

# GIVING THE EXERCISES IN DAILY LIFE

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**W**E ARE NOT well-informed as to the practice of St Ignatius and the early Jesuits in giving the Spiritual Exercises according to the Nineteenth Annotation method. Moreover, the use of this method seems to have died out relatively soon after the death of Ignatius. Consequently principles and guidelines for giving the 'Exercises in daily life' are not immediately available. These must be worked out afresh. In doing so we must seek to increase our knowledge of how in different ways Ignatius and the early Jesuits gave the Spiritual Exercises; furthermore, we must look to our own experience in giving them; finally, we must remember that our daily experience is not an obstacle to union with God, but is itself an area in which God reveals himself to us and especially so when there is an interaction between a person's prayer and daily living. In section 73 of the Spiritual Exercises Ignatius introduces ten Additional Directions. The purpose of these, he writes, 'is to help one go through the Exercises better and find more readily what he requires'.<sup>1</sup> These Directions will be useful in the 'Exercises in daily life'. In fact, in the text of Annotation 19, Ignatius explicitly says they should be given. However, there is a need to see how these Additional Directions (and the other directions Ignatius gives in the course of the text of the Spiritual Exercises) are applied in the 'Exercises in daily life'. The few notes which follow may be seen as a plea for a Directory to help those who give the 'Exercises in daily life'. They are not exhaustive and any gaps will serve to emphasize the work still to be done. It is hoped that they are faithful to the spirit of Ignatius.

Making or giving the Spiritual Exercises 'in daily life' is clearly a major expenditure of time and money. Therefore special attention must be given to selection and acceptance of candidates and to their preparation. If the director and the candidate live in the same environment, this should be of some help to the director in estimating the candidate's suitability for the retreat. The director will learn more about the candidate in spiritual conversations and discussions

about the candidate's life, work and prayer. The important point about the preparation period is that it should happen. When Ignatius gave the Spiritual Exercises to his first companions in Paris, much care had gone into their selection and preparation; four years in the case of Peter Favre. During this period the director must estimate if the candidate will be capable of a serious amount of regular prayer. If the person cannot manage this, but is nevertheless seeking for a certain degree of peace of mind, the director will propose Exercises more along the lines of Annotation 18. At this stage the director may become aware that for various reasons the candidate is of such a disposition that even a lengthy enclosed retreat would not satisfy his or her needs, because the candidate's whole interest is directed to seeking a deeper integration of life and prayer in the midst of daily living; such a person will want to check progress as life proceeds.

There is no need to propose a time schedule for the preparation period. At some stage this period will give way to the retreat itself. In the Spiritual Exercises one passes from stage to stage, from week to week. When the First Principle and Foundation begins to bite, then we can say that the 'Exercises in daily life' have begun. It is highly likely that in some way the First Principle and Foundation will deeply affect the retreatant. Reflecting on the vocation to praise, reverence and serve God, he may be fired with enthusiasm and generosity, or, pondering the serious demands of indifference, he may clearly realize what this could mean in practice. Something like a 'gear-change' will awaken director and retreatant to the fact that they have passed beyond the preparatory period and into the Spiritual Exercises themselves.

During the preparatory period the director must try to estimate if it is possible for the exercitant to proceed with the retreat; he must be open to the possibility that at some stage, and especially in the earlier part of the retreat, it might be best to go no further, at least for the time being. After the First Week, for example, the retreatant may feel that he or she has achieved a certain amount of order and peace of soul, but that for various reasons is unable at the moment to make the generous commitment to Christ which the Kingdom exercise calls for. Clearly it would be best not to go further, at least for the time being. Stopping may require courage, but it is wise to be gentle and firm rather than foolishly indulgent. However, a director must remember that in such a situation a certain amount of after-care may be necessary.

The director and the retreatant must work out together what, in the context of the retreatant's life, serious and regular prayer means. In doing so they will remember what Ignatius advises and what the serious demands of the Spiritual Exercises require; they will also pay special attention to what is possible within the context of the retreatant's daily life. Ignatius, of course, laid great stress on the hour's prayer and it is reasonable to expect this should be the normal, though not exclusive, practice in the 'Exercises in daily life'. With encouragement and gentle leading many people can manage an hour's prayer in the context of the 'Exercises in daily life'. However, it would be wise for the director to introduce this gradually, not confronting the retreatant with it but working towards it. He must always insist that the Spiritual Exercises require regular and serious prayer.

With regard to the period of prayer, the Additional Directions (Exx 75 and 76) will find easy application in the 'Exercises in daily life'. So too will Additional Direction (77) which deals with the review of prayer. After prayer it will be useful for the retreatant to write down experiences of consolation and desolation, as it may be some time before the next meeting with the director. Likewise in the 'Exercises in daily life' there will be need for preparation of the material before each period of prayer. It may be some time since the retreatant has seen the director, and so it will be necessary to recall the points given. Again some people may not be well acquainted with the scriptural passages given and will need time to familiarize themselves with them. In some cases the need for lengthy preparation and reflection on scripture may result in the following pattern: one day preparation of the material, the next day prayer and reflection on the period of prayer; this pattern continuing throughout the Exercises. However, the rhythm of preparation, prayer and reflection should, I think, be insisted upon.

In the text of the Nineteenth Annotation Ignatius introduces the General and Particular Examinations of Conscience. The retreatant in the 'Exercises in daily life' will find the practice of examen useful both in time of retreat and after the retreat for reflecting on his life before God. Consequently a reasonable daily schedule for such a retreatant would be the following: some preparation for prayer, a regular and serious period of prayer (possibly one hour) with reflection on the period of prayer, and an examination of conscience (or consciousness examen) at the end of the day.

In the enclosed retreat of thirty days the retreatant follows the

'ignatian day', five periods of prayer within twenty-four hours. The first exercise is made at midnight, the second at daybreak; during the day there are two repetitions and finally the Application of the Senses before supper. Clearly there is powerful pedagogy at work here. In the first and second exercises similar though different material is presented; for example, the first and second exercises of the first day of the Second Week are the Incarnation and the Nativity. The third and fourth periods of prayer are devoted to repetitions on the important points which have emerged from the earlier periods of prayer, the points in which the retreatant has experienced understanding, consolation and desolation. Finally in the quiet of the evening, in the fifth period of prayer, Ignatius invites the retreatant to contemplate the material yet again by applying to it his five senses. Repetitions are clearly part of the ignatian pedagogy. Though in the text of the Nineteenth Annotation Ignatius does not envisage the two repetitions (though he does mention the Application of the Senses), nevertheless in the 'Exercises in daily life' there seems to be no reason why we should not try as far as possible to follow the dynamic of the ignatian day. The following scheme might be considered: Monday, interview with the director; Tuesday to Saturday, five days for the five exercises; Sunday, a free day. It would be a mistake to suggest that such a scheme should be followed rigidly. It is merely offered to show the possibility of thinking in terms of the ignatian day.

From time to time in the 'Exercises in daily life' it is inevitable that any regular pattern will be broken. This should not be seen as a disaster but as something which is intrinsic to such a retreat. Holidays, Christmas, pressure of work, illness, family commitments — these are all part of daily life. From time to time they will interrupt the regular pattern of the retreat. In such circumstances director and retreatant must learn to cope; there may be need for a holding operation. However, the important point is that such circumstances should be seen as normal and should not ruin a retreat in daily life.

In the enclosed retreat of thirty days the retreatant may well see the director every day. In the 'Exercises in daily life' it is unlikely that a daily or frequent visit will be possible. As a principle a weekly meeting would seem reasonable. Director and retreatant should prepare well for each meeting. The meeting should not be hurried, nor dominated by a deadline. Director and retreatant should be able to give their full attention to the material in hand without interruptions or disturbances. In a retreat house, should the need arise, the

director can always visit the retreatant later in the day. In the 'Exercises in daily life' this may well be impossible. Following the example of Ignatius the director may visit the retreatant at home. If for various reasons (for example human prudence, the busy schedule of the director, etc.) this is not possible on a regular basis, it will be useful at least occasionally. In this way the director will come face to face with some of the circumstances and problems the retreatant has to cope with daily. In view of the length of time the retreatant in the 'Exercises in daily life' is left alone, there is an added incentive for the director to help the retreatant develop spiritual discernment, that is, to help the retreatant understand and cope with what is happening within himself once the retreat has started. Not only must the retreatant be able to judge that his prayer is regular and serious, but also, with a heightened fidelity to God, he must expect himself to become more critical of his own conduct with respect to the people and obligations that make up his daily life. He must be ready to recognize, both in prayer and in the events of daily life, not only God's gentle and liberating call to conversion, but also within himself powerful forces pulling him towards a more wilful selfishness. He must come to understand the spiritual experiences of consolation and desolation and be able to distinguish them from natural well-being and depression.

Above all the director must be sensitive to, and teach the retreatant to be sensitive to, the interaction between the retreatant's prayer and daily life, between his understanding of the Spiritual Exercises in prayer and his integration of their demands in his life. Clearly this integration must take place as the retreat progresses. To wait until the end of the retreat would be to reduce the 'Exercises in daily life' to a purely intellectual exercise. As the retreat gets under way, the retreatant will become more aware of what fidelity to God requires. This must produce a positive response not only in prayer but also in action. Consequently the 'Exercises in daily life' can be seen as progressing through stages, the retreatant moving on as his prayer at each stage becomes integrated into his daily life. It is not so much that there is a programme to be followed, but that, as the retreatant recognizes and responds as best he can to the challenges God puts before him, so progress is made in the retreat.

Throughout the 'Exercises in daily life' it is this interaction between prayer and experience which director and retreatant must learn to recognize. The First Principle and Foundation focuses the retreatant's mind on certain basic christian themes. He is reminded

that God is his creator. Without doubt the retreatant will find material for prayer on this theme within the context of his own life, in his family, his work, the world of nature. Praying and reflecting on indifference, he may become acutely aware of changes that need to be made in his life. Such challenges cannot be put on one side, but will require prayer and decision. Likewise in the First Week, as he prays for shame, confusion and an intense sorrow for his sins, he will look for some evidence of this in the way he lives. As he reflects on mankind's sinfulness, he will become more aware of the power of evil at work in his own environment and culture and throughout the world. As he contemplates our Lord's Incarnation and public life and prays to be received under the standard of Christ, opportunities to be prompt and diligent to respond to Christ's call will present themselves. As he realizes that Satan leads a man to pride through tempting him to covet riches and seek honours, he will be aware should this pattern be reproduced in his own public, social or family life. The contemplation on the Incarnation is an invitation to avoid a narrow self-centredness, and to find a place within one's heart for all men and women, for black and white, for the healthy and the sick, for those at peace, for those at war. This may require the retreatant to question his prejudices and to revise his attitudes to people with whom he is in daily contact. Christ's way as outlined in the Two Standards is radically opposed to the worldliness which the retreatant will encounter daily. He is invited to pray for spiritual poverty and even actual poverty, should this be God's will for him. Furthermore, he is invited to pray to imitate Christ in suffering insults. Such prayers would be meaningless in a life of extravagance, and clearly invite the retreatant to take a hard look at his stewardship of created things. Furthermore, such prayers would be meaningless if he did not seek to carry his cross daily when upsets, sufferings and difficulties come his way. As a sign that he really does want to be poor with Christ poor, and to help him understand more what this means, it would be highly appropriate for the retreatant in daily life to have some experience of the life of the poor and oppressed.

The question of the election has raised some difficulties with regard to the 'Exercises in daily life', because, it seems, Ignatius required the retreatant to retire from daily cares and acquaintances when a decision had to be made about an important matter, such as a choice of a state of life.<sup>2</sup> Possibly the thirty day enclosed retreat is more appropriate for someone about to enter religious life. On the

other hand it would seem reasonable for persons contemplating marriage or any major change in their way of life to make the Exercises while keeping contact with the people or circumstances concerned with the decision. Ignatius also envisages that there will be many retreatants who neither need nor want to make a radical change in their way of life. There may, however, be need for reform or improvements. Ignatius has a special section dealing with such a reformation of life.<sup>3</sup> It refers not so much to their need for repentance and forgiveness, as was dealt with in the First Week, but rather to their need to harmonize their lives in various ways more closely with the gospel of Christ. As in the course of the Second Week they pray for a deep-felt knowledge of Christ and contemplate the life of Jesus, they come to love the Lord more and want to follow him more closely every day. It would be wise to allow time for this interaction between prayer and experience, time to put the reformation into practice. In addition to a radical decision about one's way of life and the reformation of life, there are many people who will find in the Exercises the strength to carry their cross. When this cross is hard and irremovable, acceptance of it in the following of Christ amounts to an important decision about one's way of life; for example, someone who is permanently disabled, someone who has experienced a bereavement, someone who must live through a difficult marriage situation. For such people uniting their agony with Christ in agony in the garden of Gethsemane and their suffering with Christ suffering on Calvary in the prayer of the Third Week will give a positive direction to their lives. There have been times when in practice almost the only people making the Exercises were religious and it is not too surprising that they made the Election in an enclosed situation. It may be that with more experience of the 'Exercises in daily life' we will be able to point more precisely to areas in which retreatants doing the Exercises in this way make valuable elections.

The Third and Fourth Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises deepen the retreatant's union with Christ. It is likely that by this time the retreatant will have a clearer idea of what living the christian life will mean for him in practice. However, there is no need to rush to the end of the retreat. The decision and direction the retreatant has taken may well have been achieved with effort and struggle. The prayer of union will strengthen the retreatant for the way ahead.

In view of the intensity of the experience of a thirty day enclosed retreat, perhaps it is wise that a time limit is stipulated. However, in

the 'Exercises in daily life' the end will come when the retreatant and director realize that the time for 'exercises' is past. During the retreat the waters will have been stirred. By the end of the retreat there will be a certain calmness because the retreatant has found union with God and because, as Ignatius says in the First Annotation, the retreatant has found the will of God in the disposition of his life for the salvation of his soul.

No Directory of the 'Exercises in daily life' would be complete or of much value unless it encouraged those trained in ignatian spirituality to share with others what they received. The spirit of Ignatius is not fully represented simply by our giving the Spiritual Exercises according to the strict method and pedagogy of Ignatius. We need also his pastoral vision and imagination. For example, until recently the work of giving the Spiritual Exercises has been identified almost entirely with the work of retreat houses (or with religious houses converted for a number of days into something like a retreat house). Retreat houses, of course, did not exist in Ignatius's day. He gave the Spiritual Exercises when and where he could. We need to imitate this versatility and to widen our understanding of the apostolate of the Exercises. That means we need to give the Spiritual Exercises where we are as the opportunities arise. We should ask ourselves how we can give the Spiritual Exercises to the people we live and work with. We must stop thinking that the Spiritual Exercises can be given only in retreat houses and that those who wish to make retreats should be channelled in that direction.

Ignatius gave the Spiritual Exercises as circumstances and conditions demanded.<sup>4</sup> In the spanish towns in which he lived after his conversion, Manresa, Barcelona, Alcalá, we see him giving the Spiritual Exercises to a variety of people. Sometimes he directed people individually, sometimes in groups. The tone was not that of the lecture or sermon, but rather of spiritual and familiar conversation. The content included the articles of the faith, the commandments, frequent confession and communion, sinfulness and repentance, methods of prayer, the examen; in short, material from the First Week designed to help a person lead a good christian life. For the most part these people were ordinary townspeople and Ignatius adapted himself to their needs. These were the people of the Eighteenth Annotation, the people who made it possible for Ignatius to write that Annotation, and, in adapting the Exercises to their spiritual needs, Ignatius was simply putting into practice the advice he gives. When he moved to the university of Paris, we see a change



in his practice of giving the Spiritual Exercises and in those to whom he gave them. Now his retreatants were university students (some his future companions) and influential men, bishops, theologians, even the rector of the university. Later in Rome and Venice he gave the Exercises to cardinals, ambassadors, politicians. To them for the most part he gave the Exercises according to the Nineteenth and Twentieth Annotations. Once again we see Ignatius sensitive to the needs of those he is dealing with. The important point to notice is that in these varied circumstances Ignatius could use the Spiritual Exercises to help different groups of people; pious citizens of Alcalá, students of the university of Paris, cardinals of Rome.

Should not the way we give the Spiritual Exercises today follow the example of Ignatius: that those trained in the Spiritual Exercises should give them to those with whom they live and work as opportunities arise? Such work (an addition, not a threat to the work of retreat houses) would involve work with individuals or groups according to the Eighteenth Annotation; it would involve offering the 'Exercises in daily life' according to the Nineteenth Annotation method; it would involve finding accommodation in one's own locality (perhaps a presbytery, vicarage, convent) where a person could make a thirty day retreat according to the Twentieth Annotation.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The text of the Spiritual Exercises used is that of Louis J. Puhl (Loyola University Press, Chicago).

<sup>2</sup> Cf *Conduis-moi sur le chemin d'éternité* by Gilles Cusson (Montreal, 1976), p 22.

<sup>3</sup> Exx 189.

<sup>4</sup> For this section cf Ignacio Iparraguirre: *Práctica de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio de Loyola en vida de su autor* (Bilbao/Rome, 1946), ch I.