

# IN THE MIDST OF Noise

## An Ignatian Retreat in Everyday Life

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# Introduction

The pages that follow were originally composed to be recorded for use with a portable media player. But now that they are printed in book form, it should be remembered they constitute a document not intended to be read, but rather to be “done” or “made.” They consist of directions or suggestions for a retreat which can only be properly assessed once the retreat has been made. This entails specific conditions, the most important of which are described on days 2 and 3.

The same is true of the little book on which this is based: the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius. It is recounted how Aldous Huxley once picked it up, flipped through it, and declared it drab, trite and uninspiring. The reason is the same: The Exercises are not meant to be read, but to be made in silence before God, usually and ideally with the help of a director or guide. This is why, in his lifetime, Ignatius resisted their publication. Only one edition appeared, a Latin translation made by a French colleague from a Spanish original, and only five hundred copies were printed, which Ignatius was very loath to distribute.

The value of this present document therefore depends on making the retreat it advocates. And this commitment, as Saint Ignatius points out, should be undertaken with “a magnanimous spirit and with great liberality toward one’s Creator and Lord.” A prior disposition is therefore required.

But this does not mean the Spiritual Exercises should be restricted to Roman Catholics or, at least, to already practicing Christians. Saint Ignatius described them as a means for “the overcoming of self and the ordering of one’s life on the basis of a decision made in freedom from any ill-ordered attachments.” Such an aim can be pursued by someone of any religious creed—or none at all. Jerome Nadal, who was his secretary, on being asked for whom the Spiritual Exercises were suited, answered: “For Catholics, for Protestants and for pagans.”

My hope and prayer is that this simple presentation of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius will be of benefit not only to those already well-acquainted with them, but also to a large number of people, whatever their religious beliefs, who would not ordinarily have access to Ignatian spirituality.

MICHAEL CAMPBELL-JOHNSTON, SJ  
BARBADOS, JANUARY 2009

Week 1



## DAY 1

# Why a Retreat?

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, good night!

I don't know what time of the day (or night) it is for you, but I want to start by welcoming you to this retreat and by introducing myself.

I am a Roman Catholic priest, and I belong to a religious congregation called the "society of Jesus." It was founded some 450 years ago by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish gentleman who changed his life from being the soldier of an earthly king to serving the King of Heaven. So I am a Jesuit priest. I am called CJ because my full surname is such a mouthful.

I was born in England, but a large part of my life has been spent in Latin America doing missionary work. I am now living on the island of Barbados. I look after a small parish devoted to Saint Francis of Assisi. I also run a small guest house for fellow Jesuits from Guyana who come here to make a retreat or have a holiday. The house is right on the sea and has a beautiful view over the blue Caribbean.

To be honest, it is partly a semiretirement job since neither occupation, guest-master or parish priest, is too demanding and I am now 76 years old. I have extra time to spare, and spend part of it writing, doing translation work and sometimes giving retreats.

So now you've met me. I wish I could meet you. But though I don't know your name or what you look like or what you do, there

is one thing I do know about you: you are interested in making a retreat in your daily life. For that is why you are reading this book, and that is what I shall be trying to help you do: make a retreat, spread over thirty days, though there is no time limit and it can last as long as you find helpful. The idea is to make the retreat without interrupting your ordinary daily life, and all the things you have to do, too much.

Saint Ignatius divided his Spiritual Exercises into four “Weeks” of unequal length. We will spend ten days on the first Week and eleven days on the second. On the third Week we will spend four days, and another four or five on the fourth or final Week, devoted to our Lord’s resurrection. The shorter time for the last two Weeks does not mean either that they are unimportant or that they are mere appendices or epilogues to the Exercises as a whole.

So perhaps a few words at the start about a retreat: What is it? Why is it important? What will it involve you in?

I suppose the most important thing about a retreat is that it is an attempt to see beyond the 101 cares and occupations you normally have and to ask yourself where it is all leading. What’s the purpose of it all? Do you remember the Gospel scene when Jesus met with the two sisters, Martha and Mary? Martha was busy with all the housework and looking after the visitors. She complained to Jesus that Mary did nothing to help her—Mary just sat there listening to him. Jesus replied to her: “Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.” And then he added something that must have annoyed her greatly: “Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”

It is a very simple story with a clear meaning. I suggest you use it in your prayer today. If it helps, you can imagine being there yourself, either as Mary or Martha.

To make a retreat is to choose Mary's part. For a short time, you try to stop worrying and fretting about so many different things, and sit in silence at God's feet, so to speak, just to listen. And you want to try and understand better what Jesus means when he says, "Only one thing is needed." What is that one thing? Where can I find it? What effect should it have on my daily occupations and cares?

In case you don't have a Bible with you, I will end by inserting here the short passage that comes from Luke 10:38–42. However, if you could have a New Testament or Bible at hand during your prayer, it would be helpful, though not essential.

As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary (who) sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."