

respirando

(cf. X. Melloni, El deseo esencial)

Breathing is the basis of our life: oxygen is to the body what consciousness is to the mind and what spirit is to the soul: our vital energy source. Without oxygen our body would slowly become contaminated with toxins which would kill us. We breathe to stay alive and we breathe because it is our life. Prayerful breathing is part of many spiritual traditions, including our Christian tradition.

The four moments of breathing are a metaphor for the essential dynamism of life: inhaling, retention, exhaling, emptiness. As we walk along our Way, our breathing can help us become conscious of how present life is to us. The inhaling should be deep, and the exhaling should last longer than the inhaling. The moments of pause, when we retain the inhaled air and again when our lungs are empty after exhaling, can vary in length, according to our walking pace, but we should be conscious of each moment.

These four phases are a metaphor for the meaning of our existence: receiving and giving, becoming aware of what we have received and experiencing ourselves as needy after giving generously of ourselves. The inhalation is the moment of receiving what we are: our life and our historical existence. We receive, and we become aware that we are receivers of life. The Way makes us receivers of our life. We feel humble in the recognition that we have “received” from others and from the Other. As we inhale, there is a first moment of amazement that places us in the Presence of the Divine Essence.

The retention of the inhaled air allows us a pause, in which we become aware of what we have received: we feel that life is within us and delight in it. Our aim is to unite our inner and outer selves; we want to feel that what used to be outside us now forms part of our very being. Exhalation is the moment of giving, of abandoning ourselves to what existed before us and will continue after us. Exhaling is learning to become detached. A long, profound exhalation helps us to understand that our ultimate meaning lies not in possessing ourselves but in sharing ourselves. The air we inhaled has taken on something of our being and now we share it with the universe. We feel ourselves part of the Whole,

collaborators in a fullness of which we have also received.

The fourth phase of breathing, the emptiness that follows exhalation, invites us to desire that fullness which has been promised us and which we hope for. Out of our emptiness we earnestly long to be filled. Emptiness is the condition for receiving. In our emptiness we become aware of how needy we are, and so humility accompanies us on our Ignatian Way. Thanks to our breathing, we can make of our pilgrimage an experience of renunciation and collaboration, of breaking down and building up. Breathing helps us to become ever more aware of what our own Ignatian Way is communicating to us. Let's breathe!

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