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December 2008

SACRED SPACE

The Prayer Book 2009

Jesuit Communication Centre, Ireland

“Friendly, concise, and consistently thought provoking, these books are perfect for anyone who would like to pray more and be more connected to God, but may feel too busy to do so. In other words, everyone!”

JAMES MARTIN, S.J.

Author of *My Life with the Saints*



FIND SACRED SPACE ON THE WEB AND THE PRINTED PAGE

The Irish Jesuits launched the Sacred Space website, www.sacredspace.ie, during Lent in 1999. Their goal was to bring Lenten prayer to people via the Internet. They created a ten-minute prayer session that could be easily accessed by busy office workers at their desks, as well as anyone else spending time online. The website has become immensely popular, and the prayers are now available in twenty languages. The 2009 edition of the book *Sacred Space* makes this Ignatian prayer break available to anyone, anywhere, without the need for a computer. In this brief guide you will find aids to using the prayers, suggestions for group use, and a listing of key websites on Ignatian spirituality and the Jesuits.

For the past decade, readers have found *Sacred Space*—whether on the web or in book form—to be a great resource for creating a sacred space in which to encounter God. Every life is marked by struggle, and our attempts to live our faith on a daily basis are often all too easily set aside when other demands take precedence. These other demands are worthy of attention—after all, we have an obligation to do our jobs, care for our children, attend meetings, and pick up the groceries. However, daily prayer and spiritual reading, for as much or as little time as we can devote to it, can help us face the struggles inherent in everyday life.

Continued on inside pages

continued from Find Sacred Space on the Web and the Printed Page

A daily spiritual practice can deepen our faith and transform our lives. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Jesuits, was no exception to this reality. During a period of convalescence, Ignatius began a practice of religious reading. This practice was largely responsible for his conversion, which was his starting point to the priesthood and his eventual founding of the Jesuits, a religious order with a rich and enduring spiritual and intellectual heritage. The story of his conver-

sion is not unique. Many people from many walks of life have been transformed by the daily prayer reading of religious and scriptural texts. Such an experience can happen at any moment and may even be triggered by a “secular” text. It may have happened to you, or it may be about to. *Sacred Space* can be your guide and companion on the journey as you enter into dialogue with God.

THE STAGES OF IGNATIAN PRAYER

In Ignatian prayer, you examine your inner self and actions to see where you meet God and how you respond to him. There is a temptation to analyze and judge when delving into your days, motivations, failings, and gifts. This is not psychoanalysis, though; it is prayer. You are bringing all of yourself to God. Do not judge. You may experience distractions in prayer. Persistent distractions may be your subconscious bringing to your attention something that needs to be brought to prayer. Ignatian prayer seeks to bring the Word of God into your daily life and to link your life with Christ. Through this prayer you imagine walking with Christ, talking with him as with a trusted friend and advisor. You bring yourself, raw and uncensored, to God through his Word, allowing his Word to mix with your innermost thoughts, feelings, and trepidations—all of this becomes sacred prayer. Listen to your heart, quiet your mind.

The six prayer stages are designed to bring your whole being into awareness and contemplation of God’s presence and action in your life. Some aids to prayer (taken from *The Spiritual Exercises* and the Sacred Space website) as you move through the stages, include the following:

- **The Presence of God**—Involve your body in the prayer. Consider using aspects of Centering prayer. Sit upright, relaxed, with feet on the floor and hands relaxed in your lap or at your sides. Close your eyes or focus on a specific object. Clear your mind and let stray thoughts leave your mind as quickly as they enter. Use a mantra or simple prayer phrase if that helps you to return to your focus.

Use breathing techniques to become more aware of the spirit of God moving within you. Focus on the air moving into your lungs, filling you with the Holy Spirit. On the in-breath focus on what you are asking for or needing from God now in your life, and on the out-breath focus on re-

leasing the tension and whatever is holding you back from that which you desire of God.

- **Freedom**—Now that you have allowed yourself to experience the presence of God, allow yourself to be freed from what binds you in order to put yourself at the service of God. This is surrender to the will of God.
- **Consciousness**—In this stage you work to recognize how God is at work in your life. To begin, recall that you are in God’s presence, and think about the events of the last day in a non-judgmental way. Give thanks to God for the gifts you have been given and the gifts you have used in the service of God. Ask for help from the Holy Spirit as you assess your motivations and feelings. Again, do not judge yourself, but bring yourself to the light of Christ and allow him to show where you have walked with him and where you have not.
- **The Word**—Read the day’s scripture passage slowly a few times all the way through. Read it again, pausing at any words or phrases that catch your attention. Focus on these and make them part of your prayer.
- **Conversation**—Using your divinely given imagination, imagine Christ is with you. You are spending time with your most trusted friend. Speak to him, listen to him. Share with him your sorrows and joys, and allow him to help you understand where you have fallen short and where you have done his will. You may, if you choose, close the conversation by saying the Lord’s Prayer.

It is not necessary to follow these steps exactly. Use them as a guide at first, and then find the rhythm and focal points that make the process most fruitful for you. Feel free to add music, candles, incense, or images such as a crucifix or an icon, if they enhance your prayer time.

READER'S GROUP GUIDE

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYER

Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the belief that we are created to praise and serve God. Key aspects of this spirituality include finding God in all things, walking with Christ, spiritual suffering and the continual presence of God, and concern for others.

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits (the formal name

of the order is the Society of Jesus), developed a practice called The Spiritual Exercises as a way to find the will of God in the course of one's life. In every act of free will, in every choice that we make, we have the opportunity to follow Jesus. We can choose to be faithful to God with every decision that we make, no matter how large or small.

IDEAS FOR GROUP USE

Although *Sacred Space* is a personal prayer book, groups, particularly small faith-sharing groups, spiritual book discussion groups, and RCIA sponsor-catechumen meetings, have found previous editions to be a useful tool. Choose one prayer leader, or assign each prayer stage to a different person. Beginning with The Presence of God for the appropriate week, have the leader read slowly and deliberately. Leave several minutes for reflection between stages. Be sure to read the scripture

passage for the day out loud, several times, slowly. You may wish to have group members say aloud the words or phrases in the scripture reading that grab their attention. Allow time for silent reflection to allow the Word to enter deeply. The questions in the Consciousness and Conversation stages may be answered aloud or in silence, although you are encouraged to respond aloud. This will allow members to be Christ's presence to each other, a physical presence of the living God.

QUOTATIONS FROM THE LETTERS OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

"We should be kind and compassionate with those who are sad or tempted, speak at length with them, and show great joy and cheerfulness, both interior and exterior, to draw them to the opposite of what they feel, for their greater edification and consolation."

Letter to Fathers Broët and Salmerón, September 1541

"We should never postpone a good work, no matter how small it may be, with the thought of later doing something greater. It is a very common temptation of the enemy to be always placing before us the perfection of things to come and bring us to make little of the present."

Letter to the Scholastics at Alcalá, 1543

"As to that blindness or dryness of soul which you think you find in yourself, it may easily come from a lack of confidence, or faintheartedness and, consequently, can be cured by the contrary. Above all remember that God looks for solid virtues

in us, such as patience, humility, obedience, abnegation of your own will—that is, the good will to serve Him and our neighbor in Him."

Letter to Father Philip Leernus, December 30, 1553

"It seems fitting for the benefit and edification of the peoples among whom our Society is living, and for the increase of union, charity, and good will among Ours, that in places where we have a college or a house all who do not know the language which is in common use should learn it and as a rule speak it. If each one were to speak his mother tongue, there would be much confusion and lack of union, seeing that we are of different nations."

Letter to All Superiors of the Society of Jesus, January 1, 1556

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WEBSITES OF INTEREST



www.jesuit.ie

The home page of the Irish Jesuits includes links to Sacred Space and more.



www.luc.edu/jesuit/ignatius_bio.shtml

A brief biography of St. Ignatius of Loyola.



www.ignatiushistory.info

A collection of paintings, maps, and other aids in presenting the world as St. Ignatius would have experienced it.



www.jesuit.org/Spirituality/default.aspx

The Society of Jesus USA Spirituality page offers a brief introduction to Ignatian Spirituality, the Daily Examen, and a page of links to websites on spirituality, prayer, St. Ignatius, adaptations of The Spiritual Exercises, and more.



www.newadvent.org/cathen/14224b.htm

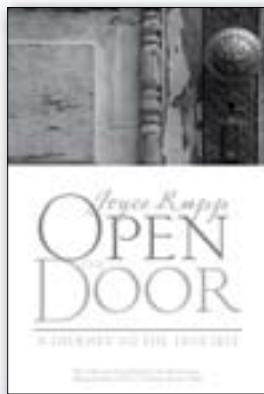
The Catholic Encyclopedia online entry on The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius includes lengthy detail on the text, its doctrine, and the criticisms.



www.jesuit.org

The home page of the Society of Jesus USA contains links to all things Jesuit, including a link to download a PDF of The Spiritual Exercises in English.

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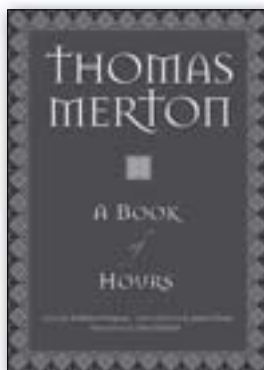
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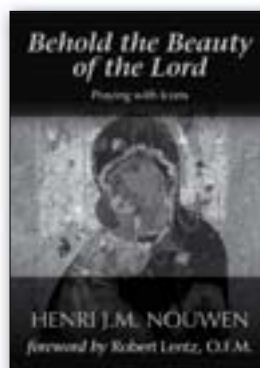
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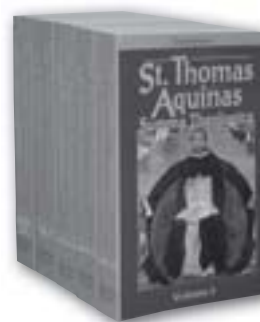
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