

Spiritual Exercises for Our Times

A Retreat for Racial Equity grounded in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius

CONTENTS

Introduction

Welcome and Overview: *Who am I?*

Week 1: Foundations: *How do I live?*

Week 2: Our shared story: *What story do I tell?*

Week 3: Recognizing God: *Who is God to me?*

Week 4: Following Jesus: *Who am I called to be?*

Week 5: Suffering & Death: *What breaks my heart?*

Week 6: New Life: *How do we go forward together?*

The Continuing Journey

Additional Resources

Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION

"I firmly believe in these uncertain times we need to invest more fully in one another...It is my persistent hope that sharing the fruit of our prayer will help us grow in trust of one another, and thereby help us grow as communities of discernment."

-Fr. Scott Santarosa, SJ, Jesuits West Provincial

In response to the call from Jesuits West Provincial, Fr. Scott Santarosa, SJ, a number of new initiatives were launched to deepen the practice of discernment across Jesuit ministries. This discernment process led to the formation of the Collaborative Organizing for Racial Equity (CORE). In the greater Los Angeles area several members of that discernment process developed a program that examined the key themes of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius through the lens of racial equity. From September 2020 until May 2021, participants met in online sessions for shared prayer, faith-sharing, and discernment for those connected with Jesuit ministries across the greater Los Angeles region. This booklet presents an abbreviated version of that original program in a six-week format. We hope these materials are helpful to you and your community.

WEEK I: WELCOME AND OVERVIEW: *Who am I?*

Five hundred years ago, Ignatius of Loyola was hit by a cannonball during a battle in Pamplona, Spain. That great disruption in his life led to a period of discernment that changed his view on the world and the course of his life. In our times the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a collective disruption in many areas of life. It marks a moment of potential change in views and actions. We hope that this booklet provides a framework for reflection that is helpful in this critical time as we work for racial equity.

The slow process of physical healing in the life of St. Ignatius was matched with a growing depth of spiritual insight that he eventually set down in his *Spiritual Exercises*. These writings serve as a record and guide to the lessons he learned through intensive prayer and personal reflection.

The “spiritual exercises” we offer here follow the pattern he set out. They are a collection of various forms of prayer, meditation, and reflection directed toward a deeper relationship with ourselves, others, and God.

As we follow the path of St. Ignatius, we will be invited to walk with God in a searching examination of our life and our world. We encourage you to enter this retreat experience with an open mind, great courage and generosity, and a prayerful spirit.

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Grace for the Week

In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius the person making the retreat is encouraged to set the intention for your prayer by asking for specific graces. Each week we invite you to follow this practice and provide suggestions for graces related to the prayer materials for that week.

- I begin my prayer this week by asking for the grace of an open mind and heart so that I can see my life with new eyes.

Resources for Prayer

In the weeks of the retreat, daily prayer resources will be provided. For this introduction a few key materials and activities are offered for your use. Please use them as a starting point for prayer and reflection this week as we enter into the retreat.

- I AM FROM [poem](#) & [template](#) provides a creative way to consider our identity and personal history.
- “Do not fear, for I am with you.” [Isaiah 43:1-7](#).
- “[Reflecting on Our Call to This Work](#)” from the Collaborative Organizing for Racial Equity (CORE) Toolkit describes the inspiration for this work.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Each week will have several questions based on the prayer materials and the theme of the week. Please use them to the extent that they are helpful to you.

- Where am I from? What are the sights, sounds, smells, and experiences that have shaped me?
- Who is God to me? Who am I to God?
- What drew me to participate in this retreat? How do I feel “called” to the work for racial equity? Have I ever witnessed or experienced racial injustice?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS...

Please take some time to record a few brief notes on your prayer. These can be as simple as a word, image, or quote. These notes will be useful in sharing with your small group and noticing the patterns that develop in your prayer during this retreat.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS...

Isaiah 43:1-7

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
I will say to the north, "Give them up,"
and to the south, "Do not withhold;
bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth—
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

WEEK 2: FOUNDATIONS: *How do I live?*

“Love is shown more in deeds than in words.” -St Ignatius

How do our actions reflect our stated values and beliefs? Who we are is a function of what we do. Consultants often point out that there is no quicker way to see what an organization values than to look at its budget. So too, what we value is shown in how we spend our time and money. This week we look at those priorities in our life.

At the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*, before any of the set meditations, St. Ignatius presents a “Principle & Foundation.” This is a framework and outlook that grounds all of the exercises that come after it. We will read and pray with several translations of this Principle & Foundation as a way to enter into the fullness of the vision it presents.

At heart the Principle & Foundation challenges us to know we are loved by God and yet bound by attachments that limit our freedom and love. This dynamic is central in our work for racial equity today. Racial injustice, including individual bias and systematic discrimination, are such distorted attachments that show our lack of freedom and our limited love. Recognizing these places where we lack freedom as individuals and as a society is the foundational step.

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Grace for the Week: I ask for the grace to experience God’s love, acknowledge the gifts that God has given me, and recognize the places where I have a lack of freedom.

Daily Resources

Day 1: Pray again with [Isaiah 43:1-7](#)

Day 2” “Where can I run from your love?” [Psalm 139](#)

Day 3: [Gratitude: The Short Film](#)

Days 4 & 5: [First Principle and Foundation Translations](#)

Day 6: [Discernment and Anti-Racism](#)

Day 7: [Repetition in Prayer](#)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *Love & Gratitude: Where in my life do I feel loved? What am I grateful for? How do I share that love and gratitude?*
- *What are the messages, ideas, principles that I have received over the course of my life that inform who I am today? How have they influenced the way I understand the reality of racial injustice?*
- *Are there experiences, feelings, or images that surprise you as you review your day in prayer?*

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS...

FIRST PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION
of St. Ignatius Loyola
Paraphrased by Jacqueline Bergan and Sr. Marie Schwan

Lord, my God
When your love spilled over into creation
You thought of me.
I am from Love, of Love, for Love.

Let my heart, O God,
always
recognize,
cherish
and enjoy
Your goodness in all of creation.

Direct all that is me toward your praise.
Teach me reverence for every person, all things.
Energize me in your service.

Lord God,
may nothing ever distract me from your love. Neither
health nor sickness,
wealth nor poverty
honor nor dishonor
long life or short life.

May I never seek, nor choose to be
Other than you intend or wish.

WEEK 3: OUR SHARED STORY: *What story do I tell?*

This week we begin by reflecting on the goodness of God's infinite love woven throughout creation. As a way to deepen in that love, we invite you to spend time recalling moments when you felt cared for and close to God.

Dwelling in those experiences can also lead us to recognize the incompleteness of the stories we tell about our world, our nation, and our own lives. In preparation for our session next week, we encourage you to spend time reflecting on your spiritual foundations and how you honor God's creation.

To help in this focus, we encourage you to pray with the narratives of creation found in Genesis and return to expressions of God's care, such as in Isaiah 43:1-7 and Psalm 139. We also ask you to watch a short video from the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture on the practice of honoring native land.

The review of our actions and priorities will also be guided by the practice of the Examen. The Examen is a form of prayer introduced in the preliminary notes of St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*. It provides a structured way to pray through the events and spiritual movements of our days.

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Grace for the Week: I ask for the grace to recognize the beauty of creation and the life-giving goodness of diversity.

Day 1: [A Midrash Creation Story](#)

Day 2: ["Honoring Native Land"](#)

Day 3: [Native Land: Territory Acknowledgement Tool](#)

Day 4: [Examen for Solidarity with All of Creation](#)

Day 5: [An Individual Racial Awareness Ignatian Examen](#)

Day 6: Pray with [An Examen for Racism](#)

Day 7: Repetition

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *How do you honor God's creation and the sacred in your life? What are ways that you could "honor native land"?*
- *In your prayer this week where are you finding God? What are the struggles and challenges that surface?*
- *As you pray with the Examen on Racial Awareness and Racism what do you notice? What are the areas of connection and what are the areas of resistance?*

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS...

Excerpt from [An Individual Racial Awareness Ignatian Examen \(for People of All Races\)](#) by Elaine Ireland

1. **Ask the Spirit for wisdom and help: “Lord, open my eyes and my heart and shine a light on this sensitive subject.”** Ask for the grace you need: “Lord, increase my awareness. Let me look at myself and others nonjudgmentally and with love.”
2. **Thank God: “For all gifts of my life: (list what you are thankful for).** Thank you Lord for the diversity of life—for the variety of plants and animals that add so much to the wonder and delight in our world, and for the diversity within the human species.
3. **Let your memory take over and see if you can recall instances from your life that stand out to you:** media reports, TV or movie portrayals, or especially personal experiences and interactions with those whose skin color or ethnicity is different from yours.... Remember, feelings and thoughts are neither positive nor negative; they just are. *Try not to judge or ruminate on actions or reactions.*
4. **Pick one thing that “speaks the loudest” to you from step 3.** It just might be the thing that makes you most uncomfortable. Try to make it a feeling rather than a thought, so that you can pray from your heart, not your head. Pray for the Spirit to again shine a light on your reflection: “What am I hearing?”
5. **Ask: “What am I to learn from my reflection? Is there anything I need to be more aware of, or change, or do as result of my prayer today? ...** Thank God again for the opportunity to heighten your awareness and ask for the grace you need to move forward, to be more aware and open.

WEEK 4: ENTERING THE STORY: *Who is God to me?*

This week we move from reflecting on “*where I am from*” to “*who is God.*” In the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius guides the retreatant to specific aspects of God’s action in the world.

St. Ignatius believed that developing our imagination helps us see more clearly the world and people around us. This is also a way to become aware of our blind spots and to expand the stories that we tell about ourselves and others.

We begin this week by praying with the way that Jesus leads us. It is a challenging call to action which emphasizes the urgency and importance of making a choice for justice. It is not enough to be on the sidelines. In a similar way, contemporary writers such as Ibram X. Kendi talk about the importance of being “antiracist” rather than “not racist.” We are called in both contexts to make a fundamental choice in who we are and how we act.

The resources this week also include a series of imaginative prayers with the stories of the Incarnation and the journey of the Holy Family which show the challenging circumstances and decisions that they faced. In the midst of uncertainty, the practices of Ignatian imagination can be a helpful tool for clarifying our vision of action in the world.

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Grace for the Week: I ask for the grace of a generous imagination to see God’s action and call in my life and in the world.

Day 1: [St. Ignatius and Serving the One True Ruler](#)

Day 2: [Racism is a sickness of the soul](#) (from 2017)

Day 3: [How to be an Antiracist](#)

Day 4: [A Look at the World We Live In](#)

Day 5: [The Holy Family Seeking Shelter](#)

Day 6: [Away in a Manger: A Complicated Birth](#)

Day 7: Repetition

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *What kind of leader is Jesus? How is he calling me to act?*
- *In what ways am I acting for justice in the world? In what ways am I “antiracist”? In what ways am I “not racist”?*
- *What might a modern-day nativity look like? What is it like to image the Holy Family as contemporary refugees? How would I welcome this refugee family?*

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS...

Prayer for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

God, no one is stranger to you
And no one is ever far from your loving care.
In your kindness watch over migrants,
refugees and asylum seekers,
Those separated from their loved ones,
Those who are lost
And those who have been exiled from their homes.
Bring them safely to the place where they long to be,
And help us always to show your kindness to strangers
And those in need.
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Who too was a refugee and migrant
Who travelled to another land
Searching for a home.

Amen

[SOURCE: Nouwen Network]
Accessed from Ignatian Solidarity Network,
[Prayers for Migrants, Refugees & Asylum Seekers](#)

WEEK 5: FOLLOWING JESUS: *Who am I called to be?*

In the midst of uncertainty, the practices of Ignatian discernment can be a helpful tool for our continuing reflection on our lives and our world. This week we encourage you to pay attention to the interior movements of consolation and desolation as we pray with scenes from Jesus' public ministry.

As we look at our life and how we are responding to the call of Jesus, we are challenged to follow Jesus into the difficult places of our lives. It is sometimes in the "desert" with Jesus that we find the strength to confront our own subconscious prejudices and wrestle with the ways that such perceptions have shaped our lives.

This is a process of reflecting on our choices and the world we are trying to create. Throughout these experiences St. Ignatius encourages us to pay attention to our interior movements. We encourage you to also continue to pay attention to the interior movements of consolation and desolation.

As you consider the Beatitudes, the response of the rich young man, and the poem of Amanda Gorman, notice the vision of what it means to be "blessed." Pay attention to the places where you are being drawn into that vision and the places of resistance or hesitation.

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Grace for the Week: I ask for the grace to recognize the places of desolation and consolation in my life.

Day 1: [Following Jesus into the Desert](#)

Day 2: [Examining Our Subconscious Perceptions](#)

Day 3: [The Problems with White Jesus](#)

Day 4: [Luke 6:20-26](#): The Beatitudes

Day 5: [Mark 10:17-31](#): Rich young man

Day 6: [The Hill We Climb](#)

Day 7: Repetition

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *In my prayers, how do I imagine Jesus?*
- *What experiences have I had of noticing subconscious perceptions and inner prejudices? How have these experiences impacted how I relate to others?*
- *How do I follow the example of Jesus? Is there anything in my life that holds me back from following Jesus more closely?*

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS...

Fall in Love

*Often attributed to
Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907–1991),
Written by Joseph Whelan, SJ*

Nothing is more practical than
finding God, 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, whom 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.

WEEK 6: SUFFERING & DEATH: *What breaks my heart?*

As we begin the fifth week of the retreat, it is a natural time to make commitments to deepen our practice of faith. In the context of our journey with the *Spiritual Exercises*, we return to the question of how we are responding to the example of Jesus.

Many Gospel stories, such as the Good Samaritan, remind us that *“in the face of the suffering of so many people destroyed by hunger, by violence and by injustices, we cannot remain spectators.”* – Pope Francis, [General Audience: On the Parable of the Good Samaritan](#).

As individuals we are also part of larger structures that contribute to these injustices, such as systemic racism. Our journey with Jesus can lead to some challenging places. In this part of the retreat, we walk with Jesus in the midst of suffering in his journey and in the world. In the Stations of the Cross we can find the ways that Jesus’s suffering and death resonates with injustices in our own society today.

“An innocent man is about to be killed, and the laws of the land will not protect him. A crowd has gathered – not to protest, but to cheer. Government leaders are indifferent, more concerned about politics than justice.” - [Stations of the Cross: Overcoming Racism](#) from the US Bishops Conference.

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Grace for the Week: I pray for a deeper understanding of the structures of racism in our contemporary world.

Day 1: [Luke 10:25-37](#): The Good Samaritan

Day 2: [What is Systemic Racism?](#)

Day 3: [John 13:1-17](#): Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet.

Day 4: [What real unity looks like](#)

Day 5: [Mark 14:12 - 15:47](#): The Passion

Day 6: [Stations of the Cross: Overcoming Racism](#)

Day 7: Repetition

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *How does the Good Samaritan parable apply to a situation in my life or in our world?*
- *Responding to the call of the U.S. Bishops to examine our own hearts and consciences: How can I break down racial divisions, intolerance, and discrimination?*
- *What Bible passages inspire me and guide my actions? How do they call me to be of service to others?*

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS...

Shake Us From Our Slumber

When our eyes do not see the gravity of racial justice,
Shake us from our slumber and open our eyes, O Lord.

When out of fear we are frozen into inaction,
Give us a spirit of bravery, O Lord.

When we try our best but say the wrong things,
Give us a spirit of humility, O Lord.

When the chaos of this dies down,
Give us a lasting spirit of solidarity, O Lord.

When it becomes easier to point fingers outwards,
Help us to examine our own hearts, O Lord.

God of truth, in your wisdom, Enlighten Us.
God of hope in your kindness, Heal Us.
Creator of All People, in your generosity, Guide Us.

Racism breaks your heart,
break our hearts for what breaks yours, O Lord.

Ever present God, you called us to be in relationship with one another and promised to dwell wherever two or three are gathered. In our community, we are many different people; we come from many different places, have many different cultures. Open our hearts that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith.

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

WEEK 7: NEW LIFE: *How do we go forward together?*

This week we begin the last part of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius as we spend time praying with the resurrection accounts. Like the disciples, we are challenged to recognize the resurrected Jesus and respond to the invitation to follow him.

The encounters with Jesus after the resurrection are filled with uncertainties and questions. Although the disciples have journeyed with Jesus throughout his ministry, they still struggle to understand the fullness of his mission. And it is only as the disciples spread the news of Jesus's resurrection that they understand the cost it involves.

As we reflect on our mission today, let us recall the commission that is given to the disciples as he sent them out "out into the world to reconcile the world." – *Bob Reiser, SJ, [Homily on the Feast of Pentecost](#)*.

Like Jesus showed the disciples on the road to Emmaus, this involves seeing with new eyes.

Let us see to see clearly the racial injustice in our world so that we can be strengthened in our commitment to work for racial equity.

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Grace for the Week: I pray for the grace of courage to live out the commitments I have made to work for racial equity.

Day 1: [The Risen Life](#): Greg Boyle

Day 2: [John 20:11-18](#); Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene

Day 3: [Easter Sunday: Surprise in Love](#)

Day 4: [Luke 24:13-35](#): Road to Emmaus

Day 5: [Homily on the Feast of Pentecost](#)

Day 6: [Contemplation to Attain the Love of God](#)

Day 7: Repetition

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *What do I notice when pray with these passages? How do I feel as I imagine meeting the resurrected Jesus?*
- *How do I show my love in "deed more than words"? How do I express my care for those in need? How is God inviting me to express my love?*
- *How is Jesus sending me out into the world? How am I called to work for healing and racial equity in our world today?*

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS...

Suscipe

St. Ignatius Loyola

Take, Lord, receive
all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding,
my entire will
- all that I have
and call my own.

You have given
all to me,
to you, Lord,
I return it.

Everything is yours,
do with it what you will.
Give me only your love
and your grace,
that is enough for me.

THE CONTINUING JOURNEY

In whatever form is helpful for you, please take time to review the events and experiences of these past weeks...

What were the areas of challenge and difficulty for me this past year? What were the areas of goodness or grace? What commitments do I want to make for the days, months, and years ahead?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ignatian Solidarity Network, [21-Day Racial Equity Challenge](#)

Ignatian Solidarity Network, [Responding to Racial Injustice](#)

Saint-Jean, Patrick, [The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice](#)

St. Ignatius Parish, [Discernment Series: Racial Justice](#)

The Jesuit Post, [Know Justice. Know Peace: A Jesuit Antiracism Retreat](#)

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