

**DAY #3: Conference****PRAYER IN THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES****1. Importance of Prayer**

“He told them a parable about the need to pray always and not lose heart” (Lk 18) — the parable of the unjust judge and the importunate widow.

“Watch and pray, for the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Mt 26:41).

Prayer is necessary for salvation. Saint Alphonsus Liguori said: *“He who prays is saved; he who does not pray is lost.”* Speaking even more specifically about meditation, he wrote: *“Let the one who is in sin never abandon mental prayer, for sooner or later either he will leave meditation or he will leave sin.”*

Saint Teresa taught: *“Whoever abandons mental prayer needs no demons to drag him to hell; he goes there by himself.”*

Prayer is necessary for sanctification. There is no growth in the spiritual life without it. The degrees of prayer correspond to the degrees of union with God.

Saint John Chrysostom writes: *“When I see someone who has no love for prayer and makes no effort to cultivate it with fervor, to me it is clear that he possesses no good at all. He who does not speak with God, who does not desire continual conversation with Him, is dead or deprived of sound reason. Indeed, it is an evident sign of madness to have no love for prayer.”*

Blessed Paolo Manna comments: *“These affirmations are truly severe. Had they come from another pen, one might call them exaggerated. But they are not exaggerated when we ponder them well.”*

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches prayer in its fourth part. At the beginning of this part, it explains that the first three sections (1: the faith we believe; 2: the celebration of the sacraments; 3: the moral life — commandments and the New Law) all form the “Mystery of faith.” It adds: *“This mystery requires that the faithful believe in it, celebrate it, and live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.”* (CCC 2558)

Thus, every person who converts begins to live a life of prayer. A whole interior world opens — the same world that moved Saint Ignatius to ask: *“What is this new life that we now begin?”* (Autobiography §21)

Cardinal Newman writes:

“The habit of prayer, of seeking God and the invisible world at every moment, has a kind of natural effect on the soul, spiritualizing and elevating it. A man is no longer what he was... gradually he becomes imbued with new ideas and filled with different principles.”

Praying with One's Life

Pope Benedict XVI taught:

"True prayer is never alien to reality. If prayer were to alienate you or draw you away from real life, be on guard — that would not be true prayer. On the contrary, dialogue with God is a guarantee of truth: truth with oneself and with others, and thus of freedom."

Prayer purifies us from pride, presumption, trends, and pressures of the moment. It gives strength to live freely and authentically, to remain in the world without belonging to it — and this precisely *through prayer*, through personal contact with God.

2. Prayer in the Exercises

Pope Benedict XVI said: *"It is necessary to learn how to pray, as though acquiring anew this art."*

In the Spiritual Exercises, the "exercise" is the time of prayer itself. All else — annotations, additions, rules — exists to serve that sacred hour.

Meditation vs Contemplation

Meditation: "With the word meditation, we should understand a form of prayer using the three potencies of the soul. Whenever we act like humans, we naturally use our three powers of our soul, that is, memory, understanding, and will, and when we do this in prayer, applying the aforementioned faculties in an orderly and reflective way on a particular point or fitting matter, with a spiritual end, we can call what we are doing meditation."

Hence, if you pay attention, you will notice that Ignatius has some things labeled as "meditations" while others are "contemplations." These meditations make use of memory (to recall the scene to mind), the understanding (to think the matter over more profoundly), and the will (to excite the emotions).

Contemplation: In the time of Saint Ignatius, contemplation was that form of prayer which is considered acquired prayer, belonging to the stage of ascetical life and not to mystical life, and which is characterized by two things.

First, that one sees what one has to meditate on in such a way that one places oneself within the scene, being present there (in the contemplation of the Annunciation, Saint Ignatius indicates that one should see oneself there, like a little servant).

Second, the intellect and the will must act in a direct way, or as if directly, like the knowledge of the angels; that is, remaining in what one is contemplating and delighting in what one is contemplating—for example, the birth of Jesus—without making a chain of thoughts or movements of the will. Rather, keeping the intellect and the will fixed upon what one is contemplating, in what one is present to, watching.

Properly speaking, this contemplation that Saint Ignatius calls for is what modern spiritual authors call the prayer of simplicity or simple gaze. It is, so to speak, a loving gaze.

The typical example always told is of that peasant who would spend hours before the tabernacle. And then the Holy Curé of Ars asked him how he prayed. And he replied, “He looks at me and I look at Him.”

But the fact that it is a prayer of simplicity or a simple gaze already indicates that we are in the highest degree of ascetical prayer, on the threshold of entering mystical prayer.

This is why the Exercises of Saint Ignatius lead one by the hand toward the mystical life.

Practical helps

- Listen to or read the meditation points as you would in a retreat house: with a sheet of paper and something to write with.
- Writing helps concentration.
- You note only what is most fruitful for you; in doing so you are already entering prayer.
- This keeps you from needing your phone or computer in the hour of meditation

Faithfulness to the full hour

St. Ignatius writes:

[12] *“In each of the five exercises or contemplations of the day one should remain for a full hour, and let the soul be convinced that it has completed that hour — indeed, more rather than less. For the enemy often seeks to shorten the hour of prayer.”*

[13] *“In consolation it is easy to remain the hour; in desolation it is very difficult. Therefore, to resist desolation and overcome temptation, the exercitant should remain a little longer than the full hour, for this not only accustoms the soul to resist the adversary but even to overthrow him.”*

Ignatius teaches this because he lived it.

Ribadeneira recounts one night when Ignatius rose from bed, as he often did, to offer himself to God in prayer. Kneeling before an image of Our Lady, he gave himself to Christ as soldier and servant. Suddenly a great sound shook the whole house. His fervor was one of complete surrender.

At Manresa, where he wrote the essentials of the Exercises:

“..he persevered in seven hours of prayer on his knees, rising at midnight continuously.”

(Autobiography 23)

Beyond these seven hours, he spoke with souls who sought his help, and spent the rest of the day thinking on the things of God. (Autobiography 26)



3. The Ignatian Method of Prayer

Placing oneself in God's presence

[73–75] Additions for better disposing oneself in the Exercises

- Before sleep, think briefly of the hour you will rise and the exercise you will undertake.
- Upon awakening, direct your thoughts immediately to the matter of your first exercise.
- A step or two before entering the place of prayer, pause for the time of one *Our Father*, lifting your mind to God, considering how He looks upon you, and making an act of reverence.

Irala writes of the Lord saying to a holy soul:

“Few arrive at the intimate union my Heart prepares in this life. They must gather all their thoughts and affections and center them on Me, who dwell at the deepest point of their souls... If only they would descend into the depths of their being, they would soon find Me, and would know a life of union, love, and light.”

Outline of the Ignatian Meditation

(For a 30-minute prayer period; double the times for an hour.)

Preparatory Acts (≈ 5 Minutes)

1. Preparatory Prayer:

Ask for the grace that all your intentions, actions, and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of God.

First Prelude - History: Recall the narrative of the scene you will meditate or contemplate

Second Prelude - Composition of Place: Using the imagination, visualize the physical setting — the place where Christ or Our Lady is found.

Petition: Ask God for the specific grace suited to the subject. If contemplating the Resurrection: to rejoice with Christ risen. If contemplating the Passion: to feel sorrow and pain with Christ suffering.

2. The Body of the Meditation

Move through the points, exercising memory, understanding, and will.

In contemplation, use imagination more fully.

[76] Choose the bodily posture that most helps: kneeling, prostrate, sitting, lying down, or standing.

If you find what you seek, **remain there** without anxiety to progress further.

3. Concluding Acts (≈ 15 Minutes)

Colloquies - The Heart of the Exercise

[54] The colloquy is “like a friend speaking to a friend, or a servant to his lord”:

- asking for grace,
- expressing sorrow for faults,
- speaking of one’s concerns and seeking counsel.

End with an *Our Father*.

One may make one colloquy to Christ, or three: to Our Lady, to the Son, and to the Father.

[3] In speaking with God or His saints, greater reverence is required than when merely using the understanding.

Composition of Place: Final Review (≈ 5 Minutes)

[77] After finishing the exercise, spend a quarter hour reviewing how it went.

If poorly, examine the cause and resolve to amend.

If well, give thanks to God and continue in the same manner.

“Attentive Prayer: The Root of All Holiness”

- Irala

God often gives heavenly consolations only to souls who are recollected.
Without attention, one neither notices divine touches nor merits new ones.

Concentration in prayer does not come suddenly. One must first “adjust” the mind, as Ignatius teaches, lifting the heart upward for the time of one *Our Father*.

Children in Irala’s school in China experienced deep consolations simply by praying with closed eyes, hands together, and sincere attention.

Since God became man, we can more easily contemplate Him — as Child, Worker, Sufferer, Redeemer.

The deeper the recollection, the greater the union and the spiritual fruit. Ignatius himself prayed for long hours with great focus; St. Francis of Assisi prayed the entire night.

When aridity comes, Ignatius counsels adding a little more time; God rewards such fidelity.