

Returning to Jerusalem

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ONE OF MY FAVOURITE PLACES TO GET AWAY is the San Juan Islands of Washington State. The pastoral beauty blended with the luscious woods makes the Islands a rich place for retreat. An added bonus is that they are within reasonable distance of my home, a couple of hours in the car and then an hour's ferry ride. This spring my husband and I travelled to Orcas Island for the weekend, with our two young children left in the doting care of extended family. The weekend was a deep breath of air. It was the pure air of life that is fresh, full and abundant. To be in the focused and attentive presence of a beloved is a tremendous gift. It was a gift I carried back into the busyness and ordinariness of my everyday life. Though I pine for a quiet moment by still water and the intense awareness of being beloved, I know my life is to be lived in the fullness of my days amid family and community and not in the quiet pastoral life of Orcas Island.

To experience life intensely, whether with another held in the beauty of creation, in the dynamic of a retreat such as the Spiritual Exercises or in an experience of the life of Christ made palpable in our world, is a great gift. St Ignatius, in the final contemplation of the Exercises, the Contemplation for Attaining Love, speaks of how God not only gives gifts to us but also continues to labour in all gifts given. The gift received from my time with my beloved or another's experience of 'belovedness' made manifest in one's journey with the Exercises is a gift that the Spirit continues to dwell in and from which much is given. The gift holds the invitation to an ever richer and deeper life in God.

What continues to labour in me from my time is not the need to get back *there* but the urgent invitation to live more deeply and in greater unity with my beloved and with my God *here* in my everyday life. To celebrate resurrection, whether within the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises, in liturgy or through an experience of the Risen Christ made manifest in one's personal life, calls one forth into deeper life and a rising to a Spirit-filled life. It is less a call to a new path in life than it is a different way of being in life.

Many people experience difficulty shifting from the intense experience that has taken one out of the ordinary place back into everyday life. Life is not the same for one who has tasted the experience of God's

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rich grace. The scriptural account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus as found in the Gospel of St Luke can lend perspective to other pilgrims of faith making the transition back to the rhythm and commitments of daily life. The disciples' encounter with the Risen Christ highlights for modern-day pilgrims key elements requiring attention in one's own desire to re-engage life in the fullest possible way. There are several aspects of the story that can serve as guide posts: giving voice to one's experience; discovering that which nourishes and sustains; naming the fire that burns within; returning to Jerusalem, the place of everyday life.

Giving voice to one's experience

The disciples on the dusty road to Emmaus were stirred up by the experience of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. These disciples, these pilgrims of faith, were struggling to hold their hopes and longings up against the intensity of what they had lived as followers of Jesus, especially his death and reported resurrection. Jesus met them on their path of question, confusion and uncertainty. After nearly ten years of walking with retreatants of the Spiritual Exercises in everyday life, I am increasingly aware that there resides in the community of the faithful a greater sense of how to be with dying than with rising. There are volumes written on stages of dying. But the movement of an experience of and beyond resurrection is better discovered deep in one's bones than from books. Like the disciples who were slow to understand, many who are coming to know resurrection need a companion with whom they can give voice to their experience and receive assistance in connecting their stories with the larger story of faith. Jesus walked with the disciples and asked probing questions. A spiritual director shares in this role with Jesus. It is important in the final days of an Ignatian retreat (or after any significant experience of faith) to ask, 'What happened?' Ignatius gives the instruction: 'The retreatant ought to note and dwell reflectively on the principal places where he or she has experienced interior movements and personal relish'.¹ His note is offered within the final contemplation but can be offered in light of the whole of one's experience of the Exercises. Often in the remembering and retelling, the graces and gifts given become more apparent. As one is invited to do throughout the Exercises, one places oneself reverently before the Creator to notice and dwell on what God would have one notice.

Jesus listened to the disciples' story and then named the story of God that ran under and through their story and their history in faith. They were so close to their own story they could not see the fullness of it.

With the intensity of a retreat or any experience of the Risen Christ the same can be said of one today. There is such immediacy that the fullness or depth of the experience is missed. A spiritual director has an important role to offer at this time. A director can put forth a few simple but probing questions:

What were your hopes in entering into the retreat? How have these hopes been realized?

What essential graces have you received during these days?

For what are you most grateful?

How has this experience impacted? How do you see your story of life . . . of faith?

By the Fourth Week of the Exercises, retreatants are often weary and may at this point lose a sense of movement in their prayer. A director can reflect back his or her experience of what has been seen and heard in the story of the retreatant as it has unfolded in the retreat. The director interprets with the retreatant the graces and gifts received, encouraging her to see more clearly what has taken root in her life of faith.

The Contemplation for Attaining Love is a prayer that involves deepening one's awareness and appreciation of all the gifts God has given. It can be offered in the final days of the retreat or given as a transitional prayer as one moves out of the Exercises. It is a prayer for all those who seek to move from an immersion in awareness of God's life-giving and abundant love into the realities and activities of everyday life. Something has happened in the graced time of a retreat or in an experience of spiritual awakening, and to root this 'happening' in one's life requires grateful acknowledgement.

Discovering that which nourishes and sustains

The disciples urged Jesus to stay with them and while he was with them he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. They urged him to stay with them and in the breaking of the bread he gave them a sign of his abiding presence. Throughout the Exercises a retreatant prays for *id quod volo*, 'that which I desire'. The *id quod volo* remains operative even as one moves into daily life for it is as much a life question as it is a disposition in the context of a retreat. What will one need to seek out and remain faithful to, in order to have true and abundant life in the continuation of the journey? What

will nourish and sustain one's relationship with Jesus and his call to mission?

For many the life of the Church will be a significant source of nourishment in word and sacrament. A director might ask a retreatant to imagine how she desires to connect with her community of faith in new or deeper ways. It is helpful to explore what one's prayer both communal and personal might look like – how will this take shape in practice in the reality of one's everyday life and responsibilities? One needs to recognize that the intensity and concentration on prayer experienced in the Exercises is often different from that which is possible in daily life.

The Exercises recommend that a retreatant begin the practice of reflecting about God's presence or absence in the events of one's daily life. Ignatius' own encouragement to his companions was to continue the faithful practice of the Examen. There are a number of ways of praying the Examen that might easily be part of one's day. In prayer around the evening table, each person might be asked to name what he or she is most grateful for as well as what he or she is least grateful for in his or her day. An individual might take fifteen minutes at the end of the day to spend time with Jesus:

Jesus

You have been present with me
in my life today.

Be near, now.

Let us look together at my day.
Let me see through your loving
eyes . . .

When did I listen to your voice
today?

When did I resist listening to you
today?

In this present moment, what is
my body-emotion climate?

Jesus,

everything is gift from you.
I give you thanks and praise
for the gifts of this day . . .

and I ask healing in . . .

Jesus,
continue to be present with me
In my life each day.²

The Examen can remain a central exercise for one desiring to maintain a mindfulness of God in all things. It is a practice to assist one in discovering what continues to bring life and sustain oneself.

There are a number of resources that might be handed on to persons moving out of the Exercises and moving forward on the journey.³ The experience of the Exercises brings about a more mature relationship with the Spirit. Sources of enrichment for spiritual and intellectual stimulation will aid those committed to continuing to foster an adult Christian life. A director who has accompanied another in the Exercises likely has the best sense of what one or two resources might be of encouragement and support to a particular retreatant. Companionship is the desire of most on the pilgrim's journey. This desire may be met by pursuing a spiritual direction relationship, participating in a Christian Life Community⁴ or linking with a prayer or Scripture study group within one's parish or congregation. For those who are unaware of how or where to turn for ongoing spiritual direction, specific recommendations as to where and how one might explore this option will assist the transition to a new relationship.

Of all the resources and supports offered, perhaps the greatest is the reminder given in the Danish proverb, 'Even crumbs are bread'. Through a retreat or time of spiritual awakening one has experienced a feast in whose shadow the ordinary life can feel like crumbs. Yet much of our nourishment comes in daily actions: small acts of kindness, lifting our hearts and minds to God through the day, pausing and listening to ourselves and others more deeply, practising forgiveness. As we choose daily to be bread and receive bread in the hundreds of thousands of little ways, we begin to trust that even our crumbs will be enough. Mother Teresa wisely advised her community, 'Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies'.

Naming the fire that burns within

With the realization that it was the Risen Jesus they had encountered, the disciples were able to name the reality of the fire that burned within them. This is God's fire and it is ignited in all who connect themselves to the life of Christ. The author of the sermon to the early Jewish-Christian community recognized this fire:

We have been given possession of an unshakeable kingdom. Let us therefore hold onto the grace that we have been given and use it to worship God in the way he finds acceptable, in reverence and fear. For our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:28–29)

Alan Jones in *Passion for pilgrimage* remarks that though there is no escape from the experience of fire in our lives, we have a choice between God's flames and those we create ourselves. He states that the alternative to God's fire is our burnout – personally and globally.⁵ The Exercises provide an opportunity to explore one's motivations and make oneself increasingly available to God's purifying fire. One of the challenges following the Exercises is to claim God's fire not merely as flames fanned that have been part of an intense but isolated experience but as a source of burning love for all times. At a recent closing retreat day of the Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life, those present were asked to respond to the question, 'How does the Spirit impel me to live out the graces and gifts I have received into the next part of the journey?' One woman responded, 'I have for years worked on loving who I am and what I do. Now I want to be Who I love.' This parallels the words of Pedro Arrupe, former General of the Society of Jesus:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than
falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything.

It will decide
what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read, who you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything.

Our loving determines how we live out each day. Claiming God's fire is letting our lives be consumed and motivated by love, compassion and justice in the face of many opportunities to be consumed with a fire fuelled by power, pride, hatred and greed.

The Fourth Week of the Exercises does not include any contemplations on the events of Pentecost, yet an awareness of and greater

availability to the gift of the Spirit, God's fire, is part of each dynamic of the Exercises.⁶ The awareness of that great gift given orientates the retreatant as she moves back into daily life. Ultimately, one is invited to respond to God's passion with passion. Present-day disciples of Jesus, by their engaged and burning love, offer to God a 'yes' while they are finding God in all that is part of their ordinary lives.⁷ It is worth asking oneself at the end of the Exercises and throughout one's faith journey, 'What is the fire that burns within me? How does the Spirit impel me forward on the journey?'

Returning to Jerusalem

Upon recognizing the fire they felt burning within, the disciples set out immediately to return to Jerusalem. In their travel to Emmaus they had headed away from the place of their own powerful religious and spiritual experience. As they encountered Jesus and were offered companionship and bread, they knew in their hearts the power of God's fire in their lives. Encouraged, they returned to their community grounded again in the invitation Jesus' life had given them. They returned marked by Christ's apostolic joy to the place from which they started.

One is called back to the place where one started, invited to see in new ways how life is to be lived. There can be the temptation to try to fit one's life over the top of this more mature experience of faith rather than letting one's joy in faith move up through one's living into each day. Ignatius' words to retreatants before beginning the Exercises seem equally fitting at the end of the Fourth Week: 'It is very helpful for him who is receiving the Exercises to enter them with great courage and generosity towards his Creator.'⁸ Courage and generosity are qualities to be sought in the life of any follower of Jesus. Ignatius acknowledges in his autobiography that he heard within himself a voice that challenged his ability to sustain a life of discipleship for many years. This voice of discouragement followed a period of great interior joy while he was at Manresa. Ignatius made it a life practice to listen intently and discern the true nature of the spirit of such voices of temptation that came as distractions in his deepening intimacy with God. One can expect in one's own life to face similar temptations and times of discouragement after sharing in the experience of Christ risen. An intense experience can open one to spirits that are of God as well as to spirits that are not. Discernment is an essential dynamic of the Exercises and significant as one seeks to weave one's prayer with a life of action.

The disciples were offered the joy and peace of the Risen Christ and it aroused in them new energies. These energies ebbed and flowed as they sought to share the good news given them by God in Christ. The letters in Scripture were written to the early Christian community to engender courage, generosity and love. Where better to direct one who desires to live in the spirit of resurrection than to the stories of those who were first in a long line of Easter people? St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians offers words to a people struggling to remain faithful: 'Be awake to all dangers, stay firm in the faith; be brave and be strong. Let everything you do be done in love' (1 Cor 16:13–14). St Peter draws attention to one's availability to love: 'Above all, never let your love for each other grow insincere, since love covers over many a sin. Welcome each other into your houses without grumbling' (1 Pet 4:8–9). A director might offer specific passages of Scripture or simply invite a person to read through one or more of the epistles and dwell on what speaks most to one's heart and condition.

The return to one's own Jerusalem is a turning *to* something more than a turning *back*. In returning to Jerusalem the disciples discover the life that wanted to be lived in and through them.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁹

The good work begun will continue

My renewing weekend on Orcas Island feels long ago now. I needed renewal and I will need it again, but my life with family and community is where I really live. Returning to 'reality' after the Exercises or any powerful experience of the Risen Christ is the next movement. The American Heritage dictionary defines reality as 'the condition or quality of being real or true; actual existence'. Does it make any difference that I make an annual retreat or go on weekends away with my husband? Will one's experience of the Exercises make any difference to one's reality . . . in that real place where one dwells and among the real people with whom one shares life? Our families, communities and our world need the answer to be 'yes'.

There is challenge and hope to be carried forward on the journey. The note that begins the Contemplation to Attain Love can be offered as encouragement and challenge in the movement back to reality: first, it is well to remark two things; the first is that love ought to be put more in

deeds than in words. The second, love consists in the interchange between two parties.¹⁰ The fruits of the Exercises and all spiritual experience are made known in the living out.

I want to know if you can be with joy, mine and your own. If you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful, be realistic, or to remember the limitations of being human.

It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have. I want to know if you can get up after a night of grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done for the children.

It doesn't interest me who you are, how you came to be here, I want to know if you will stand in the center of the fire with me and not shrink back.¹¹

Something happened on the road to Emmaus, something happened in one's experience of the resurrection and the final question is 'Does it make any difference?' One's ability to deeply live joy and suffering, to live a responsive love in relationship to our brothers and sisters of the earth, and to remain in union with God's purifying fire will testify to the power of one's 'yes' in response to this question. As one is sent with the challenge to live in response to the graces given, it is with confidence that one is capable of this 'yes':

I thank my God whenever I think of you; and every time I pray for all of you, I pray with joy, remembering how you have helped to spread the Good News from the day you first heard it up to the present. I am quite certain that the One who began this good work in you will see it finished when the Day of Christ Jesus comes. (Phil 1:3-6)

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NOTES

1 Exx 227.

2 This is a form of the Examen adapted for use by the Spiritual Exercises in everyday life. It is entitled 'A daily check-in with Jesus'. Another simple but rich form of the Examen can be found in *Sleeping with bread: holding what gives you life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995). This book is an excellent resource for those who desire to pray the Examen on a regular basis whether alone, as a couple, family or small group.

3 Suggested books as a follow-up to an Ignatian retreat experience include: Thomas Hart, *Coming down the mountain: how to turn your retreat into everyday living* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986); L. Patrick Carroll SJ, *Where God may be found* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994); *Hearts on fire: praying with Jesuits*, ed Michael Harter SJ (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1993); Jacqueline Bergan and S. Marie Schwan, *Take and Receive* series (Winona: Saint Mary's Press, 1985). I would also recommend Ronald Rolheiser, *The holy longing* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) and Parker Palmer, *Let your life speak: listening for the voice of vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 2000).

4 Christian Life Community is a world community of Christian lay women and men who seek to be Christ in the world. It seeks to assist its members to discern through the charism of Ignatian spirituality how each feels called to be Christ for others in daily life. For more information on CLC, link with www.clc.usa.org (June 2000).

5 Alan Jones, *Passion for pilgrimage, notes for the journey home* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p 177.

6 John English SJ, *Spiritual freedom* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1995), pp 236–237.

7 Gilles Cusson SJ, *Biblical theology and the Spiritual Exercises* (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), pp 326–330.

8 Exx 5.

9 T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* from *The four quartets*.

10 Exx 230, 231.

11 Oriah House, *The invitation from Dreams of desire* (Toronto: Mountain Dreaming, 1995).