

Grace ... Blessings ... Gratitude

Prelude:

In this the first period of my retreat (Section I), Ignatius challenges me to:

reconnect with ...

reflect upon ...

and revel in ...

the incredible goodness of God on my behalf (the multiplicity of His graces directed towards ... and for me) throughout the length of my life. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius suggests that at the beginning of retreat I use two distinct methodologies for doing this:

1. I examine again (the graces of) ... Creation (see Handout/Exercise #1-2)

2. I examine again (the graces of) ... the Blessings I have received in my life to date

If the purpose of retreat is to fill me (again) with the hope that I can in fact **become more like Jesus** ... *going forward* ... then the starting place ought be that I fill myself (again) with the reality of what God has already done ... *going backwards*.

And in the process of doing so ... I continually ask myself this question: ***Why would He change now?***

And, of course, the answer is: **He wouldn't!**

For the graces of God on my behalf are past, present ... *and future*. They are beyond my capacity to take in ... and are, in many ways, the foundation upon which I live my life day-to-day *going forward*.

Exercise:

During this Section I want to “lose myself” in the majesty and magnificence of God ... opening myself to be completely overwhelmed, astonished, unglued (use what adjectives you may) by the Who He is ... His incredible attributes, His creativity and, most importantly, His love for me personally.

In Handout/Exercise #1-1 I had an opportunity to examine again (the graces of) ... Creation

*“Take a good look at God’s wonders -
they’ll take your breadth away.”*

Psalm 68: 5

and now ...

In this Handout/Exercise #1-2 I have an opportunity to examine again (the graces of) the blessings I have received in my life to date

*“ ... let me tell you what
God did for me.”*

Psalm 68: 16

[As a suggestion you might slowly wander (meander) through the years of your lifetime as seen in the experiences you have had: recollecting ... seeing and noticing ... hearing ... feeling and sensing ... tasting ... **and then ...**

reconnecting with,

reflecting upon,

and reveling in

all that enters into your consciousness. I focus my mind on the FACT that all of the blessings I have received were Grace!

Taking my journal, I begin to draw from my memory bank the myriad of such blessings granted me through the years of my life.

And ... as I do ... **I give thanks continually!**

[Often it's helpful to construct a timeline in your journal ... starting at birth ... and then fitting the recollected graces/blessings into the approximate years of occurrence.

This is an Exercise that can be continued throughout the length of the retreat ... carrying your journal always ... and making note of “other” blessings you recollect as you think about and focus on your past and present life.]

And then ... I ask myself this question,

“What were the 5 greatest blessings ever bestowed upon me by God?” (You might select a greater number ... but 5 is probably enough.)

[You see it's easy to get lost in a *laundry list of blessings* (for we all have such a list). But if we shorten the list ... we no longer even have to refer to the list as we meander. Our memory is all we need.]

Then we head out ... going no place in specific ... all the while asking the Lord to overwhelm us with these evidences of His giftedness on our behalf for the 5 blessings we have selected. [Some retreatants might want to combine their meanderings here in Exercise #1-2 with Exercise #1-1.]

And in the process I might say/think things like this:

- Why **me**? Why did You God bless **me** so?
- What might **my** life have been without that blessing?
- What kinds of joys has that blessing led to in **my** life?
- How has that blessing affected others?
- What were some of the aftereffects of that blessing - what else did it lead to in **my** life?
- Has anyone I know been blessed as I have?
- How has that blessing at times led **me** to repentance?
- How has that blessing at times led **me** back to You God?
- Add in your own questions ???

[Note to annual/regular retreatants:

This Exercise might well seem familiar in that, in various versions, it's often been used over the past 30 years. But keep this in mind: as time passes *we age and we change*. What might have seemed "ordinary" years ago ... may well become a cause for rejoicing today and vice versa.

Blessings are rarely static ... they come forth (or recede into the vestiges of our minds) over the course of our lives. As such it's more than valuable to periodically revisit what God has done on our behalf.

Most importantly, let's not lose sight of the ***purpose of this Exercise***: we want to *see and experience the Lord again ... afresh and anew ... with the intent of expressing our gratitude to Him for all that He has done for us.*]

