

CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY

**Notes for  
The Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life**

**Part 1**

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Nairobi, 2001

Revised: 2015

# **Some Prayer Suggestions**

The following are some suggestions that might help you to pray the Exercises. These are only suggestions, and they might not be best for you. Prayer is a relationship with God, and you have a relationship with God that is unique. Methods of prayer are much less important than the desire to pray, and the desire for prayer comes with generosity –an openness to the immense love of God, and the trust that God wants to be with us and to communicate his love to us. So, take what you want from the following, but if you don't find it helpful, don't feel compelled to continue with it.

## **A. Preparing for prayer**

1. The preparations for prayer are very important. Try to get into the habit of prayer: That is, not just the activity of prayer, but also choose a time and place where you think you might pray best. You don't have to become a slave to that time or place, but sometimes it helps to settle into prayer quickly, with fewer distractions.
2. Take the time to look over what material (the Scripture, meditation, etc.) that you intend to pray over. You don't have to wait until you are actually beginning the prayer to see what you are going to pray over. You can look at it even in the night before, and let your spirit dwell on it before you move into prayer itself.
3. When you are ready to begin: Remember that prayer means raising your mind and heart to God so you should begin by asking God to place you in His presence. Of course, you are always in the presence of God, and at each moment he creates you from nothing and holds you in His hands. But ask that you might become more aware of this fact. Come to Him the way you are at that moment: with fears and joys, doubts and trust, successes and failures.
4. You may find it helpful to do a very brief “centering” exercises, not unlike what we do in our CLC meetings: a) Become aware of your body in the comfortable position that you are in, or b) concentrate on your breathing, becoming aware of the way that the air moves in and out of your body. In this entering exercises you may wish to silently use the Jesus prayer, thinking “Jesus Christ” as you breathe in, and “have mercy” as you breathe out, or c) try to grow aware of the noises that are around you, letting them continue on their own without interfering with you nor depending on you, or d) light a candle and focus your thoughts on its presence, light, or fragrance. Any of these are helpful. They should not distract you but help you to become quiet. Once you feel that you are quiet, move on to the prayer

## **B. Beginning the Prayer**

1. Just as you start remember to ask God for what you want. Each part of the Exercises offers some special “gift” of “grace”, which I will indicate to you as we go along. It is important to ask God for these, since it reminds us that we depend on God for everything –including the ability to pray. It also helps us to focus our prayer. They are not “themes” though. They are the gifts that we hope to receive. Try not to forget to ask God for what you want in the Exercise. If you have a special devotion to Mary or to a particular saint, you may want to ask for their special intercession to receive these graces from God.
2. Remember that the material that you are praying on is not as assignment or task that must be finished. God will lead you in the prayer, and where you feel the Spirit move stay there quietly and wait for God to lead you forward. You will become better at recognizing the movement of the Spirit with time and practice. Don’t be impatient, but always be aware that you are in the presence of God, who is your father and who loves you more than you will ever know.
3. If you become distracted, don’t worry. If your praying position becomes uncomfortable, change it. If noise is bothering you, recognize the noise and try to focus again. There will be times that you have no desire to pray, or simply cannot concentrate. Don’t panic. Try to relax. Remember that God is with you even when it seems that he is not. Pray for the distractions to end, and try to remain in the prayer even when it is difficult. Sometimes God wants us to wait for Him. Trust in God.

## **C. Praying With Scriptures**

There are many forms of scriptural prayer. For all of them though, there are ways of trying to become more aware that the scripture is the Living Word of God –the place where we meet God as he acts in the history of Salvation, and where God reveals himself most fully in the life of Christ His son.

1. First, read the passage slowly and carefully. If you can, read it out loud softly, so that you do not read too quickly.
2. Put the Book aside and try to recall what has happened or what was said in it. Can you remember the details? Who says what? What does the speaker feel? How does it strike you at first? What words or phrases. Seem important? etc.
3. Read the text a second time, perhaps even more slowly than the first time, trying to catch those details that you missed the first time. In this second reading, you read more with your heart than with your eyes. And remember that this is not a test of memory. So for example, if you were praying on the Beatitudes, you don’t have to memorize Jesus’ exact words – just try to remember the basic ideas.
4. Put the Bible aside. Maybe you can leave it open nearby, or hold it closed with the passage marked. But it is better if you don’t become distracted by the passage when you continue by the prayer.

## **D. Types of Scriptural Prayer**

It is not so important that we have a great understanding of the forms of prayer. In fact, most of the time, we pray in many ways during a single prayer period. But distinguishing them may help us to see what should be used at certain times, and in what kind of prayer we seem to be closest to God. Of course, God speaks to us in all forms of prayer, and touches us even when our prayer is confused and has no specific method.

### 1. “Meditation.”

When you meditate, you remember a real event by imagining it as it happened, perhaps in detail. You might not place yourself in the action itself, but are more watching it, and trying to understand the actions or words of those in the text. Meditation is also the form normally used for scripture or non-Scripture text. Which do not involve an action or a scene, such as a psalm, a text from a prophet, or from St. Paul’s Epistles. The aim of this prayer is also for greater understanding, and getting closer to the “spiritual meaning” of the scriptures. This prayer can be full of images and be easy to remember. The words slowly work their way into your heart, and come alive in your daily life. This is a common form of prayer, and has a long tradition in the church. It involves the heart but is concerned mostly with meanings and understanding. Again, this is a form of prayer that we may use in the Exercises, but not as frequently as contemplation.

### 2. “Imaginative Contemplation”

Unlike meditation, imaginative contemplation does not have you just watching the scene. In this kind of prayer you place yourself in the scene, and become part of it. The gospels are particularly good scriptures for this type of prayer. You may want to imagine yourself as a particular character in the scene, or maybe you are just part of the crowd. But you are never just watching. You are there. You feel not as if you were there, but because you really are there. And because you will excite certain emotions and experiences, you are very conscious of what you are feeling and thinking while you are in the scene.

It is not important in this form of prayer that all of the details are perfectly acted out. In fact, it is much better to let your imagination guide the prayer. In other words, we do not have to be concerned about being accurate, or theologically correct. It is a prayer which supposes that the Spirit works through our imagination and speaks to us through the images of our creative imagination. So, if something unexpected happens, or you are led to be a certain character in the scene, or Jesus says something which is extraordinary, do not try to “correct” it. Let the prayer unfold according to the direction that your imagination takes it. But do not daydream. In some way we can be creatively imaginative in a focused and concentrated way, without letting it become a daydream that has no real direction or focus. If you find that you are daydreaming, bring yourself back to the scene. If you fall asleep, continue with the prayer when you

awake. Don't try to force things, though. It is prayer. It is a way of being in the presence of God, and allowing Him to touch you and speak to you in whatever way He chooses.

Be very attentive to the particular details of the senses. Before the scene begins, imagine the place where the action and dialogue will happen. What is the land like? Or the sea? Is it hot or cold? Is it raining? Cloudy? Are there any odor? Is it a place of beauty or desolation? Sometimes the Gospel writers will help you with these details. At other times, imagine places that you have been, and which may be like the place that is described in the passage. St. Ignatius calls this "composition of place". It helps our imagination to get started and to be focused.

In the same way, be very attentive to the details of Jesus and the other characters. How are they dressed? What do they look like? Are they gentle? Angry? Sad? Do they show you love? Sometimes this is difficult. Don't be upset if you do not always see things clearly, but try to be close to the scene, and involved in it. Most of all, notice the way you feel as the scene is going on. At times, the Spirit will touch you through these images and feelings. Take note of these. If I ask you to do a "repetition" of this particular prayer, I want you to return to the scene, but I want you to focus especially on those points where the Spirit seemed to touch you.

I will also ask you to do a "colloquy". A colloquy is simply a very intimate conversation. When the main "Scriptural" scene is finished, you imagine that you are with Jesus alone, perhaps in the same place but at another time. Maybe the others have just left you two alone. What does he say to you or you to him? How do you feel with him? Close? Afraid? Nothing? Is there anything that you want to ask him about the scene or the prayer? This can be a difficult part of the prayer. Much of the time little happens, and our time alone with Jesus is very difficult. We have to learn to be with Jesus alone like this, though. In the Exercises, we want to become companions of Jesus. If you have ever had a very close friend, you know that it is possible for the two of you to be together without saying anything. You enjoy the other person's company even when there are no words. This is the closeness we want with Jesus. At other times, too, I will ask you to do the same type of prayer with Mary, or with God the Father. You will develop this prayer with time. Don't be impatient.

This imaginative contemplation is strongly encouraged by Ignatius during the Exercises, and for the most part, the Scriptural passages he suggests lend themselves easily to this kind of prayer. Of you have difficulties with it; we can talk about ways of making it easier. Most people find it worthwhile.

### **E. Concluding the Prayer**

When you have finished the prayer, conclude it with a special prayer of thanksgiving. Be thankful for all that you have received; the graces you experienced, and for those which you received even though you did not necessarily recognize them. God often works within us without us knowing, and this is an act of faith that makes us even more grateful to God. Unless you have a special prayer that you pray often, end you time with an Our Father.

## **F. The Review of Prayer**

The review of prayer is also very important: not only so that you can recall the graces you have received, but also so that if there was movement of the Spirit, you will remember to mention it to me, and so that I can help you to see where God is directing you. I have attached a general guideline that you might find useful. I have also attached a brief description of the examination of consciousness. You might find that you know a lot of these things already. If there is something you don't understand or find difficult, don't forget to discuss it with me. I am always here to help.

DAYS OF PREPARATION: 1

Grace: To know myself as God's child

Day 1: Psalm 139: 1-18 God, you made me in my mother's womb

Day 2: Prayer on My Dossier (handout)

Day 3: Psalm 103 The Lord's many Blessings

Day 4: Isaiah 43: 1-7 You are precious in my eyes and I love you

Day 5: Repetition of whichever prayer you found most meaningful

Day 6: The Lilies of the Field (handout)

Day 7: Summary of the important consolations and desolations of the week using  
Isaiah 49:14-16 I will never forget you

DAYS OF PREPARATION: 2

Grace: To know more deeply God's love and plans for me

Day 1: Prayer of Personal Reminiscence (When others have loved me)

Day 2: Is. 45:7-13 God creates me more surely than a potter creates a pot. He makes my shape and even my clay. He determines how I will be used.

Day 3: The Way Things Are

Day 4: Eph.1:3-14 Can I count the gifts of grace God has been giving me? I am among those who know Jesus Christ. God chose that I should believe and trust and love him

Day 5: 2Cor.5:14-18 Humanity now shares Jesus' risen life. For God has chosen not to let people's sins destroy his creation. This is God's work first, not mine.

Or:

Rom.8:14-17, 26-28 From within my own life, the Spirit seized me and taught me to know God. I am to inherit life with Jesus, God child. My own spirit knows God as loving parent, not merely as some force

Day 6: The Way Things Are, Again

Day 7: Repetition of The Way Things Are or Summary of the Week

DAYS OF PREPARATION: 3

Grace: To know God's desires for me and to give myself to them

Day 1: Prayer of Personal Reminiscence (Where I have loved others)

Day 2: Eph.2:1-10 My whole life and self are God's work of art. God himself chose to accomplish this. Sometimes I live as though I were not being called by God

Day 3: The Way Things Can Be

Day 4: Gen.22:1-19 Here is a story of a person who proved willing to give up the most precious thing in his life.

Day 5: The Way Things Can Be, again

Day 6: Rom.8:28-39 I cannot imagine getting on my own the way things can be. But the universe holds no power comparable to God. The Lord shapes all things to the good of myself, whom he is calling.

DAYS OF PREPARATION: 4

Grace: To be able to commit myself to the indifference involved in seeking what God wills for me

Through the week, when you have a few minutes, consider the Principle and Foundation.

Day 1: Active Indifference

Day 2: Is.6:1-13 Isaiah finds himself summoned by the Lord God. Who am I to be called by God? I am ready to bring the Reign of God to the world.

Day 3: Rom.7:14-25 Paul found the same contrariness in himself that I find in myself. It is a force in the world. But God in Christ has chosen to defeat that force.

Day 4: Repetition of Active Indifference

Day 5: Deut.30:15-20 In this land where God brings me to be, I can choose life or choose death. God reveres me so deeply that he gives me space to choose. All my ancestors in the faith have made this choice.

Day 6: Write your own Principle and Foundation

Day 7: Continue writing your Principle and Foundation; or, finished, ask God to help you commit yourself to living this way, and consider what it means for your life