

Healing

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Introduction

I remember recently when we went back to do a follow up retreat in a state prison. One of the men responded to the question “what do I remember from the last retreat?” He said, “I remember going to the beach using our imaginations.”

He also remembered the Gospel contemplation on Zaccheus. He remembered the tree, the big house, etc., but what was more important was that he remembered the hard part of the retreat. He remembered how he answered the question “How do I need healing in my life?”

I still have his sheet of paper where he wrote about a time when he felt like Zaccheus: short, laughed at and cast off from his family.

He also remembered how we used the image of burpies (pushup style for those locked up). He remembered that if one wanted to be strong, one needed to exercise over and over again. This is done in order to gain the necessary strength that is desired and likewise to gain spiritual strength one must do prayer exercises for the spiritual heart muscles.

Gospel contemplations are to be used frequently to exercise the heart in order to gain the necessary strength to make good decisions. In that previous retreat, Pedro went back to a childhood experience of when his mother died. He told how this loss affected him so greatly that this is when he lost control of his

life. He sought solace in the drugged lifestyle of his homeboys who were always in front of his house. He cried when he spoke about his kids who he never gets visits from.

Jesus embraces Zaccheus. He accepts him for who he is, for what he has done and will do. He is loved by this one who stood beneath a tree waiting for him to come down. Pedro could also feel Jesus' love, his acceptance by him no matter what he had done.

In his prayer hour of contemplative prayer following the retreat, Pedro began to exercise his heart muscles, feeling unconditional love from the one who also loved everyone else gave up on. Was Pedro totally healed for all the hurts he spoke about? Was his heart made whole by Jesus' acceptance all at once? Of course not. Does one become totally in shape by just one series of burpies? Obviously not. Hint: It takes practice to be in good spiritual shape.

It is the regularity and the fine-tuning of daily exercising that makes a difference to our muscles in the daily routine of exercising the heart. The daily exercising of the heart by contemplative prayer gradually creates a heart shaped like God's, like burpies produce a shaped physique.

It is easy to confuse this prayer (gospel contemplation with only using the active imagination. Because with this kind of prayer there is a moment of passivity which comes during the prayer

just like in good exercise there is a moment of held resistance when the held resistance works as effectively as the hard lifting. Ignatius of Loyola uses the term “colloquy” in the Exercises to explain this. There comes a moment when there is no use of imagination or any activity and the heart muscles remain still and something else happens. It is like the experience that some who are locked up talk about during a retreat. There comes a moment when God is as present to them as the hard metal prison stool they use. How do you measure what happens with the resting in this heart exercise of God?

The Gospel contemplations found in this book are exercises. They are to be read not like reading a novel but rather like embarking on an exciting journey.

What is the first lesson that God seemed to teach Ignatius? The first lesson that Ignatius was taught at Manresa is all about vision. Ignatius' "visions" are not something to be seen. It is not like the visions of our Lady at Lourdes had by Bernadette or the visions of Divine mercy had by St. Faustina. For Ignatius, vision is an "aha" experience, but even more than just gaining an insight. Vision is an exercise of the heart. Unless our hearts are enlarged by exercises, we will remain narrow and constricted and fixed on self. Vision, then, is not just a matter of seeing. We can look and look and really not see. We can come to an understanding of a great number of things, but it may not affect our living. The Ignatian emphasis on vision is an exercising of the heart because that is what happened to him. It is the reason why, thirty years after the original experience at Manresa, Ignatius can relate to us: his visions, lessons taught by God, in his *Autobiography*. It is the whole of our person involved in the very act of visioning.

- John Veltri, SJ

A Rock

John 1:29-42

The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples, when he saw Jesus walking by, "There is the Lamb of God!" he said. The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus. Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, "What are you looking for?" They answered, "Where do you live, Rabbi?" (This word means "Teacher.") "Come and see," he answered. (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon.) So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him. One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. At once he found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah." (This word means "Christ.") Then he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas." (This is the same as Peter and means "a rock.")

(from the eyes of Peter)

I was leaving the river walking under the shade when my brother Andrew approaches out of breath as if being followed by robbers. At first, what he said did not make any sense. Something about having found "the one."

I told my younger brother to slow down and tell me what happened. "Yesterday," he said, "John and I followed the one who the Baptist said is the Lamb of God. He is from Nazareth. Brother Peter, after spending that time with him where he is staying, I knew he was the one we had been looking for. I know he is the Messiah." It was hard to grasp what my brother was saying. The Messiah?

Andrew said he had told Jesus about me and he was waiting at his dwelling to meet me. I really did not expect much. Now walking along the river, I listened to Andrew as he talked incessantly about this person. He was excited about meeting someone who could help our people.

We soon arrived to where this one was staying. Andrew knocked on the door. I looked at him; I will never forget that moment. I have thought about it. So much came upon me when I entered

that house. My brother, at last, was quiet. Jesus introduces himself and I tell him my name. Even before we spoke, he told me, he had a new name for me.

What was I thinking as I entered this small hut? We began to speak about our recent days. Jesus told us about his time in the desert, about his vision for our society. I looked across the table; Jesus was looking at me as he did this. I thought of all the friends I have had in my life, going back to when I first began to man my boat, but I have never had this experience of someone who knew who I was even though I really had not said much about my life.

Jesus asked me various questions. How long have I been with the Baptist? What was I going to do? I looked over at Andrew; he was smiling. He knew I have had the same experience with Jesus that he had had. We began to talk well into the night.

What is it to have a friend with whom you can say anything? With whom you can walk over distances too far to count? What was I feeling as I sat around that table as the sun disappeared behind the mountains with the sound of the river surrounding us? I just know I had begun a friendship with this one. Jesus told me, "You will be called 'the rock' because from now on you will have important work to do."

Here I had just met this man and he was giving me a new name. I knew I was someone different after meeting Jesus, a friend.

The values for human living that Lucifer demands are riches, honor, and pride. Almost being a statistician, Ignatius adds that this is the process “in most cases.” In the context of the Principle and Foundation, we need immediately to divest ourselves of any judgment that riches, honor and pride are God’s good gifts. Riches can mean anything that make us “rich”; our physical beauty, our athletic prowess, our intellectual abilities, our success, our power, our money. It is true that when we are rich in one or another of these ways, we receive esteem and honor from others. And then often enough we find ourselves more and more insulated and fixed on ourselves.

- John Veltri, SJ

Face of Evil

Luke 19:1-10

When Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the city, a man named Zaccheus was there. He was a tax collector and a wealthy man. He wanted to see what Jesus was like, but he was a short man and could not see because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree. From there he would be able to see Jesus who had to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, come down quickly for I must stay at your house today." So Zaccheus hurried down and received him joyfully. All the people who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to the house of a sinner as a guest." But Zaccheus spoke to Jesus, "The half of my goods, Lord, I give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much." Looking at him Jesus said, "Salvation has come to this house today, for he is also a true son of Abraham. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

(from the eyes of Zaccheus)

Zaccheus was 13. He was the brightest in his class at school. For that reason, he had been contacted twenty years ago by the tax collectors to join the underworld where money and all luxuries were common.

He had gotten up early, tired from the work of the previous night. As he walked to his house in darkness, he really was feeling how his life was filled with darkness -- evil. Zaccheus reflected on what evil is, what it can do to the heart. He had to watch last night as the others stabbed 50 times a fellow coworker who owed money. He couldn't get to sleep right away with so many images of blood. He walked down the hill. How did he begin this life of cheating, robbing, and killing?

To his other friends it seemed normal what they were doing, but something deep within Zaccheus was bothering him as he walked along. How many people had he seen killed? How many people had he been forced to kill? For what?

He had it all and he was not happy. In fact, he was miserable as a tax collector as he walked to where he would be collecting

taxes. All this evil had driven him to use all kinds of drugs. In fact, it seemed he was always high. If only, he knew when he chose to walk this path of darkness, what he knows now.

At first it was exciting, but as he walked further, he actually could feel what evil looks like. It almost has a face, so seductive. It wants to control you in such subtle ways. Soon, you are pulled in so deeply you don't know how to get out.

Arriving at his house opening the bronze doors, the golden trimmed furniture, the Persian rugs. As always, he was alone. A self-hate took him over. Lost in his self-loathing, outside he heard loud shouts. He opened the door. He saw large crowds and somewhere in the distance, he knew that Jesus was walking by. He had heard about this earlier from many, from those who paid taxes.

Zaccheus wanted to see what this Jesus looks like, what he is about. He knows he will never know what Jesus looks like unless he climbs a tree. So quickly, Zaccheus scales a tree higher and higher. As he does this, he feels the tremendous weight of his evil actions on his back. Why had he chosen the dark path of collecting taxes? Of robbing the poor?

Finally, he was on top of the tree. He looked out. Saw the crowds. Way in the distance, he saw the figure of one walking. He knew it was Jesus. He would give anything to control what was happening within him. The face of evil was literally shaking him. Trying to take Zaccheus' eyes off of Jesus, but he resisted this strong pull. He kept his eyes on Jesus as he approached the tree.

Suddenly, Jesus was below the tree. Jesus looks at him and says, "Zaccheus, come down. I would like to eat in your house tonight." This one knew my name as he said this. I felt this strong evil voice saying, "Stay where you are. You have everything in life. Don't give up everything." In that instant on the top of a tree, Zaccheus saw the face of evil like he had never seen it before. It seemed so seductive, so beautiful, but underneath it, Zaccheus saw the horror of evil. Felt then in every bone of his body the consequences of choosing evil. The person it hurts. There was a sadness so deep. He spat on the face of evil and slid down the tree.

Now looking into the eyes of Jesus, he found in this person what he always was looking for. The darkness fled into the ground. Zaccheus was free for the first time in his life. "Jesus, all my life, I have been short. I have had people look me in the face and laugh. You are not like this. Jesus, before I bring you to my house, I tell you I am sorry for choosing the path of darkness. I have done so many things that have stained my hands with blood. All my life I have only been fixated on money and more money. I have never been satisfied. I have stained my soul for money, but being with you, Jesus, I reject the face of evil, the path of darkness. I choose to walk with you in light. I will pay back to those I have stolen from."

Jesus said, "Zaccheus, you have dedicated yourself to tax collecting and everything this entails. You have looked into the face of evil and have seen behind the appearance and seen the real face of what evil is and how it has destroyed so many."

"Jesus, I really do want to change my life." Jesus embraced Zaccheus, who felt how different his life would be after meeting Jesus. "How I have always wanted to be about light, but somehow I was fooled by evil, riches, honor, and glory, which were mere diamonds in the eyes of evil." The gentleness and love in Jesus' eyes made shallow the allures of greed.

"In Jesus, I found what I had always been looking for -- understanding from a real friend."

Now we come to the crucial period of praying for the grace of understanding. Christ proposes that the values for human living can be described as poverty, humiliations or powerlessness, and humility. Often enough, our immediate reaction is that no one of these seems to be a good or a truly human value. Perhaps we acknowledge that these words-poverty, humiliations, and humility-are familiar to us from an older-style piety and an emotive prayer language, but in the light of calm reason they do not seem to be true human values. We need to pray for the grace of understanding if we are to be enabled to respond to Jesus' call.

- John Veltri, SJ

False Messiah

Luke 9: 18-24

Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist; others Elijah; still others, one of the ancient prophets has arisen." Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said in reply, "The Christ of God." He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone. He said, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

(from the eyes of Jesus)

Yesterday, we were surrounded by so many. The crowds kept growing. The needs of the poor were without limit. My heart was heavy seeing so much misery.

"Abba, I just know I need this time with you because everything is happening so quickly; the healings, the long discussions with so many broken hearted. Abba, the vision I have received from you, Abba, is so different from the kind of triumphant warrior type, king Messiah, the kind who the people are expecting."

Arriving at the shore, I separated myself from the group. I knew it was going to be important to feel this solitude. To be alone, just listening to the water flowing in again and again. I watched as my friends made themselves comfortable; soon asleep.

"Abba, I call out to you. I look out into the distance. All I can see is darkness. Nothing is moving, only silence within and without. Abba, this space is full of your presence. Abba, sometimes I tell you I miss your voice. Abba, sometimes I cannot hear you with so much other noise. I know you are with me. I really do feel your presence, but I just need this time with you."

"I look up. I see the stars bright. I feel as we move outwards towards you, that Abba. I have so much to tell you. Abba, thank

you for being my Abba. Every morning that I wake up, I feel Abba. I am living your dream a little more clearly. Abba, in this silence, I feel this communion with you. Sometimes, I feel all I have is you. What I feel is the silence of this night. In the darkness, I feel your love. It carries me away lifting me beyond all these universes. Abba, I feel I am touching your heart. I feel it beating strongly. The same feeling I had on the mountain to be loved by you; to feel your embrace tight around me.

What can I say, Abba? Abba, in your presence, I tell you sometimes there only seems that there are problems, conflicts. But what I am feeling here with this deep love is that things can be different with you. I need this time with you to feel who I am. How I am loved by you no matter what happens.”

“What am I feeling? That there must be an easier way to be closer to you. In everything I do, it is easy to get distracted by such heaviness wondering if the storms will ever let up. Will the sun ever appear again? Abba, you were with me in every thunderstorm when the boat was blown all about.

Thank you for your presence, even with the fiercest winds. Thank you for your presence, even with the heaviest downpour. Thank you for your presence, even when I have been exhausted. Thank you for your presence, even when I have been hurt. Thank you for your presence, even when I have been sad. Thank you for your presence, even when I have been sick. Abba, you have always been with me. I am grateful for your presence.”

In the distance, a slight brightness in the horizon looking over; seeing my friends slowly waking up, making an early morning fire, walking over to the fire.

“Abba, be with me as I search out who I am and who others think I am.” Sitting down now with the disciples, still feeling strongly the presence of my Abba. “Friends, it was good to be in communion with my Abba last night in prayer. Let me ask you honestly. Who do people say I am? Who do you say I am? These days so many things have happened. If you could, please tell me what you have been hearing.”

The first to speak said convincingly, “Jesus, many say you are Elijah, or one of the prophets. Others, when they see the crowds

you draw, say you are John the Baptist, who has come back from the dead. Jesus, every day we hear so many opinions of who you are. Some are crazy, but others point to the fact that they sense something different in you. The opposite of what they experience in our trained religious leaders.”

Peter, having kept silent feeling that they were all engulfed in deep mystery, stands up, comes over to where I am; sits down next to me. He is very serious. “Jesus, I know who you are. I knew when I first met you. I knew who you were. You are the Messiah.”

In the stillness of the dawn these words flowed all around those gathered. “Messiah? Powerful armies. Conquests.” You could feel the thought of those around the circle. “Powerful leader. Dominating powers. Privileges. Status. Messiah?”

Jesus could feel this, so he gently says, “Life is not what it seems. If you want to be powerful, to rule over others, you can never be my disciple. That is not the kind of messiah my Abba is asking me to be; rather, it is only when you give your life away that you will be happy -- will be my disciples. It will not be easy, but every day you must learn what it is to follow the messiah, who is servant of all.”

“Friends, I want to live what I have seen from my Abba. Too much success will go to your head. You need to be humble, to be simple, to be disciplined every day, to let go of the image of the Messiah that you have. Let go. Deny yourself. Carry your cross. Then you will be my disciples. Then you will find life in me.”

Knowing Jesus also links us with the visions of Ignatius. In his *Autobiography*, Ignatius describes his fourth vision -- repeated a number of times and often of long duration throughout his life -- of the humanity of Christ. Again, we have a peculiar description by Ignatius: a white body, no distinction of members, but giving him a great consolation. What might this kind of vision mean? The white body, of course, relates to the creation symbol from this previous vision. But the non-distinction of members seems to indicate for Ignatius the acceptance of his humanity, the “wholeness” of being human-my looks, my height, my weight, my limp. For Ignatius, it is this very humanity that Jesus and he share. And that gives Ignatius great consolation.

- John Veltri, SJ

Luminous Figure

Matthew 14: 22-23

Then Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people away. After sending the people away, he went up a hill by himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone; and by this time the boat was far out in the lake, tossed about by the waves, because the wind was blowing against it. Between three and six o'clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. When they saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and screamed with fear. Jesus spoke to them at once, "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid!" Then Peter spoke up, "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you." "Come!" answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. "Save me, Lord!" he cried. At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, "What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?" They both got into the boat, and the wind died down.

(from the eyes of Peter)

I was glad that Jesus had time to be alone on the mountain, but this trip for us, apostles, across the water is becoming impossible. The wind is fierce, trying so hard to keep us from reaching the shore; the waves hitting hard against the boat. Why does it seem like the forces are always against us who are trying to accomplish good, and more and more obstacles always the same, always battling such negativity? With those, with small visions of the future thinking of all the difficult things trying to prevent this new way of living that Jesus is preaching.

Looking out into the distance, the waves even rougher, wind stronger. As I stared hard, I saw a luminous figure walking our way. Everyone in the boat also saw it. First, we battle against this fierce wind, this splashing over waves; now, some dead fisherman's ghost, who will push us to the bottom of this lake. The light approaching the boat was soon close. I was so full of

fear that I could not believe it. When suddenly, I knew I was looking at Jesus. He was not battling the wind or the waves. There was a power so strong within that the forces of nature were at his service.

He looks at me in the eyes and tells me not to be afraid because it really is Him. "Jesus, for so many hours we have fought this wind, high waves, and you, Jesus, move effortlessly over the water. Jesus, if it really is you, I would like to come close to you."

Jesus tells me he is waiting. My friends look at me. I would be crazy if I left the boat. They know I could easily be destroyed by this water. As I take one step after the other and do not sink, it is as if the same forces that had been battling against us were now allowing me to take another step. As I keep my eyes on Jesus thinking, "Every time I am with you, Jesus, I am always surprised by your inner depths. As I look into your brown eyes, I am grateful for having followed you, Jesus."

I was taking one step after the other. I looked down at the rise of the wave. I felt pushed by the force of the wind. I took my eyes off Jesus, and, once again, I was battling the forces of nature.

I had become so full of myself that I began to sink into the water. Now I was battling forces so much stronger than when I was in the boat. In the midst of raging waters, I could not see anything. Now, fear really did take hold of me. "Is this how I am going to die?" I thought I could reach Jesus, but, once again, I got in the way. As I sank deeper, I began to feel sorry for myself. I knew it was impossible to travel across water without keeping my eyes on Jesus. As I sank deeper, I felt someone take my hand.

As Jesus pulled me out of the water and took me into his arms and carried me to the boat, I had so many thoughts, "Jesus, I really feel safe in this moment. You carry me and we move toward the boat without effort. It was worth almost drowning to

see if I could walk on water and keep my eyes on you and not be so full of myself. Jesus, after these memories of difficult times, after so much uncertainty, so much fear; now, more than I ever knew before, I feel how much I need you. With you, it is possible to move against forceful winds. Without you, I sink to the depths.”

“Jesus, don’t give up on me. One day, I really will learn to keep my eyes on you. I am grateful for you rescuing me and bringing me back safely to the boat. Thank you, friend.”

What was so special about what God taught him? It is the clarification that Ignatius makes in naming “spiritual understanding” in distinction to “understandings of faith matters and profane matters.” As we note, Ignatius did not put together matters of faith and spiritual understanding. Rather he grouped matters of faith and profane (secular matters; he understood them in relation to each other, not in opposition. How each of them needed to be seen was in terms of spiritual understanding to his approach to Jesuit formation and ministry. The Jesuit training in studies Latin, philosophy, chemistry, divorced our ministry, whether it be biology teacher, infirmarian, cook, treasurer -- no job, however secular, need divorce us from the spiritual. The danger lies here: studying theology, teaching theology, giving retreats, being pastor -- all ministries dealing with matters of faith-- could be exercised apart from the spiritual. This spiritual vision is what Ignatius is trying to communicate in this *Contemplatio*.

- John Veltri, SJ

Sisters

Luke 10: 38-42

Jesus entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

(from the eyes of Martha and Mary)

There was a knock on the door. Martha arriving first. Opening the door, looking at the group. Tired, hungry, thirsty. "Where are they coming from?" I looked at Jesus; he smiled. His brown eyes caught mine.

Martha brought everyone to the inner room. I stayed with Jesus as Martha left, always too busy to listen. Last night, I tried to talk to her. She listened for one second; then she started to talk about her plans. I went to bed sad. How important it is to listen to another? How many friends do we have with whom we can talk about anything and we know they are really listening to us?

Sitting with Jesus. He was speaking as a teacher -- as a friend -- telling us how hard things have been with the people. I could tell he was glad I was able to listen attentively. He then asked me about my life. I could tell he really did care.

"Jesus, what am I feeling? Jesus, I have felt alone of late. It is hard to talk about this, but I will try. When I go outside in the mornings and watch the sun rise, I feel that everything I do is out of love for God. I have tried to speak about this with so many people, but for no good. They don't listen even for a moment. They change the conversation and then rush away."

Jesus looked me in the eyes. He was listening to everything I said. “Mary, it is good you work on your inner life, but you also have something to learn from Martha.” At that moment, Martha arrives in a bad mood spreading her anger around the room. Jesus says, “Martha, sit down. Now listen well to your sister this time and don’t rush away. It is too important.”

“Martha, every time I try to speak with you, you never listen to me. You are always too distracted. I don’t find you have any peace. I tried to tell you last night that you really do need to spend some time alone to be centered.” Martha didn’t say one word, but you could see from her face that she had listened. “And now, Martha, tell Mary what you are feeling.”

“Mary, every week I go to the Roman jail to visit the youth living in those horrible conditions. You never show any interest in my work.” Jesus says, “Mary, next week, why don’t you go with Martha and, Martha, before you do anything tomorrow morning, go outside to be with one greater.”

Soon two sisters, who finally were able to listen to each other because of Jesus’ presence, walked back to the kitchen to work together, two parts of the whole.

Entering into the Gospel story through the use of our imagination is Ignatius' way of coming to know Jesus. Knowing Jesus, so as to love him more intimately, in order to follow him more closely, is what our life is all about. For Ignatius, then, our Gospel-centered prayer to know, love, and follow Jesus is key to our growth and maturity as Christians. This kind of praying is not just a retreat-time experience. Just as in every Eucharist the Gospel has an integral place, so in the daily prayer of our life the Gospel familiarity with Jesus is ever present.

- John Veltri, SJ

To Be Nourished

John 4:5-15

In Samaria he came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water." (His disciples had gone into town to buy food.) The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan – so how can you ask me for a drink? (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.) Jesus answered, "If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water." "Sir," the woman said, "You don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get the life-giving water? It was over ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his children and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?" Jesus answered, "Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life." "Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water."

(from the eyes of a Samaritan woman)

The day was warmer than usual. I wanted to go to the well at this time. Because I was so tired of people judging me, of looking at me as less; and I worked and worked, it seemed harder than anyone else. I knew I needed to get water. We had none in the house. It just seems lately life has been difficult.

Walking to the well, it was as if almost there was a sadness within me having so much pressure. I wanted to run across the long stretches of this desert and disappear, but I knew this could never happen. Looking straight ahead knowing I would soon be at the well, I was thrown out of my reverie by suddenly seeing in the distance someone by the well.

This never happens at this time of day, but I keep walking like I always do. Keep walking no matter how tired or how little rest I get. I keep on walking straight to where I always go to get the

water for the house, arriving with all these thoughts flowing through me. I looked, could not believe my eyes. A Jew was sitting staring at the vast stretch of the desert.

I was startled when he asked me if he could have something to drink. He had nothing to draw the water. I looked at this one, a foreigner was asking me for something. "Sir, I am not of your religion. Why are you talking to me?"

"My name is Jesus. I am thirsty. I have been walking under this sun. But you know what, I sense you are thirstier than I am. I can help you in your life with a water that will help you deal with the problems, with the difficulties you are enduring. Why don't you call your husband."

She was stunned. Jesus inviting her to sit down. He gently spoke with her inviting her to find her own strength and not be so dependent on the men in her life. She sat looking at Jesus, whom she had just met. "My name is Lena." Jesus introducing himself. Lena knowing how much she needed the water. Jesus was offering nourishment.

Tears began to fall down her eyes because she felt how much she was really thirsty, needing to be nourished by Jesus because life is so hard. Jesus offering nourishment. Lena silently drinking, putting down the cup. "Jesus, it is hard to go through life. I have been abused so many times, but sitting here being with you I know how important it is to be nourished after so much hardship. To be nourished."

Jesus putting his arm around Lena breaking every norm there is, but he was feeling within him a sadness for how much Lena had suffered. He wanted to let her know how much she was loved and how much she needed to be nourished. To be nourished.

Jesus has a dream; it is God's dream. Jesus calls every man and woman and child to enter into that dream with him. When in our prayer we bring our life-dreams into the dream of Jesus, we find how we are to use all the talents and drives and passions that are God's gifts to us. We allow God to transform our drives and passions in ways that we could never have dreamed of. Have we considered seriously Jesus' dream about the reign of God and his invitation to us to be together with him and labor with him? We are never meant to give up on our dreams, but we are called to let God help shape them.

- John Veltri, SJ

To Comfort

Luke 7:37-38

In that town was a woman who lived a sinful life. She heard that Jesus was eating in a Pharisee's house, so she brought an alabaster jar full of perfume and stood behind Jesus, by his feet, crying and wetting his feet with her tears. Then she dried his feet with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them.

(from the eye of a sinful woman)

I held the oil tight as I pulled open the doors. All the important ones threw their hate gazes at me. I did not care. Jesus looked tired. I went over to where he sat. I just knew he would understand who I am. He saw me. I knelt down at his feet.

“Jesus, I come here tonight because I could not forget your face since I saw you this morning. Jesus, you are beautiful. I have never met anyone more beautiful than you. I come here with this oil because I know I need to change and you also need this anointment. Jesus, I pour this oil on my hands to anoint you because of your great love.” Touching Jesus’ feet, rubbing this precious oil. Looking into his eyes. “Jesus, I love you. I love you more than anyone else because you are so different. You don’t want to use me. You love me just as I am.”

“Maria, thank you for anointing my feet. Maria, all day long I was on the hill right nearby here. I was overwhelmed by the needs of the people. I came in here so tired. I could hardly walk, but your care has given me strength to try to deal with so much pain from so many stories, from so many healings. Maria, I tell you, thank you for helping me. I tell you I also need to be ministered to. To receive this kind of caring, which led your heart to anoint me.”

Maria, as she rubbed this oil on Jesus feet, said, “Jesus, to be honest, I was afraid of what others would think of me, but I don’t care now. I know my life has been hard and I have been seeking all my life someone who could heal me from all my hearts. I know, Jesus, you have walked long distances; have healed

many. I can feel anointing your feet how you also need this oil, this ministering to. I feel a weariness in you. I would like to minister to you as you have ministered to so many.”

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, we can imagine that St. Paul is only echoing the words of Jesus to us: "I have spoken to you frankly, opening my heart wide to you. There is no lack of room for you in me. The narrowness of heart is in you. "Open wide your hearts." It seems to me that Ignatius gives us exercises that are aimed at opening our hearts, enlarging our hearts good muscle fitness. We seek to be united with God not just in the religious context of prayer but also in the complexities of everyday life. That requires a healthy heart in each one of us.

- John Veltri, SJ

To Live Humbly

Luke 9:51-62

Jesus told another parable to some persons fully convinced of their own righteousness, who looked down on others. "Two men went up to the Temple to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and said: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people, grasping, crooked, adulterous, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give the tenth of all my income to the Temple.' In the meantime the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast by saying: 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'

I tell you, when this man went down to his house, he had been set right with God, but not the other. For whoever makes himself out to be great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be raised."

(from the eyes of Peter)

The judge walked into the church to pray. He stood before the altar praying with his arm upraised, "God of the universe, I have to deal with so many sinners every day. There are prostitutes, gangsters, murders. God, I am so glad I come here every sabbath and put my coins in the collection. God, I really can't understand how people can be so evil. I am so glad my family is not like this."

I was sitting with Jesus nearby listening. Jesus turns to me, "Peter, listen to this judge pray. He is so self-righteous. Listen to how many times he uses the word 'I'. Peter, I heard no music being played to God while he prayed. I only heard a man who had all the advantages in life given to him. Since he was small, he has never had to work hard but because of his position and family, he considers himself superior to everyone else. How he fools himself by thinking God listens to what comes out of his mouth. Nothing is happening in his heart and, as a result, nothing is really happening when he prays."

Just as Jesus finished, we heard a youngster praying in the back. Kneeling down, he raised his arms in prayer, "God, I am no one to come here to pray, to ask you anything, but my heart is moved to seek your mercy. These hands have committed many crimes that have hurt others. All my life, God, I have wanted to know you, to be closer to you, but all my life darkness has held me captive. More and more darkness has filled my heart. Witnessing and causing so much death."

Jesus turns to me and says, "Peter, can you hear the music coming from this youngster's heart? His is asking for mercy. He sees himself so small. He does not even raise his eyes to heaven. To live humbly knowing he has done wrong and knows no one can change on their own."

I listened and Jesus was right. I could hear this beautiful music filling the church. It was angelic. I felt tears coming to my eyes. I knew in that moment what real prayer is, how it's so powerful, so beautiful, touching the very heart of God.

He changed his life and walked differently after praying to God. How important it is to be honest and humble when praying, so the music from the heart can reach our God.

Over the past thirty years, I think that the battle about whether Ignatian Spirituality predominantly makes use of an intellectual and meditative form of prayer or a contemplative one has been won. The centuries-long controversy, in fact, may have been not so much about a way of praying as about how important imagination is in Ignatian spirituality. Even now, in the current renewal of Ignatian spirituality; I think that people do not give *imagining* the pride of place that Ignatian spirituality requires. St. Ignatius implicitly but clearly calls for imagination when he insists on adapting the Exercises to specific retreatants, but this was often ignored. Even now, in the current renewal of Ignatian spirituality, Jesuits and others often set little store by imagination. You may be getting the picture that I think that imagining is all too scarce in people's understanding and living on Ignatian spirituality today. And, in looking to the future, I think that imagining is altogether essential.

- John Veltri, SJ

Transformed

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later Jesus took with him Peter and the brothers James and John and led them up a high mountain where they were alone. As they looked on, a change came over Jesus: his face was shining like the sun, and his clothes were dazzling white. Then the three disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. So Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, "Lord, how good it is that we are here! If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was talking, a shining cloud came over them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased – listen to him!" When the disciples heard the voice, they were so terrified that they threw themselves face downward on the ground. Jesus came to them and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid!" So they looked up and saw no one there but Jesus. As they came down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Don't tell anyone about this vision you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from death."

(from the eyes of Peter)

Hearing my name. Waking up still dark, the stars bright above. Jesus asking me if I would like to journey up the mountain. Sitting up, "Jesus, let's go."

After waking up, James and John filling bags with some food, we began to climb the trail. Life has been so intense, so full. Jesus always knew when we needed to talk. Felt good to have the time to walk with friends. Jesus asked why I was walking so slowly. Still in the darkness of early morning listening to the flowing of the stream, listening to the flowing of memories. "What do you do with stories, Jesus? How do you take them into yourself? So many painful stories."

All of us began to speak about last week. Each of us could feel the weight of the stories. "Jesus, all this brings us back to healing and forgiveness. Until I met you, I could not understand what healing is. The woundedness of the people is so great. You,

Jesus, have taught me what happens when we don't heal our wounds.”

Jesus tells us how yesterday he bent down to heal a young girl of sixteen. She had been paralyzed after her friend was killed because she blamed herself for not being able to save her. Her desperation was so deep; it left her paralyzed.

Walking further along this mountain trail, the sun making its appearance on the side of the mountain. I could tell by the way Jesus spoke that he needed to talk. We listened for a long time to this one story. In so many ways, it seems this young girl never had a chance in life. Her family was abusive. Why are some people's lives so difficult? As Jesus spoke, he went deeper and deeper into the experience of having listened to his young girl. We sat by the stream watching the water flow downhill so easily. Jesus then asked me to tell a story from last week. As I spoke, I began to see clearer and clearer how everything is so simple because once we do not feel, we are loved, we act out in darkness and hurt other people.

“Like yesterday, Jesus, I was with a mother who had red blotches all over her body. She has five children, but her oldest was captured by the Romans. The memories of how he was mistreated are destroying her. Jesus, I put my hands on top of her head and prayed for her. My heart was moved. This early morning, everything seems simple. How much we need healing. Soon her blotches disappeared and I told her I would go to the Roman jail with her. She was a new person as she walked down the hill. Again and again, Jesus, on the hillsides and shores I hear stories of suffering. When I look over at you healing so many in pain, this gives me strength to continue healing.”

Walking further along the path, soon arriving at the top of the mountain, the air was different. It was as if we could touch the white clouds overhead. Felt so good to be on top of the mountain sitting, enjoying the food. Jesus went to one side to pray. We did the same, but soon I was dreaming of so many stories, of so

many faces. Again and again, feeling Jesus' power flow through me. Lepers, the deaf, diseased of every type. Dreaming of being a healer healing broken bodies, healing broken hearts. It was that simple.

Being awoken suddenly. At first not knowing where I was, then there was a moment of shock when I looked at Jesus. I was just speaking with him a little while ago and now, in front of me is a transfigured person. There is more than someone who I feel is master and friend. Now, I am tasting divinity. As I gaze at him, I am drawn to come closer. I bring with me all the stories of broken hearts and, as I gaze within Jesus' eyes, it is as if I am gazing at the stream flowing below, but the difference is the deep flowing of golden currents – the healing medicine flowing deep within Jesus' heart filled with love. It is like his heart is on fire producing such powerful medicine. Drawing closer to him this divine medicine flowed into me flowing into so many broken hearts that I have kept within my heart.

Everything was changing on this mountaintop because at last I could feel in this Jesus the source of his healing power and it made me love Jesus more – feel even closer to him. Soon other presences filling this space. Could feel the presence of Jesus' Abba hearing, listening to him. "This is the one I love more than anything or anyone. He is part of who I am. Listen to him. Listen when he tells you he has medicine to heal your pain, to heal your wounds."

As I heard Jesus' Abba say this, all the ones of last week were present also on this mountaintop. All of these were also beloved of Jesus' Abba. It is so simple, but we make everything so complicated. We forget how much we are loved. Get broken by ones who feel so far from how they are loved by Jesus' Abba. They hurt themselves -- they inflict pain on others because of their own brokenness.

I know I will never forget the beauty contained in Jesus and how this is connected to healing. I never understood this until this moment.

The image of Ignatius Loyola as a military man receives reinforcement from this prayer exercise, with its reference to its standards. Standards are flags or other symbols that give identity to a united group such as a sports team or an army corps. While it is true that Ignatius rings his own chivalric dreams into his prayer imagery as we have noted in the Call of the King exercise, I believe that Ignatius is equally influenced by the biblical imagery of the struggle between good and evil. With a few well-chosen word strokes, Ignatius draws his own picture of Lucifer and of Christ. Lucifer-a name meaning “bearer of light”- is the leader of the dark or evil forces. Lucifer stands for all those false lights that lead us astray; Lucifer brings home to us the necessity of our being able to discern false light from true light-in other words, what allows us truly to understand.

- John Veltri, SJ

Discipleship that Costs

John 6:60-71

Many of his followers heard this and said, "This teaching is too hard. Who can listen to it? Without being told, Jesus knew that they were grumbling about his, so he said to them, "Does this make you want to give up? Suppose then, that you should see the Son of Man go back up to the place where he was before? What gives life is God's life-giving Spirit. Yet some of you do not believe." (Jesus knew from the very beginnings who were the ones that would not believe and which ones would betray him.) And he added, "This is the very reason I told you that no people can come to me unless the Father makes it possible for them to do so." Because of this, many of Jesus' followers turned back and would not go with him any more. So he asked the twelve disciples, "And you – would you also like to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God."

(from the eyes of Peter)

I stood there with Jesus. What he said was strong. All those gathered began to move around uncomfortably. They began to murmur how he can say such things. "Who does he think he is?"

So many openly hostile to what Jesus was saying. Slowly, they began to slip away. They wanted easy food, easy path, easy discipleship. But Jesus spoke about something very different. He spoke about giving your life away not keeping it for yourself. "Give your life away."

As Jesus spoke these words, I was watching the people in front of me. They were laughing at this idea that they share with others. They quietly left the hillside. Little by little, so many gathered departed. What Jesus was offering, they had no interest in or in this kind of life-style. They came to get something – not to give. As time passed, more and more departed. I felt bad

for Jesus, looking at him as so many left him rejecting everything he had to offer. Soon, there were very few left. This had only happened one other time, but the rejection hurt.

It always hurts to be rejected because of what you stand for. Soon, all who remained were us, disciples. Jesus' eyes contained sadness. He tried hard to bring others into his way, but they chose any easy path. Jesus sits down with us and says, "You, friends, are you also ready to find an easier way without obstacles – without suffering? Are you also going to run away?"

"Jesus, I am sorry so many left you. I can tell you are saddened but, Jesus, where would we go? Since we have worked with you, our lives have been filled with meaning -- with joy being with you. Are we going to leave? Jesus, the answer is no. Where would we go? Some want to give such simple solutions, but there are none. Life is complicated." I went over to where Jesus sat. I wanted to comfort him.

"Peter," Jesus said, "Be prepared for much well planned opposition to what our Abba desires. I am grateful for your decision to be disciples."

"Jesus, where would we go if we left you? I know what we do does not make sense to most but, Jesus, your way is what brings life."

We all sat reflecting how important it is to realize we will always be misunderstood and not enormously successful by following Jesus' way. We all sat around for a long time trying to fully understand what it is to be rejected.

Ignatius uses the word labor most often in the Third Week, when it seems that Jesus is not the active one, the doer, but rather Jesus is the victim, the one who suffers. But passion -- what happens to Jesus -- is this greatest work, a gospel paradox. Jesus' suffering and death is his work -- not all the miracles, not all the preaching over a three-year period. What does this say to us about our judgments concerning what is our greatest work -- our studies, our teaching, our pastoring, our retreat works? Is it still ahead of us-in our old age, perhaps even in infirmity? For myself, I no longer have a clue how to answer.

- John Veltri, SJ

Jesus' Pain

Mark 8:8-10

Everybody ate and had enough – there were about four thousand people. Then the disciples took up seven baskets full of pieces left over. Jesus sent the people away and at once got into a boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

(from the eyes of Peter)

Jesus letting out his pain all day long listening to stories of suffering. Jesus had not eaten all day. His exhaustion flowed from his eyes. I looked over at him. There was an elderly woman crying onto Jesus' shoulder, then another one. Then a young girl who knelt down at Jesus' feet. I listened as she told Jesus how she had been abused by Roman soldiers last year. How she told this story tore me apart.

I looked into Jesus' eyes wondering, "What does he do with all this pain?" Even as I was thinking of his taking on of others' burdens, a youth of 16 knelt before Jesus. I looked at his face. He was scarred deeply. I listened as he spoke of how when he was 14, he had been caught in a brutal fight with a neighboring gang. The knives had done the job well. His face was distorted so badly that certainly he would never marry. He spoke about his girlfriend who left him. He could not get a job.

Again, generous water flowing, wetting Jesus' garment. Again, I looked into Jesus' eyes. What is he feeling? How is he able to take all this pain into himself? How does he let his heart be broken again and again?

The sun was setting. I knew I needed to be aggressive to rescue Jesus. He would be asked again and again for his touch, his blessing, his ability to rescue from despair, from pain. At last, four of us were protecting Jesus from pleas.

Finally, Jesus was in the boat. No one said anything for a long time because so much pain was in this boat. It was sailing so slowly, so much collective pain in this boat. I watched Jesus as he put his head between his hands. I am sure the tears falling from his eyes were reaching his Abba's heart.

It was now dark. The stars were strong above. There was a silence profound within our boat. The moon had come out. "How many times as friends have we crossed these waters?"

Now it was time to eat a little. I wandered over to where Jesus sat. His eyes were red. I sat down next to him. I asked Jesus how he was feeling, not sure if he wanted to say anything anyway. I will never forget that conversation we had as our boat slid across the water. It was in those moments I really did want to do something for Jesus. Slowly, he began letting out the tears speaking of this young abused girl, young scarred youth, and diseased man.

"Jesus, what do you do with all this pain? What do you do when your heart is broken? What do you do with all this pain?"

The wind blowing against us, the movement of the boat moving into deep darkness. Peter was falling onto the bottom of the boat. "Peter, I am sorry. I am letting out so much, but I can't help myself. I just feel a love for these ones today. I don't know why today, but I was moved more deeply than normal. The mystery of God, the mystery of love, all being contained in this boat. Peter, sometimes I feel I just need this escape from those with outstretched hands. I just need to say that sometimes I feel as if I am drowning inside from sadness. It seems sometimes I am the one listening but tonight, Peter, as we travel slowly across this lake, thank you for listening to me. I need this space. I need to have this time so I too can let out what I am feeling because, Peter, I sometimes feel sad, but I cannot show this or I would never be able to function."

I watched Jesus as more tears flowed from his eyes; the lepers, the abused, the prostitutes, the real poor, all seeking deep healing. I held Jesus close, feeling good that I could be there for him.

“Peter, I don’t know what I would do if I could not let out a part of this sadness. Sometimes I just need to let out this sorrow. Moving even deeper into the darkness to a place where there is a great distance from the land – great distance from everything. So, Peter, I know if I did not care, my heart would not hurt so much, but I love these ones who seek out healing, who seek out ways to be freed from physical disease during spiritual pain.”

That Jesus has died, with a lot of suffering, is history. The event has already happened and we cannot change the fact. That we can be present to Jesus in his sharing with us his passion and death is also a fact, and our desired response -- the grace we pray for -- is called compassion, a very precious gift of God to us. The temptation when we cannot do anything to change a situation is to walk away, to try to harden ourselves, to maintain an emotional distance, or to despair. In the face of these natural, understandable human responses, we all the more appreciate compassion as a difficult but priceless grace.

- John Veltri, SJ

Heart

Luke 23:32-33

Two other men, both of them criminals, were also led out to be put to death with Jesus. When they came to the place called "The Skull," they crucified Jesus there, and the two criminals, one on his right and the other on his left.

(from the eyes of John)

I, John, watched Jesus lower his head. He no longer could hold it up. I heard him breathe his last breath. I looked up at this bloodied one. I knew he was dead. The darkness was intense. A trembling of the earth began. At first no one moving, but soon the same Roman guards came over with a long spear. It all seemed so meaningless. Why would they want to make sure these three were dead?

Coming to Jesus, raising the spear. Ripping into the flesh piercing his heart. Deep, dark, red blood and water gushed out of the wound. They had done everything else to Jesus. While he was alive, they were treating him the same way. The tip of the spear tearing into God's heart, God's heart broken. How did this soldier keep the spear destroying his flesh for so long if clearly Jesus was dead.

I looked up at Jesus. It was as if I could look into his heart and see where the tip of the spear had pierced. So many feelings flowed through me. I, his friend, who had seen how Jesus loved, who had seen how large his heart is. How he loved those no one else cared about. How he was not judgmental toward those considered impure. He healed all those cast out of society. Now his heart was pierced just like his heart was broken when he saw such suffering.

The two mothers were also here under the cross feeling the mystery of God. The mothers called over their children. Now, we are all witnesses to what was happening. If I was alone, no one afterwards would believe me. But as broken hearted families

stood beneath the cross, Jesus' pierced heart was so full of love that all of a sudden in this dark place, God's love began to pour out. It was like a burning fire. It was a love so great. His heart exploding, I could feel it.

Dismas' mother could also feel his love. She did not hesitate to use the ladder the two soldiers were going to use to lower Jesus. She reached Jesus. She put her hand over the wound. Love turned to fire. She prayed with her hand over his pierced heart.

“Jesus, you were a prisoner. They killed you because they were afraid of love. I would like you to bless my family with this love I am feeling. This love is the same love that you loved my son with. I ask you, Jesus, with this fire from your Sacred Heart, that you surround all those who as youngsters are treated so inhumanely with cruel and unjust sentences as my own son received. In this moment, I ask you to let them feel the same love I am feeling and let them feel how much you love them. Down through the centuries, I ask you to pour out this fire on all parents who have children locked up. Jesus, I know you can hear me when I tell you how my heart also was pierced with the death of my son Dismas. During these long months while he was locked up, I have been weighted down in great sorrow.”

I looked around me, only the women and the families of Dismas and Geddes were present. Where were the other disciples? I looked inside myself and I knew. I actually seemed the most afraid of all my friends. I asked myself, “Where did I get this strength to stand here?” I knew it was dangerous to be here. I looked up at Jesus. What do you do when you feel alone like this?

I think there were so many reasons that went through my mind not to be here. I knew if something happened to me I could have been more useful after this crisis, but I needed to be here. “When the Romans pushed me, this made me more determined to be with you, Jesus. I don't want to leave your mother, these family members of others. Jesus, what do you say to me when

sometimes I do feel alone in what I do? All during these years that we all worked together, I have felt connected to the reign of your Abba, part of a plan.”

Even though Jesus is lifeless on the cross, I heard his voice saying, “John, thank you for being here. I appreciate it. I know it is not easy, that is how I felt in the garden, in the cell, in the courtroom. But, John, let me tell you something. My Abba will be with you, giving you strength. His presence is strong here on this hill, but it’s so dark no one can see my Abba. He too is experiencing in some way what they are doing to me.”

At that moment, two children ran over to where I was, a young girl and a boy. Dismas was their brother. They were crying so hard. I knelt down and embraced them. Their tears wetted my tunic. I held them for a long time letting their sorrow flow into me. Somehow, I felt consoled in that moment. As I reflected on feeling alone, I felt this message from Jesus, “John, be here. Never run away from where you are called to be, even if sometimes you feel alone with difficulties, with weariness, my Abba will be with you. I will send you my spirit to accompany you, to give you strength.”

Soon all these family members whose hearts were being broken by having their prisoner sons executed brutally came over. I wanted so much to do something for them in this suffering, in this pain. I was forgetting about feeling alone. I was actually receiving strength from these broken ones. I was so glad I had chosen to be here. I still did not know what these leaders and soldiers would do to me, but in this moment of entering into the pain of these below the crosses I knew in the future I would need to remember back to not let fear, not let even being alone, stop me from being in places like this.

After awhile with these families, I went closer to the cross of Jesus. Out of all this darkness I heard, “John, thank you. If sometimes you stand alone, you will be able to be a healing presence for those whose hearts have been broken.”

Using imagination is important for entering into his Exercises. For Ignatius, to contemplate is an imaginative exercise. Contemplation has been a longtime component of Christian spirituality in ways similar to its being an integral part of other religious traditions. Usually contemplation refers to a “gazing at” or a “resting in” the divine. Our contemporary emphasis on centering prayer is a form of this kind of traditional use of the prayer form of contemplation. But, when Ignatius asks us to contemplate, he is pointing us to use all our imaginative powers to enter as fully as we can into the incidents (or “mysteries” as we call them) of the Gospels.

- John Veltri, SJ

Do You Love Me?

John 21:15-17

After they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John do you love me more than these others do?" "Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lambs." A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." A third time Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter became sad because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" and so he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!" Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep."

(from the eyes of Peter)

Sitting around the circle, the fire bringing us even closer together after sharing the success of the catch. After the satisfaction of a good meal, I looked around at the faces of my friends. Ever since Jesus' death, there has been no joy within me, no enthusiasm, no fire, no creativity. It was like all this too had died. But now, fire was burning within this rising. New desires.

Companions, we sat around that circle dreaming what could be possible in creating a collective dream, not just myself in the boat, but with others working who deeply desired this alternative way of living that Jesus showed us. We began to imagine, "Where do we want to begin?"

Jesus was inspiring us with his presence. We felt clearly the question was not of what we wanted, but of how to bring others into the kingdom of his Abba and to places where God does not reign, compassion and forgiveness – what God desires. How important it would be to come together again and again to remember what our time with Jesus has shown us.

I begin by saying, "Jesus, it is good for us to be together around this circle. How do you desire for us to continue your work?" It was at this moment I felt the embracing presence of Jesus'

Abba. Jesus took his finger and wrote on the sand. So simple in the wet sand, Jesus had written, "Keep your eyes on me". Everyone in the circle stared and was silent. Into this silence, Jesus says, "Peter, do you really want to be a co-worker? To dedicate your time, energy, love to my Abba's reign? Do you really love me that much?"

"Jesus, when I tell you I love you, I tell you 'Yes, I love you,' and you know this. When I keep my eyes on you, though you push me into situations that are difficult, I find you there. I know in loving the most marginalized I will be loving you. I see how with the brightness of this fire and like the lighting of the dawn that I will meet you on a deep level in those heart-broken people. If I keep my eyes on you, I will be loving you. Jesus, as I tell you that I love you, I see within your eyes all those we have worked with, walked with, healed during these years are connected to you bringing them to the Abba. I remember one time speaking with that orphan girl. The brokenness in her eyes haunted me and, as I did this, I was also meeting you in that moment again and again."

Jesus asked again, "Do you love me?" I was wondering why Jesus was asking me another time if I loved him. "Jesus, I do love you more than anyone. Jesus, when I do your work, know friend, I am also loving you. How else do I know this? When the Pharisees laugh at me, when our own disciples turn against me because they don't understand your message. In all those people, Jesus, I will be loving you with all my heart. I know this makes you happy. I not only feel I am getting closer to you in loving you, but I'm able to bring others closer to you."

Jesus asked me one more time if I loved him. I looked at him having so many memories flow through me, the intensity of work. Feeling close to these friends around the fire. "I am grateful that you ask me if I love you. I am grateful for your friendship, for giving my life meaning, direction. Jesus, I love you when I begin my day till I go to bed at night. I do this all for love of you."

Ignatian contemplation is focused, not on losing oneself *in* God, but on finding oneself *with* God. Contemplating is ordinarily understood as “gazing upon” the divine. In this gazing, the emphasis is not in the relationship between oneself and God, but rather is on being absorbed in God, lost in God, taken up into God. An example of this kind of contemplation is centering prayer. For Ignatius, however, the focus is always on relationship. Because Ignatian contemplation is ordinarily focused on gospel mysteries (that is, gospel events), we as contemplatives may, of course, get *absorbed* in the gospel story, but we are always consciously in relationship. For Ignatius, contemplating the gospel mysteries is the privileged way to come to know Jesus more clearly so as to love him more dearly and follow him more nearly, as the popular song from *God spell* would impress upon us.

- John Veltri, SJ

Blessed Oil in Garden

Mark 16:1-7

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.'

(from the eyes of Mary Magdalene)

After the torture of Jesus, after seeing him die, I am sitting next to him with the oil I will not need to use on him. "Jesus, what am I feeling being with you? Tears falling down my cheeks. I have just been so destroyed by everything. I have not stopped long enough to look inside myself. I have supported the women who lost their sons who were killed by your side. I watched you go through your agony.

Jesus grabbing the bottles of oil, the spice. Slowly mixing them together. The scent was strong, rich. Taking some of the oil after mixing them together. "Mary, now it's your turn." Jesus put some of this rich oil on the palm of my hand. I could feel the wound in Jesus' hand where they drove a spike through. "Mary, I now bless these oils. I have mixed together many different oils. Abba, Father, I ask you to bless this oil. Send your power just like we have used for so long to anoint leaders, to heal wounds. Abba, I ask you that you pour your healing into these oils in order to bring healing to wounds."

I could feel warmth flow through Jesus' wound. I could feel a light flow from this wound. Could feel a love from where once there was great pain. "Mary, tell me what you are feeling in your heart?"

"Jesus, I have seen so many tears flow during these days. I feel there is a power from your wound that is giving me the strength to tell you, Jesus, the feelings I have kept in my heart. I go back to the memories of being hurt. I can see this clearly. I can hear the words. All of this because I decided to follow you. Jesus, why did I let people treat me like this? People I have worked closely with. Why? After I became your disciple, everything changed. Thank you for blessing this oil, for healing.