimate care for me. His presence is permanent in my life now; nobody can take it away. He will be there with me and for me always. And I will follow him.



Practicing What Your Preach ... You are challenged to go forth and put all that you have experienced in the Spiritual Exercises into practice. Live in God's love and respond to that love by sharing it with others. Listen to the Spirit and follow Jesus wherever He leads you.