

GUIDES

EIDES

1

Horizons of life Living the Ignatian way

Darío Mollá



HORIZONS OF LIFE
LIVING THE IGNATIAN WAY

Darío Mollá Llácer, sj.

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| 1. «HELPING»: THE KEY FOR INTEGRATION | 5 |
| 2. «GRATITUDE»: THE FIRST POINT | 11 |
| 3. «CONTEMPLATION»: CONTEMPLATIVES IN LIFE | 14 |
| 4. «CHOOSING» | 21 |
| 5. «RESIST» | 26 |

Dario Mollá Llácer sj., a Jesuit who specializes in Ignatian spirituality, forms part of the team of Cristianisme i Justícia. He has published the following works in Spanish in the EIDES collection: *Encontrar a Dios en la vida* (no. 9); *Cristianos en la intemperie* (no. 47); *Acompañar la tentación* (no. 50); and *Horizontes de vida (Vivir a la ignaciana)* (no. 54). This last work we now present in the English translation, *Horizons of Life (Living the Ignatian Way)*.

CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA Edition - Roger de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona
Tel. +34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com - www.cristianismeijusticia.net
ISSN: 2014-6558 - Legal deposit: B 8656-2014 - March 2014

The Fundació Lluís Espinal lets it be known that its data are registered in a file under the name BDGACIJ, legal title of the Fundació Lluís Espinal. These are used only for providing the services we render you and for keeping you informed of our activities. You may exercise your rights of access, rectification, cancelation or opposition by writing to the Fundació in Barcelona, c/Roger de Llúria, 13.

INTRODUCTION

To talk about spirituality is to talk about life, life according to the Spirit, life under the guidance and impulse of the Spirit. It is only in life that the impulses, the calls, and the orientations of the Spirit become concrete. Only in life can a spirituality be validated as a force that makes it possible for us to experience meaning, joy, and a readiness to serve with generosity –to live from the depths of God and in communion with other persons.

This booklet aims to describe what it would be like to «live the Ignatian way». It presents in simple and practical fashion some of the most basic traits of the style of life that Ignatian spirituality proposes. While remaining faithful to the basic intuitions of Saint Ignatius Loyola, I will also exercise some freedoms with respect to formulations and try to relate as closely as possible to the ordinary lives of those of us who seek humbly and earnestly in this world in which we find ourselves «to love and serve in all we do».

The reader of this booklet should not expect scholarly erudition or abundant texts or citations from Ignatian studies to justify each and every affirmation. That kind of necessary spadework has been done already, and it can be found in specialized publications. Nevertheless, rigor must be expected and sought in everything that is affirmed, and I have humbly tried to observe such rigor. My aim has been to take the conclusions of previous studies and put them into a form and language that make them available to a greater number of people. It is an endeavor that has certain risks and can even be open to misinterpretation. Nevertheless, the price is worth it if in some way I succeed in «helping» to reveal the wonderful possibilities that Ignatian spirituality offers to persons who are seeking to live the Gospel of Jesus in the concrete problems and situations of their daily lives. That Gospel does not need an abundance of words, and even less does it need the formulations and jargon of «initiates»; what it needs is the full truth of reality.

1. «HELPING»: THE KEY FOR INTEGRATION

«Helping», «helping souls», helping others, these are the terms with which Ignatian spirituality describes the integrating element of a person's life. The Ignatian concept of «helping» brings together love for God and love for the human person, interior experience and external action. «Helping» is what expresses and validates the spiritual profundity of persons who are sorely tested by the ordinary demands of life. «Helping» implies a convergence of the search for God and commitment to the world. «Helping» inspires an «active» spirituality but not one that consists only in «doing»; it is not satisfied with just any kind of action.

1.1. Ignatian «helping» as an integrating horizon

Given the circumstances of our society, most persons, whether believers or unbelievers, experience great difficulty if they try to live with a profound sense of humanity. They feel constantly under intense pressure: they're obliged to do a great number of things; they must assume many simultaneous responsibilities; they have to keep up with the (largely imposed) rapid pace of life; and they have to fight on a great diversity of fronts.

If, besides that, people wants to attend to the more interior dimensions of their lives, the difficulty only increases. They frequently perceive or experience contradiction, conflict, or incompatibility between their interior movements and the demands of working life, family, and society. (The interior movements are sometimes improperly called «spiritual»; the word «spiritual» actually refers to the totality of life animated by the Spirit). The harmonization of interior and exterior seems impossible, with the result that persons of faith become discouraged and feel guilty. They may even despair of being able to live in accord with their faith, and so they draw away from it. Sometimes, perhaps with the best of will, they make an effort to

go through particular «experiences» that help to reinvigorate and enlighten them (by «charging the batteries»), but in the end reality is very stubborn; it ends up imposing its own logic and rhythm.

It therefore becomes clear that one of the basic challenges of human experience –and of any spirituality that seeks to give meaning to that experience– is the challenge of «integrating» the diverse elements of experience. It is not just a question of summing up those elements or of combining them haphazardly in unsustainable balances –the challenge is «integrating» them.

In my view, integration means drawing a clear, concrete horizon for our personal life project. Such a horizon gives us direction each step of the way, adds quality and meaning to what we do, and makes it possible for us to find mutual interrelations among the diverse activities, not on the basis of their material content but in reference to a shared goal. Integration does not mean doing more but doing everything in the same direction; it is not summing everything up but choosing what we do in function of the horizon. The things we do, whatever they may be, are related to one another because they all share in the search for the same horizon.

To help toward successful integration and to facilitate this difficult process, there is a need for certainty about the horizon that is proposed and chosen. Here we come across the simple but ingenious intuition of Ignatius: for Ignatian spirituality the horizon and the key to integration is «helping». It's as simple as that, but it is also as rich in meaning and possibilities as that.

«Helping» brings into play all the dimensions of our lives, and it interconnects them. «Helping» allow us to integrate action and contemplation, serving others and caring for ourselves, audacity in setting goals and humility in the way we proceed. «Helping» provides a shared horizon for everything that life places before us; it allows us to see what is global and at the same time to commit ourselves to what is concrete; it allows us to engage in the aridity of structural struggles without losing our sensitivity for the drama and delight of personal struggles.

1.2. How do we transform our «doing» into «helping»?

We do the things we do, whether few or many –often it's too many. We like some things more, others less; some things are chosen, others imposed; some we have chosen ourselves, others leave us no choice but to do them. This is true at work, at home, and in our social lives. Our tasks are what they are, and probably it's very difficult, if not impossible, to fail to do most of them. Fine, but even granted this, we can still ask: how can we go about transforming our mottled and multiple «doing» –not any grand undertakings but simply our daily tasks– into Ignatian «helping»?

The transformation of our «doing» into «helping» can bring us many benefits, and that's why it's worth the effort. As we saw in the previous section, such a

transformation will give what we do an extra quota of meaning and make it converge with the other aspirations and dimensions of life, but not only that. That convergence of our activities will leave us less «burnt out» and exhausted because what burns us out is not the «doing» but the way we experience it. The convergence will also remove the sense of compulsivity from our activities: we won't feel the need to do «so much» or to do everything «so perfectly» just for the sake of justifying ourselves, feeling valued by others, or simply being personally satisfied. All of this will not only redound to our own benefit but will affect the quality of what we do in ways that others will take note of and be grateful for. How, then, do we move from mere doing to «helping»?

In order truly to «help» another person, our «doing» must first of all be pervaded with seeing, listening to, attending to, and contemplating the reality of others and their needs. It's not simply a matter of applying a pre-established scheme or plan that has been devised by us beforehand. Our actions will be helpful only if we understand and become sensitive to the needs of others. If we fail to do so, then we will simply be imposing our own ideas on them, ideas that might be appropriate for certain occasions but at other times are simply inadequate and might even generate tensions and overwhelm those who need help. When we fail to heed the needs of others, we end up measuring results by their correspondence to our own plans and projects, not by the extent to which others have progressed in their struggles or grown as persons. We end up being ourselves the protagonists of our action, whereas true «helping» means yielding the protagonism in intention and action to others and their needs and making others the real protagonists.

This permanent interior attitude of attending to, listening to, and beholding others and their circumstances will situate us in another indispensable dynamic that will help to transform our «doing» into truly «helping». This dynamic is the attitude of examining, questioning, and discerning; it has an interior aspect of seeking and an exterior aspect of constant, active renewal. If we approach the other with a pre-established plan or program, then once it is applied, that's all there is to it. It doesn't much matter whether we've responded or not to the other person's questions; what we may have done instead is work hard at responding to questions that are of no interest to anybody. We've delivered our discourse, we've filled out the forms, we've done «business as usual», we've put in our hours and fulfilled our obligation, and that's it –until the next time. It doesn't matter that our notes become yellowed, that our reports become ever paler reflections of reality, or that our actions become routine. From our point of view, simply «doing» things is justified; pure repetition is useful.

When we make paying attention to others a priority, we will need to reflect, to innovate, to reimagine, and to undertake change –in life nothing stays still, and this is more true nowadays than ever. Our action can be truly «helping» only if our «doing» is dynamic in this way. If we look only at ourselves, we tend to stay the way

we are; we set up barriers and defend ourselves in the face of life's demands. In contrast, what will vitalize us is affection for and sensitivity to others, along with a deep, sincere desire to «help» them.

Our «doing» turns steadily into «helping» to the extent that we grow in a sense of gratuity. Gratuity should not be understood only or principally in economic or monetary terms even though it has exigencies and implications in that regard. Such a stance doesn't mean failing to seek or demand what is just, but it does mean not making economic considerations the ultimate criterion for decision-making. It also means that in «helping» others we will bring into play vital personal dimensions that can never be sufficiently valued or remunerated in terms of merit or finance; the fact is that not everything can or even should be rewarded economically.

Gratuity also means that our «doing» does not seek our own benefit and satisfaction more than it does the good of the other person. Gratuity means not making the other person a roundabout way of satisfying ourselves, by starting out from ourselves and returning back to ourselves as an ultimate goal. Rather, it means making the other and the good of the other the final objective. Gratuity means not seeking or generating affective dependency but helping the other to become free and to grow in freedom. Gratuity also means persevering resolutely in our efforts even when the limitations and deficiencies of those we are trying to help obscure the quality or the effectiveness of our work. We should be convinced that if the deep logic of our doing is helping, then we should do more for those who are most needy and disadvantaged, for those who have least and are weakest, for those who are most vulnerable –whatever be the setting in which we move.

Without a doubt, working in groups, collaborating with others, and discussing what we are doing with and for others will make us better able to help others and to relate to our work not as proprietors but as servants.

Attention, listening, contemplation...; evaluation, revision, discernment...; gratuity, relativizing oneself, abnegation...; and a sense of working in group. All of these help our «doing» to become ever more «helping» so that more and more dimensions of our person become involved in our doing and so that those same dimensions begin to function in the more ordinary parts of our daily life. That is the meaning of «integration».

1.3. Vital attitudes linked to «helping»

Since life is a whole, our interior determination to «help» also generates in us some vital attitudes; that is, it helps us position ourselves in our relations to others in ways that flow from and manifest that determination to «help» and that allow us to recognize and identify others persons who are similarly inclined. When these attitudes become a habitual disposition, they will in turn strengthen the disposition

to «help» as the key to our lives, and they will do so smoothly, discretely, almost imperceptibly, but most assuredly.

We are now approaching the vital disposition that Ignatian spirituality engenders in those who truly live it. The first and most important attribute of this disposition is profound respect for the full dignity of other persons. That means seeking out and appreciating the values inherent in each concrete human being regardless of his or her limitations, hidden secrets, or social disadvantages. Such an attitude is made possible by attentive contemplation of others and a personal relationship that puts aside pride and arrogance and allows others to reveal themselves in all their intensity as persons.

In the same way that we experience God's profound respect for each of his creatures and for our very selves, we also respect the freedom of others. We do not «help» others by imposing but by proposing. To be sure, the proposals are made with exigency, with conviction, with honesty, with fairness, and with personal commitment. When the proposal is made in this way, then it helps others by the simple fact and simple act of being proposed, apart from whether its content is accepted or not, apart from the material consequences of any decisions made with respect to what is proposed. This disposition is also characteristic of pastoral action that seeks truly to «help» others and not simply cater to addicts; such pastoral action grounds itself in respectful listening, is especially rigorous in its methods and procedures, and is considerate in its manner of accompaniment.

All this contributes to a way of being and of acting for which dialogue is extremely important. We understand dialogue not simply as a verbal or intellectual exercise, but as the search for spaces of encounter where we can help and be helped and where we can collaborate in helping others. A dialogue about life, action, and one's own vital experience must often precede the exchange of ideas or of doctrines. Trying to begin with the latter is often like trying to build a house by starting with the roof.

«Helping» also opens the way to two other attitudes that coexist and complement each other, even at the cost of a certain tension. The first attitude is that of magnanimity, of greatness of soul and desire. «Helping» is in a certain sense «ambitious»: it means opening ourselves to all kinds of possibilities, means, and persons; nothing is excluded as a means, and no one is excluded as a subject. But at the same time that it invites us to stretch our horizons, «helping» also invites us to be humble because it means subordinating ourselves to the needs of others and placing ourselves beneath them. As a criterion, helping often invites us to renunciation.

Helping means magnanimity in our desires and our projects, but it means humility in the way we carry them out and the way we position ourselves in relation to others. Ignatian «helping» becomes quite difficult when we invert the terms of the

tension, and that unfortunately happens whenever there is narrowness of viewpoint, pursuit of purely personal interests, and arrogance in our mode of action.

Finally, we made allusion above to the dynamism in which we are placed by the desire to «help», which is constantly making us adapt to the changing needs of the persons and the situations which we want to serve. A deep, sincere desire to «help» favors an innovative, creative, dynamic disposition.

There are many personal and social borders which a resolute attitude of «helping» others makes us cross in the course of life. Crossing those borders may makes us fearful of losing the security we've acquired; it may cause us problems with those who opt to remain fixed in the place from which we're moving away; and it may arouse criticism and conflict with those who are upset by the change. There is no doubt, however, that the deep desire and the firm determination to help others will engender in us creativity and courage beyond all our possible insecurities, criticism, and conflicts.

1.4. «Helping» makes all of life «spiritual»

Often there exists in the collective imagination a very limited, inexact, and even distorted idea of what «spiritual» means and what a «spiritual person» is. The «spiritual» is identified with prayers, with church services and activities, and in the best of cases simply with interior activities. A «spiritual person» tends to be thought of as someone «pious», prudish, and irresolute –perhaps even a bit strange; it is someone who can't be counted on much for the normal tasks of life.

But that is not the real meaning of «spiritual». For Christians the «spiritual» is all the reality that is «enlivened» by the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit who opens us up to God as Father, the Spirit who makes us live together as sisters and brothers, the Spirit who drives us, as he drove Jesus, «to announce the Good News to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to give sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor» (Luke 4:18-19). Such is the Spirit who enables us to «help» in the Ignatian sense, that is, to «help» others to be inspired and enlivened by the Spirit of Jesus in such a way that all our actions, all our thoughts and prayers, all our studies, and our entire life become truly «spiritual». Helping is what makes the totality of our life «spiritual».

We have drawn close to the inner core of Ignatian spirituality. Many other things remain to be discussed: the source and nourishing of the desire to help, the strategies and mediation of that helping, the resistances and the difficulties. But «helping» is the heartbeat of Saint Ignatius's personal and apostolic life; it is what he proposes to us as the way to live our own lives in a meaningful and joyful way.

2. «GRATITUDE»: THE FIRST POINT

In the Principle and Foundation of the Exercises, Saint Ignatius first considers the fact of God's loving creation of each one of us and then lists a series of the basic human attitudes that lead us toward salvation and fullness of life. The first of them is «praise». I take the liberty of translating the Ignatian term «praise» as «gratitude» for our daily concrete life; it means living gratefully. Praise should not be only an outward action of the mouth but should be experienced from the heart, and that praise of the heart, when it is a habitual and not just a transitory attitude, is gratitude. Ignatius's proposal for life invites us to make gratitude the basic attitude of our existence as creatures loved and gifted by God.

When the general examen is proposed to us at the beginning of the Exercises, Ignatius observes that «the first point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the benefits received» [43]. We are invited to be grateful every day. Then, at the end of the Exercises, in the Contemplation for Attaining Love, the author of the Exercises repeats that «the first point is to bring to the memory the benefits received» [234], and he explains that it is «the interior knowledge of so much good received» and the ability to receive it and be thankful for it («entirely recognizing») that make it possible for us «to love and to serve in all things» [223].

Gratitude as a basic attitude of life means becoming aware on a daily basis of what I receive, accepting the things given to me, and engaging the persons I meet in life. It is not the attitude of thinking, «I'm not being given what I really deserve». Rather, it means realizing that I have received gifts and keep receiving them every day without having merited or hoped for or asked for anything.

No doubt, most of us who are reading these lines have many reasons for gratitude because we have received much and continue to receive much day by day. Considered in ourselves and even more in comparison with millions of other persons, we are plain and simply privileged. Even so, we do not find it easy to live gratefully.

It is also clear that we may all complain about life: we complain about what we have not been given, about what has caused us pain, about all the things we lack. It may be true that some of those deficits affect us and condition us greatly –sometimes more than all the gifts we’ve received. It also may happen that there are moments and circumstances in life when we are so affected by deficiencies, difficulties, problems, or frustrations that we find it hard to be grateful. All that is natural, but what is neither natural nor good is becoming forgetful or unconscious of how much we’ve received and continue to receive every day by way of affection, meaning, and possibilities of life –so that we fail to be grateful, even for a single day.

That profound «thankfulness», that attitude of living out of gratitude, is not at all helped by a cultural environment that incites us to pay more attention to what we don’t have than to what has been given to us in abundance. Such a culture stimulates and aggravates our feelings of dissatisfaction for the commercial benefit of others. That’s why it is important to cultivate our gratitude and keep it alive and active, and that’s why it is also important to do the daily «examen of benefits received» that Ignatius proposes to us at the beginning of the Exercises. This short, simple exercise will be incredibly fruitful for us and will place our daily lives in a totally different dynamic.

The reason for this is simple: gratitude is a beneficial disposition that engenders a great number of other positive attitudes. The contrary attitude of dwelling on all the things life has failed to give us is a disposition that is quite useless and frustrating –and even dangerous. It is useless and frustrating because those debts that we feel life owes us are not usually paid, no matter how much we insist on payment. It is dangerous because constant complaining only increases our frustration and resentment, and it prevents us from enjoying what we are already being given. What is more, such an attitude, when we persist in it, usually results in our treating other people unjustly; we demand that they «pay» what they neither can nor should pay, with the result that our relationship with them is debased and impoverished.

We were saying earlier that making gratefulness our basic attitude allows us to live our lives with a different «vision» or a different «spirit». Gratitude produces an interior state of joy, availability, and agility in our way of responding to the demands of life. It gives us a more acute sensitivity for perceiving everything that daily life gives us as a gift, and it also reduces the tension we feel if we do not receive due compensation for our efforts.

As regards our activity, our work, and our efforts, these all are carried out more naturally when we live with gratitude. Because they are done more naturally and with less exertion, our labors cause us less fatigue, and we experience our work not as

something imposed from outside or something to be done just to get it over with, but as a mode of action that is natural, logical, spontaneous, and appropriate for the talents and abilities that have been given to us.

In «helping» others, whoever they may be, we will be much less mindful of –or rather, much less «dependent» on– the manner in which others respond to our commitment and our service, and that makes it possible for us to give to others more spontaneously, more generously, and less calculatingly. It also allows us to seek and to find satisfaction more within ourselves than in what is outside us; such satisfaction is more secure and more long-lasting.

For all these reasons, that key intuition of Ignatius in the Principle and Foundation is absolutely true: «praise» or «gratitude» is the attitude by which the creature –the creature that is each one of us– «saves his soul», «saves his life», not because gratitude carries him to the «great beyond» but because it fills his life with an abundance of human and divine meaning in the here and now.

3. «CONTEMPLATION»: CONTEMPLATIVES IN LIFE

One of the most suggestive and significant proposals of Ignatian spirituality for our way of life is that we be «contemplatives». This proposal is perhaps the one that surprises us most.

For persons belonging to a Christian culture, the word «contemplative» evokes a select, reduced group of persons who spend their lives in a monastery, totally absorbed in prayer. Given that conception, we have a hard time seeing what sense there can be in proposing «contemplation» as an activity for everyone. In more ordinary language, terms like «contemplate» and «contemplative» seem to be limited to sporadic acts such as admiration of nature or works of art, but such a meaning does not seem to lend itself either to being proposed to people as a basic, global attitude of life. Let us go deeper into the meaning of contemplation.

When we wrote earlier about «helping» as the horizon for integrating Ignatian spirituality, we stated that «in order truly to ‘help’ another person, our ‘doing’ must first of all be pervaded with seeing, listening to, attending to, and contemplating the reality of others and their needs». Being contemplative is a condition for truly serving.

Being contemplative makes it possible for our daily existence to be opened to experience of God and to be illuminated by that experience. Sometimes it is said that there are certain vital contexts or certain concrete activities that make personal experience of openness to God or encounter with God more possible. I don’t think that experience of God is ever given in an automatic way; it has much more to do with the attitudes by which we relate to life. Relating «contemplatively» to life is more decisive for experiencing God than any of the activities or contexts in which we may be actually situated.

3.1. Contemplation as a form of praying; contemplation as a way of approaching reality

Christian spiritual tradition proposes many forms of prayer, one of which is «contemplation». In his Spiritual Exercises, Saint Ignatius also proposes a great variety of ways of praying, but contemplation is without a doubt one of the most recommended, if not the most recommended. In fact, «contemplation» of the «mysteries» of the life of Jesus occupies a large part of the Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks of the Exercises. As in so many other aspects of his method, we do not find Saint Ignatius offering a conceptual definition of what he understands by «contemplation», but we can get a good idea of what it basically consists of by paying attention to the way he develops certain contemplations in the Exercises.

Ignatius divides contemplative prayer into three parts: the «preambles», the «points», and the «colloquy». We will examine the content and the meaning of each of these parts and then apply what we have learned to how we might «contemplate» our own daily history.

3.1.1. The preambles

The so-called Ignatian «preambles» for contemplation are threefold: «surveying the history», «imagining the place», and «asking for what I desire». The basic aim of the preambles is to «situate» the person who is praying before the story that he/she is going to contemplate in a way that is objective, attentive, active, and engaging.

«Surveying the history» is recalling the story that is to be contemplated with the greatest possible precision and fidelity from its very beginning to the moment when I contemplate it; it involves being present to the context and the process that lie behind that story. «Imagining the place» helps the person praying to become aware of the concrete scenes presented in the story or of the details of a single scene that I keep before me. While the first preamble requires of us fidelity, rigor, and precision, the second summons us to be attentive to the details because these are important and meaningful. Finally, the «petition» involves asking for «interior knowledge». Our aim in contemplation is to reach profound understanding; it helps us to acquire knowledge that carries us toward both the inner depths of what we're contemplating and the deepest parts of our own being.

Let us now imagine some event or reality of our own daily life and see how we might make it the object of an exercise of contemplation. We are not talking about a quick, superficial glance at the reality; rather, we want to contemplate the reality with the penetrative insight that allows us to reach to the bottom of things. Just as is the case in Ignatian contemplation, when we contemplate an everyday reality, what we are seeking is «interior knowledge» of the things, the situations, or the persons that we're contemplating. To do that we must begin by applying the Ignatian preambles.

First, we call to mind the context and the process that lie behind the momentary situation that we're experiencing or contemplating, and we do so as faithfully and precisely as possible. We are careful not to lose sight of the small details that are sometimes more explanatory than the grand theories; they better reflect the truth than do a lot of words. We place the reality before us as authentically as possible, without neglecting the simple details that make it special.

3.1.2. The points

After the preambles, Ignatius proposes the «points». Whereas the preambles referred basically to the manner in which we situate ourselves before the reality being contemplated, the «points» indicate what we should do once we are satisfactorily situated before the scene. What is especially significant about the points is the verbs that are used; we should note that there are three groups of verbs. The first group consists of those verbs that have to do with the application of the senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching); the second group is made up of the verbs indicating reflection, such as «consider» and «ponder»; and finally, we meet up with a very peculiar Ignatian verb, «reflect». Let us examine what kind of a process is being proposed to us as we pray.

First of all, contemplating means directing all our senses –seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting– toward what we have before us. Sometimes it is the external senses that need to be called into play, and other times it is the interior senses, but what is important is to bring them all into play. The more senses we apply in contemplation, the more complete will be our knowledge of the reality we are contemplating. Once we have taken this first step, then we begin to «consider» –that is, we judge and become aware of the importance, the significance, and the value of what our senses have made present to us. To this reality as perceived by our senses we must apply our intelligence, our criteria, our values, our sense of the meaning of life. Finally, we are asked to «reflect», that is, to become aware of how the contemplated reality has affected us, what sentiments or inner movements it has provoked in us, what questions it has raised, etc.

This process of «contemplation» helps us toward «interior knowledge» of what we have contemplated: we come to know the reality in all its dimensions and depth, and we also come to realize how it relates to us.

This process can also be used as a way of approaching our everyday reality and gaining an interior knowledge of that reality. First we apply all our senses to that reality: seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting. Then, considering what our senses have revealed to us, we apply to it our own capacity for considering and evaluating; this is something we should do for ourselves rather than let others do it for us. We should also be aware that everything we contemplate affects us in one sense or another to a greater or lesser degree. That is all part of our perception of reality.

3.1.3. *The colloquy*

The final step in Ignatian contemplative prayer is what he calls the «colloquy». Since our contemplation of the Lord will provoke in us certain feelings, Ignatius asks us to dialogue about those feelings with the Lord; we should especially ask that the deeper knowledge gained about Jesus may help us to love him more dearly and follow him more closely. The colloquy is an affectionate dialogue that moves us toward loving involvement in the Lord's mission.

It often happens also that our contemplation of a human story stirs our emotions; it engages us emotionally with what we're contemplating or affects our feelings in other ways –for better or for worse. Our contemplation may draw us closer to its object, or it may distance us from it, although experience suggests that in the case of persons and personal histories, contemplation usually makes us more committed and sympathetic than we were before. It is possible for contemplation to lead us to the start of a new story, a new love, a new affection, a new journey –or it may be that the same story «continues» but in a different way.

Given what we have stated so far, we can begin to see the attractiveness of the Ignatian proposal to be «contemplatives in action», that is, persons who take a contemplative view of history and the stories that make up our history. Such a view will open us up to greater «interior knowledge», which is what we so often need with regard to many things, many realities, and many persons, for it is «interior knowledge» that links us in a different way to history, to life, and to persons. The more «interior knowledge» we have of persons, the greater will be our knowledge and experience of that God who, in the words of Saint Augustine, is «more inward than our innermost selves». Moreover, the greater our «interior knowledge» of persons, the more likely it will be that our «helping» will amount to something more than a sporadic, superficial remedy; instead, our «helping» will truly reinforce and strengthen humanity in the persons with whom we deal.

3.2. **Vital attitudes that foster «contemplation»**

We should continually grow in «contemplation» in three ways: as a way of approaching our own histories and those of others, as a way of approaching History (with a capital «h») and the lesser histories of our daily lives, and as a way of approaching the history of God in the world –which is the history of Jesus and the personal history that God grants us every day. If we grow contemplatively in these ways, then we will find other vital attitudes also growing within us. Let us look at some of them.

Contemplation helps us to get out of ourselves and not be self-engrossed and solipsistic. To the extent that we succeed in this, we also place ourselves effectively at the service of others. Contemplation helps us to be of service to others rather than

simply be the star actors on the stage of our own lives. Developing the habit of contemplation puts us in a different relation with other persons and even affects our decisions and relationships. The way we relate or respond to particular events or realities will depend on whether or not we have a contemplative habit.

We said that contemplation involves paying close attention to details and that more contemplative persons become more «attentive» in the best sense of that term. Being attentive and taking note of details means avoiding rush and distance; it is impossible to capture details hurriedly or from a distance. To say the same thing positively, attention means the absence of hastiness and the exercise of patience.

We spoke also of Ignatian «reflecting» as an important element of contemplation. «Reflecting» means acknowledging the impact that the contemplated object has on my person because contemplation presupposes that we allow ourselves to be affected, especially if we approach it with the sincere desire for «interior knowledge». Contemplation requires taking off our armor. Contemplation means the opposite of applying to reality our own schemas, our preconceived ideas, our prejudices. Contemplation means allowing the contemplated reality to enter, first of all, through our senses and then «considering» and passing judgment; our considering and our judging come only afterward, and in function of what we perceive. We must allow ourselves to be impacted by reality: by people's needs, their cultures, and their ways of proceeding.

Contemplation is one way in which our sensibility allows itself to be affected and touched by reality; that is, it lets itself be changed. Only by proximity, by drawing close to the reality, does our sensibility make the necessary adjustments. It is not just differences of age, of culture, or of social origin that separate us from other persons; we are also separated by differences of sensibility, which are influenced, of course, by the other differences. A patient, sustained «contemplation» can help our sensibility draw close to reality.

3.3. Living contemplatively

We have spoken of contemplation as a way of living, a way of praying, and a way of approaching history. We will conclude this part of our reflection by describing in summary fashion how we understand the state of life indicated by the famous formula of Father Jerome Nadal, «contemplatives in action». It describes a whole way of life animated by Ignatian spirituality; it means being a «contemplative in life».

Living as a «contemplative in action» means living from within ourselves, but not in a closed off, solipsistic way. It means living with the kind of interiority that allows us to relate to what is outside ourselves but to do so from within. It excludes both superficiality and self-absorption. Those who live as «contemplatives in action» attentively observe the course of history, the persons with whom they live, and the world in all its complexity. Such a way of life excludes both angelic pretensions and

Stoic unconcern. It is a spirituality, a way of living, that thrusts us fully into the world so that we may find therein the transcendent.

Ignatian spirituality does not allow us either to escape upwards or to drown ourselves in mere appearance. It situates us in history so that we can pursue the kind of proximity and contact that allows details to be perceived and sensibilities to be transformed. Ignatian spirituality is one of I-Thou encounter; it takes place face-to-face and body-to-body. It engages in a type of closeness that is not invasive but respectful, a closeness that allows the others to be other, to manifest what they're feeling, and to say what they're thinking. In the end, it is a closeness that grants others the supreme freedom of shaking the hands extended to them or making a gesture of dismissal. The important thing is to draw close and «allow oneself to be seen» by the other, to make oneself accessible and ready to serve. In contemplation we do not view persons and things «from above» or «from a distance» or «en bloc»; we attempt to reach out to each and every individual. And because we are all weak and limited, that closeness tends to make us more merciful than judgmental, more compassionate than punitive—even when that complicates the ways we have to respond to sensitive personal situations.

Whenever possible, Ignatian «contemplatives» try to see for themselves, hear for themselves, and touch with their own hands, and such immediacy makes it possible for them to use their own particular «considerations» and apply their own criteria to what they have contemplated. «Contemplation» is a source of personal experience and judgment, of profound analysis and freedom. Such contemplatives tend not to accept without question the status quo, the established order. Most often their nonconformity indicates not automatic rejection or opposition but mature acceptance. «Contemplation» almost always steers clear of fanaticism, chauvinism, and prejudice. When viewed with contemplative attention, almost all persons, realities, and things are very complex. Consequently, there is no need to absolutize anybody or anything. The problem is that the complexities are often invisible to those who take a hurried, superficial, distant look—that is, those do not look «contemplatively».

Living «contemplatively» means being open to being «touched» by the realities of life; it means not living encased in armor and protected by walls; it means living exposed to the influence of things and allowing our affections to be moved as a result. Living «contemplatively» means accepting a kind of human vulnerability which will often leave us wounded and make us suffer, but which will also allow our affectivity to become ever more wholesome and our life to become ever more totally committed. Being vulnerable, we suffer wounds, and through our wounds our lives are given over to others. Walled in and armored, we suffer no wounds; instead, we curdle and we putrefy for lack of air and ultimately of life. If we have to choose between the two?

«Contemplative» closeness to persons gives us the patience and constancy we need to perceive what there is of God in everybody—in both their qualities and their

deficiencies. One of the most important and original things the Gospel of Jesus teaches us is that God is also revealed in human deficiencies, whether in those who have nothing, such as the poor of the Final Judgment and the poor of the Beatitudes, or in those crucified like the Son («without form, without comeliness, without human appearance»: Isaiah 53:1-12). If we succeed in understanding that, then surely we will find God in our lives! In that moment in our lives we will truly become capable of «dialoguing» affectionately, of engaging in a «colloquy», and of sharing with all humanity our fate and our journey, our sentiments and our history.

What I am saying, then, is that «contemplation» makes us truly human among humans, and that is the only way we can be true followers of Jesus and children of God.

4. «CHOOSING»

«We ought to desire and choose only what is more conducive to the end for which we are created» [23]. From the very beginning of the Exercises Saint Ignatius reminds us that our Christian vocation and the following of Jesus require us to «choose». We must choose as persons who are motivated by the desire to respond to God's love and mercy and are oriented toward the end for which we are created: «to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord and by means of doing this to save our souls» [23]. We cannot live as Christians without «choosing», without making the decisions that day by day give substance to our desire to respond to God's mercy toward us through the following of Jesus.

We are now entering one of the most characteristic features of Ignatian spirituality, even though it is not original or exclusive to it. It is the area of «discernment», which, as we'll see, consists not only in particular choices made at definite moments of our lives but must also be an ongoing dynamic that makes our lives truly Gospel-inspired.

Discernment corresponds basically to two calls we find in the Gospel: the call to love and the call to «vigilance» or attentiveness. The meaning of discernment and the forms it takes will vary according to which call it is responding to.

4.1. Discernment as a movement of love

The first and principal call of the Gospel is the call to love, and love is never static but always dynamic. Love is always searching and wondering: how to love more? how can my love be expressed more concretely? how can I respond more delicately? how can I serve more effectively? These are the questions inherent in love that is alive, in love that is not a matter of routine but is refreshed minute by minute.

Those are also the questions for discernment, and they are the questions for the «more», the famous Ignatian magis, which is not a movement of arrogant voluntarism but one of generous love: how can I love more? how can I serve better? That is what it means to «seek the will of God»: it means searching for ways to concretize God's loving designs in my own personal life and in the reality in which I move.

All love seeks to become concrete in order to be true to itself. Love that does not become concrete evaporates. What concrete gestures are most suitable for loving this person, at this moment, in this circumstance? This is the «divine» logic that is sublimely described at the beginning of chapter 13 of John's gospel: «Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end» (v. 1). But such love, precisely because it is ultimate, needs to be made concrete in a gesture which obviously must also be «ultimate»: «he began to wash the disciples' feet» (v. 5). The truth of love is verified in the concrete gestures in which it becomes embodied. And that is precisely the basic question of discernment: what does love ask of me? where is love taking me now?

Discernment, then, means positively and evangelically going beyond the logic of mere compliance, which is a logic of spiritual «infancy», for discernment is part of a Christian person's maturity. Because it is situated in the logic of love, discernment means stretching our Christian lives beyond the parameters of calculation, mediocrity, settling for less, or «doing just enough». Discernment is always about «choosing» between two things both of which are good. It makes no sense to talk about discerning between something good and something bad.

This dynamic of love and discernment is nourished by desire. What sets the search in motion is the desire to love and to respond to the love one receives. If discernment is not nourished by desire, then our efforts in that regard will be more or less contrived or more or less sophisticated, and they'll be aimed at resolving questions with more or less human prudence, with more or less «Christian» criteria, but they will not be discernment in the fullest sense of the word. Obviously, desire is not something improvised, but that is something we'll comment on later.

As we have seen at other points in this booklet, desire is in turn nourished by gratitude. It is for that reason that the «examen»—which is the primary, daily, habitual exercise of discernment—begins with «giving thanks to God our Lord» [43]. That's what it means to «bring into action» a love that questions and seeks, for it is only from the experience of seeing Christ «die for our sins» that we can ask with truth and radicality: «what have I done for Christ, what am I doing for Christ, what should I do for Christ?» [53].

As the ultimate form and expression of love, Jesus is the basic referent and horizon of discernment. Our keen consciousness of his love for us is what sets in motion the process of search and response; in him we find the model and the horizon of love's meaning and the possibility of truly loving both God and human beings. That is why Saint Ignatius in the Exercises makes specific reference to a person who

wants to «choose» the way of life by which he may best respond to God's love: «While continuing our contemplation of [Christ's] life, we now simultaneously explore and inquire: in which state or way of life does the Divine Majesty wish us to serve him?» [135].

We must «explore and inquire» because authentic Ignatian discernment is a truly «spiritual» process, not just a rational or intellectual one. Its logic is the logic of Love; it requires prayer and not just «exploration». Discernment that originates in loves is a prayerful process not just in the formal sense but in the deepest sense of the word.

4.2. Discernment as a response to the Gospel call for «vigilance»

Constantly repeated in the gospels is the call to «vigilance» or alertness because «at the hour when we least expect» we may be surprised and deceived by forces opposed to Christ's Gospel. In this sense, our discernment seeks lucidity to help us deal with the internal and external deceits in which we may be involved. Discernment requires that we seek and request the lucidity we need to distinguish between what is truly good and what is only apparently good but is often presented to us as the real thing. For that is the very nature of deceit: what is bad takes on the appearance of what is good.

By way of example and with no claim to be exhaustive, we can point out some questions which require of us more careful attention and greater «vigilance» in our habitual discernment:

a) Personal and apostolic dynamics: It is not enough that something appear simply as good initially; we have to examine where it is leading us. This is the warning Saint Ignatius gives us in Rule 5 for Discernment of Spirits in the Second Week: «We should pay close attention to the whole train of our thought. If the beginning, middle, and end are all good and tend toward what is wholly good, it is a sign of the good angel. But if the train of thoughts which a spirit causes ends up in something evil or diverting, or in something less good than what the soul was originally proposing to do; or further, if it weakens, disquiets, or disturbs the soul by robbing it of the peace, tranquility, and quiet which it enjoyed earlier, all this is a clear sign that this is coming from the evil spirit, the enemy of our progress and eternal salvation» [333].

b) We need to be aware that the non-evangelical ways of thinking that are at work in our society pervade our lives and our ways of thinking whether we want them to or not. We may express this idea with an easily understandable expression: we are all «passive smokers» of non-evangelical ways of thinking.

We could cite numerous examples of this, such as the high regard we have for persons who are more esteemed for social reasons and the disregard in which we

hold persons who seem socially irrelevant. Other examples are the rationales of success, triumph, and power; the idea of non-renunciation, the total compatibility of values and options, etc.

c) Another theme is the use of goods that are necessary. Since we cannot do without them, it is not a matter of choosing whether to have them or not, but we can make choices about the quality and quantity of our possessions as well as about the use we make of them.

This is the sense of the «Rules to Order Oneself in the Taking of Food» that Saint Ignatius includes in the Exercises [210-217]. With the necessary adaptations, these rules are applicable to many other aspects of living and to the lifestyle we seek to adopt as a way of living evangelically in the midst of the world.

All these place us on the path toward an authentic, mature Christian life in which we, as believers, assume our full personal responsibilities and conscientiously follow Christ. We do so while taking advantage of relevant counsels and accompaniment, but always with a sense of responsibility that cannot be delegated to others or assumed by anyone except ourselves.

4.3. Other observations about «choosing»

4.3.1. The subject of discernment

From what we have already said about discernment, it is clear that the crucial element is the «subject» of discernment: the person who desires and who is capable of «examen» and contemplation. Without such a subject it makes no sense even to begin to talk about procedures, techniques, rules, etc. The «subject» of discernment is the first element we must attend to in ourselves and in those whom we accompany.

The formation of the «subject» of discernment is not an easy task, as is clear from the very itinerary proposed in the Exercises of Saint Ignatius: the process of the «elections», which is the key to the Exercises and the culminating moment of discernment, does not begin until halfway through the Second Week [at No. 135]. Everything that has gone before has been geared simply to preparing the subject and his attitudes.

4.3.2. The habit of discernment

More basic than the particular discernments we make at various times in our lives is the habit of discernment in our ordinary lives, that is, the habit of revitalizing love and cultivating attention. If we do not acquire and practice the habit of daily discernment, it is hard to imagine that particular discernments of any import are really possible for us.

Acquiring that habit supposes a vital dynamic of prayer and «examen», of reading the gospels and contemplating Jesus, of accompaniment and study, and of contrast with life. The concrete circumstances and modalities of those activities will be determined by the conditions in which each person lives, but what is more important than any specific forms and practices is acquiring the disposition of discernment in depth.

4.3.3. The «techniques» of discernment

Therefore, in regards to discernment it is much more important to speak about attitudes and habits than about techniques, which are many and varied. No one of them is to be absolutized, nor should they be applied mechanically, for that usually means applying them improperly out of rigidity or a simplistic understanding. Rather, they are to be taken as guidelines or points of reference. Applying them is not at odds with common sense; it requires the prudence that is called for in every decision about life.

4.3.4. Accompaniment

It is within the context of discernment that accompaniment attains its full value. For Saint Ignatius good discernment means «accompanied» discernment. Allowing oneself to be helped and enlightened by another person helps toward objectivity, even though the decisions must ultimately be taken by the discerning subject. As regards the relation between the person accompanying and the one being accompanied in discernment, the orientations that Saint Ignatius provides for both are marked by exquisite respect and prudence.

5. «RESIST»

«Resist» is a verb that Saint Ignatius uses with special force when speaking about «desolation», both in the initial Annotations of the Exercises and in the Rules for Discernment. It is not a verb he uses much on other occasions, but he employs it emphatically here; what that verb means may be gleaned from Ignatius's other writings.

«Resisting» leads us to speak of fortitude, a gift of the Spirit and a virtue characteristic of Christian life throughout the history of Christian spirituality. Fortitude is necessary because there is always struggle and combat in our spiritual life (understood not as a life lived separate and apart but as life itself lived in the spirit of the Gospel). We have all experienced such struggle. Not only are we subject to the normal difficulties faced by every human person, but when we try to act in fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus, we experience «added» difficulties, the very ones Jesus referred to when he spoke of suffering «for my sake and for the Gospel».

These difficulties are of diverse sorts, and their impact on us is likewise diverse. There are the greater or lesser «exterior» difficulties that come from outside ourselves and from persons we are not closely associated with; we usually feel stronger and feistier in dealing with these, or at least more prepared to combat them. There are other difficulties which are objectively less serious but which may nonetheless do more to undermine our morale; these are the difficulties caused by persons who are close to us either affectively or effectively. Such difficulties are especially painful; they make us feel bad; they give rise in us to feelings of discouragement, guilt, resentment, or to some mix of all of them. In any case, they demoralize us interiorly. Finally, there are the difficulties which come from within our very selves and which coexist with our sincere desire to love and follow the Lord. These difficulties are

often uncontrollable. Despite the best of will, we never quite manage to overcome them; they are the weeds that grow alongside the wheat in our own field. At certain moments these difficulties also leave us discouraged and despairing.

In the face of all this, how does fortitude help? What are its basic elements? What contribution can it make?

A basic and very important component of fortitude is patience. Patience is much more than simply enduring passively or taking refuge in a doorway until the rainstorm passes. We need to practice patience with the persons whom we want to help, patience with the rhythms of personal and collective processes, patience with ourselves. Patience means not giving in to anxiety or hastiness, not yielding to frustrations that are often based on impractical or exaggerated expectations. Patience also means not making precipitous judgments or appraisals about persons or about the results of projects we undertake. In the words of Dolores Aleixandre, patience means «becoming familiar with the Gospel's law of the long stretch, which depends on the slowness with which the yeast ferments the dough or with which the seed sends its shoot up through the earth».

Fortitude also has to do with our ability to put up with difficulties and setbacks, with sufferings and contradictions, and to do so cheerfully, gallantly, with integrity and without self-pity. It seems to me that this ability involves not so much Stoicism or personal stamina as a capacity for solidarity with the countless crucified persons both near us and far away, both present and past. Such ability has much to do with that impressive and meaningful phrase of Ignatius in the Third Week of the Exercises: «sorrow with Christ in sorrow, a broken spirit with Christ so broken» [203]. That is to say, our ability to put up with difficulties has to do with our capacity to experience—in every sense of the word—our pain, our brokenness, and our suffering in communion with Christ and in the same way he experienced his own pain and brokenness and suffering.

A third element of fortitude as a gift of the Spirit and an attitude of life has to do with our ability to persevere and not throw in the towel before it is time. The last temptation of Christ was not the morbid one we saw in the movie, of a supposed relationship with Magdalene. Rather, it was a temptation that was much less sensational but far more real and difficult; it was the much more a real «temptation» of coming down from the cross. This was the temptation to which he was prodded by everybody, Jews and pagans alike. It was a temptation «under the guise of good» («come down, and then we will believe in you!»); it was the temptation present from Gethsemane to the very end of his life. And often it is also our own temptation: «You're exaggerating!» «It's not such a big deal!» «Don't you see what everyone else is doing?» «Don't go to extremes!» etc., etc. This temptation can be very strong when we are centered on ourselves, and it is overcome only to the extent that we become de-centered, that is, to the extent that the needs of others, our love for others, and our service to others outweigh our own concerns.

Finally, part of fortitude—and this is very Ignatian—is caring for oneself, keeping the subject spiritually and physically strong, avoiding unnecessary attrition, calibrating one’s own forces and adjusting to them with humility. It means knowing how to say «no», which can sometimes be extremely difficult and yet is very important; we have to learn to use this word and to distinguish between the moments and situations where we should say «yes» and those where we should say «no»! Dolores Aleixandre says it very sensibly and also with much humor: «Resistance adds a sapiential dimension to the prophetic spirit. It reminds us that ‘in order that the subject not be worn down’ we need to care for it with reasonable doses of humor, common sense, support from friends, and a careful reading of yesterday’s history so as not to read today’s history too tragically».

What are the sources of such fortitude? Where are the places where it grows and becomes stronger?

The first of them is union with Jesus, whereby he communicates to us his own strength and his own Spirit. All of us should cultivate the forms and characteristics of this prayerful search for union with Jesus according to our circumstances and possibilities, and we should adapt the search to our personal characteristics, for it will lead us to a very important aspect of fortitude: remaining affectively centered in the place where we should be.

In this regard I want to indicate something that may at first seem surprising but that, in my opinion and experience, is quite true. Self-denial makes us strong. What do I understand by self-denial? It is the ability to take leave of ourselves, to stop being self-centered, to increase our interior freedom with regard to things and with regard to ourselves. Such «despoiling» of ourselves may superficially appear to weaken us, but it is actually a source of strength and fortitude. Interior freedom makes us strong.

Union and communion with others—allowing ourselves to be accompanied and accompanying others on their path— is also a source of strength for it helps us realize that we are on the road with others and are not traveling alone. Union and communion with others means accepting others and being accepted; it means guiding others and being enlightened ourselves in the process. When we share the weakness of others, we make them stronger, and we become more conscious and cautious of our own weakness. We should be free regarding the forms and structures of accompaniment; the important thing is being accompanied as far as circumstances advise or allow.

Attention to and care for the rhythms of life are important for fortitude. We should try to keep a rhythm of life that nourishes and empowers us, not one that exhausts us. Apart from what is unavoidable, there is always a margin of choice regarding how we spend our time, how we set the pace of our lives, and how we view the possibilities for action. The important thing is not to live beyond our possibilities in ways that drain us or overwhelm us, but also not to fall short of our possibilities because that can deflate us. Obviously, discernment and accompani-

ment are necessary to help us make that adjustment. We are strengthened by a life that has plenty of «green spaces», one that allows us the rest breaks that are necessary, humane, and free of compulsion.

Finally, then, what are the qualities that provide us energy in our undertakings and make us strong ourselves? They are these: our own conviction and coherence with regard to what we're doing, the sincerity and honesty of our intentions, and the rightness and clarity of the procedures we follow. When the Lord gives us a vocation or a mission, he also gives us the grace to carry it out. The greater the fidelity with which we try to live our vocation, the greater will be the strength that grace gives us to respond to that mission.

"Guides", with this verb Ignatius Loyola modestly expresses his great desire to help others. It is under this motto connoting service and simplicity that the Ignatian School of Spirituality (*Escuela Ignaciana de Espiritualidad- EIDES*) offers these series of materials.

Guides Collection

All booklets can be downloaded from internet:
www.cristianismeijusticia.net/en/guides

1. **Horizons of life.** Darío Mollá

Cristianisme i Justícia

Roger de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona
Tel: +34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com
www.cristianismeijusticia.net



cristianismeijusticia



cijusticia



fespinal89