

Session 1

Where is my life centred?

Stillness

Take a moment to become still as we begin this session: Wherever you are listening to this, sitting, standing, inside, outside, take time to notice what is around you . . . what do you see? . . . what do you hear? . . . how is the air as you inhale through your nose? . . . how is your body in contact with clothes, in contact with your chair or the ground . . . how focused were you able to be as you were noticing? Notice that . . . let God look at you . . .

We will now hear this session's reading from the Book of Job.

Reading (Job 38: 1-11, 40: 3-5)

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind; "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, Or who laid its cornerstone When morning stars sang together And all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors When it burst out from the womb? – When I made the clouds its garment, And thick darkness its swaddling band, And prescribed bounds for it, And set bars and doors, And said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, And here shall your proud waves be stopped'? Then Job answered the Lord: See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; Twice, but will proceed no further.'

Reflection

There is something about this encounter between God and Job that rings deeply true. It captures so much of human hubris, and our assumption that we can know and do and control everything. God speaks to Job 'out of the whirlwind'. Is God speaking today out of our whirlwind?

God, it seems, has had enough of 'know-alls' and confronts Job with two chapters' worth of challenging questions, that we could possibly sum up in the words 'Who do you actually think you are?'

Indeed, God's description of divine control over the limits of the ocean could well be applied to ourselves and our recent experience of being globally stopped in our tracks: 'Thus far you shall come, and no farther. Here shall your proud waves be stopped.'

Job's response is actually very touching. Utterly humbled, he realises just how small he really is and agrees to be less vocal in future and more ready to listen.

During this retreat we are on a journey towards transformation, but it begins at the bottom, not the top of the mountain. At the beginning of his Spiritual Exercises, Inigo urges us to spend time reflecting on where we truly find ourselves, and to take on board the revolutionary truth that creation does not exist to serve us and our ego, and is not under our control, but that all creation, including our own hearts and minds can only find purpose and fulfilment when in right relationship with the deeper centre. We will only 'grow back better' if our lives are rooted in this deeper centre.

Take some time this week to reflect on what this means for you personally. A good question to keep returning to might be: 'In this situation, am I really trying to make events revolve around my own ego or am focused on a deeper centre?'

Don't be disheartened. We are all ego-centred for much of the time, but to recognise this pattern of thinking and behaving is a sign that, deep down, we desire for it to be otherwise. Once recognised, we can ask for the grace to be more aware of our spiritual orientation (God-directed or ego-directed) in any given circumstances, and for the courage and humility to begin the process of change.

Talk to God

As you look back over the week, do you recognise any incidents or conversations in which you can now see that you were trying, perhaps unconsciously, to make things 'go your way'? How do you feel about them now? Such moments often leave us with a sense of unease. If this is your experience, can you express your feelings in prayer?

On the other hand there will have been incidents or conversations which, on reflection, seem to you to have been grounded in a deeper centre, a God-centre. How do you feel about these incidents now in hindsight? Such moments usually leave us with a sense of inner peace, even



though the circumstances may have been challenging.

During the past year the whole of humanity has come up against the limits of our imagined control over our world and our lives. A tiny virus has taught us that we can't make creation serve us. As you reflect on these events in prayer, both the personal and the global, what grace would you want to ask of God, to help you, and all of us, move closer to our God-centre and sit more lightly to our ego-centres.

Make a note in your journal of anything that has felt especially important to you this week. Notice those moments when you felt 'God-centred' and how you responded to this grace.

As we begin to recognise, like Job, that we really know very little and understand less, can we come to God in this genuine humility, and ask for the grace to begin this journey, trusting less in our own powers and more open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit?