

Learning to See Yourself as God Sees You

By Colin Saxton

At the heart of Ignatian spirituality is a profound belief that the presence and power of Christ can transform us into His image. Alongside other spiritual disciplines like Scripture reading and corporate worship or discipleship, Ignatian prayer exercises can be a useful avenue to reflect on and learn to attend to Christ's presence with us and in us. Part of the focus of these exercises is to help us be aware of God's call on our lives and to encourage us to live meaningful lives of Christian service in the world. In general, the purpose of the Ignatian spiritual exercises is to bring a person to a place of freedom through:

- An awareness of being created & redeemed by God's love
- The understanding that Jesus initiates this redemption within the ordinariness of the world, demonstrating that world is a good place to live and work
- A desire to work as a companion of Jesus to continue this mission in the world
- The practice of continual prayer and discernment to discover how God speaks to us

For me, the specific practice of "learning to see myself as God sees me" gets fleshed out in a pretty simple way. I am a novice at most spiritual practices so I fear that someone more skilled in the contemplative tradition might be appalled at how I have dumbed-down a traditional practice. But for me, this is what works. I encourage you, if you are a person learning to come to grips with God's love for you, that you adapt and experiment as needed to find your way with Christ.

The practice begins by quieting myself and learning to be still before God. Sometimes, I will sometimes simply repeat: "*Abba, I love you*" over and over until I am focused only on God...and until I mean it with my whole heart and mind.

Next, I take time to just be grateful. No long list of things but just gratitude for the day and for whatever it will bring. It may be that old age is setting in, but I am growing closer to that time where I know that the world does not rest on my shoulders. I am learning to be content to just do my part rather than feeling like I must do it all. I have been trying to practice being grateful that Jesus has made it possible for me *to do anything*, to be involved *at all* in what he is seeking to do. This is helping me to be much less focused on me and much more focused on him. Being sort of self-centered...this one requires work. But I am finding it very important work as I learn the way of contentment and how best to focus on what God really desires to do in and through me.

Now I am ready to ask God to help me see, again, just how he sees me. I've done this long enough now to know that God's view of me is consistently clear and gracious: God sees me *as God's beloved child*. Not that I am the only one. Not because I have done anything or need to...but I simply am. In that divine moment, I know experientially that God's love/grace for me is real, sure, abiding. I feel empowered to live up to my calling at that point. I do not have to give in to fear, insist on my way, worry or have to live up to either my own or another's false expectations of me. When I do not hurry through this process of letting God help me *know* what is true about me, it helps prepare me for when voices in my head or the real, out-loud ones try to tell me otherwise. It makes quieting them or ignoring them easier (notice I did not necessarily say "easy").

The voice of unworthiness still can ring sharp and clear in my head some days, especially at times when I have either purposely missed the mark or unintentionally failed someone. What I have learned, however, is rather than neglecting the discipline...fearing I will hear of Word of shame or rejection from God...this is exactly the time to press into the discipline.

You see, this is not spiritual transformation based on "trying harder" or "finally getting it right." Rather, this is a life-long relationship in which I am learning to yield to grace. It may take some time to become convinced again of God's relentless acceptance, and it may require some confession, but it will come again. That is an eternal truth I have learned experientially, not something I have simply read in a book or heard in a sermon. And that makes all the difference.

At the place of knowing I am God's beloved, it becomes a much easier (and I would add *effective*) to ask God to search me—to speak into my life the things *that do need to change*. Assured that God is fully for me, I can freely offer my body as a living sacrifice, as an acceptable offering in worship. Now I can give myself unreservedly to God in loving response to the grace that will not let me go, rather than in some desperate attempt to earn acceptance or avoid punishment. What I experience time and time again in this process of being searched is that God reveals those areas that do need changing...but in a way and at a pace that leads to real transformation.

The fruit of this work is freedom—to be at peace with God, others, and even myself. The world is a different place when you walk out into it knowing you are beloved of God. It makes a difference knowing God is for you, God is with you, God will not let you go. Instead of walking in fear, doubt, worry, or with a need to prove myself to others, walking in light of God's profound love can reorient the way we relate to others.

Exercise—

- In a manner that best suits you, center yourself in God's presence
- Give thanks for this day...and moment in time
- As you are able and willing ask God to help you see yourself as God sees you...
- Give thanks for this gift of grace
- As this practice becomes more familiar and real to you, move toward the disciplined grace of opening yourself to areas God is seeking to transform you
- Give thanks for this grace...and pray for courage, wisdom and companions who will help you to then act in light of this new insight