

# IMITATING CHRIST OUR LORD WITH THE SENSES

## Sensing and Feeling in the Exercises

Antonio Guillén

*'Whoever wishes to imitate Christ Our Lord in the use of the senses ...'*  
(Exx 248)

THE 'METHOD AND ORDER'—*modo y orden*—of the whole process of the Exercises is firmly grounded on what Ignatius calls 'sensing and tasting things interiorly'—*el sentir y gustar de las cosas internamente* (Exx 2). Ignatius is quite explicit (Exx 3) in demanding 'greater reverence' in what he calls 'the activity of the will', involving the affectivity (*afecto*) than in 'the activity of the understanding', involving reason (*discurso*). These presuppositions inform the way he constructs the whole network of petitions, colloquies, repetitions and recapitulations throughout the four Weeks. Everything falls into place and makes sense when one recognises that the affective will is central to the approach offered us by Ignatius to the making of choices—choices enabling us to 'order our lives' (Exx 21).

But there is more to be said. Ignatius is also aware that many human commitments are all too subject to whim and inconstancy when they depend solely on the emotional energy supporting them at any one time. He knew—and perhaps today we are even more aware of this than he was—that human decisions are indeed fundamentally sustained by our affective will. But the affective will on its own cannot ensure that the decisions are lived out consistently into the future. The will and the affections provide vital and central motivation at the beginning, but later, when, despite our sincere wishes and desires, resistances or even oppositions to our original decision surface, their

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strength evaporates. Confirmation of this in everyday life is all too easy to find.

Familiar as he was with the mysteries of the human condition, Ignatius had the intuition that a person's commitment to a decision would become stable only if their spontaneous feelings and sensibility were brought into play. We can love and desire something on a long-term basis only if we are really attracted to it, and we can truly reject something only if it has come to be really repugnant to us. To put the point in another way: it is dangerous to let our spontaneous senses and feelings float free, and become vulnerable to siren voices that may be calling us in directions quite contrary to what both the willed affections and the reason have decided.

The point, then, is not that we should allow free rein to our spontaneous and superficial reactions. Rather, Ignatius would have us educate our senses and feelings 'so that one's sensual nature may be obedient to reason, and all the lower parts of the self may become more submissive to the higher' (Exx 87). If we are to live freely, and not find our freedom betrayed, we need to train our senses and feelings in ways that match the orientations we have given to our minds and hearts.

The term 'feeling' (*sentir*), which is so fundamental in Ignatius, covers a combination of the bodily senses, the affectivity, and the understanding. No one can claim to be really free and happy if these three components that make up the person become critically out of step. As Javier Melloni succinctly puts it:

Very often the ordinary state of a person is that the senses are seeking satisfaction in one direction, the affections in another, and the mind in yet another. The result of this dislocation is that none of these three faculties is fully satisfied. However, in so far as all three can be brought together in a person's interior world then peace, growth and transformation take place.<sup>1</sup>

It is for this reason that the process of the Exercises must also address spontaneous senses and feelings. As one follows Ignatius' various proposals, one can see emerging through them all an attempt to educate a person's senses and feelings, as a necessary means towards

<sup>1</sup> Javier Melloni, 'Sentir', in *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana* (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 2007), 1634.

rendering the retreatant's decisions—which in themselves emerge primarily from the mind and heart—permanent and lasting.

Behind the 'interior knowledge' that Ignatius is always urging the retreatant to ask for (Exx 65, 104, 139, 233) lies just this prayer for a new way of feeling, one different from the feeling informed by one's egoism: a prayer for Jesus' way of sensing and feeling. This gift is rightly described<sup>2</sup> as 'the high point of the knowledge' that one is asking for throughout the Exercises; it also guarantees one's freedom. How we act flows spontaneously from how we see things. And we have a sound instinct that, if our senses and feelings can operate as Jesus' did, our habitual ways of acting—which are meant to be the fruit of our Election of how 'to love and serve him more' (Exx 104)—will always be on the right lines.

**A prayer for  
Jesus' way of  
sensing and  
feeling**

To educate our senses and feelings according to the pattern of Jesus is a matter of becoming imbued with his way of being and feeling, of resonating with everything that made him resonate, of abhorring everything that he abhorred, of reacting to things and to people as he used to react. The *Exercises* are there as 'an apprenticeship and deepening in this way of spontaneously feeling with Jesus, and a discernment of what it is'.<sup>3</sup> The real objective is the desire to have always present, as St Paul expresses it, 'the same mind that was in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:5), whom the retreatant desires 'to imitate and follow' in everything (Exx 109).

In the parable of the Two Standards (Exx 136–147) a clear picture emerges of the conflict between two styles, two logical systems, two 'ways of seeing things': that of Jesus and that of one's own egoism. And later, in the process of Election, Ignatius suggests (as part of the Fourth Day of the Second Week) that retreatants should work directly on the way they sense reality, to the point of wanting 'to imitate Christ our Lord and be actually more like him ... with poverty ... and humiliations' (Exx 167). If they can integrate the way their senses operate into their decision to follow Jesus in all things, the

<sup>2</sup> Adolfo M. Chércoles, *La afectividad y los deseos* [*Affectivity and desires*] (Barcelona: Escola Ignasiana d'Espiritualitat, 1995), 12–19, 23–24. Downloadable from [www.fespinal.com](http://www.fespinal.com). See also an unpublished graduate thesis by Juan Antonio Guerrero, written in 1994: 'Práctica del discernimiento y conocimiento de Dios en la Autobiografía y en los EE. de San Ignacio', 132–149.

<sup>3</sup> Javier Melloni, 'Sentir', 1634.

commitments to discipleship that exercitants make will become really stable and lasting.

### ***'The Gates of the Senses'***

This striking image is Ignatius' own. It indicates how the senses and feelings are involved in a two-way movement.<sup>4</sup> Our senses receive stimuli from the outside, and pass them on into our inner world; our spontaneous reactions display outwardly, and very expressively, how the inward heart has stored what it has perceived.

When I speak of 'educating the senses and feelings', it is this latter point that I have primarily in mind: how our spontaneous feelings are a mirror, so to speak, of what there is within us. Human senses do not see, hear, smell, taste and touch; that much can be simply mechanical. There is something else involved, something humane, something which 'comes from within' (Mark 7:21). This allows the five senses to do something more: they can learn to *look, listen, savour, relish and kiss*.

We are born with eyes, but not with the power to look. We indeed have ears, but we often end up failing to listen. We can smell and taste things, but we are not always able to enjoy and savour life. We touch others, and even hug them, but so often this contact fails to become a true embrace.

We are quite justified in using the expression 'spiritual senses' when the humane element is present, because it is genuinely spiritual. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Exercises, which are conceived as a way of teaching us to 'sense' (*sentir*) God, should include within their objectives the spiritual development of our bodily senses.<sup>5</sup> And Ignatius can find no better means to this end than to imitate Christ Our Lord, and Our Lady, in the use of the senses:

Whoever wants in the use of their senses to imitate Christ Our Lord should in the preparatory prayer recommend themselves to His Divine Majesty; and after making consideration about each

<sup>4</sup> *Constitutions* III.1.4 [250]: 'All should take special care to guard with great diligence the *gates of their senses* (especially the eyes, ears and tongue) from all disorder, to preserve themselves in peace and true humility of their souls, and to give an indication of it by silence when it should be kept, and, when they must speak, by the discretion and edification of their words, the modesty of their countenance, the maturity of their walk, and all their movements, without giving any sign of impatience or pride.'

<sup>5</sup> Jean Laplace, *El camino espiritual a la luz de los Ejercicios ignacianos* [The Spiritual Way in the Light of the Ignatian Exercises—French original] (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1988), 89–91.

individual sense, they should say a Hail Mary or an Our Father. And whoever wants in the use of the senses to imitate Our Lady should in the preparatory prayer recommend themselves to her, that she may obtain for them grace from Her Son and Lord for it; and after making consideration about each individual sense, they should say a Hail Mary. (Exx 248)

Indeed, it is precisely this that is the major question when the retreatant comes to contemplate the ‘Mysteries of the Life of Christ our Lord’ (Exx 261). How would Jesus be directing his gaze? How would Jesus be listening? How would Jesus be talking? (Exx 214) Through our senses we imagine Jesus’s world, so that it becomes intimately present to us; through our senses, too, we respond to this new world’s reality. As we seek and desire to be identified with Jesus, our senses can learn from him how to fondle, how to gaze, how to listen, and how to savour.

As one commentator rightly says, ‘for the one who makes the Exercises, it is not reality that changes, but the way one *looks at* reality’.<sup>6</sup> A retreatant desiring to imitate Jesus—a Jesus who was often deeply grieved for the poor and the lost—and to imitate him even in the use of the senses, will be learning, as Jesus learnt, ‘to live with compassion’.<sup>7</sup> But when, by contrast, our encounter with Jesus, and with God through him, does not extend to the senses, our senses are left in benighted disorientation, wandering vacantly all over the place.<sup>8</sup>



Christ as Man of Sorrows, by Dürer

<sup>6</sup> Benjamín González Buelta, *Ver o perecer: Mística de ojos abiertos* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2006), 180.

<sup>7</sup> This expression is used by José Antonio Pagola to describe the most fundamental characteristic of Jesus in his exceptional and controversial work, *Jesús: Aproximación histórica* (Madrid: PPC, 2007), 127–151, 465–467.

Any method, therefore, aimed at helping us take decisions that will be lasting must address the senses and feelings directly. For it is they which determine how we see and react to things. Certainly the Exercises given us by Ignatius for ‘making an election’ (Exx 169) and ‘to reform one’s life and state’ (Exx 343) do not neglect to do this.

### ***The First Week: Abhorrence for Evil***

In each section or ‘Week’ of the Exercises, there are elements which Ignatius dedicates to this ‘education of the senses and feelings’. If we can identify and highlight these, this might help us understand the role he attributes to the senses in the overall process.

The aim of the First Week is to experience and sense (*sentir*) the goodness and mercy of God. The five exercises that make up a typical day of this Week fit together as follows:

- The first two (Exx 45–61) are initially discursive: ‘to bring the memory to bear’, ‘to reason over’, ‘to recall and to comprehend’. But they immediately open up to the affections, through the ‘colloquy’, and the instruction ‘to arouse the affections of the heart with the will’. At no moment are these two exercises limited to acts of the understanding.
- The third exercise, reinforced by the fourth (Exx 62–64), concentrates on the affective; the colloquy is now a triple colloquy. But now words like ‘abhorrence’ and ‘abhorring’ indicate something more direct, more sensory. The moment I ask that ‘I may amend my life and put order into it’ Ignatius can think of no better way of supporting me than by urging me to ask for a well-educated sensibility, a sensibility in keeping with the Lord’s sensibility, so that I can abhor what he abhors and reject what he rejects. Only in this way—so Ignatius thinks—will we manage later really to act, in all things, as he acts.
- In the fifth exercise, ‘On Hell’ (Exx 65–71), which is so frequently misinterpreted, the central focus is on opening our five bodily senses to that reality which we should ‘abhor’: that neglect and ingratitude towards the God who deserved just the opposite ‘for His

<sup>8</sup> González Buelta, ‘*Ver o perecer*’, 67.

constant and loving kindness and mercy towards me right up to the present moment'. The imagination is brought into play using the five senses, so that my 'interior sense' of gratitude to God for His fidelity may be strengthened and made firm, along with 'shame and confusion' over my own conduct. And the clear *raison d'être* for this exercise of the senses is the need to give stability to any decision that may be in danger of becoming culpably inconstant: 'if through my faults I should ever forget the love of the eternal Lord' (Exx 65). The exercise is not intended to instil fear.

The entire First Week is aimed at dismantling one way of seeing things in order to construct a quite different alternative, one in keeping with the commitments that the understanding and the will have taken on. The emotive terms and images—'the corruption and foulness', 'a running sore', 'great flames and bodies of fire', 'wailings, howls, and cries', 'sulphur', 'bitter things', 'burning fires'—are not intended to replace the ideas here, or simply to instil fear (which is how they have so often been used). Rather, once our minds and wills have been set to rights, our senses and feelings should be informed and conformed accordingly.

The key term in this task of reforming sensibility is 'abhorrence'. One element in this concept is the experience of having illusions unmasked: what I used to look at as something positive now has its falsehood uncovered: 'my sins', 'the disorder in my actions', 'all worldly things and vanities'. But it also involves the senses and the feelings. Only when our ways of seeing things are being reconfigured so that they are like that of Jesus, only when our repugnances can be identified with his, does our change in



Hell, by Hans Memling

behaviour become real and effective. Only if our ways of perceiving things resemble Jesus' will the authenticity of our conversion be ensured.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The Second Week Onwards: The 'Application of the Senses'***

In the Exercises the key element in the education of the sensibility is the so-called 'Application of the Senses'. Ignatius suggests that it should be made every day at nightfall once the Second Week has begun (Exx 121, 129, 133, 134, 159, 204, 208, 227).

However, the Spanish term '*aplicación de los sentidos*' does not appear as such in the Ignatian text; it is a translation from the 'Vulgate', the official Latin version of the Exercises, and it puts into noun form a concept that is always expressed by a verbal phrase in the Autograph Spanish: 'to draw the senses', 'to pass the five senses over' (*traer los sentidos*, *pasar los cinco sentidos*, Exx 121). Something similar has occurred with other supposedly Ignatian terms that Ignatius never formulated in noun form: 'indifference', when Ignatius writes 'to make ourselves indifferent' (Exx 23); 'petition' in place of 'to ask for what I want' (Exx 48, 55, 91, 104, etc.); 'reflection on prayer' in place of 'while I see how things have gone for me during the contemplation or meditation' (Exx 77); and even the title 'director' or 'guide' for the whole experience, when Ignatius never uses any expression except 'the one who gives the Exercises' (Exx 6, 7, 8, etc.). In the present case of the 'Application of the Senses', as in all the others, there is much to be gained from attending to Ignatius' own expression, if one wishes to grasp his thought.

In the Second Week, Ignatius' own words clearly show that he envisages a sequence of five daily exercises similar to that in the First Week. After two contemplations and two repetitions, there should come a 'fifth contemplation' which consists in 'bringing the five senses to bear' on what has been previously contemplated (Exx 121–126).

One has to bear in mind that any 'contemplation' already has an element of feeling that is much more prominent than in a 'meditation'. Whenever we take to ourselves a gospel text in such a way that we feel ourselves to be present at an event that is occurring before our eyes,

<sup>9</sup> Chércoles, *La afectividad y los deseos*, 18–19, 23–24.



‘seeing the persons, hearing what they say and watching what they are doing’ (e.g. Exx 194), then the text becomes alive, so much so that we hear a word and see a gesture as if it affected us personally.<sup>10</sup> It is through our senses that we feel the ‘touch’ within the heart (Exx 335), and then the heart expands in feelings of happiness, peace and serenity, and in a renewal of spiritual strength, along with desires to ‘move forward’ (Exx 315, 329).

For that matter, the exercise of ‘repetition’ is also a matter primarily of feeling. Ignatius, when he proposes it, does not intend the retreatant to enter more deeply into rational consideration of a theme; his aim is to allow the contemplation to reach the heart of a retreatant, so that we can truly ‘sense and taste’ (Exx 2) the reality being contemplated. The exercise of repetition helps us to avoid a merely superficial appreciation of things, which is a danger in the early stages. Once we no longer stay with the ideas and have gone beyond a merely intellectual grasp, then we can feel truly in the presence of the person of Jesus; then we can recognise him at the personal level. Repetition aims to go beyond ‘having to say things’; instead we can enjoy ‘much relish and consolation’ (Exx 254), and let him permeate our whole being.<sup>11</sup>

**To allow the contemplation to reach the heart of the retreatant**

The end of the day, in Ignatius’ view, is when it is easiest to approach the inner person of Jesus with the senses and feelings. At the start of the day, the petition suggested for the first exercise of the morning—and intended to be constantly requested—has been ‘to ask for inner knowledge of the Lord’, with great affection ‘so that I might the better love and follow him’ (Exx 104). But in the evening this request becomes more a matter of the senses and feelings, and thereby emotionally more constant.

The characteristic of the Fifth Contemplation is the more explicit and comprehensive use of ‘the five senses of the imagination’ to revisit the previous contemplations. Now it is no longer a matter merely of seeing and listening to the scene with the imaginative senses of sight and hearing. At this stage, all the other bodily senses come into play in one’s imagination: ‘to smell and taste with the senses of smell and taste

<sup>10</sup> Compare Jean-Claude Dhôtel, *La espiritualidad ignaciana: Claves de referencia* [Ignatian Spirituality: Key concepts, French original] (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1991), 70; David Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 89.

<sup>11</sup> There is an excellent account of this process in Laplace, *El camino espiritual*, 56–59.

the infinite gentleness and sweetness', so that one touches with the sense of touch, 'embracing and kissing the place where these persons tread and sit' (Exx 124–125).

Though Ignatius always avoids presenting intimacy with Jesus in sensual terms, there remains some ambiguity of meaning in his talk of using the senses 'to smell and taste' something so intangible as 'the infinite gentleness and sweetness of the divinity'<sup>12</sup> of the soul and of its virtues' (Exx 124). Not surprisingly, some controversy broke out after his death about whether the five senses in this exercise were to be understood in an 'imaginative' or 'spiritual' sense: as 'ascetical' or 'mystical'.<sup>13</sup>

The most obvious upshot of that discussion is that we must not forget a clarification added in the Latin Vulgate translation of *Spiritual Exercises* concerning the 'Application of the Senses' in the Fourth Week: 'before supper should be the prayer of the senses *to impress more strongly upon the soul the three exercises of the day*' (Exx 227, addition italicized). Thus the purpose of the 'Application of the Senses' is 'a more intimate assimilation of what has been contemplated, a sort of impregnation, the spirit's soaking up what has already been felt'.<sup>14</sup> This can easily happen when we contemplate the same scene a number of times.

It is not difficult to understand how this exercise should work: in the process of 'passing the five senses over' a contemplation, the mind's discursive activity tends to diminish and the affective element to increase. Thus as we pray, we allow the mystery of the life of Christ, which has become connatural with us and present during the day, to take over and engulf us. No one would deny that this exercise—something at the intuitive and not cognitive level—impregnates the soul and establishes firmly that 'inner knowledge of the Lord' (Exx 104) which has become possible thanks to the previous contemplations. For now the senses and feelings have taken on the same orientation as the

<sup>12</sup> Editions and translations differ on whether a comma should be placed after 'divinity'. (Editor's note.)

<sup>13</sup> For a full account of this controversy, see Philip Endean, 'Aplicación de sentidos', in *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, 184–192, which updates 'The Ignatian Prayer of the Senses', *Heythrop Journal*, 31 (1990), 391–418. The matter is also discussed in Manuel Alarcón, 'Aplicación de sentidos', *Manresa*, 65 (1993), 33–46. On the mystical, as opposed to the allegorical, interpretation of the senses, see Javier Melloni, *La mistagogía de los Ejercicios* [The Mystagogy of the Exercises] (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 2001), 85–89. See also Guerrero, 'Práctica del discernimiento', 133–139.

<sup>14</sup> Alarcón, 'Aplicación de sentidos', 36, 45.

reason and the affective will—‘that I might the better love and follow him’ (Exx 104)—a desire and a prayer that has been with the retreatant all day.

### ***The Third Week: Attuning the Bodily Senses More Finely***

It is in the Third Week that we see the transformation of sensibility at its clearest and most striking. For now, the reason and the affective will together work deliberately to develop our senses and feelings to the point that these latter lose their fear of suffering and of the darkness of God.

Just like the Evangelists, Ignatius in recalling the passion avoids any self-indulgent fixation on pain and blood, on the lashes and the tortures. He is convinced that the true importance of the passion does not lie in the emotive impact caused by the presence of blood, and so he wastes no time over those elements. In place of that, he concentrates on the love and fidelity of Jesus on the day of his death, and on what his message in those circumstances reveals about the Father.

For precisely this purpose, Ignatius aims that ‘one’s sensual nature may be obedient to reason’ (Exx 87), and should not react to stimuli that do not proceed from reason. So he asks the retreatant ‘to *consider* what Christ our Lord suffers in his human nature, or wants to suffer’ (Exx 195), why Christ went up to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem even though he was well aware of what was being plotted there against him, and



Head of Christ Crowned with Thorns, by Lucas  
Cranach the Elder

why he did not accept from the Father 'more than twelve legions of angels' to free him from his arrest (Matthew 26:53).

By mentioning small details, Ignatius underlines the deliberate will and self-oblation of Jesus despite the quite different feelings and sensibility of those who surrounded him: 'the Lord went to the Mount of Olives with his disciples, who were full of fear' (Exx 290); 'he allowed himself to be kissed by Judas and arrested like a thief' (Exx 291); 'he did not reply anything at all to Herod, even though the scribes and priests were constantly accusing him' (Exx 294). The reactions of Jesus mirror the great mystery of the Father, who is also an object of consideration in these contemplations: how 'Christ as divine', and therefore as one with the Father, 'does not destroy his enemies, although he could do so, but allows himself', the Son of the Father, 'to suffer most cruelly' (Exx 196). This Jesus was the Divine Person handed over, from the moment of the incarnation, 'to save the human race' (Exx 102). At the end of each day, Ignatius asks the retreatant to 'pass the senses over' each contemplation so as to become imbued with the sensibility of Jesus.

The matter for contemplation in these 'mysteries of the life of Christ' is simply and solely the love of Jesus. It is only that love—both of Jesus and of the Father—which can humanise and redeem. No suffering on its own, not even that of Jesus, can save us, because the Father did not, and never will, ask for that sort of tribute. But it is when love shows itself at its greatest and strongest, that endurance—as was shown visibly in the manner of Jesus' death—becomes capable of taking away for ever from suffering its power to terrify. Not without reason one can describe the effect that Ignatius is hoping to produce in this Third Week as an 'education of the senses and feelings'.

Consistent with this, Ignatius asks the retreatant, as he or she 'considers' such great love on the part of Jesus, to raise the question: 'what I myself ought to do and suffer for him' (Exx 197). Once the feelings have been educated by reason and by affection—both elements convinced and desirous to imitate Jesus—then sense-inspired fears can no longer dominate as before. At this stage it is not unusual for the retreatant 'to ask for grief with Christ in grief ... tears and interior suffering on account of the real suffering that Christ endured for me' (Exx 203). Now it has become clear that the transformation of one's sensibility is not due to any masochism or neurosis, but is simply out of love for him, and the desire to be identified with him.

In a very revealing move, it is at this moment of the Third Week that Ignatius presents the 'Rules for the future ordering of one's life as regards eating' (Exx 210–217). They complement the Election and are intended to help when the discernment of a desire is particularly difficult.<sup>15</sup> These Rules too are focused on the 'education of the sensibility'; their purpose is that the Election already made should be appropriated with greater stability and consistency. These Rules try to strengthen and maintain the retreatant's freedom by proposing that 'one should be in control of oneself, both in the manner of eating and in the quantity eaten' (Exx 216); to attain this, they suggest that,

While eating, one should imagine that one is seeing Christ our Lord at table with his apostles, and consider the way he eats and drinks, the way he looks about, the way he talks (Exx 214).

The first call to the following of the King had already included an imitation appealing to the senses: 'all who wish to come with me must be content with the same food as I have, the same drink, the same clothing



The Supper at Emmaus, by Tintoretto

<sup>15</sup> For a more developed account of this aspect, see my 'Reglas "ordenarse en el comer"', in *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, 1553–1555.

etc.’ (Exx 93). Now Ignatius repeats even more strongly the call to imitate Jesus in the use of all our senses and feelings, so the retreatant can respond freely at every level: ‘and so one attains a more perfect harmony and order in the way one should behave and conduct oneself’ (Exx 214).

### ***The Fourth Week and Beyond: Looking Afresh***

Though the daily hours of prayer in the Fourth Week are reduced in number, the exercise of the five senses ‘on the three exercises of the day’ (Exx 226, 227) keeps its place in the evening. The Additions are also modified so that the message appropriate for the senses can be received, making use ‘of the light and the pleasures of the seasons’ (Exx 229), according to what the retreatant ‘thinks or conjectures’ might help him or her to feel joy in the Resurrection (Exx 229).

The Resurrected One, ‘who now appears and reveals himself so miraculously’ (Exx 223), confirms ‘in his office of consoler’ the closeness of God. He confirms too both the strength of love—consoling in ‘the way friends are accustomed to console one another’ (Exx 224)—and the meaning of suffering—when God only ‘seemed to go into hiding’ (Exx 223). The teaching given to the retreatant’s sensibility is thus complete.

From this moment the fresh gaze granted to the retreatant enables that person to ‘find God in all things’ (Exx 236). This new sensitivity allows the person to perceive how God reaches down to us, to look at how God ‘works’, to listen to God’s silent calls, to relish the effort of working along with God for a more human world, to embrace whomsoever God sends to us, to embrace the continuous gifts God makes to us.<sup>16</sup> This new perception of reality is included in what Jerónimo Nadal, one of the first Jesuits, called being ‘a contemplative in action’.

However, this new way of seeing is only possible when the change that has taken place in the retreatant has reached down and transformed the retreatant’s sensibility.<sup>17</sup> It is not enough to know the path; we have to feel it and relish it, emotionally and even viscerally, with grateful affection coupled to a sensibility that has been educated by that affection. Until this new sensibility begins to come into play, our following of Jesus, which is at once ascetical and mystical, lacks solidity.

<sup>16</sup> González Buelta, ‘*Ver o perecer*’, 85; see also his article, ‘Dios trabaja’, *Manresa*, 79 (2007), 213–225.

<sup>17</sup> González Buelta, ‘*Ver o perecer*’, 114, 186.

The deepest levels of the personality, the very foundations—the sensibility—have to be involved in the choice that has been made.

All too frequently the question is asked: why have the Exercises not changed us? The reply is disconcerting, but obvious. The Exercises do not really change us if our decision to follow Jesus has not gone deeper than our understanding and our desire, if our senses and have not taken on board the message of identification with Jesus in following him, if our ways of feeling have not been really worked upon. If that is the case, it is hardly surprising that they fail to react as they should. Very often, it is in the senses and feelings that our self-love takes refuge, and from there it can counteract what reason and affection are trying vainly to tell it.

Later in life, Ignatius recalled his experience at the Cardoner, when he ‘began to see everything with new eyes’,<sup>18</sup> by describing it as the greatest gift given to him by God in all his life. For this reason he wanted to enable the retreatant to relive the same experience. That explains why he prepared not only for the Fourth Week, but also for later, another form of prayer ‘over the five bodily senses’ (Exx 247–248). If the ‘contemplative in action’ is the person who should look at all things ‘with the same eyes as those of Jesus or Our Lady’ (Exx 248), then that person should frequently practise looking, listening, savouring, relishing, and kissing as they would. And therefore, ‘whoever wishes to imitate them’ should first ‘commend themselves to them’ and think about how to imitate them ‘considering each sense’ (Exx 248).

Placed in the presence of Jesus or of Our Lady we have to focus the imagination so that it should, ‘carefully and without digressing’ (Exx 64), range over what the Evangelists tell us about the way Jesus, during his life, *looked* at the events and people in front of him. How did he react to success and failure, to praise and blame, to rest and to threats? Do the Evangelists note anything about the way he gazed at friends and enemies, at followers and opponents, at the sincere and the insincere, at the marginalised and the powerful, at the so-called ‘sinners’ and the respectable? What message could different people read in his eyes that were fixed on them? Was his gaze the same when he spoke peacefully to the crowds from a boat at the edge of the lake, and when on his final day he looked out in

***How did Jesus  
react to success  
and failure, to  
praise and blame?***

<sup>18</sup> The phrase comes in the account given by Laínez in a letter to Juan de Polanco (1547) of experiences that Ignatius had recounted to him; see MHSJ FN 1, 80.

suffering from the cross? And how was he looking at them as he spoke of the Father?

Similarly, consider how Jesus would *listen* to those whom nobody else had ever listened to. What would be the feelings of those who went away after speaking to Jesus at length about the sufferings of a sick relative? How could Jesus have found out about the call of Zacchaeus, who had said nothing from the branches of the tree into which he had climbed (Luke 19:2–4)? What did Jesus really hear from Peter when at the Last Supper he showed himself before everyone so confident and so sure of himself?

Consider also how Jesus *found relish* in life, despite the short space of time given him by the Father; how he was able to transmit to others the way to embrace and to caress. Consider the interest he aroused, the closeness of those around him, those who touched and were touched. His own certainly felt that his presence among them had been that of a heart full of mercy: ‘how he went about doing good’, as Peter summed him up (Acts 10:38).

Consider finally the *gentleness* of a personality without harsh edges, a Jesus devoid of self-love and also of paralyzing fears, both when he stood up to preach in the Temple and when he replied to the tribunal which had power to execute him. There are no traces of rancour towards the Pharisees because of their criticisms, nor to the Sadducees because of their quibbling. He is not hurt by the human weaknesses of Peter, or Philip, or of his close relatives (John 13:38; 14:9). His disciples heard him speak constantly of the Father and proclaim his Kingdom without any self-seeking (Luke 9:50).

We see that the sensibility of Jesus in his day-to-day way of living differs in many ways from our own. Ignatius had the insight to understand the educative power of this ‘prayer of the senses’ so that we may ‘find God in all things’ and ‘divest ourselves of self-love, self-will, and self-interest’ (Exx 189). Quite often, this exercise becomes the central petition of a praying person’s life. There is no other gift from God that can have such practical consequences in its ordinary effect. No other gift will be more transformative; and therefore no other prayer can be more central.

Pedro Arrupe (1907–1991), superior general of the Jesuits, lived out this petition right till the end of his life, and formulated it in a way that cannot be bettered:



Above all, give me that *sensus Christi* (1 Corinthians 2:16) about which St Paul speaks: that I may feel with your feelings, with the sentiments of your heart, which basically are love for your Father and love for humanity. ...

Teach me your way of relating to disciples, to sinners, to children, to Pharisees, Pilates and Herods ... teach me how you deal with your disciples ... How delicately you treat them on Lake Tiberias, even preparing breakfast for them! How you washed their feet!

May I learn from you and from your ways, as St Ignatius did: how to eat and drink; how to attend banquets; how to act when hungry or thirsty, when tired from the ministry, when in need of rest or sleep.

Teach me how to be compassionate to the suffering, to the poor, the blind, the lame and the lepers. ...

Teach me your way of looking at people: as you glanced at Peter after his denial, as you penetrated the heart of the rich young man and the hearts of your disciples. ...

We have to learn from you the secret of ... a close bond or union with God: in the more trivial, everyday actions, with that total dedication to loving the Father and all humanity. ...

Give me that grace, that *sensus Christi*, your very heartbeat, that I may live all my life, interiorly and exteriorly, proceeding and discerning with your spirit, exactly as you did during your mortal life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Pedro Arrupe, 'A Prayer to Jesus Christ Our Model: Conclusion to the Address "Our Way of Proceeding"' (1979), in *In Him Alone Is Our Hope*, edited by Jerome Aixelá (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984), 58–63; also in *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, 17 (1980), 719–722.