

Inner Dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises

Thomas Rochford, SJ
21 March 2007 – Roma
[Spirit of Saragossa Seminar]

*"What do the Exercises aim to achieve and
what is the dynamic of the Exercises that reaches that aim?"*

PART I – the dynamics of the Exercises

slide/ paradigm

Ignatius and Chaminade each had foundational experiences that serve as the basis for the Jesuit and Marianist way of being religious. As paradigms they are something we go back to, they give us our roots.

At the same time, we do not simply replay their story, but must find out how that "ur" experience would play out today. So we are always doing some translation, if nothing else from their historic and cultural epoch to ours today.

Thus, Ignatius was born at the end of the medieval period in a remote valley in the Basque mountains. Later he entered the Renaissance with his graduate studies at the University of Paris, and then took part in rebuilding Rome as it came out of its medieval slumber. As a child he was proud of the three books his family owned, a sign of their wealth. Just before he died, he bought a printing press. What would he think about radio and television, or the internet, about a world in which China and India are becoming economic powers?

bottom line: we follow them closely, but not slavishly. We need to be faithful as we interpret their experience in light of our very different and yet similar experience.

slide/ retreat aim

Objective of SOS: "A 30 day, directed retreat experience, proximate to the profession of perpetual vows, meant to consolidate, confirm and to strengthen a Marianist life choice, my Marianist vocation."

The title of your retreat, "The Spirit of Saragossa," indicates that you are looking to the "ur" experience of your founder during his three years of exile in Spain.

CHAMINADE FROM MY PERSPECTIVE –

as I read this, I wondered how you would incorporate his experience as paradigm that speaks to the retreatants you are directing today.

I am rooted in Ignatius and have shaped by the Exercises that grew out of his experience. I will talk about them, always aware that the Marianist tradition is different, and hoping that what I say about my tradition can help you to see your own more clearly and understand what you can do.

slide/ Table of Contents – Ignatius as paradigm

his experiences as source of the SpEx

slide/ Pilgrim's path

image of Ignatius leaving the family home at Loyola

The first thing to understand about the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius is that they grow out of his own experience of intense struggle to find his way after a profound conversion experience.

Through his own prayer and his conversations with other people about their prayer, he developed an organized way to help other people go through the process that helped him so much.

so some things about Ignatius that help explain the dynamics of the SpEx

slide/ no title (image of royal thrones)

Family connections secured a place for him within the household of the Royal Treasurer. He hoped for a career in administration. Although he trained in arms, he was not a soldier (although several of his brothers were). He wanted to share in the wealth and prestige of court, to be honored like his patron and the other men of power he knew.

slide/ no title (portrait of King Ferdinand)

King Ferdinand was the real King Ignatius knew. He visited Arevalo where Ignatius lived as the court moved around the many royal residences. Ignatius loved court life, the wealth and luxury of items. At this time, the Spanish King was one of the most powerful men on earth.

But when Ferdinand died, the new king Charles V treated the widow in a way that Inigo's mentor could not accept and Charles quickly sacked the treasurer, sending him from court in disgrace. suddenly the year's of preparation came to naught and the door to a glamorous future slammed shut. disappointment of Inigo's hopes to serve the King of Castile in the conventional way

slide/ Pamplona

the lasting sense of personal loyalty, transferred to a second human leader, the Duke of Najera: this loyalty led him to be wounded in a militarily foolish but extremely honorable defense of Pamplona against the French artillery

slide/ no title (Iñigo in bed at Loyola, reading a book)

the back and forth temptations that he experienced during his convalescence as he read lives of the saints and tales of knights: gradually came to distinguish different spirits moving him as he thought one way or the other

slide/ no title (Iñigo in bed at Loyola, St. Peter appears to him)

Iñigo discovered a great sense of peace that came through prayer. he became more interested in the lives of saints than he was about daydreaming of great honors at court.

See this as key experience behind the Exercises: coming to be able to identify the moods and emotions that you experience and recognize which are from God and lead you to God, and which are from the Evil One and lead you away from God.

slide/ Cardoner River

Ignatius left home when he finally recovered from the wounds he received at Pamploma. He was off as a pilgrim to the Holy Land, but ended up spending almost a year at Manresa, an industrial city about an hour's drive west of Barcelona, Spain.

One day Iñigo was walking alone to a small shrine where he wanted to say some prayers. As he passed a broad space by the River Cardoner, he sat for a while. There he experienced a profound mystical insight: all contingent things—all creatures that come and go, the river flowing past, the grass and plants—come from God's eternity, moment by moment.

Eternity is not before and after time, but time is nested in eternity. So all things are coming from God, moment by moment. God is continually creating the world at every moment. Once you have that perspective, what I am to do today and tomorrow becomes a matter of dialogue between me and God.

Iñigo realized he was going through prayer experiences in order to know what God was hoping for in him, for him and for his world. God's project was written in Iñigo's human heart.

slide/ Manresa

Iñigo also struggled with his past sins during his pilgrim year in Manresa. We don't know exactly what they were, but he had reason to repent. He had certainly been proud and arrogant, violent at

times, selfish and sexually active. He asked for permission to bear arms (ie, carry a sword with him at all times) because so many people wanted to kill him that he needed the right to protect himself without threat of legal punishment.

slide/ a path of change

summarizes his developmental path. (the true king worthy of his loyalty, the only king worthy of all his heart)

There are many more things one could focus on, but these few details give insight into the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises and explain why he selects certain meditations and subjects in a specific order

slide/ Table of Contents - WHO CAN MAKE THE EXERCISES?

slide/ spiritual freedom

JT: "The spiritual Exercises are structured precisely to help me find what God hopes for me, and to determine that with the least amount of distortion from sinful yearnings and actions. They help me find my own original purpose, which God the Lord raises in me to bring me to my own salvation and to draw out of human chaos the Reign of God." (p. 185) This involves...

- accepting God's acceptance of the person they are coming to be
- acknowledging that God makes himself not only our end toward Whom we grow, but also our Beginning from Whom we grow."
- people often finish the Exercises with a much calmer sense of their limitedness: they set aside guilt that cannot do all the good things that they think they want to do
- The exercises help to put some order into our affectivity, desires and attitudes.

so you have to decide when someone is ready and able to embark on this interior spiritual journey.

slide: contrasting assumptions

(this stands against the common cultural assumption that "you can't change your personality, why try?" Those who reach spiritual freedom know that psychology does not have all the answers and that a great deal of our mind-set and habits do lie within our conscious management.

slide: no title

finding what God hopes for in me

First go through the implications of thinking about "God's plan" and then about "God's project."

...Joe distinguishes between "god's plan for myself" and "God's project that he hopes for me to do" – difference is in the role that you end up with: passively uncovering a secret that God has already fixed but not revealed, or actively discovering a life-in-progress

Some people think that religious life is simply a matter of "following a script." We already know what to do and how to do it. Obedience and fidelity to the script is what matters. Much like a classical production of a Shakespeare play.

On the other hand, what if there is no script. If the ending is yet-to-be-written? That changes my presuppositions about what I need to do if I want to be faithful to my vocation.

slide/ finding what God hopes for me

picking up the clues that allow you to sense that you are on target and developing in harmony with the God who made you as you are.

slide: ready for the journey?

who is able to make the SpEx? What qualities or readiness is needed?

- Ability not only to do self-reflection but also willingness to communicate it to another, to be transparent and honest, and even more, to be vulnerable before another person.
- plenty of people can fit into a religious community and follow a conventional life of piety but not be psychologically ready to make a directed retreat. (I am thinking of my experience with the NAC seminarians:)

so, not just folks who want to move from life controlled by sin to a life of holiness, but even more to move from a life of conventional piety to a life of personal commitment and experience of the Holy

JT: you don't do anyone a favor by inviting them to a series of exercises they are not really ready for

slide: more likely to succeed

...some people are more likely to do well in the SpEx, while others are likely to have difficulty (JT, p 186):

More successful:

- are those who have found their faith and are not unsettled by controversies
- anyone who has the disposition to be wholehearted
- someone who is able to reflect on her own experiences (not everyone can)

- those who are eager to find God more really and surely where they are

slide: less likely to succeed

Less successful:

- less successful are those strongly committed to an ideological position (perhaps because they are less open to a stance of indifference)
- also can be difficult: both those who are rigidly conservative in their theology as well as those whose faith life takes its shape from theologians are on the far edge of speculative theology
- directing people trying to remake a decision about a permanent commitment already made
- people locked into conventional

slide: aware of my feelings

Key element in the Preparation Days is to slowly cut free from all the pressures that you have experienced in whatever setting you just left behind. You need to slow down, breathe deep, and try to just be present in the moment. A key element is becoming aware of what you are feeling:

- Happy or preoccupied, tired?
- In the middle of a job or facing a change?
- Already received a new assignment?
- What have you been praying about?
- What have you avoided praying about?
- Where are the tensions that you are aware of?

The principle is to pray out of your own experience, out of an awareness of yourself. But be praying, not doing psychological therapy or problem solving. Start with where you are and let God do the rest.

You cannot make Ignatian prayer if you are not aware of your feelings, because they are the key to a sense of God's action in the retreat. You might feel, consolation, desolation or dryness—the three terms that Ignatius uses—but you have to be alert to how you feel so that you can be aware of the action of the Spirit. Start with self-consciousness.

We know that God our loving creator is always ready to meet us, so we don't need to worry about God. We are the ones who run away and avoid encounters. Only now you are here, not running away; here waiting for the Lord, hoping to sense his presence!

slide/ Table of Contents – Role of the Director

C. HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR?

slide: key: my own experience

SOS: "understand the role of the Director as listener, companion and guide"

Ignatius quickly learned that people get more out of hearing what they need to hear than in listening to the director talk about what he needs to say. So the role of the director is to share his own spiritual experience, or better, to elicit in another's life and self the wonderful things God has elicited in your own and in others' whom you know.

slide: where is he/she?

A key dynamic is for the director to find out where someone is in his spiritual pilgrimage: what gifts does he have and how does he live them? He had some loose but accurate categories that helped him decide how to treat those he directed. So the director has to make a decision about the readiness and ability of the person he is directing.

slide: not egalitarian

He did not try to help everyone in the same way or to the same extent. He had a well-developed method for "bailing out" if it was clear that the retreatant was not going to be able to go beyond First Week prayer. His approach, don't waste time trying to get a kind of prayer that the person just isn't going to be able to do. Spend more time on those who can progress more. (not a treat-everyone-equal approach)

slide: client-centered direction

Joe talks about the two approaches to directing a retreat: client-centered direction and apostolic direction (p 182)

client-centered direction takes its cue from psychotherapy and the approaches that grew out of Rogerian non-directive counseling. "The therapeutic model of spiritual direction focuses tightly on the interior experience of the person, asking constantly what the person feels and wants and how the person feels called forth by the Church's life. For instance, the director working in this model would not know how to interpret an individual's experience of consolation except according to that individual's personal history or personality. ... This director tends to shape the Spiritual exercises very freely to suit the exercitant's current personal experiences."

slide/ apostolic direction

struggles with the tension of a bipolar focus, on the Church's experience of Revelation and on the individual's experience. It requires of the director that he or she constantly alternate between the individual's subjective experience and the Church's communal experience." "The model asks not only what the person's gifts are, but also what concrete project those gifts are given for, and for whom other than the person in direction."

slide: what do you trust?

Joe says he thinks it is hard to make the distinction and even harder to maintain it. The key thing is perhaps the issue of whether you trust the norms and framework of the Exercises, which refer to and honor tradition of the Church, more than you trust your own adaptations.

slide/ different challenges

younger spiritual directors who have experienced the therapeutic model themselves can have difficulty applying the norms and framework that function in the apostolic model

older spiritual directors, who have perhaps never been directed much at all, will have trouble with the listening required by the apostolic model.

Both sides can feel hesitant to give real directives to the exercitant.

slide: daring to direct

JT: "It is worth remembering that every director truly directs, whatever model he or she tries to follow." Thus, even a director who fully intends to be non-directive in a therapeutic model will end up giving direction: "Merely reflecting back to a directee what that directee has said and projected confirms it in some real way."

JT thinks a director should not hesitate to give advice and make suggestions, which was certainly the habit of Ignatius

slide/ Table of Contents - FOCUS ON JESUS

slide: easy to forget

Ignatius' personal devotion to Jesus

Remember my conversation with a friend who is a woman religious and was going to make her annual retreat. We talked about how she would do it. She said she did mostly centering prayer and tried to get a sense of God's presence; very simple and direct. I asked her whether she prayed about Jesus or used the Gospels. She said she had not done that in years. That got me thinking about how important it is to have a sense of Jesus as a person who is central part of my life, not the wall paper against which the real action takes place. (I usually ignore wall paper.)

So this retreat is an attempt to focus directly on Jesus rather than on abstract themes. To "rediscover" him if we have moved away or taken him for granted. To use our imagination to reach out to him. That is at the heart of the Ignatian method. See this by remembering a story about St. Ignatius.

Note: (how do you focus on Mary who has so little scriptural presence? whereas focusing on Jesus opens up the Gospels)

slide: no title

Image: Iñigo in Jerusalem

As a young man, he went to the Holy Land and visited all the regular pilgrim sites. One evening when he had visited the small chapel covering the stone from which tradition says Jesus stepped on before the Ascension, Ignatius could not remember which way Jesus' foot was turned. This seemed very important to him so he snuck away from the Franciscan monastery which was giving him free hospitality to take a second look at the stone. The Franciscans at the time were in a very uneasy predicament because the ruler of the Holy Land had signed but not promulgated a decree throwing the Franciscans out of Jerusalem. They lived in fear that he would act on the decree which hung over their heads like a threat. Into this delicate situation came the young Spanish pilgrim who would not follow the rules and kept going off on his own—Ignatius. They were very annoyed when they discovered that he had slipped away to visit the Ascension chapel, so they sent a servant after Ignatius with orders to rough him up a bit and teach him a lesson. What happened?

The servant beat Ignatius a bit, tied his hands behind his back and dragged him through Jerusalem back to the monastery. Of course, rather than deterring Ignatius, this treatment thrilled him. All he could think of was that he was being dragged as a captive along the very streets which Jesus himself had been dragged as a captive.

The point is that Ignatius was motivated by personal loyalty, not by abstract considerations. All the desires that he had once wanted to devote to King Ferdinand of Spain refocused on Jesus of Nazareth, the only King worthy of all his loyalty and energy.

So for us to make an Ignatian retreat means going to the person of Jesus with the same imagination and love that Ignatius had. And it means allowing Jesus' life to touch us and teach us about ourselves. That is the goal of looking at "Jesus as hero."

slide/ going to Jesus

Exercises: going to the person of Jesus with the same imagination and love that Jesus had allowing Jesus' life to touch us and teach us about ourselves

slide: entering his story

"Only by entering the story ourselves can we truly understand its meaning." (Bruce Feiler, *Walking the Bible*, p. 420)

Bruce Feiler experienced a profound change by actually visiting all the places where biblical stories occurred. He reflected on the change he felt: "Before setting out on this journey, reading the Bible for me had been largely an act of imagination, of trust—that these characters saw these things, said these things, did these things. The characters were almost completely disembodied from time and space. But now, reading the Bible from the inside, as it were, from the places themselves, I could feel myself moving closer to the stories. The Bible was no longer metaphor to me."

If your normal taste in literature runs to books with rich, powerful settings (ie: Faulkner's south), then it is important to have a sense of immersion in the Bible: get a feeling that you actually inhabit the story. "Not until I cross that divide—not until I walk in that world—can I fully enter the minds of the characters, and feel their desires as my own." (p. 145)

Principle: prayer is a gift. What we do is make ourselves available to receive that gift.

- For that reason you have left your ordinary residence, your work and all the wonderful distractions that fill up our days.
- Don't fill up your day here with other distractions, however praise-worthy. Walk around and reflect, and then walk some more. Give the Lord time to say hello.
- An analogy: just as the cloud enveloped Moses on Mount Sinai, so we allow ourselves to be enveloped by God. We don't try to see him intellectually or invoke him through some mental trick/technique; rather we feel his presence.

slide: God speaks in the Word

- One of the key ways God speaks to us is through the Word: we might have read a passage one hundred times and know all about its exegesis; suddenly during this prayer time it grabs you and opens up in a way that it never has before. It speaks directly to you, and you just

want to stay quiet and savor this feeling of it being special for you. This is a grace and it is how God speaks to us in an Ignatian retreat.

slide: prayer through imagination

- Another way happens when you are using your imagination, seeing the story as written in the Gospels, only more alive, more full of details—in a way that you feel you are part of the story. Suddenly you imagine something that is not written, Jesus says something to you or does something that touches you profoundly. This imagination can also be a gift from God.

slide/ colloquy

Consider the actual colloquy from the First Week when the exercitant is praying about his or her sin and Ignatius asks them to directly confront Jesus and speak with him.

distinctive part of Ignatian meditation. All the work on my part aims at opening me to speak directly with Jesus, Mary or the Father. Imagination is not an end in itself.

slide/ no title

This last note from the explanation contains the key relationship: the one making the Exercises speaks with Jesus as one friend to another, or as a servant to his Master. Not as a stranger to a mighty Lord. This is key to the central dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises.

PART II

slide/ Table of Contents (Four Weeks: structure of the Exercises)

A. Key meditations from the SpEx explain the dynamics

slide/ no title

chart of the four weeks

Explain that each "Week" is a conceptual entity, not necessarily 7 days. In practice, it depends on each retreatant and the director's sense of whether or not it is time to move on. Some people speak about the "grace of each week" in the sense of a desired goal. For example, the First Week should result in the person feeling a profound sense of sinfulness yet being loved by God. Once this experience has occurred, it is time to move on. If it never happens, there is not much point in going on.

slide/ Table of Contents (Sample Meditations)

look at five key meditations, both in their own language and how they can be reinterpreted

slide: 1 - Principle and Foundation

(First Week) quote the text

Jim Martin's slim volume, "Becoming Who You Are," presents another way of seeing this meditation. He uses Thomas Merton's notion of finding your true self as the key. The contrast is with the "false self" constructed from conventional thinking about success, from the expectations of others, from your own daydreaming: everything that weaves together an image of who you ought to be—irregardless of who you are, of whom God shaped. So the process is freeing yourself from these illusions. Martin calls them "bandages" that keep us from seeing our true selves.

Quoting Merton from *New Seeds of Contemplation*: "Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: the false self."

"Thus I use up my life in the desire for pleasures and the thirst for experiences, for power, honor, knowledge and love, to clothe this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real. And I wind experiences around myself and cover myself with pleasures and glory like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and to the world, as if I were an invisible boldy that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface."

This makes me think of Lazarus when Jesus called him back to life. As he came out of the tomb, covered with the 'binding cloths of death,' the actual burial cloths that Jewish custom prescribed, Jesus said to his friends, Unbind him and set him free. This is a good image for how we live in an unreflective, unconverted way when all our priorities are upside down and we have not found God, and in finding God, find our true selves.

slide/ no title

"From this it follows..." + rose window from the Cathedral at Rheims

So Ignatius asks the one making the Exercises to start by reflecting on the relative scale of importance of things. Ultimately, only God really matters and everything else falls into place relative to God. So many people live out of balance, with an inverted sense of what matters. The things that seem so important are not, but we think that we have to pursue them in order to satisfy others and to satisfy this false persona, the role that we have assumed.

So the first dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises, is to begin to put your life in order by meditating on what really counts and what does not.

slide/ 2 - Sin

(First Week) The next major dynamic is to look at your false self and see the ways you are playing a false role out of contact with the God who made you.

Ignatius has the retreatant consider the sin of the angels and then my own sin in comparison with them. Then to consider Adam and Eve, then people engaged in mortal sin that leads them to Hell. After this contextual approach, he has the one making the Exercises review his or her own life. He recommends going by place, by period, by what we were doing and/or by the people we knew: all a way to profoundly review my life and honestly face the sinfulness in it.

slide/ no title

diagram contrasting disorder on the left and Ignatian sense of getting one's life into order on the right. Many of the same elements, but now they don't hide God. Are put into a sequence or hierarchy of value. Note: this is not so much a sense that your life must completely change, with a whole new set of realities, but that you must reorder the elements in your life. So you don't respond to sinfulness by running off to the desert but by putting your life into order.

graphic of Ignatius' vision of sin. On the left we see chaotic, conflicting entities which obscure the picture of God barely visible behind them. Lack of order.

On the right God becomes visible as the various aspects of our life fall into place and we act so that everything is ordered towards God.

Think of this in practical terms of people you know who want to be married but also want to make a lot of money so they are never home and the family suffers. Or someone is so taken up with academic promotion that she does not spend time in her religious obligations. She wants to be a religious, but she also wants the honor that comes with a good degree and a prestigious position.

All the varieties of addictive behavior introduce disorder into our lives. Whatever the substance to which we are addicted becomes the key element in all our decisions and everything else suffers.

slide/ no title

the actual text of the colloquy to Mary after meditating on my own sins.

In the colloquy he asks us to pray for an interior knowledge of my sins, and hatred of them. The clear goal is putting my life into order

slide/ 3 - Call of the King

(Second Week)

This clearly shows the world from which Ignatius comes and his set of experiences. He knew King Ferdinand and the whole life at court. Loyalty to the King is paramount in his background.

Remember what I said earlier in the morning about the progression of Ignatius's own life: going from loyalty first to Ferdinand and then to the Duke of Najera and then finally to the true king worthy of his loyalty, the only king worthy of all his heart, Jesus.

So the King becomes metaphor and paradigm. Note that some people find this difficult. In India Jesuits sometimes try to change it. My tertian director challenged us to come up with our own metaphors. I thought of the leader of a national or global movement for civil rights. The problem is that all those leaders have feet of clay that make them less than perfect metaphors. But ideals and heroism still speak to people. Think of scientists fighting cancer, the current idealism of environmental activists against global warming, the struggle for women's rights, the fight for freedom in South Africa, etc., etc.

Also note that this is not a Gospel-based Contemplation that uses the imagination to enter an actual story from one of the Gospels; rather it is a meditation where one thinks about the different points.

Look at the painting I discovered in the Alcázar castle in Segovia, Spain. It shows a knight on horseback with the King and his court also mounted on their war stallions in front of the castle. Each lance has a banner or "standard" mounted on the lance. A young page holds the reins of the knight's horse. He is clearly being sent on a mission. Note the excitement of the page's face and the stern heroism of the knight being sent on a mission.

slide/ no title

Ignatius proposes a logic: consider the human King, who has a mission from God.

Note the appeal such a King would make. Basically it is for companions willing to share in the enterprise, in all elements of it.

Then consider how a good subject would respond. Ignatius clearly presupposes the values commonly held at his time.

slide: no title

"Consider Christ, King Eternal" quote from the Exercises. Image = painting by Salvador Dali. The principle and foundation is a very logical meditation, but the Call of the King and then the subsequent Two Standards touches the same theme more concretely by looking at Jesus who is the model and paradigm of whom we are called to be. There are two standards, a false one and the one expressed in Jesus' poverty, humility and suffering.

slide: no title

"Eternal Lord of all things..." Just as Ignatius asks us to ponder the response a well-intentioned subject would make to the call of a human King, then he asks us to apply that to call of the Eternal King. This prayer summarizes the spirit that the Exercises engendered in generations of Jesuit missionaries, for example, who sailed off to unknown parts of the world, fully aware that a large part of all missionaries died in the journey itself.

slide/ Two Standards

image of Jesus and Lucifer

Related to the Call of the King and takes the idea of Jesus as the King in an upside down sense, ie "eschatological reversal of values". As a matter of fact, I like to use the story of Jesus' being tempted in his 40 days in the desert (Matthew 4: 1-11) for retreatants. It is the direct corollary of this Ignatian sense of the contrast of values.

And the key point is that we have to make a choice between two "standards" of living, a nice play on standard-as-flag and our normal sense of standards.

slide/ no title

This table shows the contrast between Jesus and Lucifer. Note especially the last item: the path that they encourage to follow. The first part of Ignatius' life was directly ordered towards riches, honor and pride. His own experience of recovering from his wounds at Pamplona and then spending the year at Manresa was one of being freed from this set of values and this way of looking at life. He discovered Jesus and chose the opposing set of values.

slide: 4 - Annunciation

Go through the meditation. First Ignatius has retreatant see the world from God's point of view, an omniscient seeing of all the activity in the world. Out of this awareness of good and bad, but especially of evil and suffering, comes God's decision to send the Son to become human and save humankind from this evil and suffering.

Note: in this as in many other stories about the life of Jesus, Ignatius draws on the commonly-understood stories about Jesus, not on the Gospels themselves. At his time people were not in the habit of reading the Bible, but everyone knew these stories. So Ignatius can presume that knowledge and then ask people to look at it in a new way.

slide: 4 – no title

bits of the actual meditation. This is a good example of the Contemplation using the imagination. Note the pattern: "to see" followed by "to hear" and then "to look" (in the sense of considering what it means) and finally "to ask" (in the colloquy).

slide: 5 - Passion

quote from the Exercises that describes the "Grace of the Third Week" – even stronger than the sorry for sin of the First Week, the person seeking to be a companion and friend of Jesus needs to experience compassion with Jesus. At the same time, the retreatant needs to continue struggling to be honest and see him or herself as a member of the crowd that roars for his crucifixion.

Whereas the previous meditations we just looked at are based on pondering over ideas and metaphors, the Third Week breaks down the story of the Passion into its various elements and the retreatant goes over each bit of the story in exhaustive detail. There are also numerous repetitions in which pieces of the story are lumped together in different ways.

All of the imaginative skills developed in the Second Week where we looked at the life of Jesus are focused in the Third Week on his death.

slide: Table of Contents – Conversion

slide/ what is conversion?

What happens as someone goes through these five and all the other meditations? They are not just strung together casually, but with a clear order and purpose. I propose that the basic underlying dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises can be most adequately described through a theology of Conversion.

the "house metaphor"

one could think of being a religious life like building a house: during the novitiate you lay the foundations and then you steadily put up the walls and roofs; finally with last vows you move in. And that is the end of the story. All that is left to do is clean the house up each spring and give it a new coat of paint every once in a while.

is there something much deeper that we face?

slide: Peter's long path

image: St. Peter and Jesus by Duccio, the calling of Peter

A better model than Paul or the Ethiopian, is St. Peter who became one of the first of Jesus' disciples and enjoyed a privileged position as witness to all the most private moments in Jesus' ministry.

Jesus burst into Peter's life at the lake side (Luke 5: 1-11) and demanded an immediate response, "Leave your nets and follow me." Bit by bit, experience by experience, Peter began to learn more about Jesus, even though he never did completely understand until after the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Think of all that Peter has seen and been part of to this point: he and the other disciples baptized people in Jesus' name, he has cast out demons, he helped feed the thousands, he directly witnessed countless miracles, he received private instruction from Jesus.

slide/ moment of truth

Eventually, the relationship comes to a point where Peter has to take a decisive step beyond the faith of the "crowds" who longed for cures and followed Jesus because of what he did.

In literary terms, Peter's profession of faith in Jesus is central point in Mark's gospel (Mark 8:27-33). All the first half leads up to this point, and then everything after it points to Jerusalem where Jesus will suffer and die.

Jesus first asks Peter whom others say Jesus is. Peter replies, "Some say..."

And then Jesus pins Peter down with the question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter clearly, unhesitatingly, unambiguously responds, "You are the Christ." (ie, the Messiah).

Note this is more than Nicodemus could say; recall John's Gospel showing him acknowledge Jesus as a teacher when he meets him secretly at night.

Draw a comparison with Mary. At the Annunciation, she had a moment of truth where she had to say yes. Not a turning away from sin, but taking responsibility for her faith in God and being willing to say Yes, no matter how unthinkable what was asked of her.

slide/ Jesus: "go further"

image of Jesus blindfolded with his hands tied.

he reveals that the Messiah would be rejected, would suffer, would be put to death and then come back to life after three days.

Peter immediately argues with Jesus who turns on his leading disciple, “Get behind me Satan.” Strong language. Jesus explains that his disciples must act differently than the conventional norm. Jesus chastizes him: “You are thinking like humans not like God.” And that is not good enough.

Peter undoubtedly understood Messiah in the conventional sense of the leader who would come to power, smash all Israel’s enemies and once and for all establish God’s Kingdom that would prevail over all forces that had made it struggle for centuries.

A Messiah who would be rejected and who could be killed is not really a Messiah.

slide: **conversion demands...**

This is conversion because Peter has to take responsibility for what he believes and thinks. He has to take responsibility for the consequences of his decisions.

Thus: conversion is not all at once. It is an ongoing process, as we see clearly with Peter who continues to grapple with the mystery of Jesus and being his disciple. Peter continually struggles to understand the consequences of his decision to follow Jesus.

In the words of St. Paul, Peter is trying to “put on the mind of Christ.”

Even after the resurrection, Jesus asks him three times, “Do you love me?” When Peter affirms his love, Jesus asks him to live out that commitment: “Feed my lambs.

Another example: the Samaritan Woman in John 4. She changed her way of living after encountering Jesus. We saw that the two days Jesus spent in her village was only the beginning; that she would have to respond to his message as it touched all aspects of her life. This kind of full, integral response would take a whole lifetime. It is how we are saved by responding to grace.

slide: lack of conversion

image: man trying to balance on a tightrope

the normal problem is not that someone does not believe in Jesus, or that she rejects his teaching. Rather the problem is that the conversion is not complete. We have a yes-but approach to God, which is the sin in our life- we believe in God but do not fully follow through in our response. (In the Gospel language, we have put our hand to the plough and then looked back.)

A standard figure in movies is the religious hypocrite, such as the preacher who can talk for ever about Jesus but slips off at night for sex with young prostitutes. The behavior in one part of his life makes a mockery of what he believes and says in the rest of his life.

slide: the personal challenge

As “true-born Catholics” who come into Catholic families and are baptized as infants, we put less emphasis on conversion than other Christian groups. But it is essential that each person makes our own personal response; our parents cannot do it for us. (our novice mistress and religious superiors cannot do it for us either. And our retreat directors certainly cannot do it for us.) Each of us faces the challenge of conversion when Jesus asks us directly, “But who do you say that I am.”

Conventional thinking: go-with-the-crowd –vs-- conversion: personal response

eventually each and every one of us needs to face a moment of truth if we will come to full discipleship.

The problem most often comes when we are not aware that we are not converted. We think we are OK, that fitting into the line and saying the rosary with everyone else is enough.

slide: no title

introduce Gelpi's notion of conversion as accepting responsibility for the consequences of your decisions in the five areas of your life.

- religious
- moral
- intellectual
- affective
- social

The key thing is achieving **an integral conversion**: becoming more whole, more consistent. Our yes is fully yes, not yes and no. This is a long process, and does not happen overnight.

A metaphor: a racing scull moves swiftly because all the rowers work in unison, all the oars knife into the water at the same time. If one oar is out of sync, the whole speed of the boat is lost. Everything falls apart, no matter how hard the other rowers work. The same is true for lack of conversion: in this case, I am the racing scull, and most of me is pulling in unison, but if one part is out of sync: disaster.

slide/ no title (image of man walking on beach)

examples- non conversion

- the person who believes in Jesus wholeheartedly but is blind to the racism she grew up with
- the person who becomes socially very active and knows details of justice issues but continues thinking about God in inadequate categories that have not changed since grade school. Can fall into a rigid fundamentalism
- the person who has never faced the effects of sexual abuse suffered as young sister; anger and resentment block prayer and take the joy out of life
- A religious who is alcoholic yet denies that it is a problem. A religious who remains angry with father or mother for conflicts when growing up. Joining religious life was a way to remove herself from the problem, but it remains an issue unexamined and hidden. Then some superior, representing authority, says something he doesn't like: ka-boom!!!

slide: time changes the battle

The terms of what we struggle with change over the years. Some issues disappear while others show up we could never have expected, partly because we are in new situations and discover things about ourselves we did not know. The world in which we live also changes, raising new issues we never expected to deal with. The choice between power and the demands of love that we talked about yesterday comes up more as we move through life. Today, we could add the idea that this is a challenge of conversion.

As we move through our middle age, we face a fundamental choice:

POWER or LOVE

“Will I fight for control over my life or yield to the demands of love?”

slide/ choosing power

Those who choose power and want to control their lives tend to:

- choose their own work and refuse to let others meddle in the decision
- keep tight control over their attitudes and opinions, and close others out from touching them
- say little about themselves and rarely be frank about themselves. They limit self-revelation and limit relationships
- help others when and how they choose (only on their own terms)

- suffer from loneliness and feeling isolated (since they do not confront their inner brokenness and refused to connect being called with being sinful)

slide/ yielding to love

Those who yield themselves to the demands of love tend to:

- know their brokenness and allow the Spirit of Life to lead them to growth
- open themselves to friendship and intimacy; be active in forming friendships
- risk being vulnerable
- be compassionate since they are aware of their own brokenness
- take on positions of authority when asked because they think they can help others and are primarily concerned to serve

So we are always making choices, either ones that lead towards power or towards love.

slide/ Dead Man Walking

Remember the movie: “Dead Man Walking.” A caring nun, Sister Helen Prejean, receives a desperate letter from Matthew Poncelet, a death row inmate trying to find help to avoid execution for murder. The key point of the movie is the accompaniment that Sister Helen Prejean did with the convicted murderer. It was not easy for her, but she dealt with the uncertainty and found the inner strength necessary to be compassionate in the face of an overwhelming scorn and lust for revenge and retribution.

This is also a good example of conversion in that she follows out the consequences of her belief. Her involvement began somewhat by chance, and it was not something she carefully thought her way through trying to predict the future. She responds to the situation she finds herself in, and she discovers the consequences of beliefs that we all take for granted. She changes as she faces the challenge of really living out the Gospel message of god’s love and forgiveness for sinners, something we normally take for granted. The relatives of the victims could not surpass their own anger and loss, so they are not converted and live out a faith that is less authentic.

In the movie, as in actual life, the sister takes up the cause of fighting to end the death penalty. It is a cause rooted in her faith, a cause worthy of great sacrifices on her part. For anyone who loves someone unjustly executed (as Jesus was), it is a cause in harmony with Christian faith. We also take Jesus’ death for granted, but this movie shows how frightening it is even for a hardened criminal who tries to put up a tough front. How much worse it would be for an innocent man, especially for a very faithful Jewish man who grew up with the idea that being faithful meant staying away from sinners. To be imprisoned and handled by the Romans. To be treated with contempt as a criminal.

so: when she gave herself to the demands of love, she definitely lost control of her life

slide: conversion questions

What are some of the key turning points in your life? What happened during them? Did you find yourself having to adopt a new stance towards something you had taken for granted?

Are there any places of “friction” in your life that indicate a need for conversion? Things that rub the wrong way might point to some contradiction you are hesitant to face. Is there some lack of integration that makes you think something is awry somewhere?

-What are the issues that you find yourself confronting now, at this point in your life? How are you doing with them?

Is your relationship with Jesus and with Mary shifting to a more profound level? Are you experiencing a deepening of faith, to a more profound sense of your commitment to service?

Are there social conventions or ordinary expectations that you still have to break through in order to be fully converted?

slide: Table of Contents - Leadership

slide/ conversion & leadership

"leadership is based on a deep understanding of the self and of the core values that drive one's actions."

So the SpEx can be thought of as leadership training for a mature person who has enough experience to reflect on. The context of the retreat in a person's life is crucial. Not someone deciding whether to be a religious or not, but a religious who has already lived out the commitment for a number of years and then steps back to examine who they are and what really matters. "Core values" is language that directly relates to the First Principle and Foundation.

The whole process is one of deepening and maturing.

Suggestion: that the Marianists think of their formation program as aimed at developing leadership in young Marianists. It is common to speak of the Spiritual Exercises as a "school for prayer" but we could also think of them as a "school for leadership."

Thus we can think of leadership based on reflective self-knowledge at three levels: the individual Marianist, Marianists as a religious order, the world in which Marianists work

slide/ the individual

personal qualities of self-knowledge and self-acceptance,
reflect on yourself during the retreat.

a renewed sense of your core values and an awareness that they are really your own values, not something imposed from outside. they are not just the price of a meal.

Your role is not to accept them, but to promote them.

slide/ the Marianists

reflect on your relationship with the congregation

a mature concern for others

For example, praying on sinfulness means not just looking at one's own shortcoming but coming to grips with the sinfulness, limitations and contradictions of the Marianists.

It is very easy to be hyper-critical of your own order, to be acutely aware of its shortcomings and the many ways it does not live up to its ideals. People early on in formation can find this a great difficulty, sometimes even a reason for leaving. "The order is not good enough for me."

slide/ the world

reflect on your place in the world

a thirst for justice.

It also means relating my own religious life to the injustice, violence, wars and corruption that mark our world; we cannot live religious lives apart from all that and we must come to some kind of working arrangement with the sinfulness outside ourselves.

Thus, the SpEx asks us to imagine the King standing opposed to the evil leader and to pledge ourselves to labor with him and share his way of life in the struggle. An integral part of our prayer, then, has to be the struggle for justice and reconciliation in our world, not just in my own life.

slide/ Table of Contents – Summary

C. SUMMARY

slide/ dynamic of adult conversion

how to summarize the complex dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises? We can say that the main dynamic is adult conversion flowing from the decision to make Jesus Christ the center of your life by accepting the lived consequences of that decision in all the areas of your life

slide/ dynamic of authenticity

"Leadership springs from within; it is about who we are as much as what we do. Leadership is not an act, it is a way of living. Leadership is not defined by the scale of opportunity, but by the quality of response."

"The process of self-questioning forms the basis of personal authenticity, an authenticity that comes from a compassionate, disciplined and discerning self.

...Personal authenticity occurs when we are attentive and conscious of our thinking, gain deeper understandings, make judgments that are reasonable, and choose to act in ways that are responsible. Actions taken become a source of new data and the subject for new questioning. Ultimately, self-questioning can lead to a conversion of one's thinking and of one's heart. ... Changing one's views of the world requires a deepened consciousness, the vulnerable contemplation of one's own thinking and value systems in order to gain clarity as to what is important, and then to take actions that align one's own deeply held intentions and the desires with the greater good of humanity."

This is very Gelpi-ish language. Personal authenticity is key phrase

Being an authentic leader requires ongoing, continual self-reflection, a habit that springs from the profound prayer experience of a month-long retreat.

"leaders in today's world need to develop personal mastery, a discipline of continually clarifying and deepening one's personal vision and focusing one's energies toward new realities." I like the use of the word discipline and the sense of a habit of focusing energies.

slide: dynamic of ordering our lives

"Contemplation as the unveiling of illusions that masquerade as reality, thereby revealing a reality behind the masks."

slide: dynamic of reconciliation

On the importance of sin and reconciliation: "Servant-leadership implies the importance of forgiveness and restoration of relationships." (Greenleaf, 2002)

- a true sense of forgiveness is inherently bound to the ideas of integrity and justice
- see reconciliation as antidote to the emptiness that is often our collective experience of one another
- Since our lives as members of a religious community are inextricably bound up with each other, our ability to deal with the wounds of sin and the need for reconciliation is crucial. This implies accepting my own sinfulness as someone who wounds others as well as being able to forgive others who wound me. It also implies my being able to forgive a sinful, imperfect religious order. (go through the Genesis story of negotiating with God to spare the city if he can find 50 just men.)

what risks are involved in making deep personal changes?

look back at the different ways you can describe the Spiritual Exercises:

- an interior spiritual journey
- a privileged moment in a long friendship and conversation

and what it is not:

- a compressed and intense hermitage experience

slide: evolving relationships with Jesus

“As the Exercises move along, we pray our way through evolving relationships with Jesus.

- At first we stand as sinner to our Savior.
- Then as we pray on Jesus’ public life, we become a disciple to our Master.
- Now Jesus no longer wants to call us servants; he invites us to walk as a friend through our friend’s last days.”

slide: steps of discipleship

1) **Student** -- listening to teacher, following his teaching

(So Peter is listening to Jesus teach while he works on his boat; he addresses Jesus as “Teacher”)

2) **Disciple** -- following the Master, taking his teaching more seriously

Jesus becomes more important than anything else.

(Peter leaves his boat and work and place in society behind to follow Jesus who becomes more important than all the rest. Peter leaves his conventional life and embarks on an uncertain future.) By contrast, the rich young man could not make this step. Jesus the teacher told him he must live the Commandments; the young man said he was doing so. Then Jesus invited him to the next step—give everything to the poor and follow me. The

young man's face dropped because he was wealthy and could not make Jesus more important than the things he had.)

3) **Apprentice** – learn by working with the Master

The disciples baptize in Jesus' name, they cast out demons, they distribute the bread and fish that he has blessed. The Twelve form an inner circle who are privileged to observe everything even though they frequently don't understand what they see. Jesus treats them as apprentices and gives them personal training. They are clearly insiders.

4) **Convert** – makes a definitive commitment to belief

At a crucial turning point, the disciple commits self and takes responsibility for the consequences of this decision. ie: Peter's profession of faith. "Who do you say that I am?"

5) **Friend** – knows the Master intimately, becomes like the Master

- cf: St. Margaret Mary Alacoque had vision of Jesus who referred to St. Claude de la Columbiere as his "perfect friend"
- In the Transfiguration, the veil is lifted and they see the true identity of Jesus; they experience his closeness to the Father.
- An intimate revelation of Master's identity, more than an explanation.
- They are close to the tremendous mystery of God, where Jesus is very comfortable, like Moses before him. This experience confirms the statement of faith.

a friend knows your stories, can anticipate how you will react, can get you what you need before you even ask for it. a friend understands you, can probably imitate you very well if she wants to.

1) I developed some outcomes that Jesuits expect from someone making the month-long Spiritual Exercises. What outcomes do you expect from Marianists making your Spirit of Saragossa?

2) If there is a difference between the two, how do you achieve what you hope for? If the two are similar, do they follow the same paths to achieve these outcomes?