

Lent 2023, Week 5 Reflection

PARADOX AND THE WAY OF LIFE

Welcome to the Fifth Week of the Lenten audio retreat, presented by Ignatian Young Adult Ministries, an initiative of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. Now that we've contemplated "Upending Expectations" and "Looking into the Heart," let's turn our attention to this week's theme: "Paradox and the Way of Life." As we enter into prayer together, breathe. Extend each exhalation just a bit longer with every breath. Observe, with compassion, whatever is happening both inside and outside of yourself. Are your internal and external landscapes in harmony? Is there anything you need to set aside in your heart or mind, or anything you can adjust in the world immediately around you, that will help you receive the Spirit of Life more fully during this time? If so, do that now, and let's begin this week's reflection, written by Amy Sytsma, former Regional Coordinator of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in Seattle...

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The paradox Jesus embodies in Scripture is currently the most intriguing aspect of my personal walk with Christ. A paradox is defined as: "a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that, when investigated or explained, may prove to be well founded or true."

Here is what I mean. Through study, prayer, contemplation, and relationships, I am coming to know God as a tender being that resides in the center of my soul, who is listening to my deepest desires and offering abundant wisdom. At the same time, I am learning about how I can join the expansive action plan of God's kin-dom (Ada María Isasi-Díaz defines "kin-dom" as working in solidarity with the oppressed toward liberation). Working to bring about God's kin-dom has the power to shape families, organizations, institutions, countries and our planet's wellbeing. Which brings me to the paradox: God is both intimate and transcendent.



"life under the milky way"

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This week's readings are dripping with another paradox: even in death, Jesus is life. For example, Jesus tells Martha in John chapter 11: "I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will never die." Then later in Romans chapter 8, Paul teaches: "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness."

What does it look like to appear to be alive but actually be dead? Have you ever witnessed someone who is in the midst of death yet is full of life? As we travel the journey as humans on earth, we have the choice to walk in death or walk in life.

Walking in death might look like numbing ourselves to the pain within us or in people around us. It could be choosing to reject the invitations for connection our community offers. Perhaps it is giving up on a calling we know we have but are unwilling to pursue.

On the other hand, inviting the Spirit into our lives even in the midst of death or suffering could look like this. After endless applications, she doesn't get the job offer or acceptance letter she desires but she chooses to bring her best energies to her current job. He can't seem to find a partner that he longs for yet he invests deeply in his friendships, family, and neighborhood. Despite relentless advocacy in her organization, the toxic culture of competition and condescension persists, however, her kindness does too and she won't give up on pushing for the change she wants.

The passages in this week's readings give us the invitation to walk with the Spirit in the way of life. We have the opportunity to say yes to the kin-dom of God in this world, knowing that the Spirit of God can guide our every step. This is the paradoxical way of Jesus, which he demonstrates many times throughout the Gospels and then ultimately with his death and resurrection.

May the absurd truth of the Spirit's resurrection promise grant you hope in this season of Lent: "I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD. (Ezekiel 37:14).

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We are so glad you took the time to reflect on "Paradox and the Way of Life" with us. On behalf of Ignatian Young Adult Ministries, an initiative of the Office of Ignatian spirituality, thank you! Join us next week for the final installment of this Lenten retreat as we explore the theme "Our Journey of Faith."

Reflection questions:

- Where in your life are you experiencing death? How might you invite the Spirit to dwell with you in that situation?
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 - How have you seen someone embody life in the midst of death?
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Opening & Closing Prayers

A Prayer for Compassion by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Oh God, I wish from now on
to be the first to become conscious
of all that the world loves, pursues, and suffers;

I want to be the first to seek,
to sympathize and to suffer;
the first to unfold and sacrifice myself,

to become more widely human
and more nobly of the earth
than of any of the world's servants.

From Death to Life by Peter Faber, SJ

Jesus Christ, may your death be my life
and in your dying may I learn how to live.
May your struggles be my rest,
Your human weakness my courage,
Your embarrassment my honor,
Your passion my delight,
Your sadness my joy,
in your humiliation may I be exalted.
In a word, may I find all my blessings in your trials.
Amen.