

SILENCE - EMPTINESS MAKING FULLNESS POSSIBLE

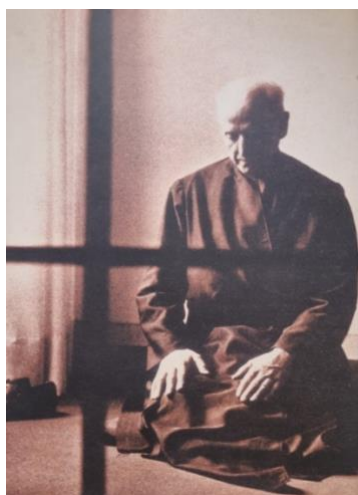
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While attending the Ignatian Immersion course in La Cova Sant Ignasi in 2014, I was drawn to the Arrupe hall where some of our experiences were offered. The Arrupe hall is in a previous 'attic space' which was remodelled during renovations to allow for gatherings for people interested in the practice of contemplative prayer. Six floors below is the cave that St Ignatius claimed as home base for much of the 11 months of his time in Manresa Spain in 1523-24, and where he began writing his Exercises.

For my companions in our contemplative evolution network (CEN) I share here insights from my explorations and discoveries in this interior journey of the heart.

A natural inner attraction to a simpler quieter prayer practice had begun in me after making the Spiritual Exercises on the long retreat some years earlier. During the immersion course, which was offered over 6 weeks, I often took the lift to the Arrupe hall for my morning or evening contemplative prayer.



Upon arrival at the entrance, all are welcomed by a large portrait of Pedro Arrupe at prayer. Entering the hall, I was surprised to discover I was rarely alone in this special space for prayer. Some of the resident Jesuits and visitors also found the space conducive to their morning and evening contemplative practice.

In this beautiful sacred site, looking out toward the stunning Montserrat, I became aware of a desire to explore connections with this simple silent emptying prayer practice and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. My inquiry introduced me to the proposals of the Hungarian Jesuit, Fr Franz Jalics SJ, whose contemplative retreat proposals inspired La Cova Sant Ignasi staff to offer his retreat style at Manresa.

After completing his training as a Jesuit, Franz Jalics was sent to Chile and then to Argentina, where he combined his duties as a theology professor with spiritual direction. He lived in a small community in one of the poorer shantytowns surrounding the capital. During the dictatorship of the generals, he was kidnapped in 1976 and held for five months (May - October) in an undisclosed location. He was blindfolded and handcuffed along with another Jesuit. The contemplative practice now taught at La Cova Sant Ignasi, emerged during this time of personal trial for Jalics. In captivity, he discovered the sustaining power of silent, wordless prayer, a school of surrender to God's presence when external structures had collapsed. Such experience convinced him that the contemplative path is not an esoteric way but a lifeline available to all of us and inherently part of Ignatius' spiritual exercises.

After his release, Jalics moved to Germany and refined his contemplative approach. Since 1984, he was able to teach it from Gries, a centre specifically designated for this purpose. He had offered over 400 retreats at Greis before he died in 2021 in his hometown of Budapest at the age of ninety-three. Franz Jalics had visited La Cova Sant Ignasi twice. First in 2007 and again in 2013. He taught simplicity and immediacy in contemplative practice and offered his path of contemplation in the tradition of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Many people in today's frantic paced world, Jalics suggests, find the Church's structures 'too complicated, impractical, and artificial,' obstructing access to the Divine.¹ Jalics' ministry consistently pointed seekers toward simplicity, immediacy, and inner spiritual reality, which he identified as accessible and the essence of contemplation.

'Contemplation cannot be learnt. It is pure grace. But one can dispose oneself for it. And the final act of disposing oneself consists in letting go of inward mental activity, till nothing is left but pure consciousness, pure attention.'²

At La Cova Sant Ignasi in Manresa this simplicity of contemplative prayer is now taught in many of the retreats offered there. Every two years an 8-day retreat is offered in English, which I have attended on 2 occasions, most recently June 2025.

Disposing oneself in this school of perception, aptly describes my experience of this path of contemplation. 'Nature is the great teacher of contemplation'³ writes Jalics, so our retreat begins in the garden, exercising perception. We were invited to walk more slowly, stand still, allow nature to have an effect on us. Engage the senses of the body to perceive this atmosphere of the divine in the beautiful garden.



Qigong exercises for an hour at sunrise with the moon at our back, looking out toward the stunning Montserrat embodies this school of perception.

We enter the Arrupe hall in a disciplined silence, taking our places in simplicity as we are introduced gently to the four pillars of Jalic's path of contemplation. As follows:



Body posture facilitating the flow of energy through the body, perception of *the breath* so the mind calms, is single pointed and becomes receptive to deeper regions of inner experience. *The palms of the hands*, a privileged place of energy for Jalics. Resembling the 'orans' of old, Jalics suggests directing the attention to the center of your palms and the heart. The fourth pillar is directing intention with *a sacred word*. A powerful addition, in my experience is the practice of this way of simplicity in community. 40 people together in the Arrupe Hall.

Throughout the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius the retreatant is invited into relationships; with Creator, with creation and with creature. The Spiritual Exercises are a journey of the heart, an inner journey, into the mystery of who or what the Creator is, who and what we

¹ Jalics Franz., Contemplative Retreat, An introduction to the way of Life and to the Jesus Prayer.3,4

² Jalics Franz., The Contemplative Phase of The Ignatian Exercises, Way supplement 103 2002

³ Jalics Franz., Contemplative Retreat, 25

creatures are and what creation is. In the path of contemplation, we are naturally drawn into silence, into this mystery, into emptiness.

I have since discovered that Ignatius himself, with typically subtle directions, builds into the text of the Spiritual Exercises, 'a contemplative phase'. He offers three layers in the text, purgative, illuminative and unitive. The unitive manifesting in retreatants typically in fourth week and understood by Jalics as a 'contemplative' phase. Ignatius' '*Contemplation to gain Love*'⁴ Jalics suggests is the principal and foundation of this contemplative phase. The third way of praying, is also referred to as an essential part of the Exercises, rather than an optional extra.⁵ The third way of praying is the culminating exercise Ignatius offers in the Spiritual Exercises retreat where the retreatant is invited into simple quiet contemplative prayer.

"The third way of praying is that with each breath or gasp one should mentally pray, saying a word from the Lord's Prayer, or from another prayer that one is praying, so that only one word is said between one breath and another."⁶

Ignatius expected the Spiritual Exercises to culminate in this quiet simple contemplative phase with attention to the breath in the absence of *thinking, imagining or achieving* anything, each of these being pre-unitive or pre-contemplative phases the Exercises. This utter simplicity is expressed in this prayer in the contemplation to gain Love. '*Give me your love and your grace, this is sufficient for me*'⁷ A simplicity of resting in the presence of God, abandoning to the emptiness of presence that makes fullness possible.



The experience of integration in this path of contemplation offered by Franz Jalics is very 'Ignatian,' being rooted in the text of the exercises and the experience can be described as *cosmotheandric*, in which the world (*cosmos*), God (*théos*), and the human (*andros*) form an indivisible unity⁸ that transcends dualisms and rests in an interdependence and an interrelatedness of all that exists. Retreatants making the Spiritual Exercises are invited to dispose themselves to this triple dimension—toward the cosmos (creation), toward the divine (Creator) and toward themselves and others (creatures) allowing oneself to experience communion in everything and with the All.

Sharing on his experience in captivity Franz Jalics said that '*Being constantly attentive to the present, along with repeating the sacred word, I was brought to the center of myself.*'⁹ This with the phrase from St Augustine 'Our hearts are restless until they rest in God' comes alive when we are able to contemplate Christ without words, without thoughts, without images, with our full attention awake. My experience at La Cova Sant Ignasi shared here for my CEN friends expresses an integrative Ignatian way described as the contemplative phase of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises where my experience of silence invites me into the mystery of emptiness making fullness possible.

⁴ Puhl., The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. [234]

⁵ Puhl., The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius [4]

⁶ Puhl., The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. [258]

⁷ Puhl., The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. [234]

⁸ Panikkar Raimon., Cosmotheandric experience., Introduction

⁹ Jalics Franz., Contemplative Retreat,