



## Meditation

Ignatius is convinced that meditation is the road to that inner space that may be revealed, opened, touched, uncovered by that unique act of creation, unique to meditation, and by no other creature, object or sensation. Only God, he believes, owns the human center (Exer. 316, 322, 329, 330). But this center is covered by a



Ignatius of Loyola

communications system, a natural attitude, a self indulgence, that impedes human access to it. Ignatius' initiation into this mystery is a definite effort at breaking down this communication system and building a new one through which the soul and God may communicate. Since the external communications system has also, through language and its repetition, through the use of the faculties and the repetition of this use, sensitized the subject into a series of body sensations and their habitual comfort, the new system of communications will aim precisely at destroying,

suspending, this habitualization. The exercises start in the human body and end in the transformation of this same human body. A new language is given the retreatant, a new memory and a new imagination. Through this retraining a new will might emerge in harmony with the Will of God.

## Language and the Will

The first week of the exercises is one of trial and training. It is a time of testing the will of the retreatant and the body of that will. Not everyone's body is ready for meditation at the particular time chosen for the exercises. Ignatius wants to single out those who might continue and those who should proceed no further. Though the exercises carry so much promise they could also be dangerous to one's health if not done under the best physical conditions. Ignatius says of "those with poco suieto (little temperament, lack of stamina and preparation) that "they should not proceed any further" (Exer. 18).

This first week is one of violence to the body habits of the retreatant. He is asked to search for a "place" (Exer. 20) away from the ordinary place to which he/she is normally accustomed: the cave of Manresa, a lonely room, a different room from the one usually

inhabited, a different house, a monastery in the country, an unaccustomed place, a place where the retreatant has to invent new body habits and where outside communications systems do not reach. The retreatant is also instructed about lights: less in the first and third weeks, more in the second and fourth (Exer. 79). The retreatant's body is subjected to new and calculated positions: kneeling, prostrating oneself face down, standing with the head bent down, pacing, walking, sitting rigidly (Exer. 74, 75, 76, 77) lowering the eyes, raising the eyes, closing out sounds, listening to special rhythms as the meditation dictates (Exer. 81, 258). The whole body of the retreatant must be reeducated until it becomes like a repellent to the external communications system and habits he/she was familiar with. All gestures, facial expressions, bodily movements, bodily expression must be painstakingly gone over as if in slow motion so that the body becomes impervious to the outside and begins to learn the technologies of facing and gathering within. **CONT. →**



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