

Contemplation on the Love of God

The final contemplation in the text of St. Ignatius' Exercises is the **Contemplation on the Love of God** (SpEx 230-237). This contemplation returns us to the Principle & Foundation, which opened our retreat. There, we considered how we are created to praise, love and serve God and how we are to rely on the goods of creation only to the extent that they *facilitate our loving*. Having journeyed through the Exercises, we now reflect on the love of God in light of the many graces of the retreat. Contemplating the Love of God, we learn to love as God loves.

We first consider how God loves us into creation and sustains us in love. All is possible because God loved us first (cf 1. John). This love, as the essence of God, overflows into every part of our lives and into the world. In this contemplation, we ask for the vision to "find God in all things". To use some images crafted by the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, we want to notice how "the world is charged with the grandeur of God" and how "Christ plays in ten thousand places and faces."

Attentive to God's presence everywhere and recognizing God's generosity to us, we naturally want to return the favor by praising, loving and serving God and others. Primordially, God teaches us to love IN and THROUGH the Paschal Mystery: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Ignatius offers two preparatory comments to the Contemplation (SpEx 231-231). They are simple statements with remarkable depth:

1. **Love ought to show itself more by deeds than by words.** Charity - love in action - is the hallmark of discipleship. Ignatian spirituality is an apostolic spirituality -- broken open into the practice and practicality of our daily lives.
2. **Love consists of a mutual exchange between persons.** Ignatius does not simply describe the "mutuality" of human love; he also emphasizes the reciprocity between God and ourselves. With God, our Creator, we enjoy a relationship of giving and receiving. God desires our friendship; God desires to be known by us. These desires have their source in God and also terminate in God. These divine desires are the source of our desire for God.

In the contemplation to follow, Ignatius suggests that we place ourselves in God's presence by imagining ourselves "as standing before God our Lord, and also before the angels and saints", who are praying for us (SpEx 232).

I ask for what I desire.

Here it will be to ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things (SpEx 233).