

JOURNEY INTO FREEDOM

A retreat based on the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola

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Produced by

The Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Glasgow

in association with

Pathways to God, Website

Journey into Freedom

First Published for Lent 2020

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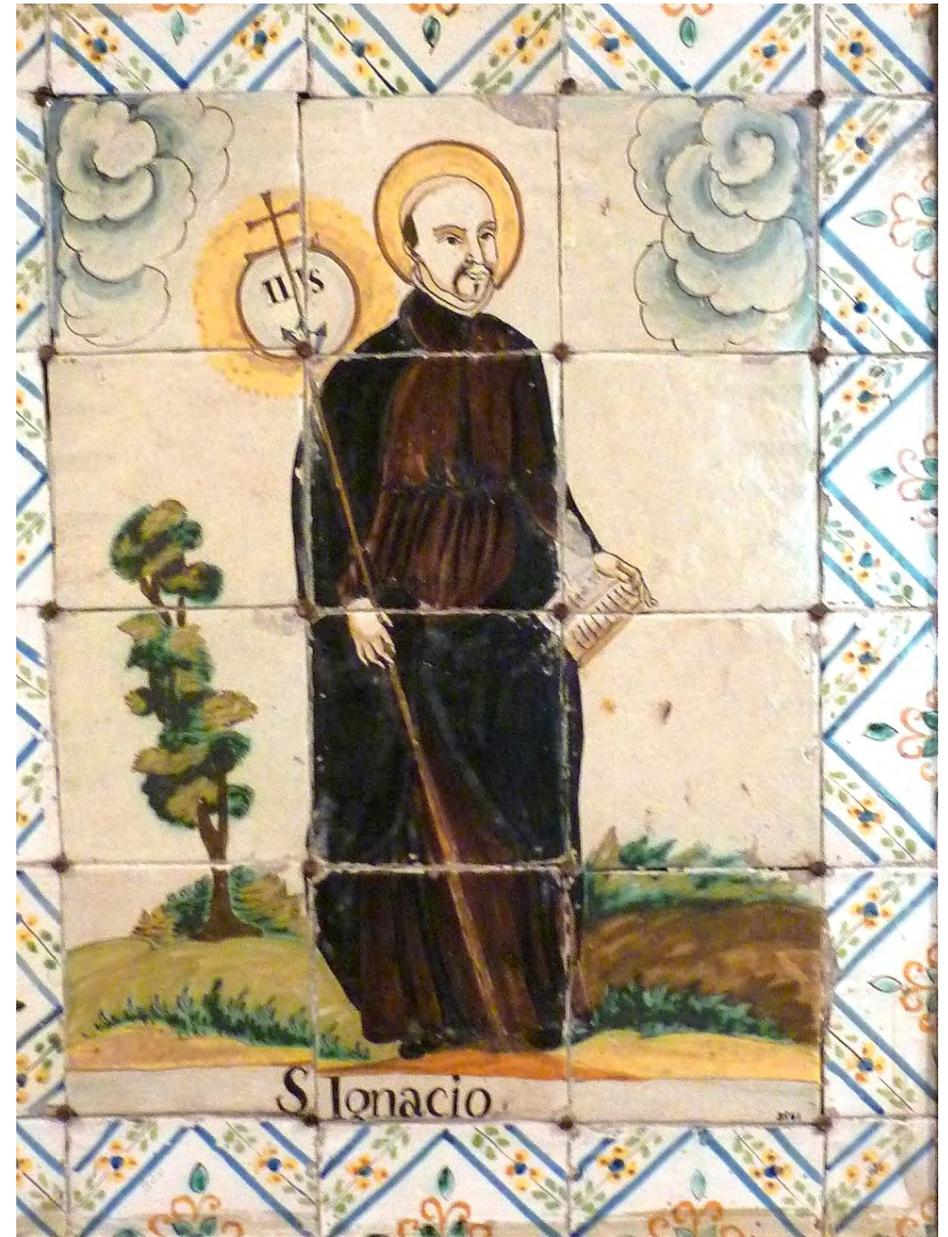
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Saint Ignatius the Pilgrim

Tiled portrait in Manresa Museum

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Introduction

For nearly five hundred years people have been praying a series of Bible passages and meditations written by Saint Ignatius of Loyola known as 'The Spiritual Exercises'. The aim of this programme of prayer is to deepen your faith by praying over events in the life of Jesus Christ in order to grow in knowledge, love and an ever closer following of Christ. The Spiritual Exercises also includes meditations which help you find what God might want you to do. This book includes all the main themes of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.

This book offers a daily reading from the Bible or a meditation adapted from the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Each day also has a picture to ponder, a short 'Thought for Today' and either notes to help you with your prayer or a poem. You don't have to use all the material; use whatever helps, discard what doesn't. Before beginning the retreat it would be helpful if you are familiar with praying with the Scriptures using your imagination, and that slow, prayerful reading known as *Lectio Divina*. (See pages 6-11) This retreat is first published for Lent 2020, but it can be done at any time of year. The full Spiritual Exercises is often given as a residential retreat lasting for a month which would typically involve up to 150 hours of prayer, or in daily life with a spiritual guide and may then involve up to 300 hours of prayer, so the '**Journey into Freedom**' retreat of this book with 52 days, is a shorter form of the retreat, but it could well be extended by repeating days. A guide to repetition of prayer is given on page 15.

Meet with a Local Group or Spiritual Guide

The ideal for this retreat is that you work your way through this book systematically beginning from day one and working through to the end. You can meet weekly with a local group, or individually with an experienced spiritual guide, and share the fruits of your prayer. Rather than doing the retreat on your own we strongly advise you to meet with a group or a guide, because it allows you to learn from others and share any questions or doubts that are likely to arise.

Review of the Day

We suggest this is done at the end of every day.

- Be still, remember God who loves you is present now.
- Look back over the day. Ask God to shine a light into your heart so that looking back you may be able to see God at work.
- Pay attention to your emotions: What brought you joy? Is there anything you feel unhappy about?
- Talk to God about your day: For what do you feel most thankful? Give thanks.
For what do you feel least thankful? Hand this over to God.
What have you learned from the day?

Look forward to tomorrow. How might you make the best of the day.

Awareness Exercises

The following awareness Exercises can be used at the beginning of each prayer period to help you quieten down.

Mantra

A mantra, a repeated short phrase, can help us to settle down. Sometimes we think about the words, but mostly we let go of thinking and trust that simply saying the words is sufficient. We can repeat the words in time with our walking or breathing or to the rhythm of music. There are many suitable phrases such as, 'Come Lord Jesus', 'The Lord is compassion and love' etc.

One of the most famous mantras is 'The Jesus Prayer':

'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner'.

Photo by Motoki Tonn on Unsplash



Awareness of Sounds

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds inside and outside the room. Identify each sound as you are able. Don't stay with any one sound.

Gently, slowly, without judging sounds as good or bad, focus your attention on each one then move on. If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it. When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing. Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

Awareness of your body

Beginning at the top of your head and passing down through the body to the feet be attentive to each part of the body in turn.

Gently focus in turn on each part ... head ... face ... eyes ...neck ... shoulders etc.

For each part, allow a few moments to become aware of what is being felt, without making judgement upon it.

Feel temperature, clothing, moving air, tension, pain, tingling etc.

Move on in turn until you have given attention to your whole body.

Then consider your whole self you as a person made in God's likeness ... you in whom God chooses to dwell...



Photo by Arek Adeoye on Unsplash

Walking

Walk slowly with awareness of whatever comes to you: the surroundings, thoughts, feelings, how your body is. It usually helps to walk more slowly than usual and to pay attention to what is around you.

Praying with Pictures

Each day during this retreat we provide a picture, often based on the Scripture reading of the day, sometimes more abstract. If you would like to use pictures to stimulate your prayer, then we suggest you:

- Settle down quietly into a comfortable yet attentive position. Wherever you are, you are in the presence of God, acknowledge this.
- Offer yourself, your time and your imagination to God.
- Ask God for what you need today, what you desire.

This could be for a greater love of Jesus, in words such as:

Jesus, may I know you clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly.

- Ask God to be your inspiration and let the picture reveal what God wants you to see.
- What do you feel overall about the picture. Do you like it or dislike it? You may appreciate the colours, the mood, the composition etc.
- Pay careful attention to the picture. If there are people in it, see how they relate to each other. How do you imagine the people are feeling? Are there significant signs or symbols in the picture?
- Spend some time just contemplating the picture.
- What does the picture say to you? Does it challenge you in any way? Does it introduce you to a new way of seeing things? Perhaps you don't like the way the artist or photographer sees things and you imagine things very differently.
- You may want to talk to God about the picture, or about something in your life that the picture has evoked. You may want an imaginary conversation with one or more of the characters in the picture.
- Finish with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

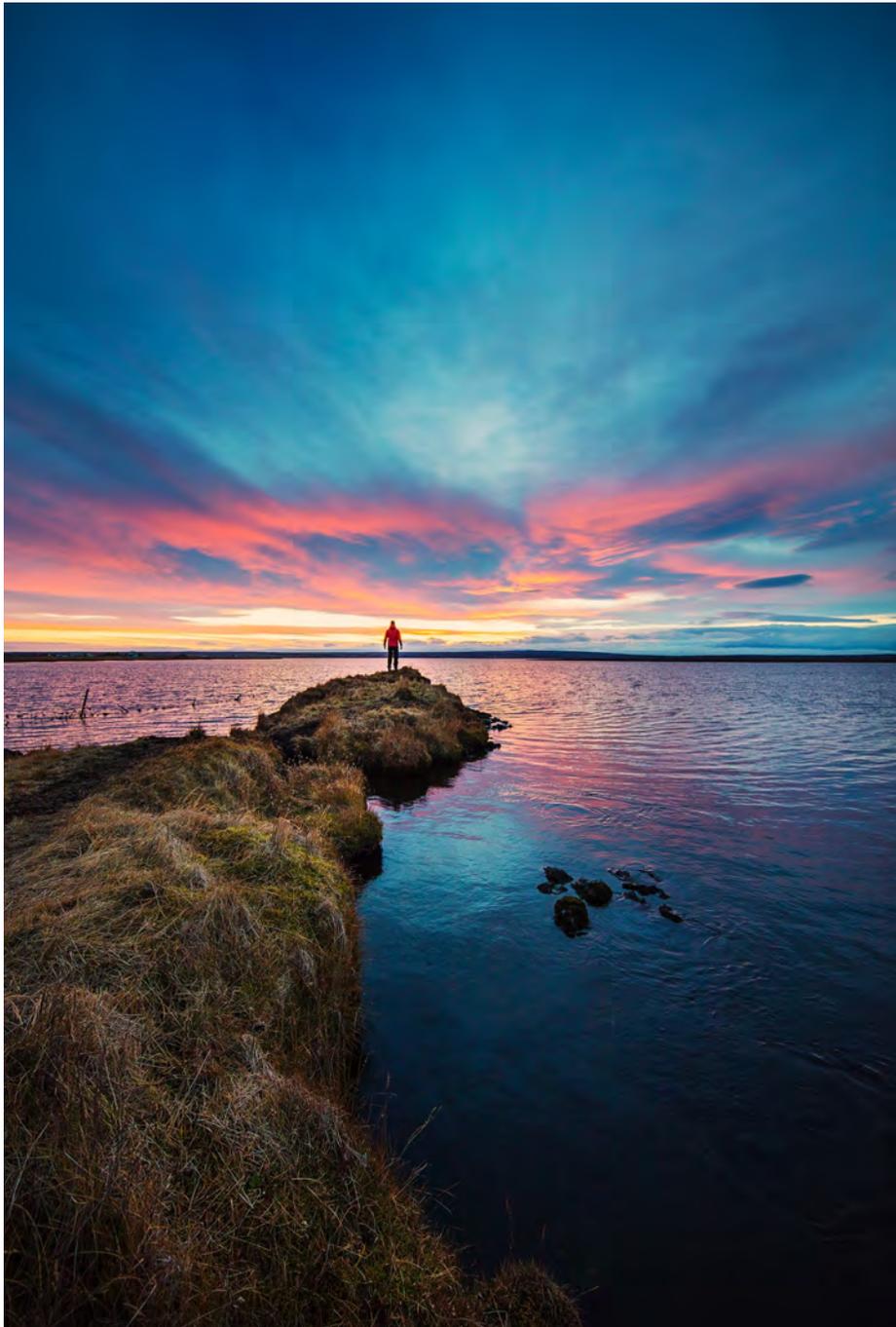


Photo by Joshua Earle on Unsplash

Praying with Scripture

The main ways of praying with Scripture as used by St Ignatius of Loyola and his followers the Jesuits are *Lectio Divina* and Praying with the Imagination (Imaginative Contemplation). If you are part of a prayer group then your group leader should give you some more guidance on both of these, but here are the basic outlines to get you started.

A Prayerful Pondering—*Lectio Divina*

- **Read the passage slowly** stopping wherever a word or phrase seems to say something. Let the words speak to you. Let the passage touch your own life, your memories. *There is no one right meaning; the same passage will say very different things to different people.*
- **Meditate on the words.** It often helps to say the words or phrases to yourself several times, ideally out loud. Ponder, ruminate!
- **Speak to God in your own words.** Imagine God speaking back to you. Express your own deepest desires.
- **Contemplate; be in silence with God.** Be quiet and open before God. Rest. Let the mind be still. When your mind starts to wander then turn back to the passage and continue reading.

Allow this fourfold process to continue until the period of prayer is over.

Finish with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

Journaling

After your prayer it is good to jot down in a journal the subject of your prayer and what happened during the prayer, your feelings, thoughts etc. This will help you remember; particularly useful if you are sharing your prayer with a group or spiritual guide. Journaling will also help you notice patterns in your prayer.

Imaginative Contemplation

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses in his book, *The Spiritual Exercises*, is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories alive for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if my imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

- **Choose a passage**, read and familiarise yourself with the story.
- **You are in the presence of God**, acknowledge this.
- **Offer yourself**, your time and your imagination to God so that whatever you imagine will be inspired by God.
- **Ask God** for what gift or grace you need, what are your deepest desires.

This could be for a greater love of Jesus, in words such as: Jesus, may I know you clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly.

- **Set the scene from your scripture passage.**

Take your time, see all that is around, hear, feel, taste and smell. What is the setting of the story in your imagination? You may imagine it in the present day, or 2000 years ago. You may be involved with people you know.

Become a character in the story..... Who are you?

You may be a central character or someone on the side-lines.

Let the scene unfold naturally. The story might depart from the Gospel scene and take on a life of its own; that's fine, trust God; everything human is appropriate material for prayer.

- **Conversation (colloquy):** When the story has finished talk in your own words to Jesus, God the Father, Mary or one of the characters in the story you have contemplated, imagine how they might reply.
- **End the prayer** with a formal prayer like the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

Day 1

Stilling: Throughout the retreat you may like to begin your prayer with a stilling Exercise as shown on page 7.

Preparation: After the stilling, dedicate the time of prayer to God and ask God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may appreciate God's good creation.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below and imagine God creating Adam and Eve.

Genesis 2:7 & 18-22 NRSVA

The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'

So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

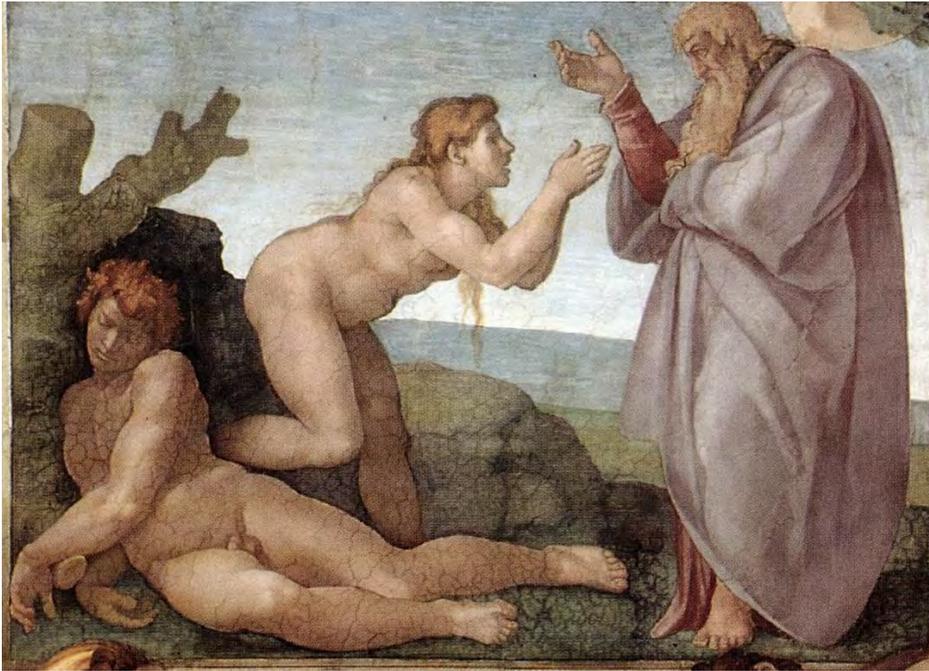
So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Conversation: Every day when you come close to the end of the prayer you are invited to have a conversation with God. Maybe you can imagine yourself talking to Jesus as a friend; a familiar conversation talking about whatever concerns you. How does Jesus reply? God can speak through our imagination. Often we seem to get unexpected and rapid replies. If you suspect that a reply is just in your imagination, ask yourself if Jesus in the Gospels is likely to have said such a thing. Most often the answer is 'yes'.

Sometimes Saint Ignatius suggests we might have a conversation with Mary the mother of Jesus, or God, the Father of our Lord.

Final Prayer: End your prayer each day with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Creation of Eve: Michaelangelo Buonarroti, 1509, Sistine Chapel, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

We are beloved creatures of God, who in His goodness calls us to love life and to live it in communion with the rest of creation.

Pope Francis

The elements of our daily Prayer

Everyday of this retreat we present the following elements in your prayer:

Preparation: You may begin your prayer time with a stilling or awareness exercise; then dedicate your time and thoughts to God.

Gift: We suggest a gift or grace to ask God for each day.

Setting: The Scripture passage or other content of the day's prayer.

Conversation: Talking to Jesus Christ, the Father, Mary as one friend to another. Talking naturally about whatever has come up in the prayer; also called a 'colloquy'.

Final Prayer: The time of prayer is usually ended with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father, Hail Mary etc.

Day 2

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for the grace to appreciate God's good creation.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below and imagine God creating the earth.

Genesis 1:1-5 & 26-31 NRSVA

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.....

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Conversation: Imagine you are talking to the Creator, what do you want to say? How might the Creator reply?

Final prayer: Finish with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Photo by Marc Szeglat on Unsplash

A Thought for Today

God dwells in me, bringing me into being,
giving me life, feeling and understanding.

St Ignatius of Loyola

Deepening the Prayer—Repetition

In the full Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola each piece of Scripture is used for prayer at least twice and often up to four times. The idea is that when praying the second or third time with a piece of Scripture you simplify and deepen the prayer. This is done by focussing on what struck you most, what moved you the first time you prayed over the particular selection of Scripture.

The final time of prayer is often just being there. Particularly when you are praying with a Bible story, you just imagine yourself in the scene, you watch, hear, touch, taste, smell; just be there with your five senses.

Day 3

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicate the time of prayer to God and ask God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may appreciate God's good creation.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below using the *lectio divina* method on page 10, let the words and phrases speak.

Psalm 104: 1 & 10-24 NRSVA

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches.

From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.

The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees.

The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the rabbits.

You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting.

You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.

The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.

When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens.

People go out to their work and to their labour until the evening.

O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



The Garden of Eden: Johann Wenzel Peter, 1800-26, Vatican Gallery, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

God works and labours on my behalf in all created things.

St Ignatius of Loyola

Gift—Grace

Every prayer period on this retreat involves a request for a gift or a grace from God. During the retreat the gift or grace is based on what is appropriate given the subject matter of the prayer. For much of the retreat the gift we ask for is to be ever more passionately involved in knowing, loving and following Christ.

Outside retreat time we would want to be aware of our own needs and desires in order to ask God for what we truly desire.

Day 4

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: Ask for what you want: Today it is to appreciate God's good creation and our human call to be co-creators with God and carers of Creation.

Setting: Read the passage below let the words and phrases speak.

LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

From *Laudato Si'* - a letter from Pope Francis to all people of goodwill

32. The earth's resources are also being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for food but also for curing disease and other uses. Different species contain genes which could be key resources in years ahead for meeting human needs and regulating environmental problems.

33. It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential "resources" to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.

Conversation: Talk to God the Creator in your own words about the environment and the way people use or abuse creation. What are your concerns and desires?

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Photo by Brian McMahon on Unsplash

A Thought for Today

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth.

Pope Francis

Give God the Time of Day

A recommendation when making a retreat is to be faithful to your time of prayer. Decide how long is a reasonable time to spend in prayer and then dedicate that time to God.

Don't stop praying if nothing seems to be happening or pray for longer than you plan if it is going well. If we get into the habit of giving up if we don't feel good, then there is a danger we can get out of the habit of praying. And anyway, sometimes the real fruit of the prayer comes in the last few minutes of praying.

If prayer is dry and you are tempted to give up, be generous with your time and give a minute or two more than the time you allotted.

Day 5

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask to appreciate God's good creation and our human call to be co-creators with God and nurturers of Creation.

Setting: Read the passage below and consider what it might say to me and my life.

The First Principle and Foundation of my Life

A Meditation to Ponder

God created me so that I can know,
love and serve God in this life, and in the life to come live in joy with God.

The universe and all it contains is lovingly created by God.

I shall respect and use all created things to help me praise,
reverence and serve God.

In areas of my life where I have the freedom to choose,
I shall strive to be free from all attachments to created things,
particularly money, possessions and reputation.

I shall try not to be swayed in my judgements by my natural inclinations;
for example, I should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty,
honour to dishonour, a long life to a short one.

I will allow nothing or no one to come between myself and God.

I should always try to do what I believe God wants because
deep-down I know God will always want the best for me and for others.

My one desire is to choose whatever leads me into a deeper relationship
with God.

Suggestion:

That you ponder this meditation from time to time over the next week.



Photo by Swapnil Dwivedi on Unsplash

Jeremiah NRSVA

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

‘Come, go down to the potter’s house,
and there I will let you hear my words.’

So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the LORD came to me:

Can I not do with you, O house of Israel,
just as this potter has done? says the LORD.

Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand,
O house of Israel.

A Thought for Today

The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God.

St Ignatius of Loyola

Day 6

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask to appreciate my own creation and the delight God takes in me.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below and let the words speak to you-*lectio divina*.

Psalm 139 HCSB

LORD, You have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I stand up;

You understand my thoughts from far away.

You observe my travels and my rest; You are aware of all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue, You know all about it, LORD.

You have encircled me; You have placed Your hand on me.

This extraordinary knowledge is beyond me.

It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.

Where can I go to escape Your Spirit?

Where can I flee from Your presence?

If I go up to heaven, You are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, You are there.

**If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits,
even there Your hand will lead me; Your right hand will hold on to me.**

**If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light around me will be
night”— even the darkness is not dark to You.**

The night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike to You.

For it was You who created my inward parts;

You knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I will praise You because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made.

Your works are wonderful, and I know this very well.

**My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in secret,
when I was formed in the depths of the earth.**

**Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in Your
book and planned before a single one of them began.**

God, how difficult Your thoughts are for me to comprehend;

**how vast their sum is! If I counted them, they would outnumber the
grains of sand; when I wake up, I am still with you.**

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



The Hand of God: Auguste Rodin, Photo© Ad Meskens, Met Museum of Art, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

The best portion of a good man's life is his little,
nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.

William Wordsworth

Day 7

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may fully appreciate God's good creation.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below and imagine God looking on the earth.

Isaiah 55: 1-2 & 6-12 NRSVA

**Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?**

**Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**

**For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.**

**For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

**For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**

**For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.**

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Photo by Ja Ma on Unsplash

A Thought for Today

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures.

St Francis of Assisi

The Spirit of Generosity

The main qualities asked of a person on retreat are honesty and generosity. We should seek to develop an attitude of openness and gratitude.

It usually gives us greater joy to give than to receive.

You are asked to seek to respond to God's will; the God who created you out of love and wraps you with care and concern.

Day 8

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask to appreciate God's loving plan for humanity.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below using the *lectio divina* method on page 10.

Colossians 1:15-23 HCSB

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible,

whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him.

He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together.

He is also the head of the body, the church;

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He might come to have first place in everything.

For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross—whether things on earth or things in heaven.

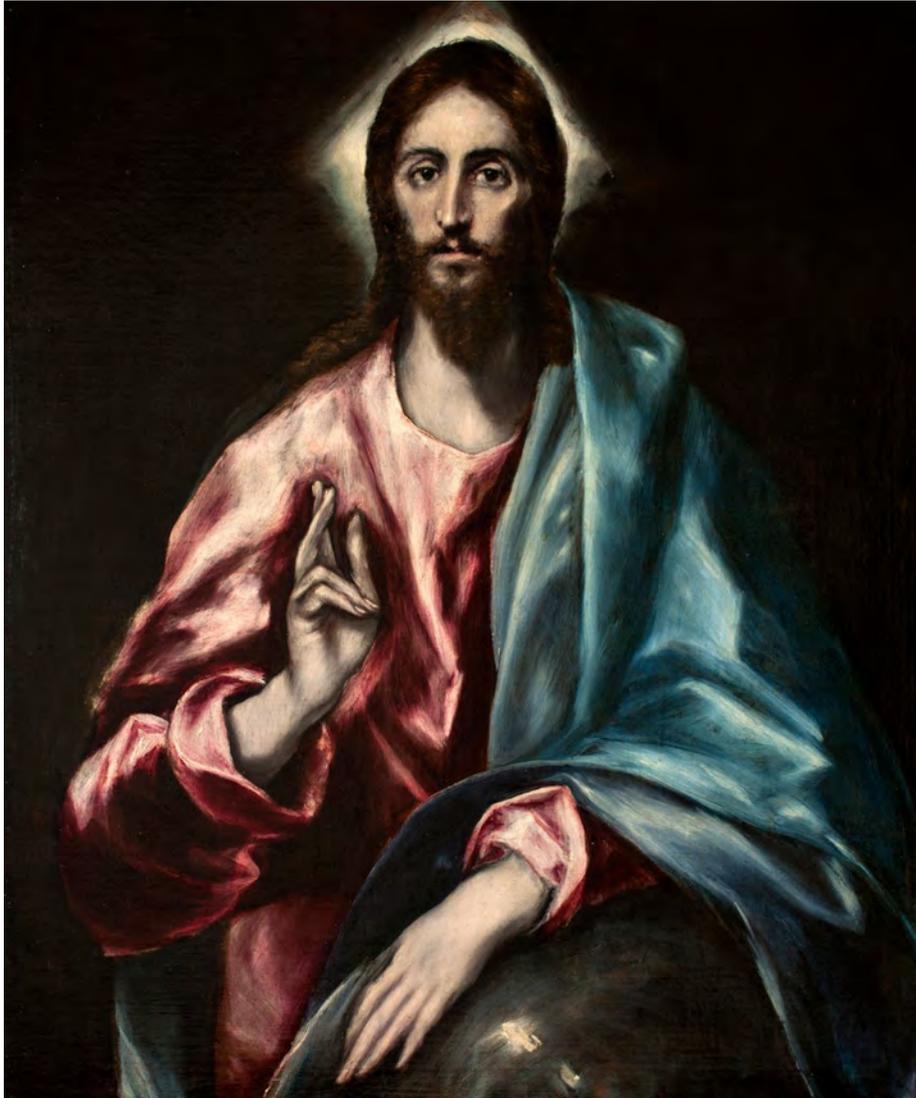
Conversation: Talk to Christ in your own words as a friend or leader.

You may want to talk about what this passage from Saint Paul's letter to the Colossians means to you.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

Jesus Christ as the 'Revelation' of God.

We human beings cannot imagine the infinite. Everything our five senses reveal to us is limited. Yet Christians believe that a good Creator God is responsible for all that exists. We may sometimes get a glimpse of the spiritual realm in a passing sense of something beyond the material world; or in the glory of a sunset or the magnificence of nature. But for Christians, God is best revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, in what he says and in what he does. When we see Christ we see God. Which is why we are going to spend so much time on this retreat praying over the life of Christ.



The Saviour: El Greco, 1610, El Greco Museum, Toledo, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

All I can do is let God's glory shine through in me, let God be God in my own life.

Gerard W Hughes SJ

Day 9

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask to recognise that God's plan sometimes seems strange to people.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below and imagine you are one of the characters in the story and imagine what it must have been like for that person.

Acts of the Apostles 9:10-19 HCSB

There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Here I am, Lord!" he said.

"Get up and go to the street called Straight," the Lord said to him, "to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so he can regain his sight."

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name."

But the Lord said to him, "Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name!"

So Ananias left and entered the house. Then he placed his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptised. And after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Conversation: Talk to Jesus in your own words. Alternatively you could imagine yourself talking to Paul or Ananias.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Baptism of St Paul: Palermo, Photo:© José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

We can't change our personality but we can change our priorities. Saul of Tarsus had a reputation for being single-minded in his desire to rid Judaism of the followers of the way of Christ. He was keen and enthusiastic in pursuing this task. After his conversion to Christ, the renamed, Paul, was every bit as keen and enthusiastic in his desire to convert people to the following of Christ. God wanted Paul to be on his side building the Church rather than destroying it. Like Paul, you may not be able to change your personality, but are you content with your priorities?

Day 10

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask to appreciate how radical and all consuming God's call can be.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below and imagine you are one of the people listening to Jesus in the story and imagine what it must have been like for that person.

Luke 14:25-35 NRSVCE

Now great multitudes accompanied Jesus; and he turned and said to them, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.

So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Conversation: Talk to Christ in your own words as a friend or leader. You may want to talk about the way you are called to follow Christ.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

A Thought for Today

The treasure lies in what you may consider a most unlikely field - yourself.

Gerard W. Hughes SJ

Priorities

Today's Scripture has a harsh sound. Jesus addresses 'a great multitude' who 'accompanied him'. To follow Jesus is not a walk in the park or a pleasant stroll, but rather a lifetime commitment. A commitment that must take priority over family and possessions.

Although not all of us are called to leave friends and family to be disciples of Christ, all Christians are called to put Gospel values first.

Day 11

Reflect on your own Life

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicate the time of prayer to God and ask God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask to appreciate God present and at work in my life.

Setting: Look back over your life; are you aware of God at work?

Looking back on your life: Consider the times and places where you have experienced loving and being loved, where you felt most alive or enthusiastic, when you sensed being most yourself.

You might like to begin with your childhood, or you could let one memory touch off another by association, not necessarily logically nor chronologically.

Remember the people and events of your life and how you felt about them.

Remember both the pleasant and the painful experiences; those that give meaning to your life and those that confuse you or don't seem to have a positive side.

Healing? Have you come across painful memories where you need to pray for healing? If so, spend some time asking God to help you deal with these.

Thanksgiving: As you look back, can you end with gratitude for your life so far? Be honest, express your true feelings!

Conversation: Talk to God in your own words, imagine how God might reply.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Photo by Mario Dobelmann on Unsplash

A Thought for Today

We must be pilgrims ready to go wherever we can serve God our Lord the more.

St Francis Xavier SJ

Why we Pray

St. Teresa of Avila had an image of prayer: Just as water is needed in order that plants may grow—so the purpose of prayer is that we might flourish.

Prayer is for the flowers in our life.

We don't pray in order to gain favour with God, but in order to live more reflective lives and follow more closely the way of life Christ is calling us.

Prayer is for our spiritual growth, not for God's pleasure or satisfaction.

Day 12

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may share with Adam and Eve that shame and confusion that is brought about by sin.

Setting: Read the passage below and consider what it might say to you and your life. You might like to imagine you are Adam or Eve in the story below.

Genesis 3:1-7 NRSVA

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"

But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Conversation: Talk to Christ in your own words as a friend or a leader.

You may want to talk about what this passage from Genesis raises for you.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



The Temptation: William Strang, 1899, Tate Gallery, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

Only when we experience God's forgiveness are we truly reborn.
It is there that we rediscover ourselves: in confessing our sins.

Pope Francis

Sin

This week we look at the effects of sin on our lives. Without the knowledge of good and evil sin would not be possible. Could it be that it is this moral sense, the ability to judge what is good and what is evil, that distinguishes us from the rest of creation?

Day 13

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for shame and confusion; a deep understanding of how sin affects me.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below and imagine you are one of the characters in the story of John the Baptist. Consider what it must have been like for that person.

Matthew 3:1-2 & 5-10 HCSB

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers!

Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

Do not presume to say to yourselves,

"We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you,

God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

A Thought for Today

Love ought to show itself in deeds rather than in words.

St Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises 230



St John the Baptist Preaching: Bartholomeus Breenbergh, 1634, Metropolitan, Wikimedia Commons

Talking to a friend—Conversing with God

During this retreat, when you have finished praying with the Scripture or doing the meditation of the day, Saint Ignatius suggests that you talk to Jesus as one friend to another or as a servant to his or her master or mistress. The idea is that the conversation is a friendly, unstilted one. It is a time when you can discuss what has come up for you in the prayer. What feelings, what issues, what surprises have arisen for you during your prayer time?

You talk about what has struck you during your prayer time and imagine what Jesus might answer. We trust that we will be inspired to hear responses from Christ that are what God wants us to hear. If we are surprised by the answers we can always ask ourselves “Is this the sort of thing Jesus would say?” The answer is usually “yes”.

Sometimes Ignatius asks us to converse with Mary the mother of Jesus or God our Father. In the Spiritual Exercises this conversation is called a ‘colloquy’.

Day 14

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for shame and sorrow for my sin.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below and see what stands out for you.

Romans 7:14-23 NIV

**We know that the law is spiritual;
but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.**

I do not understand what I do.

For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

For I do not do the good I want to do,

but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it,

but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work:

Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

A Thought for Today

I will thank God for giving me life up till now, proposing to do better in the future with His Grace.

St Ignatius of Loyola



Photo by Nik Shuliahin on Unsplash

The Call

The call of Christ can be costly, not all can bring themselves to take the radical step and follow. Calls are different.

The disciples of Jesus were called and followed him all over the country. The man who was cured of demonic possession in the land of the Gadarenes asked to follow, but was told to tell people of God's work in his own home area.

Our call begins today. It is no use lamenting a call we heard years ago but didn't follow. The evil one will want to trouble us with calls of the past we can now do nothing about. The wasted opportunities, mistakes and sins of the past are forgiven; we have to move on. The good God calls us afresh today.

We are called to face the future with enthusiasm and hope.

What is Christ calling you to do in the here and now?

Day 15

SIN, INSENSITIVITY AND MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Meditations on sin are not a time to feel bad or to wallow in guilt and despair and to centre on self. Rather they offer the opportunity to compare my own selfishness, lack of love and integrity, with the faithful love that God has shown me. It is good to recognise that whatever I have done, I am forgiven. Nothing is hidden from God. I might accept this in my head, but at the same time keep certain areas of my life out of my prayer; some things don't seem nice or suitable to pray about. All that is human, even my temptations and sins, I can share with God.

Preparation: I come before the Creator of the Universe, the Father, the Mother, who loves me dearly. I ask that my prayer is according to God's will.

Gift: I ask for the grace of feeling ashamed and sorrowful as I consider the effects of sin; the opportunities I have missed to love others in my life.

Setting: I let pass before my mind all that I have done in life that I now regret. I consider the people I have hurt. I think about the petty jealousies, the selfishness, the worrying about what people will think of me, the lies, the lack of thought for others and their feelings.

I then contrast my response to that of God, the source of life and love.

I remember that God has given me life itself and all my own personal qualities, natural abilities and strengths.

I think of all the people who have loved me.

I see the way I have been given good things in life, food, warmth, the fruits of the earth, human concern and affection.

Conversation: In my own words I talk to Jesus. I might imagine I am facing Christ on the cross.

I ask myself the questions:

What have I done for Christ?

What am I currently doing for Christ?

What could I do for Christ?

I tell him about my own weaknesses and failure to love fully, and then I become aware of his response to me.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Photo by Cristian Newman on Unsplash

A Thought for Today

With God, no sin has the last word. Don't be afraid: God loves you, loves you as you are; only His love can change your life.

Pope Francis

Being Honest

We can all learn from our mistakes.

What lessons have I learned from life? How have I grown through my sins?

Have my mistakes matured me or made me more understanding of others?

In what ways can I live a more loving life from now on?

Today's meditation is intended to look into my own depths, to bring before God the areas of life I prefer not to acknowledge. Only with nothing hidden can I be totally open to the healing touch, to the unconditional love and forgiveness of God. Only when I admit that I cannot go it alone, that I have weaknesses, that I have sinned, that I need God, can I come into right relationship before God, as creature to Creator. When I fully accept I have been forgiven, I can then begin to forgive myself.

You may feel the need to do this meditation a couple of times.

Day 16

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: Ask for a deep understanding of how easy it is to see the sins of others and not notice my own sins. I ask for shame and sorrow for my sin.

Setting: Read the Bible passage below, where Jesus is talking to a large group of people, and see what stands out for you.

Matthew 7:1-5 NRSVA

'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.

**For with the judgement you make you will be judged,
and the measure you give will be the measure you get.**

**Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye,
but do not notice the log in your own eye?**

**Or how can you say to your neighbour,
"Let me take the speck out of your eye",
while the log is in your own eye?**

**You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye,
and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye.**

Conversation: Imagine you are talking to Jesus, what do you want to say?
How might Jesus respond?

Final prayer: Finish with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

A Thought for Today

Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating.

By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

PUTTING A GOOD CONSTRUCTION ON WHAT OTHERS SAY

Saint Ignatius in a preliminary note to the Spiritual Exercises encourages us to give other people the benefit of the doubt:

“Both the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises and the one who receives them will receive more help and benefit if they put a good construction on what others say rather than condemn them out of hand.

If it seems that another person is wrong in what they say, then ask them what exactly they mean. If they are in error, then they should be corrected with all kindness.” Spiritual Exercises 22

There is a danger we listen to certain people predisposed to find fault. We should rather listen to others predisposed to put a good construction on what they say.

Another danger is that we imagine people are saying or doing things just to annoy us or put us down. We assume bad motives in the words or actions of others.

Ignatius encourages us always to assume the best. This way we avoid creating bad feeling where none was intended. Or even if bad feeling was at the root of what was said, we don't escalate the problem, but leave room for reconciliation.

Photo: J C Wilmore, Wikimedia Commons



Day 17

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may acknowledge my sin with sorrow and ask for pardon.

Setting: Slowly read the Bible passage below and see what stands out for you.

Psalm 51 Vs:1-13 HCSB

**Be gracious to me, God, according to Your faithful love;
according to Your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion.
Wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin.**

**For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me.
Against You—You alone—I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight.
So You are right when You pass sentence;
You are blameless when You judge.
Indeed, I was guilty when I was born;
I was sinful when my mother conceived me.**

**Surely You desire integrity in the inner self,
and You teach me wisdom deep within.
Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones You have crushed rejoice.
Turn Your face away from my sins and blot out all my guilt.**

**God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not banish me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore the joy of Your salvation to me, and give me a willing spirit.
Then I will teach the rebellious Your ways, and sinners will return to You.**

Conversation: Talk to Jesus in your own words about whatever has come up for you or how the prayer has made you feel.

Final prayer: Finish with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Return of the Prodigal: Rembrandt, 1669, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

God waits for us: He doesn't get tired, He doesn't lose heart.

Pope Francis

Day 18

Inspiring Leaders—a Meditation

At this point in the Spiritual Exercises Ignatius gives us the Kingdom meditation. When he wrote the Spiritual Exercises nearly 500 years ago in the age of chivalry, following a good king was guaranteed to inspire a noble young person. Today we might find an honest and reforming political leader more inspiring.

Preparation: I come before the Creator of the Universe, the Father, the Mother, who loves me dearly. I ask that my prayer is according to God's will.

The Gift: I ask that I may hear and answer the call of Christ to me.

The Setting: I imagine a human leader who promises to work to heal the environment, offers to care for the poor and marginalised in society, to create a fair system of government with education, healthcare and services provided for all. Not only would I be likely to vote for such a person, but wouldn't I want to co-operate with them in the task of building a more just, fair and sustainable world?

Now I see Jesus Christ, a leader who is both human and divine. If a human leader can inspire me, how much more should Christ inspire me to follow him?

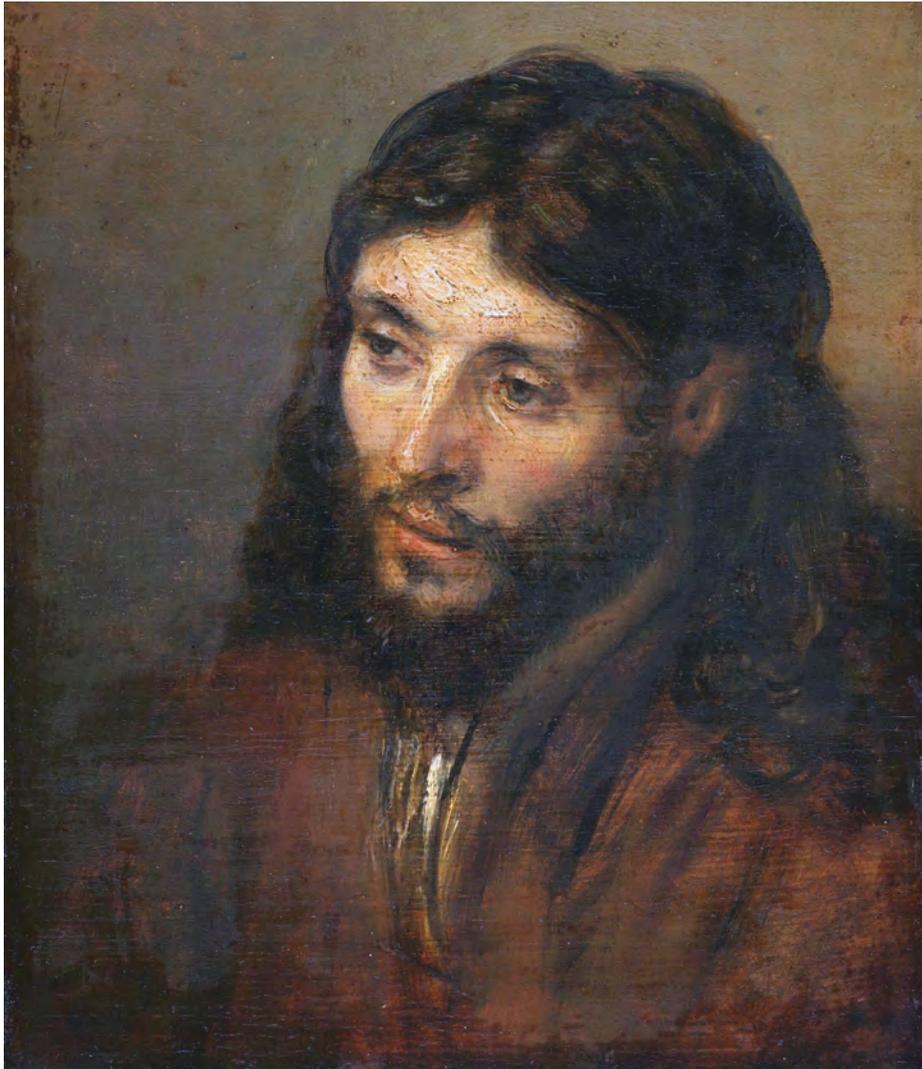
Jesus heals the sick, feeds the hungry, calms the troubled and raises the dead. He also calls people to a change of heart.

He calls on us to create a better world, not because we are obliged to by law, but because it is our great desire to love others and to love and respect creation.

I finish this prayer by offering myself and my service to God in words such as:

Eternal Lord Jesus, I am moved by your grace to offer myself for your service. I desire to follow you, living simply, as you did; reaching out to others in love and service.

I desire to follow you even if this brings me ridicule, poverty or suffering. I wish to follow wherever you, my Lord and God do call me.



Head of Christ: Rembrandt, 1648, Gemälde Galerie, Berlin, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

Jesus come and reign, let my body be your temple, my heart your throne.

St Peter Julian Eymard

Day 19

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are Mary, someone Mary is telling the story to, or the messenger from God. How does it look from their point of view?

Luke 1:26-38 HCSB

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came to her and said, "Rejoice, favoured woman! The Lord is with you."

But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be.

Then the angel told her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.

Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?"

The angel replied to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. For nothing will be impossible with God." "I am the Lord's slave," said Mary.

"May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.

[Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.](#)



Annunciation: Lorenzo Costa, 1500-1525, Gemälde Galerie, Berlin, Wikimedia Commons

The Incarnation

Saint Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises imagines the Trinity looking down on the earth and seeing people going about their lives; some being born, others dying, some at work, others at rest. Many people are sinning and being lost. So the merciful God decides the time is right to send the Son of God to save people from sin. So begins the familiar story of the Incarnation; Jesus being conceived of the virgin, Mary and born in a stable in Bethlehem.

A Thought for Today

If you desire faith, then you have faith enough.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Day 20

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are Mary or Elizabeth or Zechariah. How does it look from their point of view?

Luke 1:39-45 HCSB

In those days Mary set out and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then she exclaimed with a loud cry:

"You are the most blessed of women, and your child will be blessed! How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me! She who has believed is blessed because what was spoken to her by the Lord will be fulfilled!"

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

When you have finished the prayer note down in your jotter how the prayer went and what you want to take with you from this time of prayer.

A Thought for Today

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out.

It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being.

We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.

Albert Schweitzer



The Visitation: Catharina van Hemessen, 1550's, Cincinnati Art Museum, Wikimedia Commons

Imagination in Prayer

When we imagine a story like that of Mary going to visit her cousin Elizabeth we put ourselves in the picture as a character. Maybe we imagine ourselves to be Mary or Elizabeth, or perhaps Zechariah watching from inside the house. We fill in details of the story as we imagine they might have happened.

Just as each artist who paints the picture of this meeting imagines it in a different way, so each person who imagines the story in prayer will imagine it differently. We are not trying to recreate a historical story just as it happened. Instead we are allowing God to touch us through our own imagination. We will see what God wants us to see. Details which go unnoticed for other people might be particularly significant for us.

When we have finished our prayer, we need to look back and ask, "What is the significance of the way I have imagined that story; what is God saying to me?"

Day 21

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below; you can imagine you are Mary or Joseph or a shepherd. How does it look from their point of view?

Luke 1:1–7 HCSB

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped Him snugly in cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough—because there was no room for them at the lodging place.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours.'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Conversation: Talk to Christ or Mary or Joseph in your own words as a friend.

You may want to talk about what this passage from Luke raises for you.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Christmas Eve: Michael Rieser, 1869, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

The Eternal future has entered our time.

Karl Rahner SJ

Day 22

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are Mary, Joseph, one of the wise men (or women). How does it feel from their point of view?

Matthew 2:1-12 HCSB

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born.

"In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah: because out of you will come a leader who will shepherd My people Israel."

Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find Him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship Him."

After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen in the east! It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed beyond measure. Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Star of Bethlehem: Edward Burne Jones, 1890, Birmingham Museum, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

Uphill by Christina Rossetti

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?

From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?

A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.

May not the darkness hide it from my face?

You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?

Those who have gone before.

Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?

They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?

Of labour you shall find the sum.

Will there be beds for me and all who seek?

Yea, beds for all who come.

Day 23

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are Mary, Joseph or someone else who might have been involved in the holy family leaving for Egypt. How does it look from their point of view?

Matthew 2:13-15 HCSB

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Get up! Take the child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you.

For Herod is about to search for the child to destroy Him."

So he got up, took the child and His mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt.

He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called My Son.**

Conversation: Talk to Jesus, or Mary or Joseph in your own words about whatever has come up for you in the prayer or how it has made you feel.

Final prayer: Finish with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

A Thought for Today

The dreams which reveal the supernatural are promises and messages that God sends us directly: they are nothing but His angels, His ministering spirits, who usually appear to us when we are in a great predicament.

The interpretation of dreams is a great art.

Paracelsus



The Flight into Egypt: Jacopo Bassano, 1544, Norton Simon Museum, Wikimedia Commons

Praying with Pictures

When you look at a picture you are not just being asked whether or not you like it, but what does it say to you.

For example, you look at the Flight into Egypt by Jacopo Bassano which is above; you may think, that's not how I imagine Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus going through Gaza to Egypt. But what does the picture say to you?

You may notice the determined step of Joseph fired by an urgency to get away from danger. His eyes are cast down as he walks barefoot looking just one step ahead. The angel seems to be pointing the way even more urgently.

If you are concentrating on Mary and Jesus you may see how she holds him for all the world to see. Probably not really too sensible when riding on a donkey, but paintings are symbolic rather than practical.

Then the three men, why are they there? Do they represent something? One seems to only have interest in drinking his wine, another seems to be looking at him, perhaps disapprovingly. The third man has a basket of escaping chickens—why? One man has potential food, the other drink, the third music, perhaps they are distractions upon the way that Joseph is determined to ignore.

Perhaps you can see yourself as one of the characters.

We give a fuller explanation of how to use pictures in prayer on page 8.

Day 24

Preparation: Begin by stilling; then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are Mary, Joseph a friend, a Temple teacher or Jesus. How do you imagine they feel about this story.

Luke 2:41-52 HCSB

Every year His parents travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When He was 12 years old, they went up according to the custom of the festival. After those days were over, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but His parents did not know it. Assuming He was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey. Then they began looking for Him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for Him. After three days, they found Him in the temple complex sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all those who heard Him were astounded at His understanding and His answers. When His parents saw Him, they were astonished, and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for You." "Why were you searching for Me?" He asked them. "Didn't you know that I had to be in My Father's house?" But they did not understand what He said to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and with people.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Finding of the Saviour in the Temple: William Holman-Hunt, 1854, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.
The important thing is not to stop questioning.

Albert Einstein

On Education

When infant Reason first exerts her sway,
And new-formed thoughts their earliest charms display;
Then let the growing race employ your care
Then guard their opening minds from Folly's snare;
Correct the rising passions of their youth,
Teach them each serious, each important truth;
Plant heavenly virtue in the tender breast,
Destroy each vice that might its growth molest;
Point out betimes the course they should pursue;
Then with redoubled pleasure shall you view
Their reason strengthen as their years increase,
Their virtue ripen and their follies cease;
Like corn sown early in the fertile soil,
The richest harvest shall repay your toil.

Elizabeth Bentley 1789

Day 25

The Ways of Good and Evil

Today we have a meditation from the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola to help us become more aware of the influences upon us. We consider how evil will tempt us and how good will invite us. Evil is personified by Ignatius as Satan, the enemy of our human nature and good is revealed in Christ the giver of life.

Preparation: I come before the Creator of the Universe, the Father, the Mother, who loves me dearly. I ask that my prayer is according to God's will.

The Gift: I ask that I may recognise the deceits of Satan to help me guard against them and recognise the call of Jesus and be given the grace to follow Him.

The Setting:

I reflect on the way of evil, personified by Satan on his fiery throne.

Evil spares no individual, nation, city or place upon the earth—all are tempted.

Evil sows selfishness, division, oppression and denies what gives life.

The basic temptations which lead to most evils are a desire for wealth and possessions, which give the false promise of happiness. Evil then encourages us to seek honours and the esteem of the world, which lead to pride, where we consider ourselves better than others. **Wealth—>Honours—>Pride**

I reflect on the way of Christ, which is revealed in a gentle, humble Lord Jesus. He invites me to what brings life and joy:

- To the freedom of not being attached to possessions.
- To a simplicity of life which gives contentment with what I have and who I am.
- To have no need to seek honours or the recognition of others to build my ego.
- To a humility which accepts others as my equal, whatever their place in society.

A Conversation

I talk to Mary, the mother of Jesus as a friend and imagine what she might say in reply. I ask her to pray to her son to give me the grace to follow Him in the highest spiritual poverty, and if He is willing, in actual poverty. I ask as well for the gift of being able to accept insults and ridicule for Christ.

I talk to Jesus, and ask Him for the same graces I asked of Mary.

I talk to God, the Father and I ask again for the same graces as I requested of Mary and Jesus. I finish my prayer with the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

A Thought for Today

The battle-line between good and evil runs through the heart of every man.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn



Good and Evil figure:

Demetrio Garcia Aguilar,
Friends of Oaxacan Folk Art,
Mexico,
Wikimedia Commons.

The Enemy of our Human Nature

Christianity has personified evil under many names, Satan, the Devil, the Father of Lies, the Evil one, etc. Ignatius prefers the term 'the enemy of our human nature'. Following the promptings of this enemy will cause us to turn away from all that is good and ultimately reject life itself. Our life will flourish when we can unmask this enemy and follow instead the promptings of God, the giver of life.

In practice it probably makes little difference if we believe in good and bad spirits—a world of angels and devils or not. What is important is to recognise those temptations that lead to emptiness and desolation, and the invitations from God to a live a life which brings human flourishing with a deep sense of consolation.

Day 26

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are John the Baptist, one of his followers, a bystander or Jesus himself. How does the story look from your point of view?

Mark 1:1-11 HCSB

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way.
A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

*Prepare the way for the Lord;
make His paths straight!*

John came baptising in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were flocking to him, and they were baptised by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

He was preaching: "Someone more powerful than I will come after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of His sandals. I have baptised you with water, but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. As soon as He came up out of the water, He saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending to Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven:

**You are My beloved Son;
I take delight in You!**

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



The Baptism of Christ: David Zelenka, 2005, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

You, Eternal Trinity, are my Creator, and I am the work of Your hands, and I know through the new creation which You have given me in the blood of Your Son, that You are enamoured of the beauty of Your workmanship.

Catherine of Siena

Public Ministry

Today we begin following Jesus in his public ministry and his baptism by John the Baptist. An event marked in all four gospels with the acknowledgement of Jesus as the Beloved Son of God.

John calls for a change of heart, a recognition that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. He calls for people to live a life centred on God our creator.

Day 27

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are Jesus, or maybe a disciple to whom Jesus is telling the story of his time in the desert.

Alternative you can just ponder the story using *lectio divina*.

Luke 4:1-11 HCSB

Then Jesus returned from the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over, He was hungry. The Devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” But Jesus answered him, “It is written: *Man must not live on bread alone.*”

So he took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The Devil said to Him, “I will give You their splendour and all this authority, because it has been given over to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. If You, then, will worship me, all will be Yours.”

And Jesus answered him,

“It is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”

So he took Him to Jerusalem, had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written:

*He will give His angels orders concerning you,
to protect you, and they will support you with their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”*

And Jesus answered him, “It is said: *Do not test the Lord your God.*”

After the Devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him for a time.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Christ in the Wilderness: Ivan Kramskoi, 1872, Tretyakov Gallery, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

We should every night call ourselves to an account:

what infirmity have I mastered today?
what passions opposed?
what temptation resisted?
what virtue acquired?

Our vices will abate of themselves if they be brought every day to the shrift.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Day 28

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are Simon Peter, a person in the crowd, or even Jesus. What do you see, do and feel?

Luke 5:1-11 HCSB

As the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear God's word, He was standing by Lake Gennesaret. He saw two boats at the edge of the lake; the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets.

He got into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the land.

Then He sat down and was teaching the crowds from the boat.

When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

"Master," Simon replied, "we've worked hard all night long and caught nothing! But at Your word, I'll let down the nets."

When they did this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets began to tear. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them; they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man, Lord!"

For he and all those with him were amazed at the catch of fish they took, and so were James and John, Zebedee's sons, who were Simon's partners.

"Don't be afraid," Jesus told Simon.

"From now on you will be catching people!"

Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed Him.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Miraculous Catch of Fish: Johann Georg Platzer, 18thC., Residenz Galerie, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

However many blessings we expect from God,
His infinite liberality will always exceed all our wishes and our thoughts.

John Calvin

The Surprise

Simon Peter was so surprised at the daytime catch of so many fish that he begged Jesus to leave him. He was more comfortable with the familiar. He recognised himself as a sinner, not a saint.

Sometimes it seems easier to settle for a mediocre life; a life that doesn't stretch us, a life that is familiar. Yet the call of Christ for us is to live life to the full, overcoming our weaknesses to use our talents in ways that might surprise us.

Lord, help me to be open to your surprises.

Day 29

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are listening to Jesus on the hillside, or you can ponder slowly these Beatitudes—they are central to the teaching of Christ. What do they mean to you?

Matthew 5:1-12 HCSB

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. Then He began to teach them, saying:

“The poor in spirit are blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Those who mourn are blessed, for they will be comforted.

The gentle are blessed, for they will inherit the earth.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed, for they will be filled.

The merciful are blessed, for they will be shown mercy.

The pure in heart are blessed, for they will see God.

The peacemakers are blessed, for they will be called sons of God.

Those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

You are blessed when they insult and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me.

Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven.

For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Conversation: Talk to Christ in your own words as a friend or leader. You may want to talk about what he means in the Beatitudes.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord’s Prayer/Our Father.



Sermon on the Mount: Károly Ferenczy, 1896, Hungarian National Gallery, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

All blessings come to us through our Lord.

He will teach us, for in beholding His life we find that He is the best example.

Saint Teresa of Avila

A Reflection on the Beatitudes: The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw people to the One who alone can fulfil it. (1718)

The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude. This vocation is addressed to each individual personally, but also to the Church as a whole, the new people made up of those who have accepted the promise and live from it in faith. (1719)

Day 30

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are listening to Jesus on the hillside.

Alternatively you can ponder slowly these central teachings of Christ.

Do you find them a difficult challenge or do they inspire you?

Matthew 5:38-48 HCSB

“You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, don’t resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well.

And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

Give to the one who asks you,

and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons and daughters of your Father in heaven.

For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have?

Don’t even the tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same?

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Photo by Jonathan Harrison on Unsplash

A Thought for Today

Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Love of the Enemy

A common trait of dictators is to create an enemy of the people who can be a scapegoat for all society’s ills. Foreigners or people who are different in some way make excellent scapegoats. Evil needs enemies.

Christ calls his followers to love their enemies.

We don’t, of course, have to **like** those we think of as enemies.

But, if we are to follow Christ’s call, we have to be willing to be civil, honest, respectful towards them and always ready to do our ‘enemies’ a good turn. This is what it means to **love** them.

Day 31

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Consider the Bible passage below, you can imagine you are the rich man, a follower of Jesus, a bystander or Jesus himself.

Be aware of how you, and the others around you, react and feel.

Mark 10: 17-22 HCSB

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before Him, and asked Him,

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call Me good?” Jesus asked him.

“No one is good but One—God.

You know the commandments:

- Do not murder;**
- do not commit adultery;**
- do not steal;**
- do not bear false witness;**
- do not defraud;**
- Honour your father and mother.”**

He said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth.”

Then, looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him,

“You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come, follow Me.”

But he was stunned at this demand,

and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Christ and the rich young man: Andrei Mironov, 2017, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

Many a man thinks he is buying pleasure, when he is really selling himself to it.

Benjamin Franklin

Guidelines on Giving away Money

The Spiritual Exercises offer some thoughts on almsgiving—giving money away.

1. Be aware if I give to my own family and friends whether it is really for the Love of God or my love for these persons.
2. I should imagine another person has the money and wants to distribute it in such a way as it does the most good—for the greater glory of God. I should then do likewise.
3. Imagine myself at the hour of my death; what way would seem to have been best to have given the money. Now I do likewise.

Day 32

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly.

Setting: Look at the people in the story below, who do you feel best suits you and imagine the story from their point of view.

Luke 7:36-50 HCSB

Then one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. Jesus entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And a woman in the town who was a sinner found out that Jesus was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house. She brought an alabaster jar of fragrant oil and stood behind Him at His feet, weeping, and began to wash His feet with her tears. She wiped His feet with the hair of her head, kissing them and anointing them with the fragrant oil.

When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching Him—she's a sinner!"

Jesus replied to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

"Teacher," he said, "say it."

"A creditor had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, and the other 50. Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered, "I suppose the one he forgave more."

"You have judged correctly," He told him. Turning to the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she, with her tears, has washed My feet and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing My feet since I came in. You didn't anoint My head with olive oil, but she has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little." Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Those who were at the table with Him began to say among themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"

And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Conversation: Talk to Christ in your own words as a friend or leader.

You may want to talk about where you fit in within this story of the woman who was the public sinner and Simon the Pharisee. Tell Jesus where your sympathies lie. Notice his response.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Christ and the Sinner: Andrei Mironov, 2014, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

One word frees us of all the weight and pain in life. That word is love.

Sophocles

Day 33

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Imagine you are a disciple or a member of the crowd.
How does this story seem from your point of view.

Mark 6:30-43 HCSB

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to Him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a while.” For many people were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they went away in the boat by themselves to a remote place, but many saw them leaving and recognised them. People ran there by land from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. So as He stepped ashore, He saw a huge crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He began to teach them many things.

When it was already late, His disciples approached Him and said, “This place is a wilderness, and it is already late! Send them away, so they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat.” “You give them something to eat,” He responded.

They said to Him, “Should we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”

And He asked them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look.”

When they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.”

Then He instructed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks of hundreds and fifties.

Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke the loaves. He kept giving them to His disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Everyone ate and was filled.

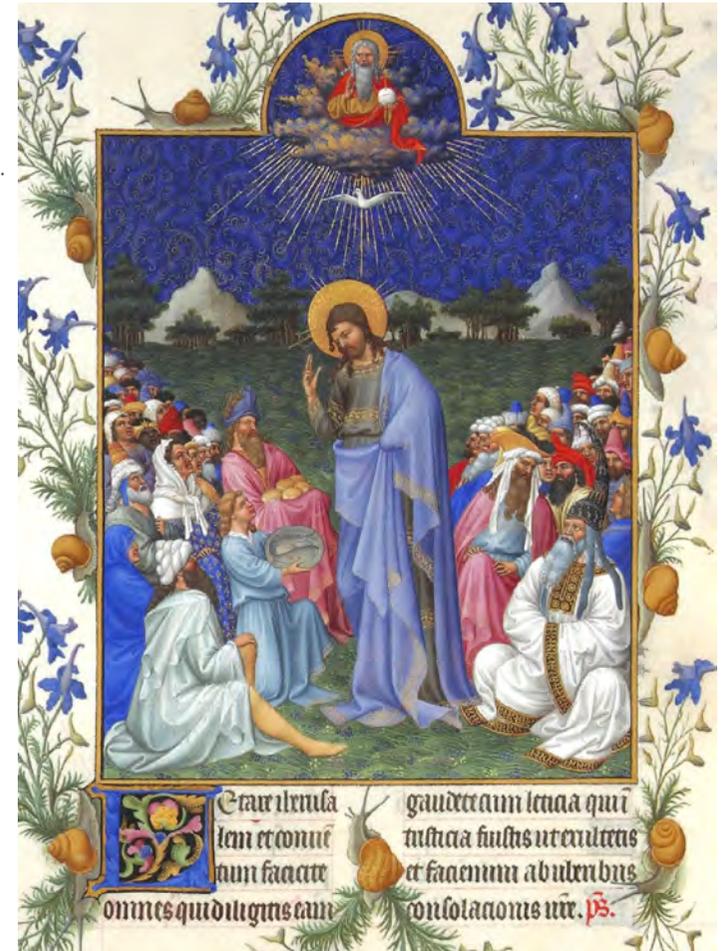
Then they picked up 12 baskets full of pieces of bread and fish.

Now those who ate the loaves were 5,000 men.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

Feeding of the Multitude:

Lymbourg Brothers,
1411,
Wikimedia Commons.



A Thought for Today

What does love look like?

It has the hands to help others.

It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy.

It has eyes to see misery and want.

It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of others.

That is what love looks like.

Saint Augustine

Day 34

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Imagine you are a disciple, perhaps Peter. Paint the picture in your mind of the Lake with the boat and the wind and waves. Get in touch with how they must have felt.

Matthew 14:22-33 HCSB

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds. After dismissing the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone. But the boat was already over a mile from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. Around three in the morning, He came toward them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and cried out in fear.

Immediately Jesus spoke to them. "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's You," Peter answered Him, "command me to come to You on the water."

"Come!" He said.

And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid. And beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out His hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Then those in the boat worshiped Him and said, "Truly You are the Son of God!"

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Christ Rescues Peter from Drowning: Lorenzo Veneziano, 1370, Berlin, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace,
so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.

Martin Luther

One of the favourite prayers of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Anima Christi—Soul of Christ

Soul of Christ, Sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O good Jesus, hear me.

Within your wounds, hide me.

Permit me not to be separated from you.

From the wicked foe, defend me.

At the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you,

That with your saints I may praise you for ever and ever.

Amen

Day 35

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly.

Setting: Another good passage to imagine. You might be Martha, Mary or one of Jesus' followers sat down chatting with him. Where do your sympathies lie?

Luke 10:38-42 HCSB

While the disciples were travelling, Jesus entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to what He said.

But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, "Lord, don't You care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand."

The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her."

Conversation: Talk to Christ or Mary or Martha in your own words as a friend. You may want to talk about what this passage from Luke raises for you.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

A Thought for Today

Together with a culture of work, there must be a culture of leisure as gratification. To put it another way: people who work must take the time to relax, to be with their families, to enjoy themselves, read, listen to music, play a sport.

Pope Francis



Christ in the House of Martha and Mary: Jan Vermeer, 1655, Edinburgh, Wikimedia Commons.

Spiritual Exercises 364 12

We must be on our guard against making comparisons between those who are still living and the saints who have gone before us, for no small error is committed if we say: "This man is wiser than St Augustine," "He is another St. Francis or even greater," and so on.

Day 36

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: Imagine you are being sent out by Jesus with these instructions. How do you feel about them? What do you do?

Luke 10:1-12 HCSB

Now Jesus was going around the villages in a circuit, teaching. He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the road except a walking stick: no bread, no traveling bag, no money in their belts. They were to wear sandals, but not put on an extra shirt. Then He said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that place. If any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, when you leave there, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they were driving out many demons, anointing many sick people with olive oil, and healing them.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

A Thought for Today

People lose all the material things they leave behind them in this world, but they carry with them the reward of their charity and the alms they give. For these, they will receive from the Lord the reward and recompense they deserve.

St. Francis of Assisi



He sent them out two by two: James Tissot, 1886, Brooklyn Museum, Wikimedia Commons

Guidelines for Eating

In the Spiritual Exercises Saint Ignatius gives guidelines for eating.

He is clear we should eat sufficient to keep us healthy and enable us to do our work. But sufficient is the rule, never overeat.

Keep food simple! Don't overdo the dainties. There will be feast days and celebrations when we can enjoy a modest amount of something special, but this should contrast with our usual basic fare.

Alcoholic drink should be kept to the minimum, taking just what is helpful.

Be mindful when eating. Eat slowly, enjoy your food.

Plan your eating—ideally after a meal when you are not hungry—decide what you are to eat and how much, then keep to this amount.

Always leave the table feeling you could eat a little more.

If you are tempted to eat a little more, eat a little less!

Day 37

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly.

Setting: Imagine you are one of the disciples being taken up the high mountain by Jesus. Let these events unfold.

How do you feel about them. What do they mean to you?

Matthew 17:13 HCSB

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. He was transformed in front of them, and His face shone like the sun. Even His clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good for us to be here! If You want, I will make three tabernacles here: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said:

This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him. Listen to Him!

When the disciples heard it, they fell facedown and were terrified.

Then Jesus came up, touched them, and said, “Get up; don’t be afraid.”

When they looked up they saw no one except Him—Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

So the disciples questioned Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” “Elijah is coming and will restore everything,” He replied. “But I tell you: Elijah has already come, and they didn’t recognise him. On the contrary, they did whatever they pleased to him. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them about John the Baptist.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Transfiguration: Andrei Mironov, 2018, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergy or lay, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon Earth.

John Wesley

Consolation—Spiritual Exercises 316/3

I call it consolation when a person is so moved to a great love of their Creator and Lord that nothing on earth is loved for its own sake but rather for the sake of the Creator.

I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is of God and fills the souls with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

Day 38

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

Setting: This conflictual passage from the Gospel of Luke allows you to see things from the point of view of Jesus, his disciples, a member of the crowd, a Temple seller, or one of the chief priest, scribes, or leaders of the people. All will have a different take on what is happening.

Luke 19:45-48 HCSB

Jesus went into the Temple complex and began to throw out those who were selling, and He said,

**“It is written, My house will be a house of prayer,
but you have made it a den of thieves!”**

Every day He was teaching in the Temple complex.

**The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people
were looking for a way to destroy Him,
but they could not find a way to do it,
because all the people were captivated by what they heard.**

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

A Thought for Today

Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.

Winston Churchill



The Purification of the Temple: El Greco, 1600, Frick N.Y., Wikimedia Commons.

Desolation—Spiritual Exercises 317

I call desolation a darkness of the soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly. In desolation there is a restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to a lack of faith, lack of hope, and lack of love. In desolation the person is lazy, tepid, sad and feels separated from their creator and Lord.

318 In times of desolation we should never make any change to our way of life, but remain firm and constant in the resolutions and decisions which formerly brought us consolation. *Wait for consolations to return before making changes. The ups and downs of consolations and desolations are natural and not to be feared.*

Day 39

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly.

Setting: Imagine you are a disciple, perhaps Peter or one of the other unnamed ones. Remember that in Jesus' day, washing feet was a job for a slave girl.

John 13:1 & 4-15 HCSB

Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

So He got up from supper, laid aside His robe, took a towel, and tied it around Himself. Next, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around Him.

He came to Simon Peter, who asked Him, "Lord, are You going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I'm doing you don't understand now, but afterward you will know."

"You will never wash my feet—ever!" Peter said.

Jesus replied, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with Me."

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." "One who has bathed," Jesus told him, "doesn't need to wash anything except his feet, but he is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him. This is why He said, "You are not all clean."

When Jesus had washed their feet and put on His robe, He reclined again and said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you? You call Me Teacher and Lord. This is well said, for I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done for you.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Jesus washes Peter's Feet: Ford Madox Brown, 1857, Wikimedia Commons

A Thought for Today

Jesus, my feet are dirty.

Come even as a slave to me, pour water into your bowl,
come and wash my feet.

In asking such a thing I know I am overbold,

but I dread what was threatened when you said to me,

"If I do not wash your feet I have no fellowship with you."

Wash my feet then, because I long for your companionship.

Origen of Alexandria

Day 40

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask that I may know Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly.

Setting: Another lively passage which is great to imagine yourself part of. You can be a disciple, a cheering member of the crowd, a disapproving Pharisee or even the donkey!

Luke 19:29-40 HCSB

As Jesus approached Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of the disciples and said, "Go into the village ahead of you. As you enter it, you will find a young donkey tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say this: 'The Lord needs it.'"

So those who were sent left and found it just as He had told them. As they were untying the young donkey, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the donkey?" "The Lord needs it," they said.

Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their robes on the donkey, they helped Jesus get on it. As He was going along, they were spreading their robes on the road. Now He came near the path down the Mount of Olives, and the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen:

The King who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed One.
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!

Some of the Pharisees from the crowd told Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if they were to keep silent, the stones would cry out!"

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Christ's Entry into Jerusalem: Pietro Lorenzetti, 1320, Assisi, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

Cheerfulness, it would appear, is a matter which depends fully as much on the state of things within, as on the state of things without and around us.

Charlotte Brontë

Why we suffer Desolation—Exercises 322

Ignatius gives us three reasons:

1. We have been lazy or negligent in our prayer; we have lost our focus.
2. God is testing us to see whether we will remain faithful if we are not rewarded with consolations.
3. To enable us to become aware of the fact that it is not within our power to attain intense love, tears, great devotion or any other spiritual consolation; these are God's gift to us.

Day 41

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: Today we change the grace we ask for as we enter the 'third week' of the Spiritual Exercises. I ask now for sorrow and shame as I enter with Christ in his suffering for my sins.

Setting: Imagine yourself at the Last Supper, the first Eucharist, as the disciples and Jesus begin to celebrate the Passover. You could be someone preparing the room, or one of the men or women followers of Jesus. What do you make of what he says and does?

Mark 14:12-16 & 22-26 HCSB

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare the Passover so You may eat it?"

So He sent two of His disciples and told them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a water jug will meet you. Follow him. Wherever he enters, tell the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room for Me to eat the Passover with My disciples?"' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." So the disciples went out, entered the city, and found it just as He had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

As they were eating, He took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body."

Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks, He gave it to them, and so they all drank from it. He said to them,

"This is My blood that establishes the covenant; it is shed for many.

I assure you: I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it in a new way in the kingdom of God."

After singing psalms, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



The Last Supper: Károly Kernstok, 1921, Hungarian National Gallery, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

If a person has the answer to every question - that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble.

Pope Francis

Last Supper

Sweet Clown,
You blessed the cup,
Gave thanks to God, And passed the cup
Among those who sat at table;
Each took the cup, and raised it up
To catch your eye

And nervously they spoke
The customary greeting: 'Long life to you!'
They drank your health in the blood you'd shed,
Whilst they shredded the bread, You had made your own,
And ate the life You gave away.

Patrick Purnell SJ

Day 42

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for shame and confusion as I enter with Christ in his suffering for my sins.

Setting: In your imagination be there in that scene in the garden of Gethsemane. You could be a sleeping disciple, one of Jesus' chosen three who he really wants to support him. How are you feeling?

Mark 13:32-42 HCSB

Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and Jesus told His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be deeply distressed and horrified. Then He said to them, "My soul is swallowed up in sorrow —to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake."

Then He went a little farther, fell to the ground, and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, "Abba, Father! All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."

Then He came and found them sleeping. "Simon, are you sleeping?" He asked Peter. "Couldn't you stay awake one hour? Stay awake and pray so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Once again He went away and prayed, saying the same thing. And He came again and found them sleeping, because they could not keep their eyes open. They did not know what to say to Him. Then He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The time has come. Look, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up; let's go! See—My betrayer is near."

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Agony in the Garden: Benvenuto di Giovanni, 1491, Washington, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

"For his mercy endures forever." This is the refrain that repeats after each verse in Psalm 136 as it narrates the history of God's revelation. To repeat continually "for his mercy endures forever," as the psalm does, seems to break through the dimensions of space and time, inserting everything into the eternal mystery of love. It is as if to say that not only in history, but for all eternity we will always be under the merciful gaze of the Father. It is no accident that the people of Israel wanted to include this psalm – the "Great Hallel," as it is called – in its most important liturgical feast days. Within the very same context of mercy, Jesus entered upon his passion and death, conscious of the great mystery of love that he would consummate on the Cross.

Pope Francis

Day 43

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for sorrow and shame as I enter with Christ in his suffering for my sins. I ask that I can feel anguish and pain with Christ in anguish.

Setting: Who do you feel it most fitting to imagine yourself: Pilate, one of the scribes or elders, a member of the crowd or even Jesus? See the story from their point of view.

Mark 15:1-15 HCSB

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests had a meeting with the elders, scribes, and the whole Sanhedrin. After tying Jesus up, they led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate. So Pilate asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You have said it.”

And the chief priests began to accuse Him of many things. Then Pilate questioned Him again, “Are You not answering anything? Look how many things they are accusing You of!” But Jesus still did not answer anything, so Pilate was amazed.

At the festival it was Pilate’s custom to release for the people a prisoner they requested. There was one named Barabbas, who was in prison with rebels who had committed murder during the rebellion. The crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do for them as was his custom. So Pilate answered them, “Do you want me to release the King of the Jews for you?” For he knew it was because of envy that the chief priests had handed Him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd so that he would release Barabbas to them instead.

Pilate asked them again, “Then what do you want me to do with the One you call the King of the Jews?” Again they shouted, “Crucify Him!”

Then Pilate said to them, “Why? What has He done wrong?”

But they shouted, “Crucify Him!” all the more.

Then, willing to gratify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. And after having Jesus flogged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Christ in front of Pilate: Jacek Malczewski, 1910, Lviv N.G., Ukraine, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end;
if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth
only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair.

C. S. Lewis

Scruples—Spiritual Exercises 349-350

The enemy considers whether we have a lax or delicate conscience. The evil one seeks to make delicate consciences excessively sensitive to disturb the person so they see sins everywhere; in a word or a passing thought where there is no sin. With the lax, the enemy tries to make them even more lax, moving from bad to worse. A soul that wishes to make progress in the spiritual life must always act against the enemy. The sensitive should seek moderation to bring peace, the lax should seek greater sensitivity.

Day 44

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for sorrow and shame as I enter with Christ in his suffering for my sins. I ask that I can feel anguish and pain with Christ in anguish.

Setting: Today we have the way of the cross and the crucifixion. Again a lot of very different participants in the action. Enter into the story from the point of view of one of the people mentioned below.

Mark 15:21-32 HCSB

They forced a man coming in from the country, who was passing by, to carry Jesus' cross. He was Simon, a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus. And they brought Jesus to the place called *Golgotha* (which means Skull Place). They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it. Then they crucified Him and divided His clothes, casting lots for them to decide what each would get.

Now it was nine in the morning when they crucified Him.

The inscription of the charge written against Him was:

THE KING OF THE JEWS.

They crucified two criminals with Him, one on His right and one on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled that says: "And He was counted among outlaws".

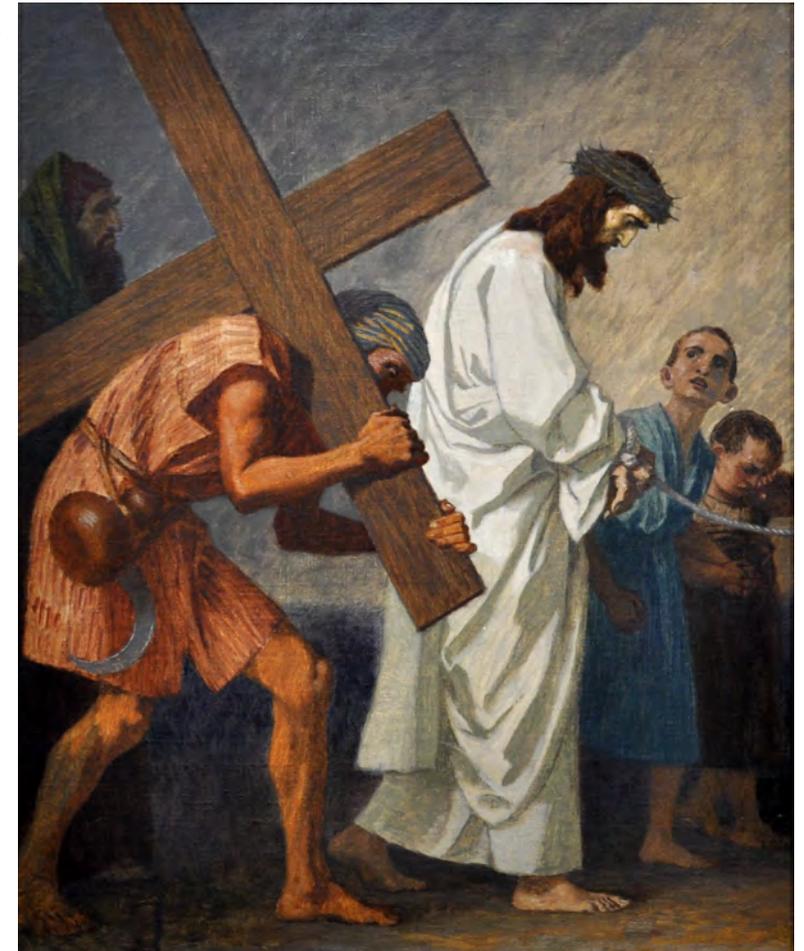
Those who passed by were yelling insults at Him, shaking their heads, and saying, "Ha! The One who would demolish the sanctuary and build it in three days, save Yourself by coming down from the cross!"

In the same way, the chief priests with the scribes were mocking Him to one another and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself! Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, so that we may see and believe."

Even those who were crucified with Him were taunting Him.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

Simon helps
Jesus Carry
his Cross:
Gebhard
Fugel,
St. Anthony's
Bad Saulgau,
Wikimedia
Commons.



A Thought for Today

Jesus Christ, may your death be my life
and in your dying may I learn how to live.
May your struggles be my rest,
Your human weakness my courage,
Your embarrassment my honour,
Your passion my delight, Your sadness my joy,
in your humiliation may I be exalted.
In a word, may I find all my blessings in your trials.
Amen.

St. Pierre Favre SJ

Day 45

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for deepening sorrow and shame as I enter with Christ in his suffering for my sins. I ask too that I feel anguish and pain with Christ in anguish.

Setting: The women who loved Jesus were watching from the distance. There were probably bystanders and maybe those who had called for Jesus to be crucified. The centurion and his soldiers were there too as these dramatic events took place. Take up a character in the story and imagine the events taking place and how you and those around you felt.

Mark 15:33-41 HCSB

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice,

*“Eloi, Eloi, lemásabachtháni?” which is translated,
“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

When some of those standing there heard this, they said,
“Look, He’s calling for Elijah!”

Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, fixed it on a reed, offered Him a drink, and said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to take Him down!”

But Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed His last.

Then the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom.

When the centurion, who was standing opposite Him, saw the way

He breathed His last, he said, “This man really was God’s Son!”

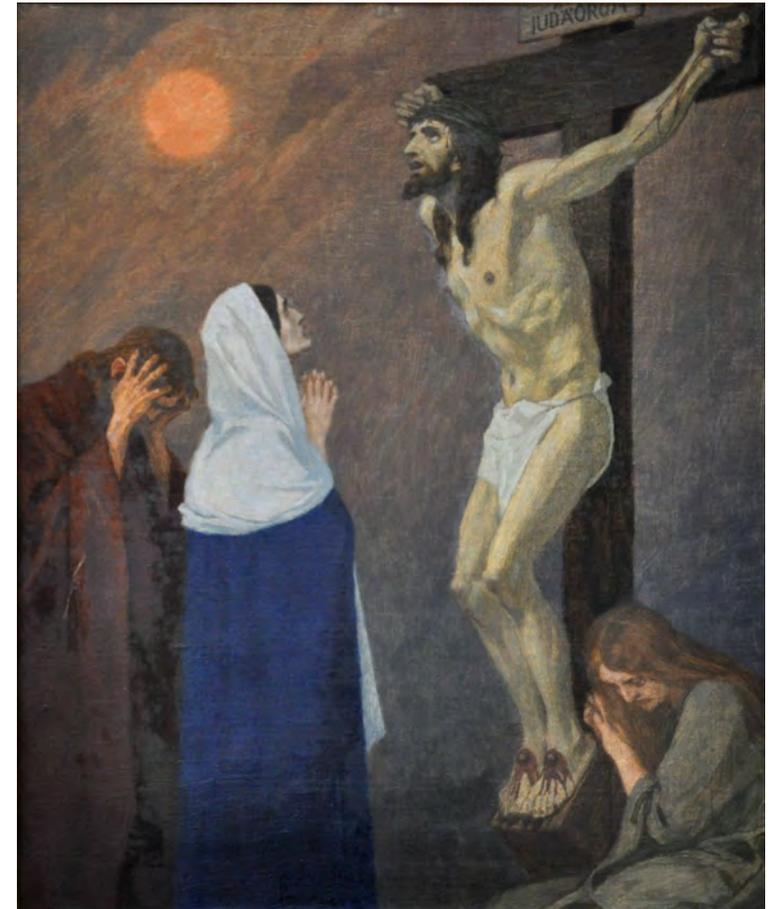
There were also women looking on from a distance.

Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they would follow Him and help Him. Many other women had come up with Him to Jerusalem.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

Jesus Dies on the Cross:

Gebhard Fugel
St. Anthony’s
Bad Saulgau,
Wikimedia
Commons.



A Thought for Today

And just when we would flee.... You come

And make of yourself an offering.

When I go towards you

It is with my whole life.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Day 46

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for sorrow as I contemplate Christ who died for my sins.

Setting: After the death, Joseph and the women do what they can to give Jesus a decent burial. Who are you in this story?

You may just want to stay with the body of Jesus in silence.

Mark 15:42-47 HCSB

When it was already evening, because it was preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin who was himself looking forward to the kingdom of God, came and boldly went in to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised that He was already dead.

Summoning the centurion, he asked him whether He had already died.

When he found out from the centurion, he gave the corpse to Joseph.

After he bought some fine linen, he took Him down and wrapped Him in the linen.

Then he placed Him in a tomb cut out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb.

Now Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were watching where He was placed.

Conversation: Talk to God the Creator in your own words about what has come up for you in this prayer. What are your concerns and desires?

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

A Thought for Today

Today there is a great silence over the earth, a great silence, and stillness, a great silence because the King sleeps

An Ancient Homily for Holy Saturday



Jesus is taken down from the Cross: Lovis Corinth, 1895, WRM Köln, Wikimedia Commons.

A SONG FOR ALL MARIES

Our Master lies asleep and is at rest;
His Heart has ceased to bleed, His Eye to weep.
The sun ashamed has dropt down in the west;
Our Master lies asleep.
Now we are they who weep, and trembling keep
Vigil, with wrung heart in a sighing breast,
While slow time creeps, and slow the shadows creep.
Renew Thy youth, as eagle from the nest;
O Master, who hast sown, arise to reap:
No cock-crow yet, no flush on eastern crest;
Our Master lies asleep.

Christina Georgina Rosetti

Day 47

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for joy in the Resurrection of Christ as he defeats sin and death.

Setting: Here we have two Marys and the guards as well as the messengers from God. What on earth is happening? Matthew has the participants in today's drama full of all sorts of emotions. What do I feel?

Matthew 28:1-10 HCSB

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb.

He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it.

His appearance was like lightning, and his robe was as white as snow.

The guards were so shaken from fear of him that they became like dead men.

But the angel told the women,

“Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here! For He has been resurrected, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay.

Then go quickly and tell His disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead.

In fact, He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there.'

Listen, I have told you.”

So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples the news.

Just then Jesus met them and said, “Good morning!”

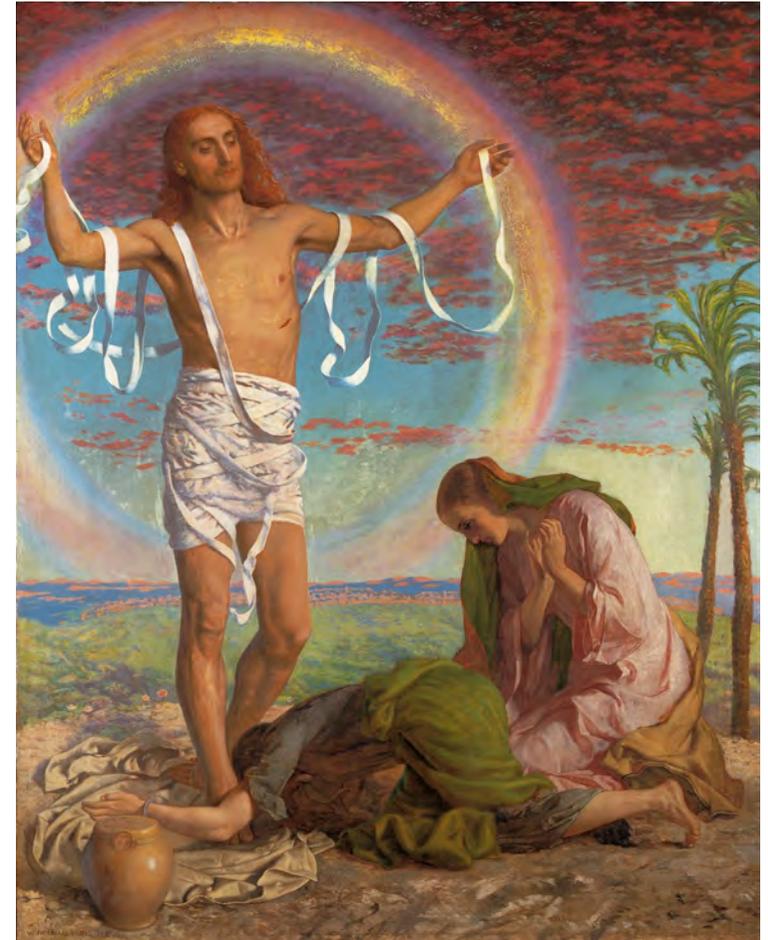
They came up, took hold of His feet, and worshiped Him.

Then Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there.”

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.

Christ and the two Marys:

William Holman Hunt, 1847 & 1897, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide Wikimedia Commons.



A Thought for Today

They just stood,
Still,
With their spice-filled baskets,
Staring, horrified,
Eyes out into the deep emptiness
Of the garden tomb,
(Tombs hold their dead)
Wits frozen,
Feet rooted to the ground;

The sheer incongruence of it all,
The terror of impossibility!
Memories of promise,
Heard but not believed,
Hung in the morning sun.
What if it were true?
What would the future be?
of the Day.

Patrick Purnell SJ

Day 48

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for the joy of the resurrected Christ as he defeats sin and death.

Setting: Today Jesus and Mary are alone in the Garden. Get in touch with Mary's surprise at meeting Jesus or Jesus' delight in revealing his risen self to his friend. You might imagine yourself as a disciple listening to Mary tell her story.

John 20:11-18 HCSB

Mary stood outside facing the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus' body had been lying. They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I don't know where they've put Him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus.

"Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Supposing He was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've removed Him, tell me where you've put Him, and I will take Him away."

Jesus said, "Mary."

Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!"—which means "Teacher."

"Don't cling to Me,"

Jesus told her, "for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

But go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father—to My God and your God."

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples,

"I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what He had said to her.

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Mary meets the Risen Lord: Alexander Ivanov, 1835, Russian Museum, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

While a gentle breeze plays in the trees.

Why do you weep? Oh! Why do you weep?

The winter is past, flowers appear; The fig-tree has put forth its fruits.

Listen! Listen! The Beloved calls; (His voice in the scents of the vine blossom)

'Mary! Mary!'

He opens my heart

And the sun breaks the day into a myriad pieces,

While the angels ascend and descend`

Upon him whom I adore, Whom I clutch with my arms,

As the voice of the turtle dove announces the Spring.

What Would The Future Be?

Patrick Purnell SJ

Day 49

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for joy in the Resurrection of Christ as he defeats sin and death.

Setting: Again we can imagine ourselves as Cleopas and another disciple, perhaps his wife, as they walk along the road. Or we can hear the two of them telling their story to the disciples in the upper room.

Luke 24:13-32 HCSB

Now that same day two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. Together they were discussing everything that had taken place. And while they were discussing and arguing, Jesus Himself came near and began to walk along with them.

But they were prevented from recognising Him. Then He asked them, “What is this dispute that you’re having with each other as you are walking?” And they stopped walking and looked discouraged.

The one named Cleopas answered Him, “Are You the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that happened there in these days?” “What things?” He asked them. So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a Prophet powerful in action and speech before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him. But we were hoping that He was the One who was about to redeem Israel. Besides all this, it’s the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women from our group astounded us. They arrived early at the tomb, and when they didn’t find His body, they came and reported that they had seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn’t see Him.”

He said to them, “How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the prophets have spoken! Didn’t the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

They came near the village where they were going, and He gave the impression that He was going farther. But they urged Him: “Stay with us, because it’s almost evening, and now the day is almost over.” So He went in to stay with them.

It was as He reclined at the table with them that He took the bread, blessed and

broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised Him, but He disappeared from their sight. So they said to each other, “Weren’t our hearts ablaze within us while He was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?”

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Friend of the Humble: Léon Augustin Lhermitte, 1892, MFA Boston, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.
It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends,
what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

Pedro Arrupe SJ

Day 50

Contemplation on Love

Today we consider the Contemplation on Love, the last of the contemplations of Saint Ignatius Loyola from the Spiritual Exercises.

We need to note two things:

That Love shows itself more in actions than words.

That love consist of mutual sharing. We share both what we own and our own time and abilities to help those we love.

Preparation:

I can imagine myself standing before God with the saints who are praying for me. A group of heavenly supporters including my patron saints and those of my friends and family who have gone before me.

Grace: I ask for the gift of a deep understanding of the gift of creation that God, in love, offers me. Filled with gratitude, I want to respond totally in my love and service of God.

The Setting: in four parts.

1. God's gifts to me—including all of creation, my own gifts and abilities, my faith and who I am by the grace of God.
2. God's self-gift to me. In the person of Christ I am given the revelation of God and God's very self. I become a temple of God in God's image and likeness.
3. God works for me. God enters and supports me in the struggles of my life. Christ's labours take him to death in order to bring me the Resurrection.
4. God as giver and gift—God's love shines on me like the rays from the sun. He cannot do enough out of love for me, calling me to a fuller and better life.

In response I pray:

**Take and receive Lord, all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding and my entire will**

—all that I have and own.

You have given all to me; to you, Lord I return it.

All is yours, do with it what you wish.

Give me only your love and your grace, with that I have enough.



Photo: Annie Spratt—Unsplash

A Thought for Today

The heart of our identity and what ought to define us as followers of Jesus is availability

Pedro Arrupe SJ

Contemplation on Love

When a person does the full Spiritual Exercises this meditation is repeated a number of times.

Maybe each time considering just one of the 'settings'.

It can be interspersed with the meditations on the Scriptural stories concerning the appearances of the Resurrected Jesus.

The meditation ends with the "Take and Receive" often known by its Latin name of, *Suscipe*, the most popular prayer of Saint Ignatius Loyola.

Day 51

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for a sharing in the joy of Christ and his followers in the new life of Christ a victory over sin and death.

Setting: Imagine you are one of the disciples, perhaps Thomas, the Apostle of the East, as he makes the great statement of belief, 'My Lord and my God'.

John 20:24-29 HCSB

One of the Twelve, Thomas, called "Twin", was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

So the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in His hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe!"

After eight days His disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them.

Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace to you!"

Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and observe My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side.

Don't be an unbeliever, but a believer."

Thomas responded to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

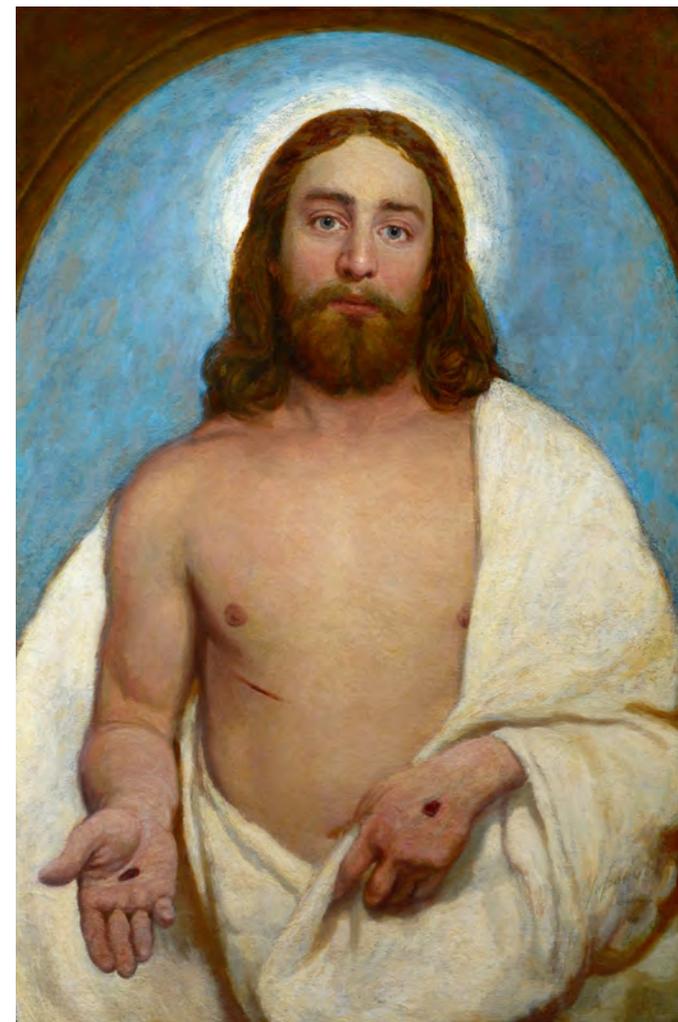
Jesus said, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Those who believe without seeing are blessed."

Conversation: Talk to Jesus in your own words about what has occurred to you in this period of prayer; imagine how he might respond.

Final Prayer: End with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

The Unbelief of Thomas:

Andrei Mironov,
2019,
Wikimedia Commons.



A Thought for Today

Christ has no body but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which He looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.

Teresa of Avila

Day 52

Preparation: Begin by stilling, then dedicating the time of prayer to God and asking God that all you think, feel and imagine are for the glory of God.

Gift: I ask for a sharing in the deep joy of Christ and his followers in the new life of Christ a victory over sin and death.

Setting: Imagine you are one of the disciples, maybe Peter or the Beloved Disciple.

John 21:13 & 15-19 HCSB

“Come and have breakfast,” Jesus told his disciples. None of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are You?” because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish.

When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “You know that I love You.”

“Feed My lambs,” He told him.

A second time He asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “You know that I love You.”

“Shepherd My sheep,” He told him.

He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”

Peter was grieved that He asked him the third time, “Do you love Me?” He said, “Lord, You know everything! You know that I love You.”

“Feed My sheep,” Jesus said.

“I assure you: When you were young, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.”

He said this to signify by what kind of death he would glorify God.

After saying this, He told him, “Follow Me!”

Follow the meditation on Scripture with a conversation with God and a Final Prayer.



Christ's Charge to Peter: Peter Paul Rubens, 1616, Wallace, London, Wikimedia Commons.

A Thought for Today

The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others.

Albert Schweitzer

Acknowledgments

Biblical texts taken from the following translations:

HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
NRSVA	New Revised Standard Version Anglicised edition
NRSVCE	New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition
NIV	New International Version

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Follow-up

Online Prayer Resources

Sacred Space: A daily meditation on Scripture	www.sacredspace.ie
Pray as you Go: daily audio reflections and music	www.pray-as-you-go.org
Pathways to God: daily prayer and resources	www.pathwaystogod.org
Ignatian Spirituality: USA based resources	ignatianspirituality.com

Ignatian Organisations in the UK

Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Glasgow: retreats courses	www.iscglasgow.co.uk
Epiphany Group: spirituality group in Scotland	epiphanygroup.org.uk
Mount Street Jesuit Centre: London	www.pathwaystogod.org
Christian Life Community of England & Wales	www.clcew.org.uk
Manresa Link: English West Midland	www.manresalink.org.uk
St Beuno's Jesuit Retreat House	www.beunos.com
Prego weekly groups and online, Wales	stbeunosoutreach.wordpress.com
St Bede's Pastoral Centre, York	www.stbedes.org.uk
London Centre for Spiritual Direction	www.lcsd.org.uk