



## DAY 2: Conference

### TAKING THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES ONLINE

*I never imagined that the Spiritual Exercises would reach the deepest part of my being and make me see that living a life of faith is the best thing that can happen to us. The love that God has for us has no comparison with anything on this earth, and to see how the enemy makes us think that being with God is not easy. Today and every day of my life, I desire that God be the center of my life, together with our Mother, the Most Holy Virgin Mary, because I know that alongside them, I can overcome any obstacle.<sup>1</sup> (Jeniffer)*

We will try to explain in this second introductory talk:

1. **What** the Spiritual Exercises are, and
2. **How** they are carried out via the Internet.

We must keep in mind that the book of the Exercises of St. Ignatius **is not written to be read**—(although that may sound paradoxical)—but rather to **perform** the Exercises. Moreover, it has been said more than once that the book of the Exercises **is written more for the one who gives them** (the director) than for the one who receives them.

A commentator writes:

*"They will not understand them. They will be disappointed. It will seem to them an **arid and stark** book. That is because it is not made for simple reading. It is rather a manual of spiritual tactics, an indicator of the **method** to follow, of the system to be developed. It is easily seen that a book of this kind—like those for learning swimming, chess, etc.—cannot be understood in its true meaning unless one practices what is enclosed in its rules and arrangements.*

Another commentator notes:

*'St. Ignatius... does not trouble himself to propose new concepts in beautiful form. He only aims to **lead**, hand in hand, hour by hour, day by day, the **blind** soul to the **light**, the cold soul to fire... It is a pedagogical manual that fills itself with the lessons of the master and the compositions of the disciple. The text only resembles integral practice as a geography map resembles the effective and concrete wealth of the represented country. Whoever took it as a reading book would commit the same error as one who wished to judge a man's beauty and life through the contemplation of his skeleton.'*

For this reason, although we offer the book of the Exercises here on the website, it would suffice to use the **texts** we discuss in each video—(which will typically be provided in a **handout**)—to be able to perform the Exercises well.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Spanish.



Also, it is recommended to **take notes** during the points (feel free to pause the video), with the goal of not to ‘capture everything’ but to have material to pray with. (If you listen or watch the audio and aren’t able to take notes, you still have the handouts as a reference).

Let it be clear: St. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises **are not merely a set of meditations**; they are much more than that. Even in his time (1560–1641), Father La Palma noted that, by not giving them properly or performing them negligently, or without a teacher or director:

*"They have come to degenerate into simple meditations on sins, and on the life and passion of Christ our Lord, not realizing that, among these meditations, all the **degrees of perfection** are arranged with **marvelous order**, and all the steps of the spiritual path, and all the ways of praying and examining the conscience are taught, and the rules of prudence and spiritual discretion are clearly explained, to know and distinguish the interior movements of the good spirit and the evil; all with such brevity that it is impossible to understand this path if it is not walked, nor is it possible to walk it without a guide and a master."*

**Father Casanovas**, for his part, comments:

*"Once again, we wish to point out that the system of St. Ignatius is not a speculative, philosophical, theological, ascetical, or mystical theory; it is something more: a practical pedagogy of evangelical perfection. Within it is enclosed all doctrine, but it also contains something more lively and of greater efficacy; that is, the profound knowledge of man and the supernatural art of shaping him according to the ideal of all perfection."*

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## 1 – What the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises Are

The book (the Spiritual Exercises) begins with 20 introductory notes, which we will comment on during today’s and tomorrow’s conference.

St. Ignatius titles them as follows (Puhl Translation):

**[1] NOTES TO GAIN SOME UNDERSTANDING IN THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES THAT FOLLOW, AND TO HELP BOTH THE ONE WHO GIVES THEM AND THE ONE WHO RECEIVES THEM.**

**1st Note:** *By the term “Spiritual Exercises” is meant every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities that will be mentioned later. For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises, so we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul. [1]*

Here St. Ignatius presents the **purpose or objective** of the Exercises—the difficulties we must overcome—and the way to achieve it.

### Purpose of the Exercises



We start here because, as philosophy rightly says: "the end is first in intention and last in execution."

If we have a 'goal' or 'end', like 'travelling to New York', or 'graduating college', we begin with that, as it determines the steps we will take to achieve the goal or end (e.g. buying a car, or a plane ticket, etc.)

St. Ignatius will say it (the goal) is " *of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition [arrangement] of our life.*"

Ultimately, what Ignatius of Loyola seeks and produces with the holy Exercises is that we perhaps perform the most **transcendent act** that our rationality (our freedom) can carry out in this earthly life: to (1) **know** and (2) **decide to do** God's will, which St. Thomas expresses thus: *But truth as applied to "life" is used in a particular sense, inasmuch as a man fulfills in his life that to which he is **ordained** by the divine intellect.*

In God's will lies our **holiness**—and it is also perhaps the greatest example given to us by Our Lord, since His whole life was nothing other than perfect fulfillment of the Father's will; precisely for this reason, we ask it daily, and multiple times, in the Lord's Prayer: "**Thy will be done...**"

We may ask, what is God's will? But first we must ask ourselves: *Do I **want** to do God's will?*

*Our Lord says: "Anyone who **resolves to do the will of God will know** whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own." (Jn 7:17)*

We can then say that knowing and doing God's will is the general purpose of the Exercises; but this purpose presupposes—or is accompanied by—other intermediate purposes, one of which St. Ignatius himself mentions in the title of the Exercises:

**[21] SPIRITUAL EXERCISES TO OVERCOME ONESELF AND ORDER ONE'S LIFE, WITHOUT BEING DETERMINED BY ANY AFFECTION THAT IS DISORDERED.**

"Ordering one's life" was already mentioned in the note cited, but here he clarifies the act of "overcoming oneself." To speak of these "intermediate purposes," we will use a commentary by Father Calaveras on the fruits to be attained in the Exercises.

**I - Conquest of Self**

The first fruit that the complete Exercises should produce consists in victory over oneself, as is evident from the title given by their author: "*Spiritual Exercises to overcome oneself*" [21]. Overcoming oneself means conquering mastery over the inner kingdom, composed of body and spirit, with its members, external senses, and internal powers of a sensitive and spiritual order, restoring—by the work of grace, as far as our fallen nature allows—the internal peace and harmony of the state of innocence, a fruit of the gift of original integrity.



Perfect victory, says **Thomas Kempis** (*Imitation of Christ*, book 3, ch. 53), *If you completely conquer yourself, you will more easily subdue all other things. The perfect victory is to triumph over self. For he who holds himself in such subjection that sensuality obeys reason and reason obeys Me in all matters, is truly his own conqueror and master of the world.*

Thus, there are **two parts** to victory over oneself: (1) mastery over sensuality and the (2) subjection of reason (will) to God. We will begin with the exposition of the second, the most important in the conquest of oneself for God.

**a) Conquest of the will:**

For reason, or the superior part of man, to be habitually subject and perfectly aligned with the divine will, it is necessary to conquer the will for divine service. For the will, as queen among the powers of the soul, is the one that must impose order and subjection to divine pleasure on the other powers, both superior and inferior.

Now, since the will contains not only the free and elective part of determinations and purposes, but also the impulsive part of desires and aversions, and the basic affective part of love and hatred, it is necessary, in the conquest of the will for God, to reach even the transformation of habitual or transient dispositions of the affective and impulsive part, which we call the heart.

This is achieved through the **perfect ordering of love**, which entails uprooting from the soul the evil or dangerous loves and desires to introduce the opposite aversion, and transforming naturally honest or indifferent loves and desires into spiritual ones, giving full place to the love of God, so that with a single and unified love, purified and ordered, we may love God in Himself and in Him all creatures, and all creatures in Him, without dividing or spilling our affection on anything outside of God.

This, and nothing else, is what is meant by *“to remove from oneself all disordered affections”* [1], namely: *“to remove, as far as possible, the love of all creatures from oneself in order to place it in their Creator, loving Him in all things and all things in Him according to His most holy divine will”* [Constitutions S.J., p. III, c. I, n. 26].

Thus, the great obstacle to overcome is the “disordered affections.”

**b) Mastery over sensuality and the lower parts of man:**

Overcoming oneself, in addition to the conquest of the will for divine service as just described, entails mastering sensuality so that it obeys reason entirely. By sensuality we understand the sensitive part of man, namely, the senses, imagination, and sensitive appetite. In this part, the rebellion of the flesh against the spirit, introduced by original sin, is primarily shown.

Establishing and maintaining perfect order in this part, with the recovery of full mastery, is a difficult and long task, for which there is work for a lifetime. Nevertheless, much can be achieved in the holy Exercises, provided that each person contributes their part to it.

## II - Ordering one's life:

The **second intermediate fruit** that the Exercises should produce consists in ordering one's own life, as we read in the title: "*Spiritual Exercises to overcome oneself and order one's life, without being determined by any disordered affection*" [21].

Our life is the successive series of acts that develop our interior and exterior powers and faculties. Ordering one's life, therefore, means putting order into the entire activity of one's person, internal and external, private and in relation to others, in all that directly or indirectly depends on one's own will. In this concept, as complements of the person, also included are the things that surround us, such as clothing, house, service, tools for work and recreation, use of material goods, etc.

Ordering primarily involves:

- The negative part: removing all that is **evil** and imperfect; sins, serious or venial, and faults or disorders that do not reach the level of sin.
- And then the positive part: shaping all our activity according to the ideal of Christian perfection, that is, seeking and deciding to do the will of God, concretely for each person in their state of life, occupations, and relationships that divine providence has assigned them.

It is important to note that the standard of order to which we must **adjust our conduct** is established generally in many things, because what is proscribed is always and for everyone evil or imperfect, and what is imposed or advised is better (e.g. the commandments).

In other things, conversely, it varies according to **persons** and circumstances, and the one most in conformity with divine service and the greater benefit of the soul is not governed by a general rule.

### For those repeating the Exercises: what fruits are to be attained?

We can distinguish two possibilities: (1) either one has **not faltered** in the dispositions maintained from the previous Exercises, carrying forward and advancing their own sanctification along the paths and with the momentum with which they approached it; or, (2) on the contrary, they have **weakened** in some or many of the spiritual dispositions acquired, and consequently the work of their own sanctification has stalled, advanced very little, or perhaps even suffered a setback.

In this second case, it is evident that the first objective of repetition must be to **restore** the fundamental dispositions of the Exercises where they faltered, particularly insisting on the part of the Exercises most suited to produce again the lost dispositions.

In the first case, with normal perseverance in the fruits, the repetition should aim to: 1) renew and further strengthen the fundamental dispositions, and 2) advance positively in the knowledge of God and oneself, taking a good step forward in perfect victory over oneself, in ordering one's life, and in communication and union with God.

**Method: what “exercising” implies**

The Saint says: “By the term “*Spiritual Exercises*” is meant every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities that will be mentioned later. For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are **bodily exercises**, so we call **Spiritual Exercises** every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul. [1]

It is truly about exercising oneself! Perhaps, to be more precise, we could use “**training**” rather than just “exercise,” because exercise is to feel well, be healthy; training, on the other hand, is for a **goal**: to surpass oneself physically, to play better in a sport, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race the runners all **compete**, but only one receives the prize? Run **in such a way** that you may win it. <sup>25</sup> Athletes exercise **self-control** in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run **aimlessly**, nor do I box as though beating the air; <sup>27</sup> but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified. (1 Cor 9:24–27)

We must bear in mind, therefore, that there is **personal work**, exercise, training, that *cannot be evaded*; it falls to each person **individually**, and if it is missing—if one merely watches the videos or listens to the audio (without taking the time for prayer, particularly on the days of “Meditations” rather than “Conferences”)—the Exercises will undoubtedly do *some* good, but *far less* than what is expected.

In other words – the main ‘work’ is not so much in the Points for Meditation, but in your **time of prayer**. The videos, the talks, are meant to give us something to consider in our time of prayer, to teach us how to pray.

To achieve such a transformation of the heart, there is only one path: to feel<sup>2</sup> God intimately within oneself, making heavenly things present and experiencing divine consolations through prolonged prayer and intimate encounter with God. The human heart clings only where it finds **satisfaction**, pleasures, benefits; naturally, it finds these only in created things. To attach oneself to divine things, one must experience in them satisfactions, pleasures, and benefits of a different order, which can occur only during prayer and interaction with God through the exercise of one’s own faculties or receiving divine consolations in them.

With good reason, St. Ignatius places the power of the Exercises in the interior work of the person exercising, “For it is **not much knowledge** that fills and satisfies the soul, but the intimate

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<sup>2</sup> Faith – a supernatural gift of God – is not something ‘perceptible’ per se, and hence we have faith without feelings (which is very comforting especially in times of desolation, as we will see later!). Nevertheless, in meditation, through the use of all our human faculties (imagination, memory, understanding, will, etc.), we can in a way come “into contact” or “touch” the mysteries we are contemplating. St. Ignatius is very much aware of human anthropology, that we are body and soul.



understanding and relish of the truth” [2], and it is this internal feeling and tasting of God and divine things that must steal the love of our heart from creatures and turn it toward God.

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## 2 – Spiritual Exercises via the Internet

[19]: “One who is .. engaged in public affairs or necessary business, should take an hour and a half daily for the Spiritual Exercises ...”

St. Ignatius was very practical, a realist. He knew that all people don’t have the opportunity to take a 30 day, an 8 day, or even a 3 day retreat because of their responsibilities in the world. Not everyone is called to be a religious, a cloistered monk, but all are called to holiness!

This is the type of **adaptation** we make via the Internet, for someone dedicating an hour and a half per day to exercising (or however much time you’re committing to).<sup>3</sup>

We start with **three introductory talks** via the **medium** (these videos) we are using; if they were in-person Exercises in retreat, a brief presentation is also made on what Ignatian Exercises are and what the retreat dynamics will be, along with sharing a schedule.

### *Practical Points*

Performing them in **daily life and online is another dynamic** that needs a **little more explanation** than an in-person retreat, but everything will be explained step by step, and since it is recorded, one can listen again to clarify doubts. You can also **submit questions** or ask for counsel from a priest if you are confused on anything or need help in some area.<sup>4</sup>

This series will last 50 days: Beginning in Lent and concluding a few days after the Resurrection. (it can be taken at other times as well).

There is no need to connect at a fixed hour, since the shared material is a **recording** that allows two things: to adjust **schedules to the exercitant’s availability** and to **listen more than once if something calls attention**.

Similarly, if one day it is difficult to listen to the material, it will be possible to listen the next day to the material of two days... or with full **freedom**.

**What the Exercises are not:** They are not spiritual talks or formative lectures; rather, they are a **journey** designed by St. Ignatius to order life and find the Lord’s will for each person. This implies first listening to instructions and then “exercising” individually. Without this personal exercise, the fruit will be very limited.

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<sup>3</sup> As we’ve said, St. Ignatius recommends an hour and a half. Whether you take (beyond the time of “Points of Meditation”) 30, 45, or 60 minutes for prayer, the important thing is to strive to complete the time you have committed to. Otherwise, one is constantly tempted to cut short the time of prayer.

<sup>4</sup> On the page for each video there is a button to “Consult with a Priest”.

**Silence and recollection:**

*The "great" discipline requires a suitable atmosphere; and, in the first place, meditation. At Milan station I once saw a porter, who, with his head resting on a sack of coal propped against a pillar, was sound asleep... Trains left whistling and arrived with clanking wheels the loudspeakers continually boomed out announcements; people came and went in confusion and noise, but he—sleeping on—seemed to be saying: "Do what you like, but I need to be quiet." We priests should do something similar: around us there is continual movement and talking, of persons, newspapers, radio and television. With priestly moderation and discipline we must say: "Beyond certain limits, for me, who am a priest of the Lord, you do not exist. I must take a little silence for my soul. I detach myself from you to be united with my God."*

[John Paul I, Discourse to the Clergy of Rome, 7 September 1978]

I think that, although exceptional, it might be **possible** in some cases to perform meditation on a train, tram, metro, or plane... that takes us to work. It will depend on the **concentration ability** of each exercitant.

**Great spirit and generosity:**

5th: *"It will be very **profitable** for the one who is to go through the Exercises to enter upon them with **magnanimity** and **generosity** toward his Creator and Lord, and to offer Him his entire will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may dispose of him and all he possesses according to His most holy will."* [5]

St. Ignatius is asking us that we strive to **enter** with this disposition.

It is interesting to note that these are not so much "fruits", but "pre-conditions" for the SE. What exactly does St. Ignatius mean?

What is **generosity**? It is defined as: *"the quality of being kind and generous"* and is linked with magnanimity. Generous is: *"showing a readiness to give **more of something**, as money or time, than is strictly necessary or expected:"*

What is **magnanimity**? It comes from Latin meaning "great of soul". To stretch beyond the bare minimum. St. Thomas says: "Magnanimity by its very name denotes stretching forth of the mind to great things." (II, II, 129, 1).

So we see the idea of going "beyond the minimum." We are not content with mediocrity. We desire greatness, not for pride. We were made to be holy. And our holiness is the glorification of God. Our whole being ought to be a great act of worship: *"offer your bodies as spiritual worship"* (cf. Rm 12:1).

Let us consider our Lord's words: (Mt 5:39-41) *if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*

See how our Lord is asking us to go beyond the “*bare minimum* level of justice”. He is asking us to be *perfect*, to be like Him (cf. Mt 5:48).

*"Necessity of the disposition indicated in the fifth note. — Strictly speaking, it is necessary, or at least highly convenient; 'it is very helpful,' says St. Ignatius. That is, it is very convenient for the Exercises to produce, at least from the beginning, a fruit **proportionate** to their efficacy. If this **disposition** is present **before** entering the Exercises, and there are no **contrary positive dispositions**, then, with divine favor, it will practically be **acquired** during the holy Exercises, or at a particular moment when God illuminates with very vivid particular light, or gradually, so that it is at the same time fruit and disposition from one exercise to another. On the other hand, if there are contrary positive dispositions, the fruit is generally not that of the Exercises. This seems to be what Father Meschler refers to when he says that if one does not have the disposition of the fifth note, 'it would almost be better not to begin' the Exercises."*

Father Casanovas Commentary:

The twentieth note gives a slightly different formula, but it contains the same disposition recommended here; namely, “*the **desire** to take advantage as much as possible.*” Whoever possesses one, possesses the other as well.

The fifth note is the **principal one** among all the notes and declares the disposition that the exercitant should have to perform St. Ignatius’ Exercises with full perfection. This disposition is that the exercitant puts no obstacle before the Holy Spirit and opens all the doors of his soul wide.

Our desires, in matters that compel us by His infinite goodness (such as the paths of holiness), depend greatly on the effort of our will. Thus, desiring to be holy is almost the same as wanting to be holy; wanting it, of course, with firm and effective will.

Men generally want and desire spiritual things only to a certain degree and with limited intensity; if it concerns something higher that requires greater effort, the volitions are conditioned by this impossible condition: “*if it did not cost so much.*” Perhaps man does not state this clearly to himself, but in reality, this is often our way of wanting, and therefore our way of desiring holiness...

The well-known proverb that “*the things of the Saints are more to admire than to imitate*” does not only refer to the miracles worked by God through them, but is also improperly applied to the virtues the Saints exercise for the honor of His Divine Majesty and the sanctification of their own souls.

By saying, “*God does not call me by these paths,*” man remains content, even if he has made no effort to seriously investigate whether God calls him or not. [Ibid., 309.]

We read in the Directory of 1599:

Ch. 2 – Dispositions which the Exercitant should bring to the Exercises

- One should understand their importance (concerns his soul); ought to come with **eagerness, diligence, and courage**; to **act manfully [bravely]**, to throw aside all hindrances to God's grace and to bend all the power of his soul to cooperate with this grace and to dispose himself as fully as he can for receiving it
- Should enter with great **hope** (cf. 1 Thess 4:3 – *For this is the will of God, your sanctification*)

The following might be something helpful for you to meditate on in your time of prayer:

Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the **path**, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on **rocky ground**, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell upon **thorns**, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on **good soil**, and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.*

*Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the **path**. As for what was sown on the **rocky ground**, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy,; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among **thorns**, this is he who hears the word, but he cares of the world, and the delight in riches chokes the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on **good soil**, this is he who hears the word and understands it, in once case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another, thirty.*

Below is a summary of the kinds of soil in this parable.



Soil	Explanation	Kind of Person
Path → birds	Doesn't understand; devil	Frivolous; superficial; doesn't take holiness seriously
Rocky ground → scorched by sun	Receives with joy; no roots; falls in trial/persecution (immediately)	Slacker; afraid to suffer; wants holiness with no cross.
Thorns → choked	Delight in riches	Holds something back; keeps something for self. Won't give Jesus a cup a water on way to calvary, because maybe he will need it later...faith is imprisoned by a worldly passion (doing good things but for wrong reasons)

Consider your own soul. Which kind of soil do I have now? Is it the path? The rocky ground? Covered with thorns? Why?

Is the soil **good**? Ready for 30, 60, or a hundred-fold? Where do I need to improve to be more open to God's call?

May God bless you.