

GUIDES

EIDES

2

The Exercises in ordinary life

Francesc Riera



THE EXERCISES IN ORDINARY

Francesc Riera, sj.

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1. PRESENTATION

Around the middle of the year 1983 we set ourselves a challenge, to give the Ignatian Exercises to suitable members of our *Comunidad Popular* of the district of Collblanc (Barcelona). In this way we hoped to *assist* in the development of the Christian Life Communities, especially among the young people of the *Comunidad Popular*.

1.1. A challenge

For many years we had been holding regular meetings celebrations, courses in scripture and theology etc. We had now to take a further step towards promoting a personalized faith firmly grounded in commitment. But neither adults nor youth had any possibility of making a retreat of four or five days, nor in any case was a period of four or five days long enough to assimilate the Ignatian experience at any depth.

To meet the concrete situation of 1983 as we saw it, we gathered seven married couples, young and middle-aged, and proposed to them a spring weekend retreat in which they would have a first experience of prayer and silence. During 1983-84 we conducted with these couples the first programme of the Exercises in daily life. It lasted for four months and was reinforced by three retreats of 48 hours at the beginning, middle and end of the experience, as shall be explained in detail below.

Since then, *we* have offered the programme annually. Young people and adults of various Christian communities or movements have passed through it.

Participants have also included young people and adults of our Christian Life Communities and individuals recommended to us by former exercitants or counselors. It has always been important for us that the group should be half young people and half adults. The presence of an adult community turned out to be very significant for the young; it gives them a living image of the possibility of a committed and credible adult Christianity. For the adults, the presence of the young people brings a distinctive note of hope into one of the most powerful experiences of Christianity of their lives. In this type of Exercises, it can also be of value to add a group of five or six religious (both younger and older) so that the religious can be evangelized by the married couples and so that the non-religious (both younger and older) can experience something of the reality of religious life.

The group now consists each year of twenty-five persons (this year there were thirty-three, which has proved to be an excessive number for our resources). Each has a counselor with whom they meet on a weekly basis. This means that each year some fifteen people have to be mobilized as counselors.

1.2. Ignatian Exercises

There can be no doubt that our project—which remains very faithful to the Ignatian methodology—has the limits of any adaptation. But it is Ignatius himself who in his 18th annotation encourages adaptation of the method in order to respond realistically to the needs of the individual exercitant.

The experience of the Ignatian Exercises, as we have come to propose them, takes as its starting point the supposition formulated by Ignatius in the 19th annotation, where he refers to persons prevented by their work and other obligations from going into retreat for a sufficient time to make the Exercises. In this annotation he describes an adaptation through which persons such as these can make the authentic Exercises and even do so in their entirety.

Though the 19th annotation envisages adaptation for reasons of «available time», it opens up the possibility of adaptation for reasons of «life-situation». The majority of our exercitants do in fact find considerable difficulty in getting away for a complete week. (This is true especially of parents of young children when husband and wife are both working, but many young people also have difficulties arising from professional, scholastic, or voluntary commitments). In the cases we are dealing with here, however, the idea of adaptation, which was originally motivated by the «time» factor, also enabled us to adapt better to the «situations» of our clientele, while remaining faithful, we believe, to the internal dynamic and the contents of the Ignatian Exercises. This adaptation has integrated all the realism of daily life into the experience of four long months of prayer, spiritual accompaniment, and discernment for the purpose of discovering the will of God for one's own life.

1.3. The method

In the course of nine years we have progressively modified our methodology, adapting it to the clientele of each programme and learning continuously from ongoing experience. In the following account, therefore, there may be a danger of selecting only the best of each year and giving an ideal picture of what we are claiming to do.

As we have said, the programme consists of four months of Exercises in ordinary life during which the exercitant meets weekly with the accompanying counselor and attends three intensive retreats from Friday night to Sunday night. We shall look at all this in parts.

2. THE WEEKEND RETREATS

The first danger to be averted by both exercitants and counselors is that of giving greater significance to the more intense –and satisfying– experience of the weekend retreat than to making the Exercises in the more arid and difficult situation of ordinary life. It is mainly in the hard grind of ordinary life that the effects of the Exercises come into play.

It is precisely for this reason that we have the weekend retreats: they are a reinforcement for the Exercises in daily life.

In the first weekend retreat the Ignatian themes of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises are proposed, and in the second retreat the basic points of the Second Week. In the third retreat, we conclude by expounding the paschal mystery not so much from the perspective adopted by Ignatius in his Third and Fourth Weeks but rather as reinforcing the perspectives of the Second Week.

2.1. Four themes

In each retreat four themes are proposed, and to each of them are assigned three times of prayer (two lasting an hour each); that means a total of some five hours of prayer a day. This programme we must now consider in some detail.

- Each exercise begins with the giving of points –half an hour maximum– which are based on a short photocopied guide and provide a concrete methodology for making prayer.
- There follows a complete hour of personal prayer.

- A second time of prayer is done in a small group led by one of the counselors and lasts about thirty minutes. In the case of couples, it is recommended that this prayer be between the partners (for this they are given beforehand a brief methodology, as we shall explain later).
- After a break, the theme under consideration finishes in a third time of personal prayer for an hour in the style of the resumé or repetition taught in the book of the Exercises [62, 64].

Each theme occupies a morning or an afternoon. For the evening, after supper, a broad period of time is given to an overall examen, in which the exercitant evaluates the entire day, and notes the principal movements during prayer and the other periods, together with any difficulties of method, etc. (Later we shall explain the content of these themes and the apprenticeship of prayer and examen.)

2.2. The apprenticeship of prayer

Above all, it is indispensable to make an apprenticeship of prayer especially with regard to personal prayer, but also with regard to communal prayer, and when relevant, prayer between partners.

2.2.1. Introduction to personal prayer

At least at the beginning of the retreat we propose a very concrete methodology which serves as a kind of prayer «go-cart». A sheet entitled «suggestions for prayer» is distributed and commented on. In this we propose a simple method. For many, it will be a wonderful discovery to realize that an hour of prayer can be filled easily and agreeably. The sheet indicates that prayer has three moments: certain indispensable preliminaries, the central part, and a conclusion.

The preliminaries

The exercitant must discover above all the pedagogy of the First Additions [73-75]. We make three points:

- Even before prayer begins, there needs to be a time when one centres oneself, turns one's thoughts towards prayer, desires to meet with the Lord. (We remind them of the scene of the fox and the corn-gold hair of the little prince in St Exupery's fable).
- There is a need to become conscious of being in the presence of the Lord, to greet him cordially, etc.

– One makes the initial petition –«asking for what I want» [48]– since all is gift of the Lord, and also because the petition fixes the objective of the exercise.

The body of the prayer

After this, we suggest to the exercitant the following:

– They should try to remember, in dialogue with the Lord, the points which struck them personally in the exposition of the theme (this corresponds to the use of memory of the exercise of the powers [45]); they should reflect (use of the «understanding») and try to move from knowing to feeling, asking the Spirit to turn their heart of stone into flesh (response of the «will», the heart, in the exercise cited). They easily spend considerable time in this and tend by themselves to arrive at colloquy, without the idea being proposed to them.

– But it is also possible that for some inspiration may come to an end after a quarter of an hour. In this case, we suggest that they take their photocopy of the points and read it slowly and savouringly, underlining words, writing reflections, drawing applications, all in dialogue with the Lord; we also suggest that they interrupt their reflection frequently, take the photocopied psalm we have given them, and use it to express their feelings before the Lord.

– Often, we tell them, one will cease to use words and prefer to confine oneself to a silent contemplation, much as one might gaze upon the immensity of the sea or the beauty of the fire. In this way we try to introduce them already to prayer of a more contemplative kind.

The idea of the central part of this prayer, we explain, is to enable the exercitant to penetrate the theme in depth.

The conclusion of prayer

The exercitant must also learn that prayer concludes in a colloquy with the Lord which takes up everything that has been experienced and understood during the hour of prayer, and that it is important to write these thoughts and feelings down briefly as a kind of «log of the journey». In this way, one can begin to introduce exercitants to the fifth addition [77] and to the practice of examining the movements of prayer.

The first experiences of prayer made with a certain method usually proves to be highly gratifying. There are always some exercitants who never imagined that they could remain an hour in silence and prayer, and then share their experiences in the times of evaluation. They give a very positive rating to the «suggestions for prayer» sheet.

Having made this apprenticeship in prayer in the course of this weekend, the exercitants will have to examine more in detail with their counselors what their particular form and style of prayer should be.

In the second weekend, which is an introduction to the Second Week of the Exercises, the exercitants practice a new method of prayer. It is similar to the former method but no longer consists in meditative prayer according to the use of the three powers [45-54]; now it consists in the method of contemplative prayer expounded by Ignatius for the first day of the Second Week [101-131].

2.2.2. Prayer in group

During the first weekend we give group prayer a larger role and more time, but as the exercitants' experience develops, the time for it is reduced in favour of personal prayer. The people who come to these Exercises are accustomed to meetings of various kinds, such as discussion, debate, study, etc. We are now helping them to enter into a new kind of meeting: the experience of meeting together before God (rather than in the simple dialogue, debate, or study in which their usual meetings with one another consist). Moreover, they must be helped to discover that this encounter in communal prayer is an epiphany of the Spirit: that where two or three are united in the Lord's name there He himself is present. The prayer of the group will be neither dialogue, nor study, nor mutual exchange. It will be the simple exposition of movements (what each person has felt and understood in his or her personal prayer). The exercitants will be able to discover in what the others declare the presence of the Creator Spirit who speaks through the mouth of their companions, as if in a new Pentecost. In doing so, the exercitants will have to learn to adore the Presence of God through –dare one say this?– the particular features of their companions.

Two dangers should be kept in mind In connection with this type of group exercise. Such an exercise can be for some an experience of personal success, while it produces in others feelings of inferiority because they feel they're unable to express themselves well. The team of counselors should know the ways of overcoming such a difficulty in groups which are diverse both in age and in culture.

It is also important that married people learn to pray as partners (prayer of the couple). They must experience the truth that the «subject» who stands before God includes also the partner. At the beginning a concrete method is proposed to them by way of a «prayer apprenticeship»; it is suggested that this period of prayer begin with a mutual greeting and a vocal prayer begging the Lord to grant the fruit of the exercise currently being made. After these preliminaries, the prayer consists in explaining to one another the movements of personal prayer (that is, the things understood and felt) and seeing how these relate to the concrete realities of their

lives. The time of prayer can end with a final prayer that is read (e.g., a psalm or a prayer of their own composition).

One of the major fruits of this way of making the Exercises is that the couple learns this kind of prayer in the course of the weekend and then puts into practice during four months amid all the hassles of ordinary life. The married exercitants practice such prayer frequently and do so without difficulty.

Though much of this section has been devoted to discussing group prayer, let us repeat in conclusion that personal prayer is still the principal element in the Ignatian Exercises, and it is that to which most time should be given.

2.3. Examen

As implied in the above discussion, we propose that at the end of the day, the exercitants put in writing the principal movements of their prayer and in this way build up a kind of log of their journey. We also suggest that they see whether the prayer has gone well or badly and why. An attempt is made to introduce briefly the fifth addition.

In the evening after supper there is a general exercise on the examen. We introduce it by a brief informal talk on the value of the Ignatian examen as a means of knowing and recognizing our interior movements, both in times of prayer and in the course of the day [316-317]. At the same time, we set out the general lines of the fifth addition [77] and of the general examen [43].

With this introduction, the exercitants retire to make an examen lasting a good quarter of an hour. They are asked in a context of thanksgiving and prayer to recall their principal movements, look over their notes and papers, identify the elements of method which were helpful and those which did not seem to work. All this must take in the whole day.

After this, we gather again in the meeting room, where each is asked to share some aspect of the method which they found especially helpful (way of praying, silence, communitarian prayer in groups or couples, the occasional writing during prayer, etc.). This is usually an enjoyable stage for all, and one in which people learn from each other about the specific ways of making the various exercises. The director can use the occasion to give brief explanations –often taking the form of response to difficulties– of annotations, rules, etc., or to draw attention to particularly important details among the points that have come up.

In the weekend group retreat, which has to be a support for the exercises in ordinary life, we have realized that the various (and few) moments of sharing are helpful and create a climate. But if these were developed too far, there would be a danger of people becoming dependent on the dynamic of the group, and losing out on the individual character proper to the exercises of Ignatius which tend towards

«separation from friends and acquaintances» [20.2]. Though in our case the element of solitude arises in ordinary life, even at this stage a balance must be found, and the person responsible for the group must keep an eye on this.

The day concludes in the chapel with a final prayer, vocal or silent, from which each person rises to go to his or her room when they are ready. Some people remain in this prayer for a good length of time.

2.4. Silence

a) During the first years, for strictly practical reasons, we chose the Casal Borja of Sant Cugat del Vallès (Barcelona). This is not so much a house of silence and retreat as a multi-purpose centre for cultural and Christian meetings; each weekend 100 to 200 persons can easily be brought together there (Christian communities, cultural groups, etc.). But at the same time, it provides sufficient opportunities for isolation and for finding places ideal for silence (room, park, woods, the two chapels of the Casal and the two in the residence). From our perspective, the situation helped to clarify some points of principle. We realized that in the dynamic of exercises in ordinary life, there is no need, even in the weekend retreats, to try to get absolute silence. Moreover, for exercises of this kind, we felt that the classic retreat houses, with the impression they can convey of elitism and spiritual luxury, were unsuitable. We saw as positively preferable a more popular place which might be hosting a parish group, a Christian youth movement, or even cultural meetings of a not specifically Christian character, as well as our group of exercitants. Thus even in the retreat «ordinary life» would be present.

b) For the last five or six years, however, we have preferred a more secluded situation, where there is only our own group and the ambience is more conducive to creating silence. For the final weekend retreat we now always choose the house of the Exercises of the Cave of St Ignatius at Manresa, and we try to draw maximum benefit from its quasi-sacramental value. But even so, the principle remains that in the dynamic of the Exercises in ordinary life there is no need for the exercitants to try to achieve absolute silence. We try to procure for them a general climate of silence during the day, but *we* talk over meals and extend the dessert course so that exercitants can get to know each other. All this, together with the times of communal prayer, Eucharist and the evening session –which includes the night examen as we shall explain– helps to produce a certain group dynamic, which, though in no way envisaged in the book of the Exercises, can be beneficial.

Despite its intensity, the retreat as a whole turns out to be a relaxing occasion. This can be due in part to the brevity of a weekend experience, but it arises also from the atmosphere of cordiality breathed in during the moments spent together.

Sometimes during the exercises, a need *is* felt, especially among the young, to meet and chat in groups which easily become «clandestine» and as such bring tension rather than relaxation in the situation described above. The need to «chat» is well contained by the method itself.

2.5. The points

As already explained, during the first weekend we present a concentrated form of the First Week of the Exercises; during the second, the themes of the Second Week as far as the Two Standards and Three Classes; and in the third week we present the paschal mystery, not from the perspectives of the Third and Fourth Weeks but in relation to the objectives of the Second Week.

During the four months, the exercitant generally reaches at most the level which Ignatius expects for the first half of the Second Week (often it is already a good outcome if the exercitant comes to realize seriously the objectives of the Ignatian First Week). When the «official» four months are ended, it remains for the exercitant possessing the requisite qualities to move on with their counselor to greater heights.

From the beginning exercitants are told that the matter proposed in the weekend will be more than can be digested in this brief space of time. For the moment one has to «cram in» everything that must subsequently be slowly absorbed amid the realities of ordinary life, where the authenticity of ideas and sentiments arising in the peaceful climate of retreat are ultimately ratified.

3. TWO PERIODS OF TWO MONTHS IN ORDINARY LIFE

Little by little, as the experience of the four months proceeds, people discover that it is in ordinary life that the effects of the exercises come mainly into play. In these four months all that has been understood and felt in the retreat is lived out. And it is lived out in the midst of daily difficulties and contradictions, accompanied by frequent prayer and by meetings with the counselor. The result is a spiritual experience which is in no way idealistic or ingenuous.

The dynamic of prayer in ordinary life leads the person to desire to return again to the longer periods of prayer made possible by the weekend retreat, in the same way that the dynamic of the weekend calls for ratification of its insights in the day-to-day realities of life.

The different exercises of this two-month period pivot on two axes: personal prayer and spiritual direction.

During the first years we gave these exercises, we offered as a back-up some meetings of the whole group for a time of communal prayer (as explained below). We eventually dropped this, however, because of the practical difficulty –it burdened the exercitants with an extra commitment– and in order to maintain the primacy of personal elements (prayer, spiritual direction) over group elements.

3.1. Prayer

Each week the exercitant receives by post or from his or her counselor a leaflet with Orientations for prayer. Each of these explains or amplifies one of the points of the weekend retreat.

3.1.1. *Extended times of prayer*

The exercitant has to find a number of extended times for prayer during the course of the week (whether four, five, or daily will emerge from the examen, from experience and from dialogue with the counselor). These more extended times of prayer will be devoted to deepening the points from the weekend retreat recalled in the Orientations leaflet. Above all, with the help of the counselor, the exercitants will gradually learn their own particular and personal way of praying.

If personal prayer is not given a minimum of quality and quantity time –in the face of the acidities and desolations intrinsic to daily life– the Exercises will be greatly impoverished. In this regard, the counselor can provide considerable help. It is also worth bearing in mind that Ignatius himself expected an hour of prayer every day in a nineteenth-annotation retreat [19,4].

3.1.2. *Prayer in the course of life*

At the same time, the Orientations initiate the exercitant into prayer «in daily life». Particular attention is drawn to three specific times of the day (note the correspondence with the method of the particular examen [24-31]).

a) In the morning a prayer should be made, perhaps very brief (while dressing, or going to work, or in the metro...); it marks the day with the point of the Exercises to be worked on during that week. For example, if the Orientations refer to the Fatherhood of God, the exercitant should recall that God is Father and Mother, rejoice in this, ask to be able to recognize in the course of the day the features of fatherhood or motherhood to be met within oneself and in others. If the Orientations and the prayer of the day use the language of proportion (*tantum-quantum*, in so far as), the exercitant should note this in the morning and carry it through the day while asking the Spirit for light to see how he or she (and others) behave or fail to behave in this way. Following other Orientations, the exercitant might begin the day looking at the face of Christ on the cross and seeking light to discover, throughout the day, Christ crucified for their own sins and those of all persons; or to feel themselves called by Jesus to be with him during the day in the great labour of building the kingdom, etc.

This prayer of the morning, which can last for some time or only a few minutes, aims to bring into ordinary life a special quality of attentiveness.

b) Throughout the day the exercitant should try to maintain this quality of attentiveness naturally and without in any way forcing things. To this end, the exercitant has sufficient resources in the moments –or «flashes»– of insight which, even if only very briefly, light up the particular truths currently being lived out, as explained above. At the beginning, the isolated insight and the act of attention in the midst of the weariness and stress of the daily round are essential, but they are essential precisely in order that the whole of life be converted into «exercise» and that through the examen and through dialogue with the counselor the exercitant becomes aware week by week of an increasing quality of enlightenment in ordinary life.

c) For a few minutes at night or perhaps a longer period, one tries to go over the day with the intention of interpreting it according to the Gospel norms coming out of the material proposed for meditation in the paper. One will rejoice or be sad before Jesus depending on how one meets him implicitly or explicitly in that material. The exercitant will recognize the presence or absence of the kingdom in the various situations and events and perhaps in the news items which have marked the course of the day, but which one did not view explicitly at the time with the eyes of faith because there could be no pause for contemplation. (Within the methodology of the particular examen, to which *we* have referred, this would be the moment to recall the «flashes of insight» and jot down the number, so as to compare one day with another as indicated in additions 2 to 4 of the Ignatian particular examen [28-31].

Day by day and slowly, the apprenticeship of prayer in the stream of life develops in such a way that the great majority of exercitants come to live with greater depth in the presence of God. The basic points seen in concentrated form during the retreat become gradually present in the consciousness of life.

Each exercitant will live out these times of prayer in his or her own way. For some, the easier and more important time of prayer may be in the morning or at night; for others it will be the prayer during the day. But for every exercitant there always comes about a progressive integration of prayer and life.

During the Exercises, at some moments a person will give greater importance to prolonged prayer, at other times to the prayer just described. These are two styles of prayer which exist in a dialectical relationship, each calling forth the other. We must not forget, however, the central place that belongs to times of extended prayer.

The Orientations, especially in the first two-month block, have more the purpose of reminding the exercitants (that the prayer has to be done and how to go about it) rather than of giving them new material apart from what has been already explained during the Weekend retreat. Hence, they can sometimes be repetitious, but experience has consistently shown the value of this way of proceeding.

On the other hand, in the second two-month block, the weekly orientations, in addition to «reminding», develop and amplify the principal ideas of the Second Week which were expounded in somewhat summary fashion during the second weekend retreat. They also offer fresh material for meditation on the mysteries of the life of Christ.

3.2. Spiritual direction

Here we have one of the most essential characteristics of every kind of Ignatian exercise, and specifically of the present «adaptation». Each exercitant has his or her own counselor, an arrangement which requires, in our experience, that some fifteen people be available for accompaniment. Over the years we have been helped by Jesuits of all ages and ministries including Jesuit scholastics, religious of the Company of Mary of the Sacred Heart, and secular priests. The interview takes place on a weekly basis, and as a general rule it is brief, lasting for more or less half an hour.

It is not our intention here to expound the method of interview in the Exercises; what follows is simply a broad outline of certain features that seem specially appropriate for the kind of Exercises here under review.

The visit to the counselor bears a certain similarity to the visit paid to the abbot by an anchorite living in solitude in the wilderness in the time of Anthony and the desert Fathers. The spiritual counselor brings an ecclesial dimension to the personal, individual experience of the exercitant who is living in the arid and lonely desert of ordinary life, today populated by an infinity of ambiguous spirits needing to be discerned. The counselor gives an ecclesial dimension to the life of the solitary and thus frees him or her from the specious or idealistic elements of an immature or over-subjective outlook. In the past, the visit to the abbot established a rhythm in the monotonous life of the desert, and similarly, it now establishes a rhythm in the journey through the Exercises today.

The visit to the counselor calls for preparation: it obliges the exercitant to recognize and name numerous movements that were experienced through the week, perhaps unreflectively.

The exercitants must articulate things to themselves. All this amounts to an Ignatian examen and would of itself be of value even if there were no response on the part of the counselor.

But more than this, in the type of Exercises which we are describing, the counselor is –if the word be allowed– the authentic «director» of the experience. There is indeed the support and direction provided by the weekly Orientations and by the weekend retreats with their element of group dynamic. but the four months' experience of the Exercises consists in a continuous personal relationship, namely,

the dialogue between exercitant and counselor. It is the counselor's task to accommodate the experience of the Exercises to the needs of the exercitant; the counselor can allow the exercitant the freedom and creativity to depart from or adjust the Orientations, directives, etc., which mark the general programme.

3.2.1. Apprenticeship in prayer

At first, the counselor will be especially concerned to help the exercitant organize the week and to set aside extended times for prayer; the exercitant will need help in finding the best way of doing this. In the first weeks this matter will have to be gone into in detail.

The counselor will also have to help the exercitant to learn to pray throughout the day, as described above.

In the course of their weekly meetings, the counselor will help the exercitant to understand that spiritual exercises include not only the exercises of prayer, examen, etc., but also a wide range of other spiritual activities, as Ignatius indicates in the first annotation, and that the exercitant must come progressively to discover that in the end everything is a spiritual exercise. Thus, when the week is being reviewed, the counselor will try to help the exercitant to realize that many of his or her actions have been done under the movement of the Spirit. In this apprenticeship of prayer, the exercitants must be helped to encounter God in all the things that make up their personal, domestic, professional, and social life.

3.2.2. First discernment rules

Perhaps the exercitant will need to be confronted with their moments of discouragement, aridity and desolation. The harshness of ordinary life, its contradictions and difficulties of every kind, may be experienced as blocks on the spiritual road that the exercitant wants to follow. At such moments the counselor will especially have to support the exercitant, acting gently and with kindness, giving courage and strength for the future [7]. This will be the time to read through with the exercitant, at a leisurely pace, the discernment rules of the First Week. The exercitant will have received these, in a slightly updated version, by post, along with the Orientations.

3.2.3. Preparing for the interview

With the second set of mailed Orientations, the exercitant receives a general schema to help them prepare for the visit of the counselor. The purpose of this schema is to emphasize the importance of the interview and to ensure its quality, while at the same time providing further assistance in making the examen of the week.

- In this schema the importance and the objectives of the interview are recalled, and certain elements are suggested (but only suggested, for the interview does not have to be forced into strict formulas).
- It is suggested that the week be given a title that sums up its content or salient themes in two or three words, like the title of a film or a novel.
- In connection with prayer, whether at set times or in the stream of life, the exercitants should examine the methods adopted, the movements experienced, etc., and they should check whether the various movements of prayer exhibit any common denominators.
- With regard to the more significant events of the week, the exercitants should be asked about their response to these, and whether they were able to convert them into exercises.
- The exercitants should also ask whether they appear to be realizing the objectives of the Exercises.

3.2.4. *Initiation into discernment*

This is an essential part of the counselor's role, for the whole process of the Exercises is an initiation into the practice of discernment. The exercitant learns to read his or her life in the light of faith, to discover within it the callings of the Spirit, and to respond to these not out of willed decisions (as might happen after the meeting of a task force or review-of-life group), but from a more interior experience. This discernment process can be divided into three moments

a) *The daily praxis of the relationship between faith and life.* At the end of the Weekend the exercitant has come to the point where he or she must transpose into terms of daily life everything that has been lived in the situation of prayer during the retreat. Many elements of daily life will bring to mind one or nother of the points previously meditated upon. Conversely, many of these points the exercitant is now living out in the situations to be undergone in daily life. In this way, various related interior elements are brought together in a single texture.

b) *Experiences of consolation and desolation.* These situations are experienced in various ways: interior peace, the appetite for life, an increased desire to serve, pray, forgive, love, create, etc.; or to the contrary, the experience of sadness, fear, impatience, doubt, sin, personal confusion, etc. These are, in short, consolation or desolation.

c) *The thematizing of experience.* The experience of consolation and desolation, which is often neither identified nor reflected on, is made explicit in personal prayer and in the meeting with the counselor. In these times especially, the exercitant learns to identify, to evaluate, to discern, and to read the concrete

situations of life in relation to the following of Jesus and to give an evangelical response to such situations. In these moments of explicitation, the counselor will comment on some of the discernment rules using the text received with the Orientations, in this way helping the exercitant deal with the fantasies and deceptions that arise in everyday experience and respond to desolations in such a way that they become growth-points.

3.2.5. Election, reformation of life

During the second two-month block in ordinary life, it will be the counselors' task to help the exercitants to clarify where the dynamic of the exercises is taking them. The Orientations can deal with these themes only as a very extrinsic aid; it is for the exercitants themselves to start putting them into effect in their lives, and the counselors will keep them aware of the need to do this. There is a limit to what can be said here in general terms, for the diversity of states and situations of our exercitants calls for highly personal approaches. In the case of young exercitants faced with the discernment of vocation or with a choice of studies or profession, it is difficult to help them completely resolve these questions in the four months of exercises, but the exercises should be a decisive stage in the eventual resolution of these questions.

3.3. Meetings of the group

In the first years we offered fortnightly meetings that lasted about two hours; the youth and adult groups met separately. These were highly enjoyable gatherings of people who, it should be remembered, did not know one another before the Exercises. There was therefore a quality paschal joy in the meetings. The sharing of prayer that arose in these groups was similar to that of the weekends. Each exercitant explained how things had gone with him or her in daily life, both in the extended times of prayer and in the moments of insight, together with the movements' experienced and so on. The married couples would also comment on their prayer as a couple. The group counselor would take advantage of the occasion to underline significant points made during the meeting, to offer some remarks about method, etc.

In recent years, for reasons partly of principle and partly of practice, we have not always held these meetings. While the support provided by the dynamic of the weekend groups was important, it became apparent to us that what best fits the Exercises made in ordinary life is to live these out in a fully individual and personal way, without depending on the immediately gratifying contribution of the group meeting. Given the increasing value we set on the weekly interview with the counsellor, the significance of the support group diminished. The practical reasons

had to do with the difficulties encountered in adding still another exercise –with all the time and travel it entailed– to the various other exercises (prayer, interview, etc.) already being carried out. Nevertheless, on later occasions we have sometimes run a small group meeting.

As a person grows in aptitude for the Exercises, the external back-up and resources diminish in importance.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE EXPERIENCE

On our part the objective is twofold. In the first place, we want to help make committed adult Christians, men and women responsible for making Jesus a force in the world, as distinct from passive «consumers of the Christian products». In the case of the young, this has especial relevance to the time of choice of life profession. (It must be admitted, however, that it is harder than we imagine, in these four months of ordinary life, for the exercitants to reach the second kind of humility [166], which makes it possible to enter upon the elections [169, 5-8]).

As a second objective, we aim through these Exercises to bring a certain quality to the Christian communities to which the exercitants belonged.

Regarding the younger exercitants, their motivation in coming to the Exercises, whether expressed or: implicit, has to do with their interest in going through a strong Christian experience within a maturing process which has already been promoted through various experiences of community and retreat. They sense intuitively that in this process the Exercises will constitute a specific new step.

They also have a desire to integrate faith and life. Their lives tend to be marked by a persistent sense of non-integration between these two realms of experience. On the one hand, there is the deeply felt prayer of the meetings of their Christian communities; on the other, the daily round of their lives. Sometimes the two experiences appear to them to run on parallel tracks. and their hope is that making the Exercises in ordinary life will help them achieve integration.

The motivation of older exercitants is usually to take up once again the Christian life in a radical way. Now that they have reached maturity, they feel they have been living with a certain sense of holding back on the way of Christian commitment, and they want to renew that commitment.

5. FIRST WEEKEND

5.1. Objectives

a) *Apprenticeship*. The first objective is that of apprenticeship in various kinds of prayer: personal, matrimonial, in group, as already explained.

b) *Interior silence*. Another basic objective of this First Week End is to begin to discover the value of interior silence (even in an ambiance which is not especially silent and when no great insistence is placed on «exterior silence»). Having had the experience of interior silence will be of immediate help in the exercises made amid the pressure of ordinary life.

It is important to have learned through experience that one does not suddenly pass from ordinary noise to the serious atmosphere in which one places oneself in the presence of God.

Those in charge of the retreat should not speak excessively about the theme of silence, and still less should they force exercitants into strict silence. Still, they should help to create a climate of interior silence, and each weekend they should introduce more times of exterior silence. It is well to remember, however, that in the weekend retreat one is preparing for making exercises in ordinary life and not for a life of monastic silence.

c) *Group dynamic*. Together with this silence, it is necessary to initiate and facilitate a certain group dynamic; this should be understood in dialectical relationship with what has just been said. In our judgment, this is indispensable for the adaptation of the exercises here proposed, even though it sidesteps the

provision of the twentieth annotation regarding separation from friends and acquaintances [20,2]. (In our case, the separation will consist precisely in the harshness and solitude of ordinary life.) The elements which constitute this group dynamic have already been stated: introduction of participants during the Friday evening group prayer, Eucharist, and sharing of elements of the night examen.

d) *Assign a spiritual counsellor.* If this has not been already done, this weekend is the moment to assign a spiritual counsellor for each exercitant. At this time, it will be possible to hold a preliminary conversation which will help the exercitant get a personal grasp of the method, the points, etc. (This is especially important when exercitants come from various cultural backgrounds. Some may need particular support.) The first steps in the examen and in discernment should also be explained. This will be extremely helpful in eliminating initial obstacles. However, in our case it was not possible to ask all the counselors (a group of fifteen) to introduce themselves in the middle of the day in the retreat house; the programme directors must therefore decide how to deal with this situation.

5.2. Themes

The aim of this first retreat is to provide the exercitant with an overall sense of Ignatius' First Week. There is no question at this stage of the exercitant trying to digest this dense material in all its implications; at this stage all that is needed is a global vision. This is communicated by an intensive presentation of the points which the exercitant will later be asked to interiorize in their prayer-in-life over the next two months. This presentation is divided into five themes, the first three on the Principle and Foundation, and the fourth and fifth on sin.

a) *The name of the unfathomable mystery of existence is Father.* The exercitants need to experience this truth. To help them to do so we suggest that they pray the Our Father according to the second method of prayer [249-257], dwelling especially on the first words (we give them points for this on a photocopied page. It is important that the first experience of the Exercises be that of the *Abba* who seeks me out personally, an experience of the Fatherhood/Motherhood of God. This in our judgment can be a good way to approach the first part of the Principle and Foundation.

b) *The life of the human person finds its meaning in praise and service.* The exercitants need to know what they want to do with their own lives, independently any project that the world might have imposed on them. To this end orientation is necessary; human persons defined by their sense of direction, by their «utopia». The role of human beings in the world, according to Jesus, is to make the world into the kingdom of God, a place where the presence and goodness of God reign supreme. A human life is praise, reverence and service; we are concerned with a new attitude in relation to persons, nature and God. Through an attitude of

appreciation, heartfelt joy, respect, and gratitude the human person exists in order to be happy, and the person's happiness consists precisely in this. As a basic text for these themes we use Genesis 1 and 2.

c) *The challenge of the freedom of Jesus.* This third moment of prayer moves into the second part of the Principle and Foundation, drawing three conclusions from the preceding material:

- We are lords of created things and never slaves to them.
- We are to attain a state of freedom in relation to all «means».
- We are to go through life «desiring and choosing only what is more conducive to the end».

Among other basic texts, the following serve to show how Jesus called forth freedom in those who lived with him. In various ways he summoned his disciples to freedom from the slavery of money (Zacchaeus, Luke 19,8), of sex (adulteress woman, Luke 7,39), of presumption and superficiality (Peter, John 13,37-38; 21,15), of violence (James and John, Luke 9,54-56), of prestige and fear of suffering (Acts 5,41), of death itself (Acts 7,54-60). Jesus also tried to free the Pharisees from pride in good works (Matt 6,1-18); he tried to free the rich young man from putting his trust in possessions (Mark 10,21); he tried to free his disciples in relation to «home, father, family» (Mark 10,29) and to make them capable of a life of celibacy (Matt 19,12).

At the same time, we give them for this period of prayer a sheet with a slightly modernized form of the Principle and Foundation, so that they can pray the text using the second method of prayer and make a prayer of petition.

d) *Frustration of God's project.* Here the object is for them to *understand* what happens when God's plan is not accomplished, to *feel* the sorrow of God and of the oppressed people of our world, and to *be distressed* at realizing the extent of one's own collaboration in this frustration of God's plan. We suggest that these three graces be sought insistently at the beginning of the prayer.

We present this material in three points. First point: recall the legend of the earthly paradise, in which the Bible imagines, with poetic nostalgia, a humanity without frustration, living according to God's plan. Second point: some glimpses of the modern world: events and statistics with regard to hunger, wars, unemployment, migration, etc. These realities are to be faced and pondered with objectivity; they are to be seen through the eyes of the Father and the oppressed people of our world. Third point: Nathan's statement to David «That man is you!». The exercitants are invited to survey the world of sin and discover themselves in it as collaborators, as fifth columnists, and to list the principal ways in which they collaborate with all this. They are given, again in slightly adapted form, the text of the three colloquies [63], which they are encouraged to make.

e) *Looking at the face of Christ crucified.* It is proposed to the exercitants that they first recall the history of their own sin, of their collaboration in the world's distress. This must be done with sincerity, so the point must be given sufficient, but not excessive, time. It can be helpful to take some objective classification such as the «thoughts, word, deeds, and omissions» of the penitential act of the Eucharist.

In this recall their sins, they should see themselves through the eyes of the Father, never with self-hatred; they should realize that the Father, who is the Father of the parable of the Prodigal Son, looks on us with love. We ask God to grant that we, like the Prodigal, may enter the deepest of Christian experiences, that of knowing ourselves loved by God gratuitously and not because of our qualities or virtues. This experience helps us in our own relationships to accept others gratuitously and not because of their importance, their pleasing qualities, or other factors. In this context, Psalms 51 or 130 can be recited, and the parable of the Prodigal Son can be used as a base-text.

Finally, we propose that the exercitants gaze attentively on the cross of Christ, and then they should see in the face of Jesus a fusion of the faces of all the crucified persons whom we have collaborating in crucifying, in order to become aware that our lives are bathed in mercy. And before this cross they should ask themselves the Ignatian questions: what have I done for Christ? etc. [53], which we give them in photocopy.

5.3. Timetable

The following is the proposed timetable followed in the weekend. It is always adaptable according to circumstances.

8.45 Short prayer meeting in the chapel

9.00 Breakfast

FIRST EXERCISE

9.30 Presentation of theme and method

10.00 1st prayer (personal)

11.00 2nd prayer (group or couple)

11.45 Break

12.30 Meeting for reflection in hall or chapel

12.45 3rd prayer (personal prayer of review)

13.45 Free time / lunch / rest.

SECOND EXERCISE

16.00 Presentation of theme and method

16.30 1st prayer (personal)

17.30 2nd prayer (group or couple)

18.15 Break

18.45 Meeting for reflection in hall or chapel

19.00 3rd prayer (personal prayer of review)

20.00 Eucharist / supper / rest.

EXAMEN

22.00 Examen—evaluation (Retire at about 23.00)

Again, note that this is a suggested hour, to be adjusted according to the circumstances of each day or period of the exercises, to levels of fatigue, etc., in such a way that the whole experience turns out to be at once intensive (the two days should be well-spent) and relaxed.

6. FIRST PERIOD IN ORDINARY LIFE

6.1. Objectives

a) The exercitant must appreciate very clearly that when the Exercises are made in this way it is in this period that they realize essential function. It is now that the condensed material of the weekend retreat must be personally assimilated, day by day, week by week, in the everyday stress and strain of life. The exercitant has to discover personally that prayer throughout the day and careful attentiveness to the quality of one's life are as important as are the times of silent, solitary prayer.

b) *The apprenticeship of prayer through the course of the day.* This is not going to be completed on day one. To help develop this apprenticeship the exercitant receives the weekly Orientations, which, as we have seen, require only a brief moment in the morning and evening –they can even be read on the metro or bus. The Orientations invite the exercitant to assume an attitude of attentiveness to the moments of insight throughout the day which illuminate the daily reality in a new way. In the ongoing experience of the exercises, many exercitants do acquire this habit of attention to the quality of life, and hence an ability to live their lives not on the surface but with a certain depth.

c) *Finding a few long periods of prayer each week.* This not always easy to do, but it is indispensable. However, the counselor must not become excessively anxious if the exercitant has difficulty in finding these times. The exercitant must be given gentle assistance, which will not always be easy. If the exercitant does not give at least the minimum, the Exercises can remain greatly impoverished. Our initial suggestion is that there should be a set time of prayer each day.

6.2. Themes

The leaflets will continue to recall the basic points of the Weekend. In the course of ordinary life these will have to mature and be tested amid the hard and complicated situations of each day.

a) *Service and praise.* The content of the first Orientations leaflet, explained in detail in the final stage of the weekend, has two goals: a) to teach the prayer exercises for the following morning, day, and evening, and to encourage the longer time of prayer (see 3.1); b) to explain further the second theme of the weekend. It also draws attention to the importance of starting the interviews with the accompanying counselor promptly.

b) *Principle and Foundation.* The same methodological notes of the preceding Orientations leaflet are repeated. (In fact, they will be repeated in practically all the leaflets.) For the longer times of prayer the exercitant is referred to theme three of the Weekend. For prayer throughout the day, it is suggested that they take one of the points of the Principle and Foundation (e.g., «all things are created for human beings»; «creatures are to be used/avoided in so far as»; «we must be free with regard to all created things», etc.).

The idea is that in the morning the exercitants should open the day by recalling a text, so that throughout the day there will be moments when they see their lives as illuminated precisely by this text, and at night they should go over the day with the Lord in the light of it. Thus ordinary life is gradually converted into «exercises». For this process no special time is required beyond a few minutes in the morning and evening, and a few seconds in the course of the day.

c) *To be sensitive to evil (1).* Each of the Orientations contains new directives regarding aspects of method: dialogue with the counselor, preparation for the longer periods of prayer, ways of praying, etc.

In this week special emphasis is laid on the need to be attentive and sensitive (theme 4) to the «power of evil» that is active and death-dealing, whether on a large scale (wars, hunger, poverty, unemployment) or the more trivial scale of the aversions or jealousies towards those whose paths we *cross* in daily life. There is also the need to be attentive to one's own small ways of colluding in the power of cosmic evil. The objective is to gain sensitivity by «becoming aware» of the sorrow of the Father who sees his children wounded and killed (or better, who sees his own Son dying on all these modern crosses).

d) *To be sensitive to evil (2).* Repetition of the foregoing.

e) *My life is bathed in mercy.* This refers to the fifth theme, which will be entered into more deeply in the extended times of prayer. The dynamic of attentiveness to life continues. In the morning, throughout the day, and in the

evening, the exercitants should see the Evil of the World which crucified Jesus and to see their own ways of colluding with these forces; they should feel pain for the Crucified One and for all those who are crucified; they should see themselves as forgiven and loved: «My life is bathed in mercy». All this leads to the great questions: «What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What should I do for Christ?»:

f) *The prodigal son*. This week gathers up the experience of the previous two months with its methodology of a) long periods of prayer and b) prayer throughout the day.

The parable helps to move towards synthesis. The broad themes already worked through are prominent in the parable. We propose that the exercitant read Luke 15,11-23, but we also send them the adaptation made by the book *Un tal Jesus* (J. I. and M. Lopez Vigil, Ed. Loguez, 1982, Salamanca, vol. 1, p. 245-252). Old familiar texts take on a new significance when read on the basis of imaginative portrayals such as these. It is suggested that the exercitants ask themselves whether, like the prodigal son, they find themselves disconcerted by the unconditional love of the Father, whether they live their life in the world with a heart like the Father's, or whether they are mean-hearted like the elder son.

6.3. Role of the counselor

Now begins the serious work of accompaniment in prayer and discernment. It will be the function of the counselor to review with the exercitant whether the latter has obtained the fruits of prayer, if he or she has observed the specific ways of prayer (e.g. with regard to places, times, methods, more intellectual or more affective types of prayer, etc). The interview normally should be brief and on a weekly basis.

7. SECOND WEEKEND

7.1. Objectives

a) On reaching this point, the exercitants will already be wanting another retreat in order to be able to dedicate long and tranquil periods to prayer. They will also want to meet with the group again. The Friday night sharing, when each relates some detail of their experience, will be especially important. It will usually be found highly invigorating, and it provides the directors of the Exercises with a basis for comment, advice, etc.

These two days provide preparation for the second period in ordinary life. The exercitants will receive a global vision of the Second Ignatian Week up to the Two Standards, so that this material can be gradually assimilated in the course of the next two months in the midst of their daily tasks.

b) What is essential for this period is that it be an apprenticeship in a new, more contemplative style of prayer, the «contemplation of the mysteries of the life of Jesus». In the first points, after the exercise on the «Earthly King», the exercitants are given a second paper containing «suggestions for prayer».

c) At this stage increased time of personal prayer is called for, which in practice entails shortening or eliminating some of the communitarian prayer.

For each exercitant it will be of benefit to increase the element of «silence». It would be suitable for them to take the middle of the day as a more especial period of recollection (up to evening points or the Eucharist). If this requires absence from one or another of the conversations, the counselor can fill the exercitant in so that they won't be at a disadvantage in the exercises in Ordinary Life.

7.2. Themes

The exercitants must take away from the weekend a general vision of the course proposed by Ignatius up to the meditations on the Two Standards and the Three Classes. (The numbering of the themes continues from the first weekend).

a) *The parable of the ideal king calling his subjects to a worthy campaign.* We explain the parable and distribute photocopies of it which adapt the Ignatian text to contemporary language. It can be presented on the evening of the day of arrival as a preparatory «warming up» for the points to be given the following morning. The parable assumes that the exercitant is a person of grand ideals and firm character. Though Ignatius' parable can easily be replaced by more contemporary substitutes, we have found that for such idealistic persons the original turns out in the end to be the most effective. It must be proposed, however, as an ancient text, in a sense a museum piece; it should be presented as a noble fantasy of the young Iñigo as he prayed in the cave at Manresa still imbued by the chivalrous climate of his time.

b) *«I especially need you for the greatest of missions».* The parable is to be taken up again so that it becomes clear that it is the individual in particular that the Lord is calling. We then follow the three points of the second part, which we illustrate by the proclamation of Jesus and the call of the first disciples (Mark 1,14-20).

c) *Moving with Jesus through the world, building the Kingdom.* The object of this hour of prayer is to accompany Jesus through the course of a complete day. For this we propose an extensive text of Mark: Jesus' first day in Capernaum (Mark 1,21-45). There are six vivid scenes in which it is easy to be with Jesus in his public life, and the scenes are easily transposed into terms of our own time, enabling us to see how Jesus is our own companion in our apostolic tasks. The exercitant is not asked to work through the text completely but to take a panoramic view and to choose certain details. In this first prayer period on the life of Christ it is important that no one lack sufficient material.

d) *My talents at the service of the best of causes.* The parable of the talents is presented (Matt 25,14-30), and with the help of this the exercitants are invited to hear Jesus telling them that they themselves have talents; they should hear their own talents being enumerated on the lips of Jesus himself. They must hear from Jesus that these talents are not to be buried but put at the service of his cause. It will be good for Jesus to speak to them, too, about the talents of others, especially of those closest to them. For some this exercise is far from easy. Some people find it easy to look at their sins, but only with difficulty can they look at their talents.

To ensure the validity of this exercises it should conclude with a reading of the parable of the pharisee and the publican (Luke 19,9-14). Our talents are given

us not to enable us to impress others, or indeed God, by our own worth; but to be placed at the service of the greatest of all causes, the building of the Kingdom.

e) *Under which standard do I place myself?* The following of Jesus is characterized by making an option for the Kingdom, for Freedom, for Solidarity, for Justice, etc. The following of Jesus requires an attitude of sharing, of poverty of spirit (and of real poverty should the Lord so choose), and of humility (and of humiliations if the Lord wishes). It consists in the willingness to enter into contradiction, sacrifice, and struggle –in short to carry one’s own cross. It means encouraging others and creating hope about the possibility of the kingdom; it means accompanying Jesus through the world with a creative and generous heart.

The style that characterizes the «world» is quite different than this. It may sound like an option for change and freedom, but it is so only in words. (We criticize with our lips but not with our lives; the world’s real option is to change nothing, so that the ‘established disorder’ which suits us can continue.) The style of the world consists in accumulation, in being above others, in taking flight from difficulties and from the experiences of the cross which inseparably accompany the struggle for the kingdom. The style of the world is to take one’s stand in comfort, lethargy, consumerism. In this connection, use can be made of the blessings and woes of Luke 6;20-26.

f) *Jesus in times of trial.* We propose the temptations of Jesus in Luke 4,1-13.

8. SECOND PERIOD IN ORDINARY LIFE

8.1. Objectives

a) To assimilate the material of the weekend in the course of ordinary life. (The weekly Orientations, now deliberately repetitious in style, aim to keep the exercitant mindful of both the method and the key points.)

b) In particular, to experience oneself as called to journey with Jesus in his work of bringing about the Kingdom; to discover how the world continuously puts before us another vision; to understand how sometimes even our own «yes» to Jesus is in reality a «yes, but»; and finally, to seek to live the mysteries of Jesus' life as realities of one's own life.

c) This period should end «concretely», that is, by concretely specifying what the exercitants are going to do with their lives in response to the call of Jesus. For the unmarried young, this might involve the choice of a state of life (married life or celibate life for the Kingdom). For everyone it means centering one's life on the Kingdom, becoming responsible for the work of Jesus in the world, and no longer being just a 'consumer'. The concrete implications of all this must be specified in a way that bears on the real problems.

8.2. Themes

To help exercitants to interiorize and broaden the content of the Weekend, the Orientations contain the following themes. (The numeration continues from the preceding two-month period.)

a) *Companions of Jesus*. It is suggested that the exercitants re-read, in relation to ordinary life, texts 6 and 8, which were already considered during the Weekend. The purpose now is to know that one is accompanying Jesus and being accompanied by him in following the habitual programme of prayer both during special times and in the course of the day. In the morning I will hear the Lord remind me of the talents I have to put at the service of the Kingdom; during the day I will experience the moments of light or insight that occur; in the evening I will review the movements of the day. If the exercitants understand their day as an accompaniment of Jesus in his work of building the kingdom, then in the evening, when the work assigned has been done, they will naturally want to reflect back on it with Jesus and ask whether its aims have been attained.

b) *Jesus, the friend*. The exercitants comes gradually to realize that Jesus makes himself present during the day and that they should in turn be present to Jesus, just as it is narrated in the gospel. We propose a repetition of theme 7 or a reading of Luke 6,20 –8,3 or other texts which may have made an impression on earlier occasions. Texts should be narrative rather than discursive, the narratives serving more effectively to foster the sense of being accompanied by and accompanying Jesus.

c) *The road to Jerusalem*. Chapters 11 to 13 of Mark, with the three prophecies of the passion. Thus, the central message of the Two Standards is taken up again.

d) *The rich young man*. Mark 10,17-31 or the text proposed in *Un Tal Jesús* (10). This serves as a statement of the theme of the Three Classes as a preliminary to entering into the choice or reform of life.

e) *The week of concrete decisions*. This is an important stage of prayer and of dialogue with the counselor; the exercitant gathers the many movements and decisions which have come up in the journey so far. Points are offered to help him or her to make concrete decisions regarding choice or reform of life.

f) *The man born blind*. John 9, 1-38 will help the exercitant to see that Jesus is the light in the midst of the world's darkness. The exercitant enters into increasingly closer companionship with Jesus.

g) *Jesus' solidarity*. Mark 6,30-52 will bring to a close this series of themes by showing Jesus as the man-for-others

8.3. The counselor's role

The counselor's role is to accompany the exercitants' discernment and to help them understand what God is asking of them in life. The counselor must try to encourage

the exercitants. If the exercitant has the capacity, the counselor should discreetly accompany him or her in approaching the choice of a state of life.

In the matter of reform of life, the counselor should help the exercitant to undertake this task seriously and to pay attention to the particular, focusing on what is really important without escaping into areas of secondary significance.

9. THIRD WEEKEND

The objective of the final 48 hours of retreat is reaffirmation and confirmation of all that has gone before.

Certainly, it will not be possible to proceed to the objectives envisaged by Ignatius for the Third and Fourth Weeks of the Exercises. Here the objectives are still those of the Second Week: to know, to love, and to follow Jesus. But it is to know, love, and follow the Jesus whose love leads him to the total surrender of the Last Supper and the Cross, the Jesus whom the Father constitutes Lord of the Universe through the resurrection.

For this retreat we propose the following themes:

a) *The key to the Kingdom: the new Covenant is the gift of self to others.* The washing of the feet (John 13,1-60) and the Last Supper (Mark 14,22-26). The encounter with Christ therefore continues. The objective here is to understand his last will and testament as made explicit in the revolutionary character of these two events. At the same time this is an important moment for the exercitants to renew their appreciation of the Eucharist.

b) *The failure and the frustration of Jesus and the Kingdom (1).* Mark 14,26-15,20: the Garden and the religious and civil trials. Although for the most part the perspective remains that of the Second Week, here the exercitant needs to enter into Jesus and accompany him in the process of humiliation to which he is progressively subjected. The scenes of the religious and civil trials should be contemplated as revelations of Christ, in which he is shown first as Messiah and then as King precisely in circumstances where he appears the very opposite of either. Again, the central theme of the Two Standards makes its appearance.

c) *The failure and the frustration of Jesus and of the Kingdom (2)*. Mark 15,21-47, the death of Jesus, Messiah, King, and Son of God. In the total humiliation of his humanity, Jesus is revealed as Son of God. The exercitant prays to feel overwhelmed before this central event in the history of humanity.

d) *The crucified One has risen. (The other face of commitment to the Kingdom)*. Mark 16,1-8. Mark suggests that it is in Galilee, after they have returned to ordinary life and resumed the struggle for the Kingdom, that the followers of Jesus see Jesus and experience his resurrection. Our aim is that the paschal experience should coalesce with the contemplation to attain love and to find God in all things.

e) *A day in the life of the apostles. (The quality of Jesus' presence)*. John 21 is like an extremely beautiful audio-visual catechetical montage, designed to show the presence of Jesus with us each day in our own Galilee, as we go about our own work of announcing and making known the kingdom. After a day of apostolic life and difficult "fishing," the inspired disciple can see that 'It is the Lord!'. Jesus has already prepared for us the fraternal Christian meal (the Eucharist), to which we are invited to bring the fruits of our labour. Finally, the disciple (the exercitant) is asked three times to affirm the sincerity of his or her love. The triple question is a summing up of the whole of the Exercises.

The response to this question must not, of course, have any note of arrogance about it. It must consist, rather, in the humble and supplicant prayer of persons who have known their own weaknesses and yet also know themselves loved unconditionally. It is the prayer of persons who have experienced their sinfulness but at the same time realize that their lives are bathed in mercy. (These dispositions are a summary of the First Week).

Such persons, having descended into the depths of their own weakness, can be entrusted with sharing in Jesus' work of going about the world proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom. (Second Week).

There needs still to be integrated into this vision the realization that in the mission one is often not a person who 'girds himself.' Rather, one is a person who is girded by another and then taken where one would rather not go, even to death like Jesus and with Jesus. (The theme of the third weekend retreat).

The aim of this final retreat is to grasp the twofold aspect of discipleship (death/resurrection). The retreat therefore repeats in a new way the key points of the Two Standards and the Three Classes, and if the exercitant is ready for it, the third kind of humility.

It will also be appropriate to insist on the theme of experiencing the call to work for Jesus' cause, a central component of the apostles' experience of the paschal mystery.

Finally, it will be necessary to consider with each exercitant –sometimes also with the group– the ways and means to assure perseverance. This is especially the responsibility of the counselor. A Christian Life Community would be one of the ideal situations by which to continue the experience initiated in the Exercises.



“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.

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