



Day 6 | Sunday, March 13, 2022
Presenter Fr. Ryan J. Rallanka, S.J.

In the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius invites those making the Exercises to pray for the following grace: To know Jesus more intimately, who become human for us, so as to love Him more and to follow Him more closely. This grace can be summed up in the following prayer: **“to know Him more clearly, to love him more dearly, and to follow Him more nearly.”**

For Ignatius, there is an order to the grace being asked. He believes that the more we get to know Jesus, the more our love for Him grows. And the more we come to know Jesus, the more we desire to follow in His footsteps.

What does it mean for us, though, to know Jesus more? Is knowledge of Jesus reducible to the ideas and insights we gain from reading and talking about Him?

When I was studying for the priesthood at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, I took a homiletics class from a Dominican priest. One day, he shared with the class a memory that I have always remembered and have referenced quite frequently in my priestly ministry. When he was in high school, he really wanted to date beginning his freshman year. His parents, however, didn't give him permission. In response, he went to the library and began to check out books on dating and kissing. When sophomore year came around, he asked again if he could date. They said no. Junior year—same request, same response. Finally, during his senior year, he asked them again “can I date?” After years of asking, his persistence paid off, and they gave him permission to date. And so, during his senior year, he was able to finally go on his first date. And, on that date, he was able to experience his first kiss.

Thinking back to that moment, he remarked how he had acquired a lot intellectual knowledge about dating and kissing from the books he checked out over his high school years. Yet, he reflected how those insights and ideas that he learned from reading those books could never replace the experiential knowledge he received from experiencing it firsthand.

This experiential knowledge is precisely what St. Ignatius is getting at when asking for the grace to know Jesus more intimately. It is not the knowledge gained solely from books. Rather, it is comparable to the way that children know the cooking of their parents, how best friends know each other's personality quirks, or how a loving couple can complete one another's sentences. It is the knowledge we gain about one another when we spend time with one another.

The grace we pray for today—to know Him more clearly, to love Him more dearly, and to follow Him more nearly—is ultimately a grace to grow in deeper relationship with Jesus. As you may know, one of the gifts that St. Ignatius helped develop for the Church is a method that Jesuits and those trained in the Spiritual Exercises refer to as *Ignatian Contemplation*—a primary method of the Spiritual Exercises which uses the imagination as a means of knowing Jesus experientially.

When Ignatius guided Francis Xavier through the Spiritual Exercises, it changed his life, and I would imagine this change in Francis Xavier happened because he came to know Christ in ways he had never known before.

Our Gospel reading that we heard is the Transfiguration. Jesus' face is changed, and his clothes become dazzling white while praying with his disciples on a mountain. Truly, a moment where the disciples come to know Jesus in a profound way. Rather than me reflecting about the Transfiguration and giving my own personal insights, I would invite us to use the rest of this time reserved for the homily getting to know Jesus more by spending time with him in this scene. For those who need it, I will lead you through a guided prayer, but for those of you who are trained or who feel you can do this Exercise on your own, feel free to tune me out.

Preparation: To prepare our minds to enter into this prayer space, I invite us first to take a few slow deep breaths. Breathe in for four...hold for four...breathe out for four. Breathe in...hold...breathe out. As we breathe in, we are called to recognize each breath as gift—the gift of life, which inspires us literally. As we breathe out, we seek to let go of any distractions, anxieties, or worries that we might bring with us into the prayer. Through this preparation, we seek to be as present to Jesus in the prayer as much as possible.

Opening Prayer: As we begin, we now ask for the grace to direct our whole selves towards Jesus, surrendering our expectations during this time of prayer and simply being present. We ask that the Holy Spirit guide us to experience what we are being called to experience at this moment. (*Silently count to 15*)

Desire: I now invite us to pray for the following grace in our own way—to know Him more clearly, to love Him more dearly, and to follow Him more nearly. (*Silently count to 15*)

Prayer: I invite you now to close your eyes and to begin visualizing in your mind being at the top of a mountain. Begin to notice first what you see. Perhaps you can see the landscape lush with great big evergreen trees, a clear blue sky, and some birds gracefully gliding across the land. What do you see? (*Silent count to 10*)

Next, notice what you begin to hear. Perhaps you can hear the beautiful song of the birds or a far-off, cascading sound of rushing waters. The sounds of nature...the sounds of stillness. What can you hear? (*Silent count to 10*)

Next, notice what you begin to smell. Perhaps you can smell the dust from the mountain path. Perhaps you smell the fragrance of nearby flowers or the towering pines. What do you smell? (*Silent count to 10*)

Finally, notice what you are able to touch. Perhaps you notice the ground beneath your feet and the gentle breeze of the wind. Perhaps you can feel droplets of rain gently tapping your head or the rays of the sun warming your face. What can you touch? (*Silent count to 10*)

As you become aware of your surroundings through your senses, you begin to notice the sound of footsteps and distant voices getting closer. It is Jesus, walking up the mountain with Peter, James, and John. What do you do? As He comes closer, He looks at you lovingly,

greet you warmly, and invites you to join Him and the others in prayer. How do you respond?

Soon, you notice Jesus enter into a posture of prayer, and Peter, James, and John follow suit. How do you imagine Jesus to be in prayer in this moment on the mountaintop? Do you find yourself praying with Jesus and his disciples? As Jesus enters more deeply into His state of prayer, you notice something beginning to happen to him. His face begins to radiate light like the rays from the Sun. The clothes he was wearing begin to dazzle and sparkle like the countless stars in the sky.

For the next five minutes, I invite us now simply to be with Jesus—as you are—in this profound moment, which some might characterize as a religious experience. Be with Christ, our Light. Allow yourselves to soak and marinate in the love that emanates from his very Being. Allow His light to brighten any darkness within you. Allow His love to begin to heal you from any woundedness you carry deep within. Come to know Him more clearly through your own experience. Perhaps, through this prayer, you may begin to notice like St. Francis Xavier a deepening love for Him and a greater desire to follow Him.