

Introduction to Ignatian Prayer: Part III

St. Ignatius of Loyola was born Inigo Lopez de Loyola in 1491. He was born into a family of some nobility and therefore was exposed at a young age to the romances of courtly life, including gambling, sword fighting, and women. At the Battle of Pamplona, Inigo's leg was shattered by a cannonball, seemingly ending his life of excitement and adventure. While he was recovering at his family castle in Loyola his boredom led him to begin reading about the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. These books introduced him to a new kind of noble adventure, an adventure with God. Upon an unsuccessful pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he stopped in the town of Manresa. He had only intended to stay there for a few days, but he ended up living in a cave for ten months. This is where Inigo developed the Spiritual Exercises, a series of Spiritual Disciplines that are dedicated to growing in intimacy with Jesus.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are made up of four "weeks," each "week" dedicated to a contemplation of a different aspect of the Gospel. The first week being personal sin and the sin of the world, the second week being the life and ministry of Christ, and the third and fourth week focused on Christ's passion that culminates in the apprehension of Divine Love. The complete retreat is often done in a one month block, where a participant leaves his or her home and spends time in a retreat center or monastery, or over the course of 9 months where one dedicates an hour each day to a spiritual exercise.

Each individual meditation calls the participant to use several faculties of the mind in engaging with scripture passages and theological truths. The imagination is key in Ignatian prayer. The participant must offer his or her imagination to the Holy Spirit and allow the Spirit to bring the Scriptures to life and personal relevance. This allows the participant to experience the life and work of Christ more completely in his or her life.

Unlike many other retreats, this one necessitates a highly qualified spiritual director. The retreat may seem counter intuitive at times, so a director is very important for the interpretation of experiences. For this reason, Metamorphosis is not promoting a self-guided Ignatian retreat. We do however see the benefits in Ignatian prayer concepts and it is these that we will be introducing over the next several months.

Ignatian meditation involves several key spiritual disciplines: lectio divina, Ignatian contemplation, reminiscence, and the examination of consciousness (notice: not conscience). Each of these disciplines plays a role in one Ignatian meditation. Fortunately, they are also all highly beneficial to integrate into our own prayer life apart from a complete Ignatian Meditation.

The Prayer of Reminiscence

Context

We are very tempted in our culture to dichotomize life into sacred and secular. We are tempted to do this even in our own prayer lives. We consider thoughts about Holy things to be prayer time well spent and time thinking about all else, distraction. The truth is that there is no separating our own life experiences from the growth process. The Holy Spirit uses the truth of Scripture as it intersects, bounces off, and informs our real life experiences. Allowing the “distractions” to be real legitimate players in our prayer life is actually a way of offering ourselves to God from a deeper place. Let us now practice the prayer that allows the Holy Spirit to use our lives as material for our transformation.

Practice

4 Steps of the Prayer of reminiscence

Quiet your heart—Find a nice comfortable spot to sit and quiet your thoughts. You may want to focus on your breath or intentionally pass noisy thoughts to God.

Seek a Grace—Ask the Lord for what you desire. To start, consider asking to be reminded of the love of God, the care of God, the protection of God. There are occasions in doing the complete Ignatian Exercises where one might ask for the experience of fellowship with the suffering of Christ or other feelings that might seem less positive.

Acknowledge God as a co-laborer in this process and reminisce—God is involved in this time of prayer. It is you and the Holy Spirit remembering the events of your life. Allow your mind to recall and re-experience that which is coming to mind. Let it wander and jump around. Continually Acknowledge God with you.

Closing Conversation—Have a conversation with the Triune God about what you experienced in this time. Did you receive the grace you asked for? Were there any surprises? Do you now have more questions? Were there any points of frustration? Were there times of consolation?