**THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA – 6/30/2016**

**WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY THEY MATTER**

When we pause to take stock of ourselves as human beings—good but imperfect and flawed—and our world--imperfect and flawed—we may realize that the one life we have to live may not go well without some conscious tending to it. The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) are one way of paying attention to it that has proved helpful to millions of people over the past four and a half centuries. It is a way of wisdom—not just head-learning—for the whole person. And it offers means of aligning and transforming a person for a truly good life. The need is especially great in our time because all the loud “static” of our culture makes it very difficult to pay attention to what really matters. Finally, for all too many people, life feels empty, without meaning. The Exercises can give a person hope.

Ignatius divides his Spiritual Exercises into four “weeks” (this is within the context of making them full time for 30 days; the “weeks” are not calendar weeks of seven days but of varying length adjustable by the guide according to the need of the person making the Exercises).

Here, using the capital-letter headings from Dean Brackley’s *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola,* is an outline of the goals and sequence of the “weeks”:

***Overall Goals:***

+ To come to a deeper appreciation of and trust in one’s own experience and to recognize that life-experience as the place to encounter the One many people call God. + To come closer to God (who desires a personal relationship with us--God’s creation)—the real and true God (of course, all our images of God are inadequate, but many people need to be liberated from clearly false and debilitating images).

***Specific Goals of Each Week:***

**GETTING FREE** + [“pre-Exercises”] To have an *experience* of God’s love + [First Week] To know oneself as a loved sinner (loved unconditionally by God) and to recognize the “sin of the world”--how most people struggle to live because of oppression by the powerful.

**SOMETHING WORTH LIVING FOR** + [Second Week] To experience being called by Jesus (for non-Christians, by God) to serve, and to answer in freedom and adult responsibility, inspired by a closer relationship with Jesus that comes from entering imaginatively into the gospel stories (“contemplating” them). . (over)

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**DISCERNING AND DECIDING** [During the rest of the Exercises and afterwards] To develop the ability to sort out the many conflicting “voices” coming from within us and without.

**PASSION AND COMPASSION** + [Third Week] To know and empathize with the vulnerable, suffering human Jesus; to recognize our sharing in the “paschal mystery” in the larger and smaller dyings and risings of human life; and to be in solidarity with others who suffer.

**RESURRECTION** + [Fourth Week] To empathize with Jesus’ joy and the sureness of his victory over death as a source of hope in our struggle against evil and for the liberation of God’s people, Jesus’ sisters and brothers.

The Ignatian Exercises are not the only wisdom available in this world. But they are very, very good, and they happen to belong to and with and in Jesuit education. That’s why they matter.

GWT

4/7/16