

Week Two

Isaiah 43:18-25
Psalm 41
2 Corinthians 1:18-22
Mark 2:1-12

Last week, I preached briefly on Week One of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. This week, we're going to look at Week Two. It is only natural that, as we look at Week Two, we will also be looking more at Week One and comparing the two of them. To begin this comparison, I want to share with you a brief Scripture story from the Gospel of Luke.¹ As I read these few sentences, I want you to think about how you're hearing them. What are they saying to you? What desire are they stirring up in you?

[Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

-Luke 4:16-19

How you and I hear Sacred Scripture can often tell us a lot about where we are at in our relationship with God. For example, a person who is in Week One of the Spiritual Exercises, will more than likely hear this passage from Luke and be drawn to how Jesus' words will benefit them. They will perceive themselves as one who is the either poor, captive, blind, or oppressed. They will hear Jesus' words as words of encouragement about the good things that are to come. Where is such a person's focus? On themselves. This is one of the characteristics of a person in Week One—he or she is still in need of healing and freedom. Therefore, the focus is usually on themselves and their needs and what Jesus might be able to do for them. This is not a bad thing—it is what it is. If that is where we're at, then we need to stay there with Christ until we find the healing that we, as well as He, desire.

People who are in Week Two of the Spiritual Exercises would, more than likely, hear the same Scripture passage with a slightly different focus. They would feel excitement about the opportunity to be *with* Jesus in such an exciting ministry. They would not think of themselves poor, captive, blind, or oppressed, but rather, as a disciple of Christ who would be sharing in the ministry to the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. In this way, people in Week Two have their focus more on Christ than on themselves. This is one of the fundamental shifts between Week One and Week Two.

As I mentioned last week, I think it's safe to say that there are many people who never move from Week One to Week Two. Many people struggle their whole life to move beyond the boundaries of their own woundedness. Other than brief periods of freedom, they stay locked in the prison of their own neediness and self-preoccupation. Once again, the key is not for them to pretend they are in Week Two, but rather, to stay in Week One, aware of their woundedness while desiring a new encounter with Christ's healing.

¹ This suggested reading comes from the book Letting God Come Close by William Barry, S.J.

As I pointed out last week, there is both a *disposition* and a *desire* for the person in Week One of the Exercises. The disposition is an awareness of his or her woundedness, brokenness, and sinfulness. The desire is to *encounter Christ's healing*. Similarly, there is a disposition and desire for Week Two of the Spiritual Exercises.

The disposition of Week Two is an awareness of what Christ has done for us. He is the one who has healed us, forgiven us, rescued us, and redeemed us! Our situation was absolutely hopeless—like that of the paralyzed man in today's Gospel reading. Yet, now it has changed because of Jesus. Such an awareness primes us for discipleship! It sets the stage for the desire that is inherent in Week Two.

According to Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the desire for Week Two is to gain “an interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely” (Spiritual Exercises, n. 104). In other words, we desire to know the Master more intimately so that we can be His disciple more faithfully. Christians who are this stage of their relationship with Christ will find themselves desiring to *know* Jesus better. They might experience a new zeal for meditating on Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels. They might also experience a new passion for being involved in a ministry or service. The Jesuit, William Barry, describes this desire in these words, “We want Jesus to reveal to us his values, his loves and hates, his dreams and hopes, and especially his hopes for our relationship with him and for our lives” (Letting God Come Close, p. 53).

So where do we go from here? In addition to simply making sure that our daily prayer reverences where we are really at in our relationship with Christ, we might also be led to take advantage of a wonderful resource on the internet, by Creighton University, called the “Online Retreat.” Since most of us cannot take a vacation from all of our responsibilities in order to do a 30-day Ignatian silent retreat, the Online Retreat has put the Spiritual Exercises into a magnificent 34-week format that can be done while a person continues other normal daily activities. The link to the retreat is:

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html>