

SPIRITUAL BOOK NEWS

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FEATURED SELECTION

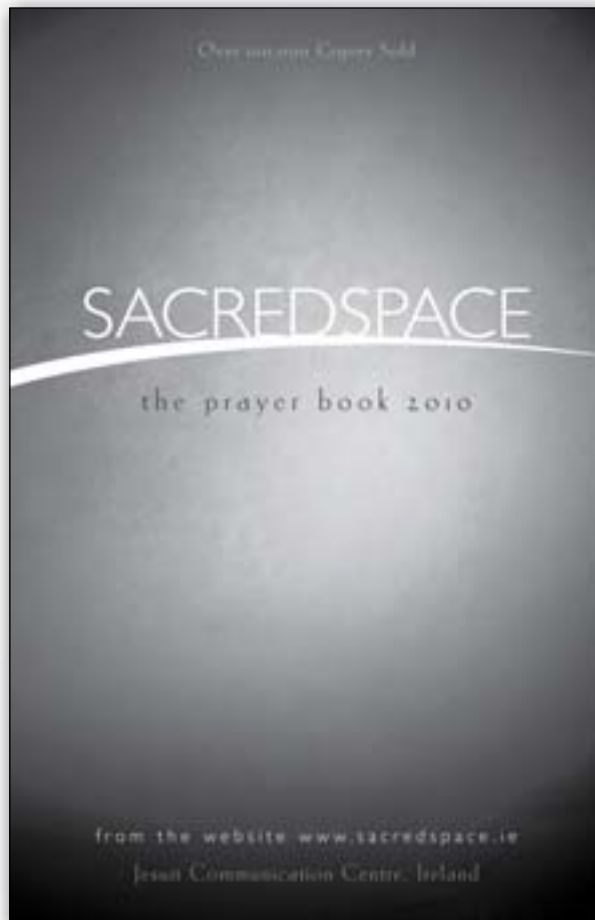
November 2009

SACRED SPACE *The Prayer Book 2010*

Jesuit Communication Centre, Ireland

Now in its sixth year of publication, *Sacred Space: The Prayer Book 2010* is the ideal year-long prayer book for thoughtful Christians with busy lives. With daily scripture readings and meditations in the Ignatian tradition, this well-respected book is a refreshing introduction to Jesuit spirituality. Popular, portable, and accessible, the annual prayer book can be used by readers anywhere and anytime. The Sacred Space website (www.sacredspace.ie) has logged over 23 million visits, and the books have now been translated into twenty languages.

ISBN: 9781594711947 / 384 pages / \$15.95



A PREVIEW OF THE DECEMBER 2009 SELECTION

COMPASSIONATE FIRE *The Letters of Thomas Merton and Catherine de Hueck Doherty*

Edited by Robert A. Wild

The correspondence between Thomas Merton and Catherine de Hueck Doherty reveals an inspiring portrait of true spiritual friendship. For the first time, the letters exchanged between these two prophetic voices are brought together in one volume.

ISBN: 9781594712166 / 128 pages, with a 4-page photo insert / \$12.95

Fr. Piaras Jackson, S.J., editor of the website Sacred Space and the accompanying book *Sacred Space: The Prayer Book 2010*, was kind enough to answer questions posed by SBA about the thought behind the prayers found there. Before joining the Jesuit Communications Centre in Dublin, Fr. Jackson earned a master's degree in journalism from Dublin City University and fulfilled an internship in Melbourne, Australia.



Q: *Sacred Space: The Prayer Book 2010* so aptly speaks to people where they are in their lives. How did you choose which prayers to include?

A: The idea of the website Sacred Space first came into existence from an informal conversation between two Jesuits in 1998. Discussing the use of Internet, one of them asked, “What could we do to make more of this medium? Do you think we could guide people through prayer over the Internet?” Thus “Sacred Space” (www.sacredspace.ie) came into being as a prayer site.

Following the approach of the founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola, a few words are offered on the screen for each of five stages of prayer; the reader moves onto the next stage when ready. We encourage

daily prayer so that people could spend some time every day with a different selection of prayers and an inspiration point to help when stuck. Our prayers and reflections are based on people's lives. We do not offer a homily but rather prefer to encourage people to find God in their daily lives. We believe God is everywhere, all around us and constantly reaching to us even in the most unlikely situations.

The website—www.sacredspace.ie—began on Ash Wednesday and regularly has more than 600 people visiting it each hour—15,000 a day. The book was first proposed by Michelle Anderson, an Australian publisher, who saw the possibility of giving the website a “hard copy” life. A great number of people have used the book without referring to the site, which now has additional supports for prayer and reflection.

Q: How and why did you choose to begin the year's worth of prayers at the beginning of Advent?

A: The Catholic Church's liturgical year begins with Advent and is a well-established cycle of readings, so we thought it is appropriate to begin the year with Advent. Most of our users are probably unaware that the cycle of readings corresponds with those used in our liturgy.

Q: You have organized the book in a meaningful way. What is the significance of organizing the spiritual exercise as you do: the presence of God, freedom, consciousness, the Word, conversation, and conclusion?

A: Being Jesuits, we are firmly rooted in Ignatian Spirituality. St. Ignatius, in his spiritual exercises, proposed different stages. As the readers begin to pray, we want them to bring themselves into an awareness of being in the presence of God. The freedom and awareness stages help us to acknowledge our limits and seek the freedom God desires for us; the conversation stage invites us to talk to God as we would to a trusted friend, as Ignatius would have us do. All the stages are to dispose the reader to listen to the Word of God in the scripture and engage in conversation with God. Listening to the Word of God, reflecting and



READER'S GROUP GUIDE

responding from the conversation with God that is the prayer. The doxology that concludes the prayer is followed by a reminder that has become valued by many: when you pray, you are never alone.



Q: In the book, you encourage readers to become better listeners. How can we become better discerners of God's will?

A: Prayer is a conversation—a dialogue between God and oneself. The stages of prayer that Sacred Space offers have helped many people to establish a habit of prayer in a way that engages and enriches them. It has created the disposition to notice better

how the Spirit is at work in everyday situations—at home, in relationships, in the office, and so on. This quiet work of discernment goes on deep in the heart, as we listen to the Spirit. People have found that Sacred Space has helped them to become better listeners as they come to know themselves better in the silence of prayer. In this process, as God becomes more personal, we are better able to discern God's will.

Q: In the reflections, you often ask the reader how he/she feels. Why is it important to be conscious of our emotions as we pray? How can we use these emotions as we pray?

A: We like to keep in mind that we are embodied spirits—a balance between body and mind. Our bodily business makes it

more important than ever to tend to our inner being, to cultivate greater awareness and to listen to our hearts. In his spiritual exercises, St. Ignatius proposed that by becoming more aware of our feelings and engaging them in our prayer, we use all our senses for prayer and meditation. Our emotions are such a vital part of what makes us human. We are emotional beings as well as rational beings. Just as a person without emotion would be odd, prayer without reference to our emotions would hardly be alive. Prayer is something dynamic. Thus being conscious of our emotions is very important as we pray, and it may lead us to a deeper meeting with God.

Q: As you write, you make the Biblical characters come alive—as if they were contemporaries. How do you become so personally connected to them?

A: Almost all those who have written for Sacred Space have been Jesuits. We share a spirituality and appreciate that the questions that engage us are likely to arise in prayer for other people.

Q: Where do you find inspiration?

A: Our feedback pages on the website (www.sacredspace.ie/feedback) are a continuous source of encouragement. They express the universal character of the Church in a powerful way. The gratitude and appreciation that are always evident are a sure sign that prayer is alive and well. The prayer of those concerned with the site is enriched by reflection on the insights of those who use it.

FOR INDIVIDUAL ENRICHMENT

St. Ignatius of Loyola once said, “Considering that the blessed life we so long for consists in an intimate and true love of God Our Creator and Lord, which binds and obliges us all to a sincere love.” Through prayer, we develop and sustain that intimate friendship with God of which St. Ignatius spoke. To guide us to a deeper relationship with God, we can turn to the Bible for examples from those who came before us. The authors of *Sacred Space* help to make some of those characters more real to us by describing them as human beings with strengths, dilemmas, quirks, and foibles.

As you meditate on the prayers in *Sacred Space*, choose a Biblical character with whom you feel a kinship. Reflect upon that character's personality, position in society and relationships. What was happening during that period of history? How

does that person approach conflict or problems? How do you describe his or her relationship with God? What makes that relationship with God unique? Write down your observations as if you were writing a letter to a friend and describing this person.

After a few days, return to your writings. Are there additional observations that you want to add? Continue this process until you feel you know this Biblical character and how he or she relates to God. Then, ask yourself what similarities you share with this character and use this profile to reflect upon your own relationship with God. The more aware you are of your personal relationship with God, the deeper that relationship will grow.



FOR GROUP ENRICHMENT

Developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, Ignatian spirituality is a way of being that focuses on how Jesus lived in the world. It is the underpinning of *Sacred Space: The Prayer Book 2010*. With an emphasis on prayer and discernment, Ignatian spirituality calls us to examine our lives on a regular basis in order to be aware of God's will. To this end, St. Ignatius gave us two gifts: examen and spiritual

exercises. The examen is a method for daily reflecting upon our lives. Its practice leads us to find God in all things and to be open to God's plan. The spiritual exercises of Ignatius detail a 30-day retreat meant to open the heart to prayer. For a list of Jesuit retreat houses and programs by state, go to: www.jesuit.org/parishesretreatcenters/retreatoppscenters/default.aspx.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST



SACRED SPACE

<http://sacredspace.ie>

Forefather of *Sacred Space: The Prayer Book 2010*, the Sacred Space website offers daily meditations in 22 languages. This electronic forum allows you to post a prayer or pray with the pope. In conjunction with the Religious New Network, Fr. Jackson and his staff post weekly podcasts with news, features, and reflections.



IGNATIANT SPIRITUALITY CENTER

www.ignatiancenter.org

Based in Seattle, the Ignatian Spirituality Center offers programs, spiritual direction, and resources to help people of all faiths live lives of compassion, healing, and justice. The website features a beautifully written account of St. Ignatius's life and conversion, an explanation of Ignatian Spirituality, and a novena of grace.



THIS IGNATIANT LIFE

<http://ignatianlife.org/blog>

Bloggers from different parts of the globe and different walks of life share their insights into what it means to live out Ignatian spirituality. This ambitious project invites all interested parties to become involved in contributing blog posts. The website also points out other interesting blogs and websites that relate to the Jesuits and faith.

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

We want to know more about your experience with Spiritual Book News. Please take a minute to answer a few short questions to help us to better understand your wants and needs. All of your comments are welcomed and valued.

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Please check the box that most accurately describes you.

- I am in a book group and find the Group Enrichment questions helpful.
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- I am not in a book group but find the Individual Enrichment questions helpful.
- I am not in a book group and do not find the Individual Enrichment questions helpful.
- Other _____

Do you find that the additional resources that are listed on the back page of the newsletter to be helpful, or would you rather see something else on this page? (Please check all that apply)

- I find the resources helpful and I have ordered some of them.
- I find the resources interesting, but have never ordered them.
- I do not find the resources to be helpful and would like to see something different on this page.

What would you like to see on this page instead?

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