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Personal Experiences of the Exercises: On Becoming a Jesuit

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So, where do I live? In whom or what do I abide? Since beginning the process of entering the Society of Jesus a few years ago and subsequently following the Spiritual Exercises, I have encountered these questions as central to my spiritual life. Initially, I thought I was being asked about my association or membership. I discovered, however, that I am being asked how I proceed, live my life, and lead others.

When I consider the Contemplation on the Love of God, I am reminded that love is shown in deeds and in the mutual sharing of goods. In short, the Exercises invite me to live in love, to proceed in love, and to lead always in love, never in fear, resentment, anger, or regret.

Where I live impacts how I proceed. If I live in fear, I will act and respond in fear. However, when I live and abide in love, I act accordingly. During my experience of the Exercises, I spent a significant amount of time with the Gospel according to John in which one’s abode and dwelling is a recurring theme. Here I revisited the Greek words, mone and meno. Mone (μονή) is a noun meaning room, dwelling, or abode. Meno (μένω) is a verb meaning to remain, stay, and abide. Throughout the Gospel, the Greek words are used to describe the call to discipleship which is modeled upon the relationship and community of the Trinitarian God: “In my father’s house, there are many dwellings” (14: 2); “I abide in the Father and the Father abides in me” (14: 11); “Abide in me as I abide in you” (15: 4). This recurrence of “abide,” “dwelling,” “abide in,” and “live in” brings forth an intense call to rest in God, to recline as a child does in the arms of a parent. Additionally, the call challenges me to release the past, future, and even my professional and self-development.

Where I live, abide, and dwell directs or animates how I will proceed and lead. As the president of a Jesuit university, awareness of where I dwell and in whom I abide is essential. Such awareness is essential for everyone. Where I live, abide, and move in God’s love, the tasks, both significant and quotidian, don’t become easier, but my way of proceeding will be consistent and clear. Clarity, after all, is not such a bad thing. That’s what happened to Ignatius at Manresa. After almost a year in reflection and composing the Exercises, while overlooking the Cardoner River, he received clarity. God wanted him to live, dwell, and abide...in his love and grace. I join him in prayer and with the belief that it will be enough.

Fr. Thomas Curran, president of Rockhurst University, entered religious life as an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales and is currently in a transitional period as part of a process to become a Jesuit. Previously, he served as associate vice president for university relations and assistant to the president at Regis University.