

Sacred Space: The Prayer Book 2006

The Web site www.sacredspace.ie was launched in Lent of 1999 by the Irish Jesuits to bring Lenten prayer to people via the Internet, making a ten-minute prayer session easily accessible to busy office workers at their desks. The popularity of the Web site is immense; the prayers are now available in twenty languages. This second annual volume makes this Ignatian prayer break available to anyone, anywhere, without the need for a computer. In this guide you will find aides to using the prayers, suggestions for group use, making a sacred space, a brief intro to Ignatian spirituality with ways to find out more, and a listing of key web sites on Ignatian spirituality and the Jesuits.

Ignatian Spirituality

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, developed a practice titled *The Spiritual Exercises* as a way to find the will of God in the living 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. The Exercises aid in the discernment process and encourage us to walk with Jesus, engaging in dialogue with him along the way. Our god-given imagination is used to engage with Christ as we move through the four weeks, or stages. The Exercises are typically used on a 30-day retreat or over a period of several months at home in the midst of daily life, usually with the guidance of a spiritual director. *Sacred Space* draws on this Ignatian discernment process.

The Prayer Stages

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 but 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 aides to prayer (taken from *The Spiritual Exercises* and the Sacred Space Web site) as you move through the stages:

- **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 minds, letting 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 breathe focus on what you are asking of or needing from God now in your life, and on the out breathe focus on releasing 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, you must 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 on recognizing God at work in your life. Use the Examen or Review of Consciousness. To begin, think about the events of the last day in a non-judgmental way, focusing on what you are grateful for, giving 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 to help you assess your motivations and feelings. Again, you are not to judge yourself but to 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 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. Use an image of Christ that resonates with you: a crucifix, an icon of Christ. If you find praying with icons fruitful, you may also enjoy *Behold the Beauty of the Lord* by Henri Nouwen.

More prayer helps, including poems, pictures, icons, and detailed information on some of the techniques listed here can be found at the Sacred Space Web site by clicking on “Prayer Guide” as you move through the prayer online.

Creating a Sacred Space

Sacred Space: the prayer book makes it convenient to carve out a special time for prayer anytime, anywhere. Such a resource used consistently can help open our ears to hear God speaking to us in our hectic everyday lives. We more easily set aside time for God to speak to us, making that time sacred. And while we can and should pray anytime, anywhere, we should also set aside a sacred place for prayer.

Creating a prayer corner (or shelf or end table or dresser top) can further enrich our use of *Sacred Space*. For those of us dealing with a hectic schedule and a cluttered a home, a space cleared and dedicated to prayer can help keep us centered and grounded. Clear a dresser top and gather some items that help you focus on God in your life. For the more organized among us, a prayer corner can be a refuge from the demands of secular life as well. Some ideas of items to include in your prayer space: a crucifix; a religious icon of Christ; a favorite rendering of Christ, the Madonna, or the holy family; a nature scene; a favorite Bible passage or poem; a rosary; one or several candles. Be creative and personalize your prayer space. If possible, place a comfortable chair nearby.

Group use for faith sharing and spiritual book groups

While *Sacred Space* is a personal prayer book, groups, particularly small faith sharing groups, spiritual book discussion groups, and RCIA sponsor-catechumen meetings, can use it. 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, leaving several minutes for reflection between stages. Be sure to read the scripture passage for the day through 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 invited to respond aloud. This will allow members to be Christ's presence to each other, a physical presence of the living God.

Web sites

For more information on the Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian Spirituality, check out the following Web sites:

<http://www.jesuit.ie/>

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

http://www.jesuit.org/sections/sub.asp?SECTION_ID=192&SUBSECTION_ID=207

The Society of Jesus USA Spirituality page offers an extensive listing with links to spirituality Web sites on prayer, St. Ignatius, adaptations of the Spiritual Exercises and more.

<http://www.luc.edu/jesuit/ignatius.bio.html>

A brief biography of St. Ignatius of Loyola

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14224b.htm>

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

<http://www.ignatiushistory.info/>

A Web site collecting paintings, maps and other aids in presenting the world as St. Ignatius would have experienced it.

<http://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.