

Week 34

Let Us Reflect on the Path Before Us

Guide: Contemplatives in Action



This retreat is ending in one sense. In another, it will continue in the way it has changed our lives. Unlike a retreat to a retreat house, we didn't retreat from our everyday lives. The path before us will be shaped by what new patterns we have developed through these exercises. During this final week, we want to identify the patterns we desire and choose the path before us. The "Prayer to Begin Each Day" gives a sense of our ongoing prayer:

May all that I am today, all that I try to do today, may all my encounters, reflections, even the frustrations and failings, all place my life in your hands. Lord, my life is in your hands. Please, let this day give you praise. The grace we ask for this week is simple: that our Lord would *guide us in choosing how we will live our lives more with and in Jesus.*

We owe the inspiration for this retreat to Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) and the author of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He has been our guide in recognizing God's invitation to freedom; God's mercy; God's plan to save us; God's invitation that we join Jesus in his mission; and God's grace in allowing us to come to know, love, and desire to serve with Jesus most intimately. After guiding people through the Exercises, Ignatius would sometimes receive letters complaining that it was difficult to be contemplative in the midst of a busy life. He would always answer that it was more important to be *contemplative in the midst of action*. He explained that for those who had found intimacy with God in prayer, it would be easy to *find intimacy with God in all things*. He always included one qualifying addition: *if they continued to die to self-love and act against whatever tempted them away from freedom to love of others.*

- As we go through each day this week, let us ask:
- How do I want to keep naming my desires before God?
- How can I keep focused in the background times?
- What patterns do I choose to make a habit?
- Which ones will I choose to be free from?
- Who, and in what ways, will I love as I have been loved?
- What will "dying to self-love" mean for me?
- What choices does living with and in Jesus lead me to?
- About my current and future life goals?
- About my lifestyle?
- About my relationships?
- About my solidarity with and concern and care for the poor?

The resources here offer concrete help for making this week a wonderful transition to everyday life.

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

“Getting started” this week takes on another meaning. This week will be our transition to a daily life after the retreat. Our reflections will take us into our desires for the future and our choices about putting those desires into action.

What We Are Considering

We want to look back over this retreat and consider the patterns that were the means through which God’s graces flowed into our hearts. We want to understand the path that brought us to where we are now, so that we can continue on it for the future. We want to resolve to live our lives as contemplatives in action, by finding intimacy with Jesus in all we do.

The Grace We Ask For

Our desire for this week is that our Lord would guide us in choosing how we will live our lives more **with** and **in** Jesus.

Our Daily Life Contemplation

Last week our gratitude for all God has done for us stirred our hearts to a response of love and service. If that kind of reflecting proved to be helpful, it would be very important to stay there and to continue growing in gratitude and to continue making the offering of self expressed by the prayer Take, Lord, Receive. We may want to keep finding ways to say that prayer, or our version of it, each day, at a specific time, in order to move it more deeply inside our consciousness. This week we want to *name* what it is that we intend to make a part of our life after the retreat. We want this to be a creative part of the process in the continuing relationship God desires with us.

By this time in the retreat we have developed some habits. We want to *recognize* those and let God *show us* the path before us.

How We Began Our Day

- What did I do each morning to begin my day *focusing* on the grace I desired?
- Did I use a simple, daily routine, like putting on my slippers or robe, to fix this as a daily prayer moment?
- What do I choose to resolve to do from now on?

How We Ended Our Day

- What did I do each night to end my day, collecting my day, in gratitude?
- Did I use a simple, daily routine, like taking my clothes off or brushing my teeth, to fix this as a daily prayer moment?
- What do I choose to resolve to do from now on?

How We Used the Background Times in Our Day

- What did I do to carry on a conversation with my Lord throughout my day, if even for thirty-second periods?
- Did I use the brief spaces in my day, between things, to be contemplative in action?
- What do I choose to resolve to do from now on?

Other Patterns That Made This Retreat So Open to Grace

- Were there new ways I let these reflections into my everyday life?
- Did I experience the conflicts, difficult times, differently because of how I placed them in the context of being with and in Jesus during this retreat?
- What do I choose to resolve to do from now on?

Other Choices We Can Consider

Some may feel themselves desiring to make a weekend or weeklong retreat at a retreat center. Making this choice can be a powerful gift one could give oneself to deepen the graces of the retreat. Locate a Jesuit retreat center to contact for more information.

For all of us, we will want to make choices about the *ways* we will *de-selfish* our living of our everyday lives. We will want to name concrete people and concrete situations where our *loving* will be expressed. Some will want to choose to make some choices to become more involved in *service* for others, beyond our families and work situations, through our parish or congregation. Some means of getting to know and being in solidarity with those who are poor can be a most profound means of staying in touch with the movements of God in our hearts.

Sharing the graces of this retreat with others can be an important choice. It will not only ground us more deeply in the experience but also will let the grace be not only for us and maybe fruitful for someone else. Make use of the various resources provided for this week: especially “For the Journey” and the sample words for our attempts at expression in “In These or Similar Words . . .”

At the end of the Eucharist, the priest may use several dismissals. One of them seems very appropriate at the end of this retreat. “Let us go forth in peace, to love and serve the Lord.” And the people respond, “Thanks be to God.”

For the Journey: “I Was Blessed”

Graduation, which is the ending ceremony, is also called commencement. *Commence* means to begin, and so the graduates are celebrated as those beginning their new lives.

One might think that one makes the Spiritual Exercises in such a way that there ought to be an ending ceremony and a commencement or graduation. Baptism is our beginning and our resurrection is the eternal ongoing fulfillment of that life. It never ends, and so too with the exercise of our spirits. No person who has begun the Spiritual Exercises can say that they “have made” them. We have been concentrating on our beginnings and the work of the Holy Spirit never ends. The working of the Evil Spirit never ends. The workings of our own fallen selves never end.

We are similar to a garden whose weeds seem to multiply the more we pick them. Our spiritual weeds have always been there—“some enemy hath done this.” What has been going on during this retreat is a process of becoming aware and not discouraged or negative about those weeds of which we have become aware.

We are commencing, then, to let God continue to attract us to the ways of Jesus. We will always have our own ways, which may dissect and contradict his ways. We have watched him walk our ways and have heard his call to insult the ways of this world and our cultures of violence, greed, and power. We have admitted that we live in a tension between God’s call and the many other calls that are so attractive. We have prayed that God would take our gifts of liberty, memory, and will. We have become aware that we will slowly, and maybe not so slowly, want to find ways to take those gifts back. This is not a cause to be frustrated or feel hypocritical. We are loved by being created, loved by being called, loved in being saved, and loved by being on pilgrimage.

We are those who believe that keeping on keeping on, is what God loves us into doing. Will any graduate live what she or he hears during the graduation speeches or even all that he or she has learned? We walk off the stage of this retreat knowing we will return to find out where we have gone and to hear his call again to be the beloved of God.

*My fiftieth year had come and gone;
I sat a solitary man in a London shop,
An open book and an empty chafe cup on a marble table
top. While on the shop and street I gazed,*

*Of a sudden my body
blazed, And twenty minutes
more or less, It seemed so
great my happiness,
That I was blessed and I could bless.*
—William Butler Yeats

In These or Similar Words . . .

Dearest friend Jesus,

I feel you with me now, close by my side, holding my hand as I begin the walk down the road. I'm not sure where it is leading, but I know that I am both following you and walking with you as we go. Peacefulness has seeped into my soul and I feel like nothing can disturb me. Together we will walk through this world, through this life, and I will have the love and care that have changed my life. My life is different now than it was thirty-four weeks ago. In some ways I am very changed and in some ways I am so much the same.

It seems like what I do with my life will be different now. I know I will make choices that people won't understand, and I will face decisions that frighten me. Sometimes I will fall back on what I know best or what is easiest and will make the wrong choice. But I know I can turn to you, look into your eyes, and talk about it. Help me, gentle Jesus, in my life as I try to live a life of self-giving, not considering my needs first but those of others. Give me the wisdom and courage to make the right choices, to have a faith that does justice and a life that always cares for the poor.

I know that I am not perfect and maybe—finally—I understand that is something to rejoice in. I can be happy in my imperfections and my weaknesses because it is there that you come to me so gently to support and love me.

I feel you with me at all times, in all that I do and in everyone I see. Give me the patience and insight to recognize you in the people who annoy or frighten me, the people I don't understand. Let me see your eyes looking back at me when I speak to them.

What I want the most, what I feel so very deeply, is that I want to live a life of service to you by serving others. I want to be where you want me to be and live as you want, without hearing the self-serving echoes of the world.

Please help me in my struggle to be free from anything that keeps me from loving and serving you. All I want in my life is to love you.

Thank you so much for all you are in my life. Please accept these tears in my eyes, the great love in my heart, and the life I to offer you. It is everything I have.

Give me only your love and your grace. I want nothing more.