

INTRODUCTION

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap” (Lk 6:38). You have received the First Spiritual Exercises (FSE) and its overflowing graces, and you desire to share it with others. The purpose of this Manual is to encourage, help, and support you in this desire. With it, you can better direct the flow of gifts from the FSE.

In this work, you have three identities and roles: Friend of God, which you are already, and Spiritual Conversation Guide and Giver of the FSE, which you may desire to become. These roles are represented in the structure of the Manual, training you for each one of these identities.

The FSE is all about receiving and giving. In the language of the prayer that serves as the epigraph of this Manual, Ignatius speaks of receiving and giving. “Take Lord and receive, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You gave it all to me; to you I return it.” This is the language that will be used in this Manual. You are the “giver” of the FSE. The person making the retreat is the “receiver.” In the FSE there are actually four lives that receive and give together: Jesus, Ignatius, you, and your receiver.

Echoing the words of Jesus (Jn 13:20), whoever receives you receives the First Spiritual Exercises, and whoever receives the First Spiritual Exercises receives Jesus and the one who sent him.

From the beginning Ignatius intended the FSE to serve three needs:

1. to give the receiver the desired retreat,
2. to provide the receiver with exercises to use after the retreat,
3. to teach your receiver how to instruct others in these exercises.

This is the ripple effect of the FSE. Each receiver becomes a giver in some manner. And many people, like yourself, spread out into the community, giving the FSE retreats across all sorts of boundaries and renewing lives. This is the dream and energy of the FSE.

Here are three things that may free you from any initial anxiety:

1. All you need do is give the exercise. Your receiver pours her or his life into it.
2. The effect of the FSE is with God and your receiver. It is not in your hands.
3. You will not be alone. You have the Spirit and a partner as cogivers, and if possible a mentor for your first retreats.

Your own experience of receiving the FSE is your best teacher in giving the FSE. Actually giving these retreats to others is the next best teacher. So this Manual is the teacher that sits between these two. You need all three. The Manual teaches an exercise or process through commentary. To keep step with your receiver, it will, at times, closely replicate the text in the book *The First Spiritual Exercises*.

Though Catholic in origin, the FSE is inclusive of all Christian traditions, searchers, and unchurched. It is for all people—the disadvantaged, youth, workers, professionals, the influential, the middle class, the poor, leaders, parishioners, teachers, prisoners, the sick, the confused, the lost . . . anyone looking for inner peace.

WARNING: Please do not read this Manual before receiving a First Spiritual Exercises retreat. It will create very unhelpful expectations and seriously intrude between God and you in your retreat.

The Spirit of the Lord Is upon You

The time is ripe. “Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting” (Jn 4:35). In your hands, the FSE stands ready to help. But before giving you the particular guidance in this Manual, two general helps are offered now.

The first is a “Sending Meditation,” a short spiritual exercise that reveals the purpose of the FSE and its way of proceeding. This gospel text was the foundational inspiration for Ignatius and his companions of their own identity and desires. Like you, they wanted to serve this way under Jesus. Of course how you move into communities, through new technologies and presence, and in what ways you apply the FSE with particular people, is as challenging today as it was for the first disciples.

The second is a “Sending Blessing,” for every time you find yourself sent out to give an exercise, or a number of them, or a whole FSE retreat. Both the sending meditation and the sending blessing are provided here, before anything else, as places you might return to often during your work with the FSE and find life.

The Sending Meditation

This is a short prayer, seven minutes at most, for when the time is ripe. It is the story of Jesus’ desire for me. First I read it in its entirety, then I choose one of the ten parts with its pair of points that attracts me. I close my eyes, enter the scene, and stand before Jesus on the mountain. I take my place with the women and men he has called to send out. He addresses me personally. Then I listen to him and respond with feeling.

1. *The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. . . . To provide for those who mourn in Zion, to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit (Is 61:1–3).*

Point 1. Jesus accepts the call to bind broken hearts and liberate. So have you.

Point 2. The FSE is affirmation, praise, and gladness. It strengthens faint spirits.

2. *When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Mt 9:36–38).*

Point 1. Jesus feels compassion for the helpless and the lost. So he sends you.

Point 2. The FSE guides, shepherds, and helps those who are harassed.

3. *Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him (Mk 3:13–15). Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God (Lk 6:12–13).*

Point 1. Jesus called to him those he wanted. He wants you. And you have come.

Point 2. The FSE brings prayer to important choices. It frees people for service.

4. *These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" (Mt 10:1,5,7–8).*

Point 1. Jesus gives his disciples his own mission. He reveals these needs to you.

Point 2. The FSE brings Jesus to the sick, lifeless, rejected, and unfree.

5. *You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food (Mt 10:9–10).*

Point 1. Jesus is very clear: what was freely received is freely given.

Point 2. The FSE takes no baggage, goes with free hands, and seeks local hospitality.

6. *Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you (Mt 10:11–12).*

Point 1. Jesus says find, stay with, and serve those who are ready and open.

Point 2. The FSE is about receiving and giving the deep inner peace of God.

7. *After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever*

rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Lk 10:1,16).

Point 1. Jesus sent his disciples in pairs. Find yourself a partner.

Point 2. FSE: In listening to you, receivers hear Jesus, and the one who sent him.

8. *The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” Jesus said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:17–20).*

Point 1. Jesus affirms his disciple’s joy; people are now free. He will affirm you.

Point 2. The FSE helps to discern the spirits and deepen intimacy with God.

9. *At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” (Lk 10:21–23).*

Point 1. Jesus rejoices with the Spirit and his Father for what is revealed to you.

Point 2. The FSE reveals the true feelings and desires of the Trinity.

10. *Jesus said to his disciples privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it” (Lk 10:24).*

Point 1. Jesus blesses his disciples’ eyes, whispers their gifts. So too with you.

Point 2. The FSE opens eyes and hearts to see and hear God in all things.

The Sending Blessing

Bless my feet, Lord,
as I go out to give the First Spiritual Exercises.
Bless my mind with the confidence to explain it.
Bless my mouth for each exercise I give.
Free me from any anxieties.

Bless my ears to be a good Spiritual Conversation Guide.
Bless my lips to converse with humility.
Bless my heart to discern your movements.
Free me from selfishness.

Bless my eyes to see you at work in my receiver.
Bless my soul with loving reverence for her or him.
Bless my body to feel the rhythms of this retreat.
Free me from distractions.

Bless my hands to be empty of baggage.
Bless my nose to find the holy desires.
Bless my tongue to accept my receiver's hospitality.
Free me from attachments.

Bless my whole self, to be a giver of your peace.
You have freed me for love; now send me.

PART ONE
A Friend
OF God

THE STORY OF THE FIRST SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

This is a story you need to know, for you are a part of it. It all began in 1521, at Loyola, a fortified tower in the Basque country. Ignatius read and daydreamed during months of recuperation from a near fatal war wound. It becomes a time of conversion; he desired to give everything away, go to Jerusalem as a penitent pilgrim, and imitate the great saints of the desert. At this time, he wondered at the spirits moving in him, and gave himself over to spiritual conversations with his family.

The next year he set off to the Black Madonna in the mountains of Montserrat where he spent all night in prayer and conversation with her, offering his sword like a knight to become her knight of God. The monks gave him a small book of exercises to help prepare for his confession.

He walked down to Manresa, where he experienced great trials and mystical graces. God taught him about prayer, good and bad spirits, scruples, true desires, creation, and much else. Ignatius wrote his own exercises and discovered that what helps him can help others. He said people “wanted to talk to him, because even though he had no knowledge of spiritual matters, yet in his speech he revealed great fervor and eagerness to go forward in God’s service” (*Autobiography* 21). So began the great Ignatian connection between personal relationship, spiritual conversation, and spiritual exercise.

After this, he sailed to Jerusalem but could not stay, so he returned to Barcelona learning Latin for future study. Polanco, an early Jesuit, says that during this time Ignatius did not stop helping many people through his conversations and spiritual exercises.

This continued at Alcalá and Salamanca during his university studies. His conversations attracted the Inquisition, who twice put him in jail, but judged him innocent. He gave exercises from what he now called his little book of Spiritual Exercises, named in this book the FSE, to a noble woman and her daughter, to a baker and his wife, to a hospital orderly, to

university professors and students. Young or old, educated or illiterate, poor or rich, Ignatius felt the FSE was for all.

He then started serious studies at the University of Paris. After a year, he also began “to give himself more intensively to spiritual conversations than he normally did, and he gave exercises to three people.” At once the three “gave all they had to the poor, even their books” and began begging in the Paris streets (*Autobiography* 77). This caused great commotion at the university and strictures by the authorities. Later a teacher remarked to Ignatius his surprise that no one was causing him trouble anymore. Ignatius answered, “The reason is because I’m not talking to anyone about the things of God. But when the course is over we’ll be back to normal!” (*Autobiography* 82).

At this time, Ignatius gave the Spiritual Exercises in a longer form than the FSE, intensively over many months, to his college roommates, Francis Xavier and Pierre Favre. This form of the Exercises, named in this book the Full Spiritual Exercises, had new exercises on decision making, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Through conversations and regular enjoyable meals, this group of three became a group of seven companions, who all desired to go to Jerusalem and live as actual apostles.

Arriving in Venice, Ignatius “busied himself giving the Exercises and in other spiritual contacts” (*Autobiography* 92). The now nine companions joined him later and while they all waited for a ship, they begged and served in the hospitals. After most were ordained, they went out into the towns, to beg for food, preach on street corners, and engage in spiritual conversations.

When their Jerusalem plans were ended by war, they returned to Rome to offer themselves to the pope. In the end, they became a new religious order, the Society of Jesus. In their Institute, a foundational document for the pope and their new order, they describe their purpose. Not surprisingly, spiritual conversation and giving exercises stand proud in the short list, for these had not only helped so many people but also made them who they were.

Ignatius writes later, “Endeavor to be profitable to individuals by spiritual conversations, by counseling and exhorting to good works, and by conducting spiritual exercises.” Again, “The exercises of the first week can be made available to large numbers; and some examinations of conscience and methods of prayer can also be given far more widely, for anyone who has good will seems to be capable of these exercises” (*Constitutions* 84, 649).

In 1548, the pope approved the Spiritual Exercises, and they are printed. In this book were complete instructions and material for giving the Spiritual Exercises in its two full forms, thirty days enclosed from normal life, and thirty weeks in daily life. The book also included instructions for the FSE, given for four weeks in daily life. So there is one book, but three forms of giving the Exercises, which use all or part of the exercises within. Ignatius also includes ways to apply the exercises to different people, their desires, and life situations.

Both the Full and the First Spiritual Exercises were then taken out into Europe and the New World, the FSE being given to greater and greater numbers of people. The early Jesuits record this: Nadal says how different parts of the Exercises helped different people with different needs. Polanco insists the Exercises were intended for every class of society, and in fact had helped every class, in ways that preaching, exhortation, and fear of damnation did not.

Ignatius wrote that the FSE can be extended to large numbers of persons, including women and married ladies. Domenech gave the FSE to orphan boys in Messina. Broet often gave them to young women in Bologna and Landini gave them to priests and young women.¹ Favre saw the FSE ripple through Palma and out into the countryside. As lay and church people received them, they then enthusiastically gave them to others, and these receivers in turn gave them to more others.

One pastoral strategy in a new city seems to have been to give the FSE, then form a lay sodality or confraternity, whose rule of life was a way to live out the exact exercises they had learned and the graces that had been given in the FSE. These sodalities, involving huge numbers, spread like wild fire, and today, 450 years later, they continue as the worldwide Christian Life Community.

The preached Spiritual Exercises, annual retreats for religious, exercises and catechesis, renewal programs, detailed retreat books applying the Exercises to new groups, directories for eight-day versions, drama, music, street processions, art and architecture, devotional books, local language translations, engraved gospel contemplations, visual exercise handouts, the illustrated Exercises and bestselling spirituality books all grew naturally from the seedbed of the Spiritual Exercises. Many of these were locked into the life of Jesuit institutions and missions, which protected the form of the Exercises. Others were creative forms that have flourished and passed, rightly as times, needs, and the world changes.

In the last fifty years, the Spiritual Exercises has seen a new growth of individual spiritual direction in the Full Spiritual Exercises, lay people receiving and giving them, and new forms of street, youth, and guided retreats in daily life. Now the FSE, applied today in full exercise and retreat form, is gathering momentum. In fact, you are a part of it. This is happening now.

Jesuit Congregations, formal international meetings to keep the direction and ministries of the Jesuit order responsive to the greatest needs worldwide, met in 1890 and 1920, and vigorously supported, to the “greatest extent possible,” giving the FSE especially to men, ecclesiastics, the workers, and the poor. So too, they encouraged forming sodalities for students, young people, workers, and the poor. Both works, likely in turn, were to “imbue an interior spirit of the Christian life, strengthen in solid virtue, train in love and the works of mercy, and inflame with zeal for souls.”²

Today the Spiritual Exercises are promoted as a source of similar inspiration, so that “our deep love of God and our passion for his world should set us on fire, a fire that starts other fires.”³ The FSE needs you to take it to wider groups of people again, to new places, to train new givers and recover the great good they can do. In short, use the FSE to light a fire that starts other fires.

In the new millennium, the First Spiritual Exercises is defined again here, to help you describe it to those interested in becoming your receiver of it, and to help you to apply it to her or him in the giving of it.

The Forms of the Exercises

An Ignatian “spiritual exercise” is a five-part structured prayer with a particular aim to bring one into relationship with God. The “Spiritual Exercises” is a set of spiritual exercises, structured in a four-week retreat, with a particular dynamic written by St. Ignatius and developed by his experience, the experience of the first givers, and the experience of those who received it. They are a single, progressive, and powerful experience of grace, built around prayer and spiritual conversation or direction.

The Spiritual Exercises take two forms, the “First” Spiritual Exercises and the “Full” Spiritual Exercises. As noted already, the Full Spiritual Exercises are given for thirty days in seclusion or thirty weeks in daily life. The First Spiritual Exercises are given for four weeks in daily life. The

First Spiritual Exercises, formally called the 18th Annotation Exercises, are “first” in four ways:

1. First in the spiritual journey. They are the first spiritual exercises learnt by the pilgrim Ignatius seeking God’s will. They are the first spiritual exercises he gave to others. They are the first exercises you might give to a searcher today.
2. First in content. They contain many “first” exercises: the first principle and foundation, first Christian prayers, first virtues, first morning thoughts, first creation, first sin, first methods of prayer, first fruits of the Spirit, first rules of discernment, etc.
3. First in the dynamic of the Exercises. One of the First Spiritual Exercises retreats includes all of the First Week of the Full Spiritual Exercises. These and other first exercises must be made first before all the rest.
4. First in use. It is the first form of the Spiritual Exercises ever given. It can be given immediately to everyone. It is a complete form of the Spiritual Exercises in its own right. In Ignatian spirituality, it is the best place to begin.

The FSE offers a choice of four retreats to meet different desires. Applying the Exercises to needs and situations today, each retreat guides a person or group through four weeks of prayer in daily life, Monday to Thursday, and includes a Sunday Eucharist and exercise. Fourteen methods of prayer are taught, usually three new methods each retreat. Four Examen prayers, the mini-discernment of spirits, spiritual conversation and a Program for Life are also received.

While these elements are common, the purpose, content, and dynamic of each retreat is different.

Inner Peace in Divine Love. This retreat expands the spiritual exercise called the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love (*Spiritual Exercises* 230–37). In content, it explores a lover’s relationship, where each desires to give and receive from the other. It begins with the receiver’s experience of love and moves into the gifts of God’s love.

Inner Peace in Darkness and Light. This retreat is for those living in some form of darkness, a serious disorder in life, suffering, sinfulness, chronic illness, or lack of freedom. In content, it begins with love, covers the first week of the Full Spiritual Exercises on mercy, gives parallel exercises for