

The Oblates of the Virgin Mary
at Saint Francis Chapel

Spiritual Exercises for
The Year of the Eucharist



Year of the
EUCHARIST

Spiritual Exercises for The Year of the Eucharist



St. Francis Chapel—Boston
staffed by
The Oblates of the Virgin Mary

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On the Cover

Christ and the Disciples in Emmaus Follower of Caravaggio. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Photo by Yelkrokoyade, 2012

Contents

1. Prayer of Preparation for Eucharistic Adoration	6
2. Introduction	7
3. Foundational Week: From Sacrament to Reality	11
4. Week I: Abraham To See as God Sees	15
5. Week II: St. Paul God Sees Me in Mercy	19
6. Week III: The Man Born Blind I Am!	22
7. Week IV: Peter or Judas To Whom Shall We Go?	25
8. Week V: Ruth Being in Communion	28
9. Week VI: St. Mary of Bethany Patient Love	31
10. Week VII: St. Joseph Silent Devotion	34
11. Week VIII: Our Lady Reciprocal Love	37
12. Week IX: St. John Living the Eucharist	40
13. Eucharistic Amazement	43

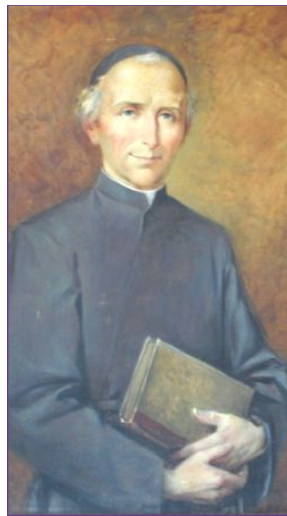
*Not as man sees does God see,
because man sees the appearance
but the LORD looks into the heart.*

1 Samuel 16:7

Prayer for Preparation for Eucharistic Adoration

By Venerable Bruno Lanteri

O my gracious God, make my act of adoration pleasing to you. This marvelous and simple act, as I give you all that I am and unite myself to all that you are. Oh Jesus! I am at your feet; let me find you in my prayer. Oh Jesus! Speak to my heart that I may abandon myself and my concerns to you. May I give all of myself to you; all my thoughts, all my feelings, my desires and all that is within me and without. I leave all to you, oh Lord. Make of me what you will, oh my God. I give to you my life, not only the life I live in exile on earth but also my hope for life in eternity. I leave you my salvation. I put my will in your hands and give to you the power you gave to me over my actions. Make me according to your heart and create in me a pure heart, a docile and obedient heart. Strengthen my faith that I may run after you and after your sweetness. Oh my God, make my heart right that I may love you with all of it, with that heart which you form in me by your grace. May I surrender everything to you and have nothing left but myself, so that I may surrender that too, the one gift I know you desire. Amen.



Venerable Bruno Lanteri
(1759-1830)

Founder of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary

Introduction

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men. Then the angel said to the women in reply, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you." Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."*
(Matthew 28:1-10)

"Just as he said." Before the resurrection happened as an historical event, Jesus announced it. The angel sent the women to announce the resurrection even before they had seen the risen Jesus with their own eyes. Entering into the power of the resurrection is first and foremost an act of believing in what Jesus said and entrusting yourself to his promises. Then sight becomes possible. That is why in the Gospel of John Jesus is recorded as saying, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29). Yet, as it was for St. Thomas the Apostle it is so for us, namely, that we struggle with doubt. The struggle to come to greater trust in Christ is a noble one. One that requires a commitment to spiritual exercise.

Jesus Christ has given himself to us as spiritual nourishment in the Holy Eucharist. His very life is given up for you and shared with you to be consumed and to become one with him, *just as he said* at the Last Supper.

Faith is always an event of communion. No one comes to faith alone and isolated. Faith is a gift that comes from God but is transmitted through a community. The Apostles did not come to knowledge of

the resurrection through their own intuition. The women were sent to them and they shared their new faith. The Apostles then established Churches, communities of faith centered on the Eucharist, throughout the world. To receive faith is to receive the gift of communion with God and with others. It means to entrust oneself to this communion and to give oneself to its growth and mission.

The Exercises

These spiritual exercises are meant to generate a deeper love, devotion and faith in the Holy Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus Christ said, “My flesh is true food, my blood is true drink” (John 6:55). The Church is built on this promise and celebrates it faithfully throughout the ages, *just as he said*. The exercises are divided into ten weeks. That is the number of weeks between Holy Thursday and the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, sixty-six days. There is a theme for each week of exercises focused on a particular biblical figure and how that theme relates to the Eucharist. With each theme there is a grace to ask the Lord for prior to each exercise. This grace to ask for should be present with you throughout the week as it shapes your encounters with the Lord. As you go through whole book of exercises you should find yourself asking for other graces as well.

Each week of exercises include contemplations and meditations. These are to be understood within the Ignatian tradition of prayer. Contemplation means to use your God-given imagination to picture the scenes of the scriptures assigned. Be as vivid as possible. See the whole scene, including the place, the people, the sounds and the colors. Place yourself in the scene as well and be a particular character, or yourself. When you do this be sure to enter the scene as you truly are, not as you think you should be, but according to how you really feel. In this way, a contemplation is not a work of fiction; it is allowing the word of God to penetrate deeply into your heart. Contemplation is a work of the whole person: mind, heart and emotions. Some of the scriptures for contemplation are lengthy. This allows for the contemplative exercises to be divided up over a couple of days. They do not have to be, nor should they be, completed in one sitting.

A meditation is a work of the mind. We read carefully the scripture passages and we ponder the meaning. What particular words,

phrases or images attract you as you carefully read over the text? Meditation primarily concerns thinking through the scripture verses, but in its best form it often leads to very intimate conversation with God or simply resting in his love.

Repetition & Colloquy

A very important part of Ignatian spirituality is repetition. It means to return to a particular exercise when it is fruitful to do so. If you pray over a particular passage of scripture and it brings you either great consolation or desolation, that is, when there is significant spiritual movement within you, it probably calls for a repeat meditation on the same passage. At the end of each exercise you should prayerfully converse with any Person of the Holy Trinity, Our Lady or the saint of the week. This colloquial prayer opens one to divine intimacy.

Journaling

At the end of each exercise, contemplation or meditation, you should use a journal to record what happened in the prayer. Do not do this while the prayer is taking place. Wait till you are finished. Record such things as what you reflected on. What was said? How did you respond? What did it make you think or feel? Did you receive a special grace or a new challenge? To do this means you must review your prayer. If the prayer did not seem to go well, explain to your journal why. You should write in your journal all that would describe the drama of your prayer. These journal entries are for you. You should re-read them as you continue through the whole ten weeks, noticing the trends that emerge from your time of prayer.

For Consideration

Each week contains a number of questions to help guide your meditations and contemplations. These questions for consideration assist in maintaining a spirit of recollection.

Literary Example

Each week of exercises also contain an example from a great work of literature. These literary examples help to illumine the theme of the week. Coming to a deeper faith and love of the Eucharist is truly a drama. Part of the drama of life is our continuing transformation into the likeness of Christ and our growing ability to become a living spiritual sacrifice to God. To live this Eucharistic life we need to be nurtured by a truly Catholic culture. Attempting growth in the spiritual life while concurrently being shaped by a worldly culture is impossible. The literary works mentioned in these exercises are meant to provide a sample of how a Christian culture nurtures and protects the life of communion with God.

Other Spiritual Works

As a compliment to meditation and contemplation, the other traditional spiritual disciplines are recommended during these days. Fasting and alms giving are important means to aid prayer and to allow the effects of prayer to be manifested in acts of love. Fasting doesn't just have to involve meat or foods. We should fast from the things that have the greatest hold on us. That could be a cell phone or social media or a particular hobby. While in a period of fasting utilize your journal to record the thoughts and emotions that arise within you. This will allow you to know what kind of hold these objects have on you and how they forge a part of your identity as a Catholic.

Spiritual exercises always require a spirit of generosity to the Lord. They also require an honesty in prayer. Be mindful of all your thoughts and emotions and record them honestly. It is only through this type of honesty and generosity that a true transformation of the heart may take place.

Foundation Week: From Sacrament to Reality

He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will" (Mark 14:35-36).

Jesus

At the Last Supper he proclaimed the words and celebrated the supper. Later, he lived out the full implication and truth of what he said and celebrated. In between he prayed and struggled within himself to accept and take unto himself the full truth of what he said and what it meant.

Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He proclaimed that the bread and wine became his body and blood shed and broken for the forgiveness of our sins. The Last Supper and institution of the Eucharist was the sacrament, the ritual signs and words, of the reality that Jesus would live out to the full on the cross. Before he lived it out, he anticipated it, in sacramental form at the Supper. What Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the time of his agony, was to prayerfully take into himself the meaning of the sacrament he celebrated at the Supper in order to live out the reality to the full on the cross on Good Friday.



Christ on the Mount of Olives. Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). Museum of Fine Arts Rennes. Photo by Pymouss, 2010

In the Garden the humanity of Jesus resisted the reality of the horror of the cross, but he knew the Eucharist—the sacrament of his sacrifice—that he had proclaimed and celebrated at the Last Supper was the will of his Father and so in his agony he brought his humanity, and ours, into conformity with the Father's will just as he had proclaimed at the Supper and prepared to fulfill his sacrificial mission.

By our baptism we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to undertake with Jesus the same task. Before we even fully experience and understand the reality of what it means to receive the body and blood of Christ and to be in communion with God, we profess faith in the sacrament. First we speak the words; we say that we believe in the Eucharist before we even recognize the implications. On Holy Thursday we celebrate with sobriety the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood that makes it possible, and accompany the Lord to the Garden of Agony. On Corpus Christi, 66 days later, we celebrate with joy the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. Those 66 days—the in between time—is a time of appropriating, of taking unto oneself, the full truth of what we profess in faith and must live in charity. Living to the full the faith we profess in the Eucharist as communion with the body and blood of Christ is not simply recalling a sacrificial death on the cross; much more, it is participating in the glory of the Lord that shines forth on the face of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Exercises for the Foundational Week

First Exercise: Jesus at the Last Supper

Grace to ask for: To profess a deep faith in the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, that his body and blood are given to us as food and drink in the Eucharist.

Contemplations: Matthew 26:20-30

Meditation: John 6:52-59

Second Exercise: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Grace to ask for: To recognize any resistance to faith in the Eucharist within me and to accept the will of God concerning the Blessed Sacrament.

Contemplation: Mark 14:32-42

Meditation: John 6:27-29

Third Exercise: Jesus is Crucified and Buried

Grace to ask for: To experience the love of Jesus for me in securing my redemption on the cross.

Contemplation: Matthew 27:45-61

Meditation: John 6:37-40

For Consideration:

1. What are the reactions and responses within you as you pray through the words of Jesus concerning his body and blood?
2. What does believing in Jesus really mean?
3. Have you had your own Garden of Gethsemane moments in your life of making a commitment and struggling to follow-through?
4. Can you see how the celebration of the Eucharist is a fulfillment of the statement of Jesus that he will not lose anything of what was given to him by the Father?

Atticus Finch

Perhaps the most read and well-known American novel in contemporary times is *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Atticus Finch is a lawyer in the 1930's in a town in Alabama and he must defend a black man who has been accused of assaulting a white woman. In chapter 9 Atticus speaks to his children, Jem and Scout, about the implications of taking the case of Tom Robinson. The children have been exposed to racist ridicule because of their father's decision to accept the case. Atticus speaks to his children about the attacks that will be coming due to his decision to defend Tom. Atticus' brother Jack has come to visit the family and he too engages in the conversations about the case and all of the fury the family will face in the town. As Atticus explains to Jack how he came to take the case and how he really wanted

to get through life without a case like this one, Jack responds to Atticus, “Let this cup pass from you, eh?” It is an allusion to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Atticus knows what he will face as a result of accepting the case. He has said yes, and will now accept upon himself all that is to come, ultimately, he says, so that he can fulfill all righteousness.

The Garden of Gethsemane is again alluded to when we see that the First Purchase African M.E. Church has cardboard fans that bear the image of the Garden available for its members. Tom Robinson and the whole black community of Maycomb must face the overt racism of the town and face it with courage. They know that Jesus has suffered for them and now he will suffer in them.

Atticus too was not simply accepting his fate. Fate is something external to us that we have no control over. Atticus has chosen his destiny and he actively and virtuously follows through on his decision to defend Tom. This is what Jesus does in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus Christ is not ruled by fate. He is master of his destiny with his Father and has chosen out of love to follow through on the mission he embraced at the Last Supper. This is how the Eucharist becomes a means to freedom for us too. As disciples of Christ we are not victims to fate. To embrace the Eucharist is to choose to remove oneself from the external forces of fate and to be moved by the providence of God. Providence is not an external force that “pushes us around” like game pieces. Providence is a synergy between God’s freedom and ours. In his freedom Jesus fully embraced the will of the Father and loved us to the end. In our devotion to the Eucharist we grow in our own freedom to do as Jesus has done. True freedom is not to be unbound by obligations; it is to embrace love at all moments and the binding to others that accompanies it. All of this power is contained in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Week I: To See as God Sees

Then God said: Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you (Genesis 22:2).

Abraham

It is perhaps one of the most terrifying scenes in the Bible. God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. In chapter 1 of Genesis—in the beginning—we read of the magnificent, beautiful and good loving God who creates the whole world from nothing. He loves his creation and he loves the human person most of all, making him in his image and likeness. Later, in the book God calls Abram out from his society in Ur and promises to him many blessings and many descendants. After establishing a covenant with him, changing his name to Abraham and providing him with a son in his old age, God now seems to move in an utterly stunning direction: He commands Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. That is why it is called the testing of Abraham. Why would the omnipotent and loving God test Abraham in such a way? Why would God take Abraham from his secure place in Ur to this new and terrifying place called Moriah and demand ultimate sacrifice?

The word Moriah is derived from the Hebrew word *ra'ah*, which means “to see.” When God sends Abraham to the Land of Moriah he is sending him to a place where Abraham’s inner spiritual eye will be opened. What Abraham will learn to see is the truth about God and about his own destiny. Returning to the first chapter of Genesis we read of the account of God’s creation. It says that after God created light he *saw* (*ra'ah*) that the light was good. God then creates the earth, the sea, the sun, moon, all creatures and finally mankind. After creating these things it says that God *saw* that they were good. Finally, after all things were created on the sixth day it says that God looked at everything he created and found them to be very good.

Seeing as God sees is not merely a matter of noticing. To see (*ra'ah*)

as God sees is to have a deep experience of the truth of things, to taste them. God saw the good in the things he created. God especially sees into the heart of a person and knows what is there. To see as God sees is to experience within oneself the goodness of creation and to act in accord with that goodness. It is not merely possessing knowledge in the mind but experiencing deeply in one's heart that something is good, true and beautiful. This is why God called Abraham out of Ur and eventually to Moriah. He is not toying with Abraham, he is removing the stains of Ur from Abraham's eyes and teaching him to see as God sees. Through Abraham, God's chosen people would be empowered to learn to see and experience the world as God sees it. But the vision of God's chosen people suffers from the effects of the Original Sin. To learn to see as God sees means to surrender the things that we accumulate from the world that clutter our vision and block us from experiencing the gifts of God.

Spiritual Exercises for Week I

Grace to ask for: To know what I must let go of and entrust to God, in order that I might see.

Contemplations: Genesis 22:1-19

Meditations: Genesis 12:1-6
Romans 4:13-25
2 Corinthians 4:1-6

For Consideration:

1. In the Genesis 22 passage wherever it reads "provide" it can also be translated as "see." Read that way, how does the meaning change for you?
2. If you were in Abraham's place what would you be thinking and feeling? What would you do? What must you surrender to God?
3. Has God ever asked you for something big and difficult? What did you do? How did it impact your spiritual life?

4. Who does Paul in his Letter to the Romans say are the descendants of Abraham?

Orual and Psyche

The great C.S. Lewis wrote many books but his purported favorite was a novel *Till We Have Faces*. The story is based on the ancient Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche and is retold with a Christian vision. The two main characters are two sisters, Orual—who will succeed her father, the king, as queen—and Psyche, her very pure and innocent sister. At one point in the story the king is told by his priest that a pure sacrifice must be offered to the god of the Mountain in order gain favor for the kingdom. Psyche, the purest person in the land, is offered. She is taken to a place beyond the boundaries of the known kingdom to the mountain of sacrifice. Orual, who hates the gods and does not believe in their goodness, travels to retrieve the body of her slain sister. When she arrives at the mountain she finds that Psyche is alive and well. She resides in the valley of the Mountain and invites Orual to cross the river into the valley to see her new home. There, across the river, in the shadow of the Mountain, Orual and Psyche talk and it is clear that they see completely different things. Psyche claims they are in a palace, that they are drinking wine and that she is dressed in fine robes and that the weather is glorious. Orual believes Psyche is either pretending or is completely mad, as all Orual can see is water, not wine; rags, not robes; rain, not sun; and a dark and wet meadow, not a palace. Psyche realizes at one point that Orual does not see any of the things that she sees. Orual is flush with anger and hate. Psyche is filled with love and delight. The two sisters, while standing in the same place, see utterly different realities and have utterly different experiences.

One sees beauty and riches, the other sees ugliness and poverty. Psyche lives in the vision of the god of the Mountain, while Orual still sees things as someone from the other side of the river. Orual demands that Psyche let her see the god if it is all true but Psyche tells her sister that you cannot demand to see the god, he must show himself when the time is right. Psyche tells Orual that only the god of the Mountain is able to make her see, and that he will if she would let him.

The title of the novel bears its principle theme: in order to see we must have faces. By faces, C.S. Lewis does not just mean the space at the front of the head, but a virtuous and loving character that is able to see things in a godly way. To have a face is to have a virtuous character. This is what is at the heart of God's call to Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice. God is creating for Abraham a face so that he might see as God sees.



The Sacrifice of Isaac. Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804). Metropolitan Museum of Art

Week II: God Sees Me in Mercy

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do (Acts 9:5-6).

St. Paul

When the light of the world broke into the life of Saul of Tarsus it knocked him to the ground. All the knowledge he thought he had, the way he saw the world, began to be utterly transformed. Only through Jesus could he truly see. Only by trusting in the voice of Christ and allowing himself to be assisted by the community of believers could Paul become a man able to see. It was not Paul's knowledge of God that made him the great missionary saint. Paul himself would say that what made him who he is, is that God sees him; that God knows him. For the disciple of Christ the most important thing is to know that we are known and loved by God first, before we see him, or know him or love him. The Lord is the one who initiates. We are always the ones who respond. When we are loving, when we are praying, when we are humbly serving, we are in that moment being loved by God. It is his knowledge and love of us that makes us believers in his Son and servants to one another.

God's love is creative. When he looks upon the sinner with love—we call that kind of love mercy—he creates within that person the possibility of repentance. Paul knew that his repentance was not the fruit of his own goodness; rather, God's love of him created within Paul the moral and spiritual conversion that would make him the most dynamic missionary in history. It was not until Paul looked up and saw that Christ was looking at him that he could begin to fully live. All his life Saul of Tarsus had looked down at those who did not rise to his level of moral and spiritual purity. He thought that in his pharisaical zeal for the God of his fathers that he was serving the Lord. Only when he realized that Christ looked upon him in mercy could he know his own blindness. With baptism into Christ, Paul finally began to see. What he would see from that day forward was the work of God loving the world back into the holy embrace of his bosom.

Spiritual Exercises for Week II

Grace to ask for: To know that God looks upon me with love and sustains me in life, especially through my reception of the Eucharist.

Contemplations: Acts of the Apostles 9:1-22

Meditations: 1 Corinthians 8:1-3
Galatians 4:9
1 Corinthians 10:16
1 Corinthians 11:23-29

For Consideration:

1. What does Paul say is the sign that one is known by God?
2. How does Ananias respond when God calls him? What is the significance of that response? How might you respond if you were him?
3. What is your impression about the way Ananias treated Saul?
4. What does it mean to proclaim the death of the Lord? Why do we proclaim his death in the Eucharist? What does it mean to you personally?

Samwise Gamgee

In the great novel *Lord of the Rings*, two of the principle characters from Middle Earth must traverse the dark land of Mordor to destroy a magic ring that could enslave the whole world in darkness should it fall into the wrong hands. The two hobbits, Frodo and Sam, are exhausted and very close to either death or despair as they lay in the dark land struggling to continue on their journey. They traverse Mordor seeking the volcano that alone is able to destroy the ring. All along their journey they must evade the attention of evil the eye of Sauron, the dark Lord of Mordor and the one who seeks the power of the ring. Sauron is literally a lidless eye that never closes or looks up. The eye only looks down or out but never up. Sauron cannot accept anything above himself so he can never know beauty and truth, only oppression. As they continue to struggle along the way, Frodo and Sam stop from exhaustion, desperately in need of sleep. The darkness of the night totally envelopes them as Frodo falls into sleep immediately. As Sam keeps himself awake, protecting his vulnerable master, Frodo, suddenly he is struck by the sight of beauty from a star twinkling in the night high above. In that moment Sam's heart is pierced by the warmth of the glow of the star, and the knowledge that the darkness ultimately cannot be victorious over beauty. The evil eye can never know this because it cannot look up, but Sam discovers a new hope because he is able to look beyond himself. He is finally able to overcome the fear and fall asleep under the beauty of the star.

In the Eucharist, the love of Christ is actively at work to bring us into the beauty that no darkness can ever touch. Receiving holy communion we are taken up and participate in that beauty that rises above all things. By looking up to this beauty, we come to find a hope to continue the journey of faith. Gazing upon the Blessed Sacrament, we must know that it is first, actually, God looking upon us with love that has brought us to this place of union.

Week III: I Am!

Then Jesus said, I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind (John 9:39).

The Man Born Blind

One of the principle themes of John's Gospel is how Jesus uses the Divine Name in reference to himself. In John 8:58 Jesus tells his audience that, "before Abraham was, I AM." I AM refers to what God said to Moses in Exodus chapter 3 at the burning bush. Moses asked what God's name is and God responds, "my name is I AM." Jesus declares himself to be the Son of God by using the Divine Name. In chapter 9 we encounter a man born blind. The Apostles identify him as either a sinner or the son of sinners. All his life this man has heard again and again how either he is a sinner or the son of sinners. That is how he has come to know himself. That is the identity that his society gave to him. Encountering Jesus, he is now able to see for himself the one who will give him his true self. Still, after Jesus heals him, other people question whether it is truly the man they used to see begging. The man answers for himself and proclaims, "I am." The man, who now walks about freely and is able to look at others in the eyes, is not claiming to be God. He is declaring his own dignity; the identity Jesus has given him. Prior to his encounter with Jesus, the man was a blind beggar, thought to be a son of sinners, forgotten by most. Now he is someone because he has trusted in Jesus and obeyed his voice.

As the chapter continues we begin to understand just what it really means "to see as God sees." As was the case with Abraham, it is not simply the ability to use one's eyes, but to see with understanding and with the heart; to experience within oneself the goodness of God. To see is to experience God's powerful action in the world. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Hearing his voice, believing and trusting in his words, brings one out of darkness and into the true identity that is uniquely God-given, never to be taken away by anyone. Hope comes from recognizing the beauty of Jesus.

Spiritual Exercises for Week III

Grace to ask for: That I may see all the ways that I build my identity and how I think of myself, surrender them to God and receive from him my true self.

Contemplations: John chapter 9

Meditations: John 15:1
John 8:12
1 John 2:15-17

For Consideration:

1. Do you notice how the man born blind changes what he calls Jesus as the story progresses? What are the three ways he describes Jesus? Can you see this as a progression of seeing deeper and more clearly?

2. The man says that Jesus must be from God since he does something that has never been heard of before. How might this be related to what Jesus does in the Eucharist?



Healing of the Man Born Blind. El Greco (1541-1614), 1573. Galleria nazionale di Parma

3. What do you think Jesus means by the “light of life?” What does this light mean for your life?

4. Considering John’s first letter, what do you suppose John considers the cause of real blindness? What would he call true sight?

Jean Valjean

Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* follows the life of Jean Valjean through his fall and redemption in the midst of post-Napoleonic France. Valjean is an ex-convict who at first was intent on living a life of a petty thief but has found conversion of heart through an encounter with a holy bishop. Valjean becomes a respectable business man, benefactor, and mayor of a town. But police Inspector Javert is determined to find the convict, who was accused of attempted robbery, and return him to prison. Javert has joined the police force in the town where Valjean, under the alias Monsieur Madeleine, has become mayor. A man named Champmathieu is arrested and accused of being the convict Valjean. When the real Valjean becomes aware of this he engages in a great interior conflict over what to do. Part of him believes that he can be free at last from hiding as another man. A poor man of little societal consequence, will be convicted of being Valjean and sent to prison in his place. But Madeleine/Valjean's conscience instructs him that he cannot truly be free if he lives a lie all his life and allows an innocent man to be condemned. Madeleine/Valjean tries to convince himself that he must be free to continue all the good he has done and must be a provider for all the people who have benefited from him. The inner struggle for Madeleine/Valjean is about his true identity. Will he maintain the identity that has arisen from his societal reputation and thus allow an innocent man to be condemned, or will he declare his true identity before God and spare the other man? Who is he truly? Will he be the man of society or the man of God?

We likewise construct an identity based on the world we experience around us. Unwittingly, we can assimilate the messages of the world telling us who we must be to be considered "someone." Meditation before the Blessed Sacrament allows us to engage in the inner struggle we must all face in allowing the life of Christ to rise in us, lest we cling desperately to the identity society permits us. Seeing past the appearance of the host and loving the reality hidden within the Eucharist strengthens us to live as children of God, rather than as masks for the world. As the man born blind opened his eyes through faith in the word of Jesus, so we must identify and fight through the messages of the world hidden in our hearts. Then the works of God will be made visible in us.

Week IV: To Whom Shall We Go?

Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave? Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God. Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?" He was referring to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot; it was he who would betray him, one of the Twelve (John 6:67-71).

St. Peter or Judas

In the end, Jesus was abandoned by his disciples. Two in particular fell farther than the others. While the name of Judas forever stands as synonymous with betrayal, the name of Peter stands through the ages as the rock of the Church's faith. Yet, both men failed the Lord in his hour. How is it that one could stand in infamy and the other become the first pope?

In the Gospel of John we first hear of a traitor in chapter 6. Jesus has just revealed that his body is true food and his blood true drink. His disciples begin to murmur about this teaching on the Eucharist. It is revealed then that Jesus knew there were some who did not believe and there was one who would betray him. After this, many of his original disciples leave him. Turning to his twelve apostles Jesus asks them if they also wish to leave. It is Peter who replies, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

The drama centers around Peter, Judas and the Eucharist. Peter announces that he will remain with Jesus and his words of eternal life. Judas does not believe and will subsequently betray Jesus. When the time of Jesus' Passion arrived it would be Judas who would leave during the Last Supper when the Eucharist was instituted. He would betray Jesus from that moment. Peter would later deny that he knew Jesus when confronted so as to escape arrest. But the final outcome for the two is very different. Both men would come to see their actions as terrible. Judas would commit suicide but Peter would come back to Jesus and be forgiven. No matter what would happen

Peter clung to the words of Jesus and to belief in the Eucharist.

In the end it is Peter who believed that if Jesus would give his body and blood as food and drink, then he would forgive all sins to those who repent. Judas, who never believed in the Eucharist, and therefore could not experience (see) its goodness, could not trust Jesus in the end. Both Judas and Peter were influenced by the spirit of Satan, but Peter held fast to the words of Jesus, while Judas did not.

Spiritual Exercises for Week IV

Grace to ask for: To discern the different influences in my life. The ones that keep me close to God and the ones that keep me distant from him.

Contemplations: John 6:52-71
John 13

Meditations: 1 Peter 1:19-25
1 Peter 2:5

For Consideration:

1. Why would many of Jesus's disciples abandon him over this teaching?
2. What does Jesus mean when he tells Peter that he must be washed to have an inheritance with him? What would you have said to Jesus if he tried to wash your feet?
3. Why does Jesus tell Peter that he cannot follow him now but will later?
4. What does Peter mean when he writes that we should offer spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ?

Imogen and Posthumus

In Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline*, Imogen, the daughter of the king of Britain, marries Posthumus, a member of the royal court. The king is angry about this secret wedding so he banishes Posthumus from Brittainy. Before they part, the couple exchange a ring and a bracelet to symbolize their love and fidelity to one another. In Rome Posthumus meets a man named Iachimo and boasts to him of his wife's chastity and fidelity, even though they are parted. Iachimo wagers that he can travel to Britain and entice Imogen to betray her vows and that he shall bring back to Rome proof that he has done so. Posthumus very foolishly agrees to the wager.

Iachimo utterly fails in his attempt to entice Imogen, who remains faithful, but through treachery he steals the bracelet Posthumus gave to her as a symbol of their union. When Iachimo returns to Rome with the bracelet, Posthumus believes that Imogen has been unfaithful and flies into a rage, even plotting to kill her. The prideful Posthumus so easily forgets the virtue of Imogen and her vows to him. Instead, he accepts the words of a scoundrel simply because Iachimo shows him the bracelet. Rather than trust his experience of life with Imogen, who has always proved true, Posthumus has placed his trust in appearances. All of his attention and faith is in the appearance of the bracelet, not in the substance of Imogen's vows.

Judas trusted more in appearances than in the substance of his experience of Christ. Peter held on to the words of Christ and trusted that what he received at the Last Supper was the gift of Jesus' body and blood sacrificed for him and for you. The Eucharistic faith of Peter held on tightly to the words of Jesus even when everything around him seemed to collapse. Peter was solidified by the Blessed Sacrament.

Week V: Being in Communion

But Ruth said, "Do not press me to go back and abandon you! Wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God. Where you die I will die, and there be buried. May the LORD do thus to me, and more, if even death separates me from you!" Naomi then ceased to urge her, for she saw she was determined to go with her (Ruth 1:16-18).

Ruth

One of the great heroines of the Old Testament is Ruth. Her book begins with a migration. Due to a famine in the land of Judah, a man named Elimelech migrates with his wife Naomi and their two sons to the foreign nation of Moab. After a while Elimelech dies but the two sons marry Moabite women. Ten years later the two sons die leaving the three women alone. Meanwhile, the famine in Israel comes to an end. Having now no more ties in Moab due to the death of her husband and sons, Naomi decides to return to her home in Judah. She admonishes her two daughters-in-law to go back to their own families among the Moabite people where they may find new husbands and a new life. Orpah tearfully accepts and leaves but Ruth refuses to abandon Naomi. She will follow her mother-in-law back to Judah.

Ruth's bond of love to Naomi transcends national boundaries, culture, blood and race. By clinging to Naomi and her faith in the God of Israel, Ruth shares her destiny. Neither knows what shall become of them as they migrate back to the land of Judah. But by imitating the faithfulness and tenderness of God, Ruth establishes a firm foundation for them to find their way into peace and prosperity. Ruth and Naomi have formed a bond of communion, an act of intense love based on faith in the God of Israel. Ethnicity, while good and important, does not prevent communion. Through the fidelity of Ruth, God was preparing hearts for the true universality of the Eucharist. Receiving Holy Communion means that we say amen to the whole Body of Christ in every ethnic culture, race, and class.

Spiritual Exercises for Week V

Grace to ask for: That I may know the bond of communion that the Eucharist creates between me and all the faithful, and to work past all pride and prejudice that blocks me from that communion.

Contemplations: The Book of Ruth

Meditation: Ruth 3:11
Ruth 4:14

For Consideration

1. Can you imagine what Ruth's experience would be leaving behind everything she knew to follow Naomi to Judah? Can you imagine another person's experience of being different from others?
2. Do you have a sense of the universal character of the Church and how it both celebrates diverse cultures and transcends national boundaries?
3. Solidarity is the social virtue of firmly and determinately committing to the common good of everyone, since we know others to be made in the image and likeness of God like ourselves. Do you have a sense of solidarity with the greater society and the whole Church?
4. Christ said that his blood is shed for you and for many. What does he mean by the "many"?

Elizabeth and Darcy

Jane Austen's well-loved novel about marriage and 19th century English manners and customs is appropriately titled *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth Bennet is the protagonist of the story and Fitzwilliam Darcy is the leading man become suitor. Both characters are filled with pride and prejudice and, in Mr. Darcy's case, elitism. Following the story we experience the deep development of character between the two of them as true love and humility fight their way through the pride and prejudice in each of them. As Elizabeth would say, "I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine."

Darcy is much too concerned with social standing. While social responsibilities are something to be taken seriously, in a man like Darcy they risk becoming such a boundary to love that he could be left alone with his reputation, the only consolation of his life. Meanwhile, Elizabeth is so convinced of Mr. Darcy's haughtiness that she is unable to see into the deeper parts of his character. The reader is meant to abide patiently with both characters as they struggle internally to make room in their hearts for the other.

Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy must leave room for development in themselves for coming to a better, more human and true understanding of the other. Character development is a painful but necessary process for all of us. Our pride and our prejudices are enemies of love. When we say, "Amen" to the Eucharist we say amen to the whole Body of Christ as the Church. Every person is equal in dignity before the Eucharist. Every eucharistic celebration is a building up of the communion of all who are baptized in Christ. Our character development requires that we remember these important truths daily.

Week VI: Patient Love

Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God (John 11:40)?

St. Mary of Bethany

In chapter 11 of John's Gospel we are told that there was a man named Lazarus who was ill and that he was from Bethany, the village of Mary and Martha. These were very close friends of Jesus. Mary and Martha send word to Jesus telling him that "the one you love (Lazarus) is ill." We are told that Jesus loved them all but that he stayed where he was for two more days. By the time Jesus arrives in Bethany Lazarus has died. When Martha hears that Jesus has arrived she goes to meet him but Mary remains at home. After speaking with Jesus for some moments Martha returns to Mary and tells her that Jesus is asking for her. When Mary finds Jesus she immediately says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died (John 11:32)." When Jesus sees her weeping he becomes very disturbed and weeps himself. We can see the connection between Jesus and Mary of Bethany is deep. He wanted to see her but Mary at first did not want to see him. She would not go to him when he first arrived. What Mary wanted was the miracle. She wanted Jesus to come and rescue Lazarus from his illness. Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus of Lazarus' illness, reminding him that he loves them. Yet, Jesus did not rush. He remained where he was and allowed Lazarus to die. Mary is devastated because she thought that surely Jesus would come in time. She did not have trust in the love of Jesus. She thought love meant coming immediately when she called. When Jesus did not do that she repaid him by not coming to meet him immediately when he eventually did arrive. What was lacking in Mary's love was the trust that comes with intimacy. Intimacy is won over time through patience and perseverance. Yes, Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He loved them enough to count on their patience. Mary did not possess that level of love yet. Hers was not patient, steadfast love, but love of "special effects."

Without the miracle Mary doubted. Once Jesus did raise Lazarus from the dead there is a profound change in Mary. She learns to trust Jesus and to grow in deeper intimacy. The very next chapter we are told that Jesus has returned to Bethany to dine with his three friends. Mary anoints him and dries his feet with her hair. Mary has learned her lesson. The way of Jesus is trust and patience, not spectacle. He called Lazarus forth from the tomb; and later will enter a tomb himself requiring even more trust from his disciples.

Spiritual Exercises for Week VI

Grace to ask for: That I will grow in holy patience, and confidence in the Lord's care for me.

Contemplations: John 11:1-45

Meditations: John 12:1-8
Luke 10:38-42
2 Peter 3:8-9
Rom 5:1-5

For Consideration:

1. Can you empathize with Mary of Bethany? Can you empathize with Jesus?
2. What do you think has changed in Mary between chapters 11 and 12 of John's Gospel?
3. What is Peter saying about delay and patience?
4. What is Paul saying in Romans 5:1-5?

Fr. Zosima and Alyosha

Alyosha is the hero in Dostoevsky's great novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. He is young, with an innocent heart, and has entered the local monastery with the sincerest desire to grow in faith, hope and love. Alyosha is mentored by Fr. Zosima, a holy monk whose reputation for having special gifts of healing and soul-reading is wide-spread. Vast numbers of people seek out Fr. Zosima in hopes of encountering his deep spiritual gifts. To Alyosha, Fr. Zosima is the embodiment of wisdom and holiness. Later, after he dies, the holy monk is being prepared for burial. A large assembly gathers about the monastery in anticipation of some great miracle that they are sure is to follow. Instead of a miracle the body of the dead monk begins to rot, and the stench is ghastly. At the sign of decomposition the people, and even many of the other monks, begin to denounce Zosima as a spiritual fraud. For to them, a saint would surely generate some great sign of holiness at his death. With the body in decomposition the assembly is convinced that Fr. Zosima is not the holy man they thought, and that the spiritual teaching and example he left them must be false. What has actually been exposed is the corruption inside the hearts of those assembled. True holiness is not a spectacle, but the daily commitment to faith, hope and love in God. Fr. Zosima served the Lord and the Church faithfully till the end. The people were ultimately not interested in following his way of fidelity to Christ, but in the appetite for spectacle and easy miracles. In the end there is no love for Fr. Zosima, for his service to the people, or gratitude to God for raising up a holy monk in their midst; there is only the self-satisfaction that the work of holiness, so often filled with patient toil, monotony and disappointment, is not worth the effort.

Whether in the celebration of the Mass or in adoration, the Eucharist is the most powerful spiritual thing in the universe, but it is not a spectacle. Sometimes it is said, "I don't get anything out of the Mass." Or, "I don't get anything out of adoration." The power of Christ in the Eucharist is not in spectacle but in what it draws forth from us. Don't ask first what to get but what to give. The Eucharist brings forth faith, hope and love and a host of other virtues that brings us forth from the tomb and into the life of Christ.

Week VII: Silent Devotion

Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph (John 6:42)?

St. Joseph

When Jesus first announced that he was the bread of life, the first response of his audience was to speak of his ties to Joseph. Jesus has several titles: Son of God; Son of Mary; Son of Man; Son of David. At the time when he first revealed himself as the Bread of Life, the title by which everyone knew him was Son of Joseph. While he did not take his flesh from Joseph, who was his foster father, Jesus took much of his human growth from him. At the age of 12 after having wandered off in Jerusalem and been left behind by his parents, who would find him in the temple three days later, Jesus went back home with Joseph and Mary and was obedient to them. What Jesus witnessed in observing Joseph was a truly godly man who served and protected his family, and spoke powerfully through actions rather than words.

Not much is revealed about Joseph in the scriptures. What we are told is that he was a just man. To be just in the scriptures means that Joseph measured his life according to God's ways. Joseph did not make himself or his own judgments the measure of his life. He understood himself as a man of God, the husband of Mary and the foster father of Jesus. Joseph rose above himself and found his fulfillment in obedience to a higher way. Comfort was not what Joseph sought. We know the phrase "like father, like son." Joseph was a just and loving husband and foster father because he was first a son and servant of the God of Israel.

There is no record whatever of Joseph speaking. He was a man of silent action. First he was a listener; then he spoke powerfully in his godly actions. "Be doers of the word and not hearers only" (James 1:22). There are many times in the events of life when words will never suffice, only an act will. Joseph heard the word of God and as a head of the household he acted resolutely.

The impact of his actions on his family and on those around him was greater than any discourse he could have given.

Spiritual Exercises for Week VII

Grace to ask for: To grow in my capacity for silence, that I may hear the word of the Lord and act on it.

Contemplations: Matt 1:18-25
Matt 2:13-15
Matt 2:19-23

Meditations: John 6:4
Matt 13:55

For Consideration:

1. Why are Joseph's responses to the call of the angel of the Lord a model of faith? How is this reflected in your life?
2. Can you imagine what Joseph may have actually said based on his actions in the gospels?
3. Why is it important to know that Jesus worked as a carpenter?
4. How do you describe your relationship to Joseph? How do you see him fitting into your life?



St. Joseph with the Child Jesus (1692-1696) from St. Joseph church Warsaw-Koło, Michael Willman. Photo by Fallaner, 2019

Father Elijah

Michael O'Brien's thrilling novel *Father Elijah* follows the mission of a Carmelite priest in an apocalyptic time. As Father Elijah Schaefer is on his mission in Europe he comes to know of a wealthy Polish count who may have knowledge about Schaefer's old friend and mentor from when he was a young man. Father Elijah meets with the old Count, a painfully sardonic character, in hopes of learning more about his old mentor. As they encounter each other in the sickly Count's chateau, they discuss much about the spiritual life and the Count's utter rejection of God's love. The Count shares much of his philosophy of life and of some details from his younger days, explaining how he has come to be the angry man that he is. Father Elijah speaks to him of the love of God that tears the heavens asunder to reach down and save all who will accept it. Then the Count makes one final verbal attack against Father Elijah. He speaks of terrible things related to the life of the priest's one-time friend and mentor. The Count speaks these terrible words with the intent of turning the priest into the same kind of cynic and angry man that he himself has become. Father Elijah offers no retort, no argument, and no hate, even though that is seemingly justified in the moment. He simply walks over to the Count and kisses him on both cheeks. Father Elijah's answer to the Count's vicious philosophy and calumnies is love-in-action. His act has a power that no lie can defend against. In acting so, the good priest demonstrates the love of God that tears through every vicious wall meant to keep it out. Father Elijah follows the pattern of Joseph. He acts without words.

The Eucharist is not a static sacrament. It is not as if Jesus sits in the Blessed Sacrament simply staring at us. The Eucharist is a dynamic sacrament. In it is Christ in the very act of giving himself to the Father and to us. The Eucharist is love-in-action, not simply static presence. If we receive love-in-action then we are meant to become love-in-action. Often this action is silent. Under the guidance of St. Joseph it is a powerful statement against every hatred.

Week VIII: Reciprocal Love

*And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart
(Luke 2:19).*

Our Lady

Standing at the foot of the cross, present with her Son to the end, was the Mother of God. The Blessed Virgin Mary teaches us what happens when we say yes to God. Saying yes to God's plan from the heart is like placing night goggles on when there is no light. Saying yes to God opens up a new world of possibilities and enables us to have the vision that Our Lady had of the Kingdom of God. This vision can only be attained through a surrender to God. While Roman soldiers could look at the crucifixion and see the bloody defeat of a poor and insignificant man, Our Lady could see the most beautiful act of love ever known. Because she surrendered, believed, and said yes to God, Our Lady is able to see a new and deeper beauty than any other person. At the wedding feast in Cana when waiters could only see empty wine bottles, Our Lady could see a whole world of possibility and creativity. Saying yes to God unleashes a spiritual potential and vision into the kingdom Jesus established. It leads to deep vision and creative love. Our Lady wishes to teach us how to obtain this vision and creativity by surrendering to God as she did. Coming before the Eucharist with Our Lady opens the heart to a whole new world of the possible.

There are always two parts to a sacrifice: The sacrificial act and the acceptance of that sacrificial act. Jesus gave his life in supreme sacrifice for us. In order for that sacrifice to be completed it must be accepted with the purity with which it was given. Our Lady is the one who accepts the sacrifice of Jesus with immaculate purity. On behalf of the Church she performs the role of completing the sacrifice of Jesus through perfect reception. We do well to increase our love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary that we may accept and partake of the sacrifice of Christ contained in the Holy Eucharist with ever greater purity and love.

Spiritual Exercises for Week VIII

Grace to ask for: That I may learn from The Blessed Virgin Mary how to accept, with purity and love, Jesus in the Eucharist; and to share that love with others.

Contemplations: Luke 2:15-20
John 2: 1-12

Meditations: John 19:25-27
Acts 1:13-14
Acts 2:1-4

For Consideration:

1. What is the significance of Jesus' first miracle being the changing of water to wine at a wedding? What is the significance of Mary being the one who arranges for this first miracle?
2. How do you invite the Blessed Virgin Mary into your home?
3. Have you grown in your capacity to see creative possibilities in your relationship with God? What are some creative possibilities within you with which you could serve God? Have you asked Mary to help you with this?
4. How is the relationship between The Holy Spirit and Our Lady demonstrated in the Annunciation and at Pentecost? What are the effects of that relationship?



Icon of The Queen of Heaven. Public Domain

Rosalind

One of Shakespeare's great heroines is Rosalind from the comedy *As You Like It*. Rosalind and Orlando, the neglected younger son of a nobleman, have fallen in love. Due to unjust circumstances, they must both flee separately from their homes. They both end up hiding in the forest.

Rosalind disguises herself as a young man, so all the people she meets in the forest do not realize who she is. Rosalind—disguised as the young man named Ganymede—meets Orlando and eventually begins to tutor him, and some of the other characters on what real love is and how to live it practically. Unbeknownst to Orlando, Rosalind is actually training him how to love her properly; she likewise assumes this same role for the other characters in the play so that they may love each other properly. The characters in the forest struggle to understand the true nature of love and especially how to practically live it. As they seek to properly shape their powerful emotions, the resilient and confident Rosalind secretly instructs them on the proper ways of love and the virtuous directing of their emotions. Rosalind wants them to move beyond the mere feeling of love into the action of love.

Our Lady is truly Mother and Teacher of the Church. Her fiat at the Annunciation and her presence at the cross and at Pentecost confirms her singular role as an advocate and teacher for us. Love is both sacrificial and exciting; the pain of the Cross, but also the ecstasy of Pentecost. Our Lady was present for both, and her Immaculate Heart is completely formed in the art of divine love. While the Sacred Heart of Jesus exposed for us in the Blessed Sacrament teaches us that God loves us, the Immaculate Heart of Mary teaches us how to love him back.

Week IX: Living the Eucharist

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us (1 John 4:7-12).

St. John

We are told in chapter 1 of John's Gospel that the only Son of God is at the Father's side. In the original Greek the phrase means "to be in the bosom of the Father." The Son of God, who has become flesh and dwelt among us, rests in the bosom of the Father and reveals God to us. Later in the same Gospel we are told that John, who is called the disciple whom Jesus loved, rested in the bosom of Jesus at the Last Supper. At that same supper where Jesus instituted his Eucharist, John rested his head on his bosom and listened to the beats of Jesus' heart. John would later be the only one of the apostles who would be with the Lord to the end at the crucifixion. There John receives one of the last gifts from the Lord: The Mother of Jesus. We are told that the disciple whom Jesus loved took his mother into his home. John is the disciple who rested on the bosom of Jesus and listened to his Sacred Heart and then took Mary into his life, his home. John is the apostle who first saw the empty tomb and believed after the resurrection. This is why John names himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. After all that he experienced and learned from the hearts of Jesus and Mary, John does not even use his given name in his own Gospel. He now knows himself only as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Spiritual Exercises for Week IX

Grace to ask for: For growth in contemplative prayer and love.

Contemplations: John 21

Meditations: John 1:14-18
Luke 9:51-56
John 20:1-10

For Consideration:

1. Do you notice any difference in John between the description in Luke 9 and the one in John 20?
2. Why do you think John believed when he saw the empty tomb?
3. Why do you think John was the first apostle to recognize Jesus while they were fishing and he was on the shore?
4. John called himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. That name became his identity and personal vocation. Do you have a name that signifies your relationship to Christ and your personal mission?



The Last Supper. St. John's Church, Kolkata. Photo by Schwiki, 2011

Beowulf

An epic poem in Old English tells the tale of a great warrior and hero of the Geats, Beowulf, who comes to the aid of the Danish King Hrothgar. Hrothgar's great hall, where he holds his court and feasts with his servant warriors, is named Heorot. The great hall is the heart (heorot) of the Danish kingdom not only because it is the seat of government but most importantly it is a place of community, culture and merriment. However, the demon Grendel, who hates the merriment, has been attacking Heorot and killing Hrothgar's lords. Grendel represents the demonic attack against the human heart. It is the heart that is the seat of culture and socialization, and decision for all persons. The demonic always seeks to bring ruin to the heart of a person.

Hrothgar is an aged king and needs assistance to fight the demon. Fortunately, his plight reaches the ears of Beowulf who is the king of the Geats. Beowulf travels to Heorot to face Grendel and free the Danes from the terror. Beowulf is truly a Christ-like figure, for Christ wishes to come into the heart of every person through the Holy Spirit to fight and destroy all that would corrupt it and keep it from experiencing God's joy.

What is contained in the Eucharist is truly the heart of Christ; not simply in the sense of the physical heart of Jesus being there, but in the sense of the core of Jesus' life, his self-sacrificial and perfect love for the Father and for us. The heart of Jesus is the core of his very being where he makes all of his decisions for the Father and for us. John rested on this heart and so do we whenever we come before the Eucharist to receive the gift of Holy Communion or to be in silent adoration.

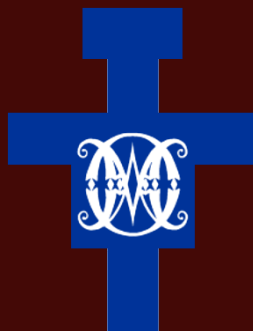
Eucharistic Amazement

*Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.
(Luke 24:39)*

We come to the end of the journey and enter into the final mystery of these exercises. In this concluding spiritual exercise place yourself along side the disciples as they experience the risen Lord. Record your prayer experience in your journal and review all your experiences from the past 10 weeks. See where the Lord has called you to your own Mt. Moriah.

Grace to ask for: That my eyes may be opened and I may recognize the Lord in all things, especially in the Eucharist.

Contemplation: Luke 24:13-35



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