

Seeing with the Heart: A Guide to Navigating Life's Adventures

Kevin O'Brien

Loyola Press

(224pp)

978-0-8294-5529-8

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Jesuit priest Kevin O'Brien's spiritual handbook *Seeing with the Heart* is an excellent introduction to age-old disciplines.

Seeing with the Heart is based on the writings of Ignatius of Loyola, a sixteenth-century mystic who created a series of spiritual exercises. Drawing on years of study, workshops, practice, and retreats, this book takes those storied exercises and suggests practical applications for today's world. Its wisdom is accessible and appealing.

O'Brien asserts that the realization that true freedom is not simply doing whatever one feels like doing at a given moment, but rather committing to a program of controlled actions aiming at personal transformation and right action, is central to Ignatian spirituality: "Authentic freedom animates great, holy desires in us." He includes examples of this principle in action, beginning with the story of Ignatius himself, who turned away from a life of self-centered indulgence and found joy and peace in a more disciplined lifestyle.

Although the book and its exercises come out of the Catholic tradition, there are clear efforts to be inclusive and to make its content relatable to all. Steps such as establishing a first principle and foundation for life are described in a manner that makes them applicable to followers of all traditions. The chapter on grief and suffering, with its admonition to always choose hope, is a standout in its universality. And examples are drawn from sources including popular movies, Buddhist practitioners, and secular authors. Further, O'Brien analyzes biblical stories, like that of the prodigal son, to mine new meanings from them. He suggests inhabiting different characters from the story in order to recognize differing points of view and how they manifest. Likewise, the story of Adam and Eve is presented within a meditation on the importance of gratitude and the realization of the essential goodness of being human.

The book is written in everyday language and its tone is conversational. Personal experiences are shared to illuminate its points; they are encouraging and entertaining. Some of these anecdotes are humorous, too, so that even though the subject is spiritual discipline, the approach is lighthearted and filled with grace. All of the material is covered with the necessary depth, while the chapters remain short enough for daily reading. Further, each chapter ends with a series of insightful questions to guide subsequent reflection.

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MATT BENZING (December 7, 2022)

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