

**Bellarmino Chapel**  
**Advent Ignatian Retreat 2022**

**For God So Loved the World: Preparing to Welcome the Christ Child**

**Introduction**

Welcome to our Advent 2022 Retreat in Daily Living! Whether this is your first experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, or you are a veteran of Ignatian retreats, be assured that God has something special in store for you.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius aim to both help us deepen our relationship with Christ and grow in spiritual freedom so that we can hear and respond to the invitation to take our place as co-laborer with Christ in building the Kingdom of God. Although originally intended to be given as a 30-day silent retreat with an individual director, Ignatius realized that, even in his own time, many people could not absent themselves from their work and daily lives for such a long period. He thus suggested alternate formats in which the Exercises could be made.

The format we will be using for this Advent Retreat is the same we used for last year's retreat. You will be provided with material for your daily prayer during the four weeks of Advent. Each week of prayer will be preceded by a talk exploring the theme for that week of prayer and providing instruction for the prayer. You have the option of participating live via Zoom for the talks, allowing you to ask questions or raise comments, or watching a video of the talk later that day. You will also have the opportunity to meet in small groups each week to share the fruits of your prayer.

We ask you to commit to pray over the material given to you for at least 30 minutes a day. But please do not approach the prayer material as a homework assignment that you have to complete. If something strikes you, stay with it. Often the prayer material will include questions designed to stimulate your thoughts and reflection. Use them if they are helpful, but you need not feel like you must go through all of them. Just stay with what you are getting some benefit from. Linger with spontaneous movements toward or away from God. You may find it helpful to journal about those at the end of your prayer session.

Some of you may have prayed before with some of the scripture or other material you will pray with in the coming weeks. Please remember that there are layers of meaning in any prayer exercise that speak to us differently at different times in our lives. Therefore, we encourage you to approach the prayer material for each day of the coming weeks as though you were seeing it for the first time, being open to whatever it is God wants to reveal to you now.

We encourage you, as St. Ignatius did, to begin each prayer period asking for the grace that is identified for that period or week. We also encourage you to be sure your prayer time includes some colloquy with Jesus. (Ignatius uses the term colloquy to mean some dialogue with God or Jesus; we share our feelings, thoughts, reactions, as we would share with a friend.)

Please also be sure to take some time at the end of your prayer each day engaging in a review of prayer, paying attention to what you just experienced and jotting down in your journal any major insights, strong feeling or emotions. As you journal about what happened in you during your prayer, ask yourself”

What happened as you prayed?

Where did God draw you?

What did you feel?

Was the grace you sought given to you?

On the final day of each week, you will be invited to review your prayer over the course of that week. Spend some time reflecting on what happened in you during this week of prayer; for example: significant moments, insights, different feelings, experiences of consolation and desolation, what God’s presence was like. Ask yourself: what do you feel moved to share with the group when it gathers?

With respect to sharing during the small group sessions, in your first session, your group facilitator will invite participants to share a little bit about themselves – who they are, why they signed up for the retreat, what their hopes are. Additionally, although your facilitator will go through these in the first session, here are some guidelines for small group sharing that will help keep the atmosphere of trust that allow everyone to feel comfortable sharing about their faith.:

- Only one person speaks at a me.
- No interrupting.
- No one is forced to speak but everyone is encouraged to participate and share what they are comfortable sharing.
- There is no judging or arguing. What people share should be accepted without judgement or comment, with a reverent, respectful taking in what each is saying.
- After everyone has shared, participants may respond to each other in a contemplative, reverent, respectful manner, that respects each other’s experience.
- Everything that is shared is treated as confidential.

### **A Prayer to Begin Our Advent Retreat**

(Mary Oliver, *Making the House Ready for the Lord*)

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but  
still nothing is as shining as it should be  
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an  
uproar of mice – it is the season of their  
many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves  
and through the walls the squirrels  
have gnawed their ragged entrances – but it is the season  
when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And  
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard  
while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;  
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling

in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly  
up the path, to the door. And I still believe you will  
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,  
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know  
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,  
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

## **FIRST WEEK: THE GOD WHO BEHOLDS ME WITH LOVE**

*Grace for this Week:* This week I pray for the grace of seeing myself as the beloved of God.

### **Day One of First Week**

Albert Haase, O.F.M., suggests that our image of God is one of the most, if not the most, important aspect of our spiritual formation. Our God-image, he writes, “shapes and colors everything about our personal spirituality: from why we pray to how we understand suffering and evil in the world.”

Our God image is shaped by (and can be damaged or healed through) our experiences of our significant relationships, and develops and may shift through our own mature exploration.

Your invitation for this opening day of our Advent retreat is to reflect on your image of God.

Begin by completing each of the following sentences simply and with whatever comes naturally to mind:

*When I was a child, God seemed....*

*God is similar to my father....*

*God is similar to my mother....*

*The thing that reminds me most of God is...*

*The main strength of my relationship with God is....*

Now ask yourself:

*What is my image of God? Who is God in my life right now? What are the main characteristics of your God image?*

*How has my image of God shaped my prayer, my relationships, my response to others and my response to God?*

*Is there a particular area that concerns me as I reflect on my image of God?*

*What happens when I share with God my image of God?*

### **Day Two of First Week**

Consider this poem by Rebecca Ruiz, titled *My Response*.

To be seen,  
gazed upon,  
beheld,  
can be disconcerting,  
even scary.  
To know that my imperfect heart is known,  
yet still embraced.

The challenge stands,  
To accept that Love.  
To allow Love to know me,  
lead me.

How will I respond  
to being looked upon and loved?  
Dare I return the gaze?  
Can I take in that Love?  
Do I soak it up—or do I resist?  
If I feel resistance, what is it in me that is resisting?  
Is it too much love?  
Am I being called to increase my capacity to accept this Love?  
Am I being challenged to see myself through the eyes  
of the One who beholds me?

I wonder.

How will I go on if I accept this Love?  
How, then, shall I live?

I decide.

The world needs more love.  
I shall savor the Love,  
store it up  
and let it flow over as I behold the world  
and all I encounter today.

How will you respond?

*How will I respond to God looking at me and loving me, even in my imperfection?*

*How do I feel when I realize the Divine is gazing at me—that God is beholding me?*

*Do I dare return the gaze? Or do I resist it?*

*What difference does a deep realization of God's love for me make for my ability to behold the world and those I encounter with love?*

### **Day Three of First Week**

Catherine of Siena  
Excerpt from *The Dialogues*

It was with providence that I created you, and when I contemplated my creature in myself I fell in love with the beauty of my creation. It pleased me to create you in my image and likeness with great providence. I provided you with the gift of memory so that you might hold fast my benefit and be made a sharer in my own, the eternal Father's power. I gave you understanding so that in the wisdom of my only-begotten Son you might comprehend and know what I the eternal Father want, I who gave you graces with such burning love. I gave you a will to love, making you a sharer in the Holy Spirit's mercy, so that you might love what your understanding sees and knows. All this my gentle providence did, only that you might be capable of understanding and enjoying me and rejoicing in my goodness by seeing me eternally.

Catherine heard God speak the above words to her, and they affected her deeply. Here is her response:

O abyss! O eternal Godhead! O deep sea! What more could you have given me than the gift of your very self?

You are a fire always burning but never consuming; you are a fire consuming in your heat all the soul's selfish love; you are a fire lifting all chill and giving light. In your light you have made me know your truth: You are that light beyond all light who gives the mind's eye supernatural light in such fullness and perfection that you bring clarity even to the light of faith. In that faith I see that my soul has life, and in that light receives you who are Light....

This light shows you to me, and in this light I know you, highest and infinite Good: Good above every good, joyous Good, Good beyond measure and understanding! Beauty above all beauty; Wisdom above all wisdom – indeed you are wisdom itself! You who are the angels' food are given to humans with burning love. You, garment who cover all nakedness, pasture the starving with your sweetness, for you are sweet without trace of bitterness....

You responded, Lord; you yourself have given and you yourself answered and satisfied me by flooding me with a gracious light, so that with that light I may return thanks to you. Clothe, clothe me with yourself, eternal Truth, so that I may run the course of this mortal life in true obedience and in the light of most holy faith. With that light I sense my soul once again becoming drunk! Thanks be to God! Amen.

Spend some time hearing God speak to you the words he spoke to Catherine. What is your response? Speak to God whatever is on your heart, with the same honesty with which Catherine spoke.

### **Day Four of First Week**

#### *Psalm 91*

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shade of the Almighty,  
Say to the LORD, "My refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust."

He will rescue you from the fowler's snare, from the destroying plague,  
He will shelter you with his pinions, and under his wings you may take refuge;  
his faithfulness is a protecting shield.

You shall not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day,  
Nor the pestilence that roams in darkness, nor the plague that ravages at noon.  
Though a thousand fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, near you it shall not come.

You need simply watch; the punishment of the wicked you will see.  
Because you have the LORD for your refuge and have made the Most High your stronghold,

No evil shall befall you, no affliction come near your tent.  
For he commands his angels with regard to you, to guard you wherever you go.  
With their hands they shall support you, lest you strike your foot against a stone.  
You can tread upon the asp and the viper, trample the lion and the dragon.

Because he clings to me I will deliver him; because he knows my name I will set him on high.

He will call upon me and I will answer; I will be with him in distress;  
I will deliver him and give him honor. With length of days I will satisfy him,  
and fill him with my saving power.

St. Ignatius suggests that we begin our prayer by considering "how God beholds me."

*How do the words and images of this Psalm help you get in touch with how God beholds you?*

*What do they tell you about God's nearness and care for you?*

*What does it mean to compare God both to a “fortress” and to “wings”? What does that suggest about God?*

### **Day Five of First Week**

The Spiritual Exercises end with a meditation referred to as *The Contemplation for Learning to Love Like God*. In it, Ignatius invites us to contemplate the variety of ways God gifts us. Today, you will reflect on the third part of that exercises in which we are invited to reflect on God’s constant labor on our behalf. Here is Joseph Tetlow’s translation of that part of the exercise:

I consider that God – to use St. Peter’s words – works busily in all creation. I use a metaphor here, of course, but I can see that if God attends to each and every creature and keeps shaping instincts and consciences and raising the energies that form our weather and our interactions, then I make a lot of sense when I say that God works busily. I let my mind run through all created things: the far reaches of space, our own galaxy, the globe of the earth, imagining how God labors to keep their magnificent order and functioning. Then I enter into living things perhaps into individual birds or animals and individual persons, imagining how God keeps nerves crackling and bone marrow producing blood and the like. I might consider a tiny little bug or flower, and imagine how many other living and nonliving things conspired to bring it to life and sustain it.

I consider this and ponder it, letting my heart go out to God. How great God is! How full of life, and how eager to have others exist, particularly other rational creatures. God labors and hopes and keeps sustaining us even when we destroy.

Then I think about my own case, about my own life history and my own self. How did God have to labor to keep me alive? To keep me growing and learning and believing and hoping? Were there no times when I realized that God was working in me? For me?

*As you sit with the questions raised in this portion of the Contemplation, what to you want to say to God?*

### **Day Six of the First Week**

In the Spiritual Exercises, repetition is an invitation to go back over a prayer experience in order to allow for deeper appropriation of the particular mystery. It is not repeating the material in sense of going back and looking for something new. Instead you want to return to the points where you experienced the greatest movement allowing yourself to savor, deepen and better appreciate the experience, allowing it to be reinforced.

So today, simply return to the moment in one of your prior prayer periods this week where you felt the greatest movement toward or away from God. The place of deepest affect. Go back there and see what else God wants to share with you.

**Day Seven of the First Week**  
**Review of the Week**

On the last day of each week during the retreat, you are invited to review and pray back over your journal for the preceding days of prayer this week. As you do, consider

*Where was I most moved?*

*What was God's presence like?*

*What do I want to share in my small group?*