

# A Do-It-at-Home Retreat

*by*  
André Ravier, S.J.

*The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola  
According to the "Nineteenth Annotation"*

Translated by  
Cornelius Michael Buckley, S.J.

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## *Common Features of Every Prayer*

*(Irrespective of What Type It Is)*

Preliminary note: There are no more beautiful prayers than that one that our Savior himself taught us, namely, the Our Father, or the Angel of the Incarnation's salutation to Mary, or the everlasting canticle of heaven: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

### **A. How to Live in the Atmosphere of the Prayer for Each Day; This Is a Point of Capital Importance**

A few practical rules to achieve this end:

- During the First Week I will not allow myself to think of things that make me feel happy or joyful, such as the glories of heaven, the Resurrection, and so forth. The reason for this is that every joyous thought prevents me from experiencing sorrow and pain for my sins. I should rather force myself to think about death and judgment.
- During the Second Week I will call to mind frequently the life of Christ our Lord, from the mysteries that I have already contemplated up to the one I am presently contemplating.
- During the Third Week I will banish joyful thoughts, even if they are good and holy. Rather I will awaken in myself thoughts of sorrow, repentance, or interior suffering by reminding myself of the burden and sufferings that Christ our Lord took on from the time of his birth down to the mystery of the Passion, in which I am at the present time involved.

- During the Fourth Week I will direct my memory and thoughts to subjects that cause me to feel happiness, pleasure, and spiritual joy, such as the glories of heaven, intimacy with God, etc.
- The bodily position I take and the physical setting of the place where I am during prayer have an influence on that prayer. So, in addition to looking at my inner dispositions, I shall pay attention to the *external behavior and circumstances* surrounding my prayer. Whether I should pray in a lighted place or in a darkened room, inside or outdoors, in a place that is cold or warm—these are factors that help some feel joyful or sorrowful; they should be used to facilitate prayer.
- During the retreat, no matter what week I am in, I will avoid anything that can distract me, and I will withdraw from conversing with others except in cases of necessity.
- Some form of *penance* will be useful, particularly in the First and Third Weeks. One should practice penance in the Second Week if the mystery he is meditating on suggests it.
- *After getting into bed at night*, just before falling asleep, I will think of the subject of my next day's meditation, and if I wake up during the night I will think about it again. In the morning when I get up and while I am dressing, I will do my best to put myself in that frame of mind that best corresponds to the mystery I am going to be meditating on soon and throughout the day.
- *Nighttime* often makes prayer easy because of its silence and solitude. But it is most important that the retreatant first take into consideration his age, temperament, and situation in making up his schedule of prayer.
- St. Ignatius foresaw that the retreatant could, if he so desired, *attend the singing of the Divine Office* when it is celebrated in a nearby church.

## B. At the Beginning of Prayer

- *Before beginning prayer*, I will refresh my spirit for a moment and put myself in *a state of interior peace*. I shall do this by sitting down for a few moments or by walking around a bit (whatever seems best). During this time I will call to mind what I am about to do and why I am about to do it.
- Then I will place myself *in the presence of God*: “I will stand for the space of an Our Father, a step or two before the place where I am to meditate or contemplate, and, with my mind raised on high, consider how God our Lord watches me. Then I will make an act of reverence or humility.”
- Next I will recite *the preparatory prayer*. This consists of asking God our Lord “for the grace that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be ordered purely to the service and praise of his Divine Majesty.” This preparatory prayer is extremely important. It satisfies an essential requisite of every prayer, that is, a purification of thoughts and heart, a purification that in the normal course of events will gradually become perfected as the soul makes progress in the retreat.
- Following this comes *the composition of place*. Generally this is made before those contemplations or meditations that contain some potentially visible features. It consists of seeing with the eyes of the imagination or recalling the real, actual, historic, concrete place where the action of the meditation took place or where the persons I am considering lived.

Also, the composition of place can be made before a meditation whose content is purely spiritual. Then it consists of the imagination’s creating a type of symbol that stands for the truth upon which I am meditating. It can also be associated with a Gospel scene. Its purpose is to create in me a “setting” for my imagination.

The use of the imagination is tricky. An image should be used in prayer only insofar as it helps us fix our interior seeing, but as soon as its purpose is realized, we should not hold on to

the image. We should go beyond it in order to enter into a true contemplation.

- Finally, I will make a petition for *the grace I am looking for in the meditation*. I will ask God our Lord for “what I want and desire.”

This grace varies according to the theme of the meditation or the subject of the contemplation. For example, in the contemplation on the Resurrection, I shall ask for joy with Christ because of Christ’s joy; in the contemplation on the Passion, I shall ask for sorrow and compassion with Christ in the great affliction he endures.

### C. During the Time of Prayer

- What posture should I take during my prayer? Sometimes kneeling, sometimes prostrate upon the floor, sometimes lying on my back, face upward, sometimes sitting down, sometimes standing, *the posture that best helps me find what I am seeking*.
- *I will remain quietly meditating upon the point (a reflection, an affective response) in which I have found what I desire*—and I will stay on at that point as long as I feel I have been satisfied.

### D. Ending the Prayer

- I will complete the prayer, no matter how it has gone, with *a colloquy, a discussion, or a conversation*. I should reserve a long time for this colloquy. Moreover, it is all right for me to use the colloquy during the course of the meditation or contemplation as often as the Holy Spirit inspires me to do so. In fact, it is encouraged.

A colloquy means talking with God, or with the Blessed Virgin Mary, or with some saint, *exactly as one talks with another as friends do, or as a son talks with his father or his mother, or as a servant speaks with his master*. Sometimes he thanks the other for a favor, sometimes he blames himself for making a mistake, sometimes he confides with the other about his spiritual affairs, or he may ask him for advice

and courage and the like. This conversation ought to be simple and informal, while ever maintaining an attitude of reverence.

- In the colloquy I ought always to speak and pray *according to the actual state of my soul*. In other words, whether I am tempted or fervent, whether I want this virtue or that, whether I want to get ready to make a particular commitment, or whether I want to be sad or joyful in the mystery I am contemplating—the point is that I should never divorce my here-and-now self from my conversation in the colloquy. The colloquy is also the time to ask again and again for what I want. A person can make one sole colloquy to Christ our Savior, but if the subject of his meditation or his own inclination calls for it, he can make three colloquies: one to our Lady, the Mother of Jesus; another to Christ our Lord; and a third to the Father.
- Every colloquy ends with a *vocal prayer*. For example, the colloquy with God our Father ends with the *Our Father*, the colloquy with Jesus with the prayer *Soul of Christ*, and the colloquy with the Blessed Virgin with the *Hail Mary*.
- It will be beneficial if, after completing the Exercise, I make a brief *review* of how the prayer went: that is, to go over the meditation or contemplation and if it was successful to thank the Lord; if it was made poorly to seek the reason why (my preparation, recollection, manner of praying). After I have found it I shall then ask pardon of God and make a firm and precise resolution concerning the cause of the failure in order to meet with success in the future.

Should I keep a journal and write down a few notes after each prayer? That depends on my preference and especially whether or not a journal is useful. If one thinks he should write down certain movements “of the Holy Spirit in his soul,” there is no general direction other than that he should be guided by simplicity, moderation, and sincerity.

**E. After Prayer Time**

Every master of the spiritual life recommends that the morning spiritual exercise be recalled from time to time during the day, even if only for a brief moment. The reason is to enable the soul to recall how it was well ordered to God's will. And, in order to do this, these experts suggest the use of a very easy procedure which they call "ejaculations"—that is, short prayers directed toward the Lord, such as "O God, come to my aid," "Jesus, Lord," "Jesus, have mercy on me." Benedict, Bernard, Bruno, Teresa, and Francis Xavier were all in the habit of making such short prayers. Such aspirations are genuine cries of distress or of love that spring up from our very selves; they can be quite simple, yet really solid.

Sample

## II

### *The Framework of Prayer*

In this section we are going to look at the principal Methods of Prayer that St. Ignatius recommends in his *Spiritual Exercises*. These constitute a veritable education of the soul for those who want to learn to pray.

There are many methods of prayer outlined in St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. Contrary to the legend, there is no such thing as an "Ignatian method." St. Ignatius borrowed from a number of different spiritual writers who were popular at the time what he considered to be the most teachable methods for introducing the soul to a true union with God. He made no philosophical reflections on these methods, but little by little they eventually found their way into the Exercises, and he taught his retreatants how to use them. Moreover, he realized that, once the "parameters" were mastered, the retreatant could employ them while considering the matter contained in other meditations. It is not unusual—at least when he is dealing with important topics—for St. Ignatius to ask the retreatant to apply several methods successively to the same "mystery" or even to the same "virtue" in order to penetrate more deeply into the truth of the mystery or virtue. The person who desires to unite himself with God might use one or another of these methods extensively outside the retreat, depending on his state of soul, the subject matter of his prayer, and his physical or psychological state. Furthermore, during the course of the same prayer, he might even mix these methods together. What is essential is finding God in his prayer.

We shall not here go back to commenting on the matter we have already touched on in the section entitled “Common Features of Every Prayer.” We assume these topics have already been sufficiently explained for our purposes.

### A. Meditation by the Three Powers of the Soul

The first time St. Ignatius introduces this method of prayer on the three powers—a method that was in vogue before his time and that was a traditional way of praying in the Church—is in connection with the Meditation on the Three Sins. Ignatius did not invent this method, and he certainly does not recommend it for anyone who finds it a detriment to prayer. Also, in the *Spiritual Exercises* there are many more “contemplations” than “meditations.” As for the method of prayer on the three powers of the soul, the retreatant

- puts himself in the presence of God,
- makes his preparatory prayer,
- makes his composition of place,
- asks what he wants and desires.

He then uses the following procedure during the course of his meditation on a given subject or on some particular aspect of that subject.

*First*, he will call on his *memory*. Let us take for example the meditation on original sin. The person who sets out to consider this mystery will briefly recall to mind the story of the creation of our first parents, the gifts God gave to the first man, what he was prohibited from doing, his temptation, and finally his fall.

*Second*, he will focus his *understanding* on the subject. Every intellectual process that enables the person to take a better account of the theme at hand can be used: reasoning, reflection, a fortiori argumentation, comparisons, analogies, contrasts, etc. St. Ignatius uses certain phrases to identify the work of the intellect such as “to wander about the matter” or “to think over [it] in more detail.” *Meditari* means “to be ruminated upon,” “chewed over.” St. Francis de Sales gives “under-

standing” the same emphasis: a person should make “one or a number of considerations” on the matter at hand.

*Third*, the effort on the part of the memory and understanding should *end up moving the will* or, better, *moving the heart by means of the will*. Let us note this carefully because it is what is essential in a meditation. If this factor of moving the heart is not present, the meditation will not really be a prayer. It might be a beautiful consideration, a profound reflection, but it will not be a prayer. Let us again listen to what St. Francis de Sales says on the subject. Considerations of the understanding are made “to raise your heart to God and to the things of God. This is where meditation differs from study and from considerations which are made to become learned. . . .” “As long as you are gaining light and help from any one consideration stay there without passing on. . . .” “It may happen that you find your heart raised up to God from the very beginning of your prayer, in which case there is no need to follow the method I have suggested, for though considerations usually come first, if the Holy Spirit has already brought this about they would be to no purpose.”<sup>1</sup>

The “affections” should lead to firm, precise, sincere resolutions. To some degree the fruit of meditation is always a conversion to a more fervent love.

The meditation should end with *one or more colloquies*. These colloquies gather up all or part of what has been meditated upon. By their nature and from their results they are intimate conversations, special moments when the retreatant “applied his will to move his heart.” This does not mean, however, that they are expressions of sweet sentimentality. On the contrary, they speak of a realistic commitment to God by the most sincere and total gift of self.

## **B. Contemplation on a Gospel Mystery**

The word *contemplation* has a multifold meaning in spiritual language, and different authors give different connotations to it. St. Ignatius

<sup>1</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. Michael Day, Cong. Orat. (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1956) 57, 58, 61.

defines it very precisely in his *Spiritual Exercises*. (He explains it when he treats the contemplation on the Incarnation [see p. 77].)

- After the retreatant has placed himself in the presence of God and has made his preparatory prayer, St. Ignatius asks him to *call to mind the history* (as it is described in the Bible or by one of the Evangelists) *of the mystery*. This is a most important directive because the contemplation that follows will depend to a great extent on the quality and distinctness of this recall. However, this exercise of the memory need not be a lengthy process, provided that it is precise and vivid and that it casts a spell, so to speak, on the retreatant, immersing him completely in the reality of the scene.
- Next the retreatant makes a *mental representation of the place* or the places where the mystery unfolds itself, and *then he asks for what he wants and desires*.

After this we have the following sequence:

1. The one who is praying will look at *the persons involved*.
2. He will listen to and savor *their words*.
3. He will look closely at *their actions*.

Each time, he will try to “draw spiritual profit” by reflecting on how these persons, words, and actions affect himself.

At the beginning of the Third Week, St. Ignatius introduces some new elements into the contemplation. These are, as it were, a framework of the themes that should be rediscovered during all the contemplations of that week. These themes are more allied to meditation than to contemplation:

*Third Week:* consider what Christ our Lord suffers in his human nature

*Third Week:* consider how his divinity is hidden

*Fourth Week:* consider how the divinity now appears

*Third Week:* consider how Christ suffers all of this for my sins

*Fourth Week:* consider the office of consoler that Christ our Lord exercises

Ignatian contemplation consists, then, in *reliving the mystery with a great deal of faith and love*; that is, the one who is praying relives the Gospel account as if he were present there and had a part to play in the unfolding mystery. For example, at the Nativity: “I will make myself a poor unworthy slave and look upon them [Jesus, Mary, Joseph], contemplate them, and serve them in their needs, as though I were there present, with all possible homage and reverence.” Contemplation also requires some of the elements of reflection and meditation. In this sense it is distinct from that method called “Application of the Senses.”

Like meditation, contemplation should terminate with the colloquies, where affections intermingle with resolutions.

### C. Application of the Senses

St. Ignatius explains this method in connection with the Meditation on Hell (see pp. 57–60).

— After placing himself in God’s presence, saying the preparatory prayer, calling to mind the history of the mystery, making the composition of place, and asking for the grace he wants, the retreatant is ready to employ this method. It consists of *exploring the mystery, so to speak, with the aid of each of the five senses.*

*First with seeing:* The one making the prayer *sees* with the imagination the persons who are involved in his Exercise, and he meditates and contemplates in detail on the circumstances in which they find themselves. Then after what he has seen, he endeavors to draw spiritual profit by reflecting *on himself.*

*Next with hearing:* The person making the prayer *hears* what the persons say or what they could be saying. As a result of what he hears, he endeavors to draw spiritual profit by reflecting *on himself.* Then

*with smelling and tasting:* For example, at the Nativity: “To smell and taste with the interior senses of smell and taste the infinite fragrance and sweet savor of the Divinity, of the soul and of its virtues, and of all else, according to the person we are contemplating...” Then, to reflect *on oneself* to draw profit from this contemplation.

- The application of the senses also terminates with *colloquies*, where affections of the heart and resolutions of the will are intermingled.

This method is closely connected with contemplation, but it penetrates even more deeply into our feelings and is, so to speak, more refined and intuitive. St. Ignatius uses it frequently, either for subjects that of their very nature are moving (for example, hell) or at the end of the day so as to impress upon the retreatant even more thoroughly a scene upon which he has already made a number of exercises (for example, the birth of our Lord) or when the meditation is one that seems to him to be of exceptional importance (for example, the Two Standards). In these last examples, the Application of the Senses is already a part of the important method of “repetition.”

This process of getting a hold on spiritual realities through the five senses is part of the intuitive order. It grasps these realities by a single flash of insight, which is possible only when there is a simplification of spiritual activities. It greatly outstrips the slow and somewhat heavy march of meditation by the three powers of the soul, and it even surpasses the analyses of contemplation. However, it presupposes both. It takes place at the end of the day so that the fruit of the preceding exercises can be gathered and savored.

#### **D. Repetition of One or Many Exercises**

Repetition enjoys a very important role in the Exercises conducted over a period of thirty days (it is hardly possible for us to make use of it on a regular basis in this *Do-It-at-Home Retreat*). St. Ignatius envisaged the retreatant’s making four and sometimes five exercises during a single day—and sometimes even on the same topic. If, however, the

retreatant who follows the schema contained in this book wishes to make use of the repetitions, let him do so with complete freedom.

Whatever the retreatant decides, it is essential that he know something about this excellent method of meditation. It is through the repetitions that the soul steepes itself more and more in the mystery or the truth upon which it has been meditating. Each person has his favorite mysteries from the Gospels and the particular words of Christ he savors most. For him there is a grace connected with scenes of these particular mysteries, something that “sings in him” when he contemplates them. It is most profitable, therefore, to return to them frequently in perfect freedom.

The repetition begins the same way as all of the Exercises: with the placing of oneself in the presence of God, the preparatory prayer, the history of the mystery, the composition of the place, and the asking for grace.

After this, the retreatant repeats the preceding exercise or exercises. But he does so with this important difference: he says, “*I will return to where I dwelt upon those points in which I experienced greater consolation or desolation or light or greater spiritual appreciation.*” In addition to giving this advice, St. Ignatius also recommends developing “colloquies,” which are important in the development of these points, for it is the heart that always forges ahead in meditating on a particular Gospel event.

It is not a question, therefore, of merely repeating our consideration of ideas or reflections. What is essential is the *spiritual experience* we had during our meditation, and now what we want to do is relive those motions within our soul, those times when God was experienced in clearer way. In short, we want to return to the “warmest,” the most effective, and most meaningful points in those meditations we have already made.

It should be noted that St. Ignatius includes “desolations” among these experiences that he asks the retreatant to go back and relive. We will only draw attention to the importance of this piece of advice without giving it a long treatment here. But at least we should remark that, in Ignatian spirituality, confrontations with what pains

the soul are precious indeed because they are the “nights” when faith is made more pure, hope more ardent, and love more sincere.

There are times when St. Ignatius seems to envisage a type of repetition that is more objective and seems, to be more like a resumé. “The intellect, without distractions, will turn over assiduously the remembrance of the matter contemplated in the preceding exercises.” So what was contemplated the first time is made more real, is better integrated, and becomes more internalized. It is even possible that, due to this “perseverance,” God’s will for the retreatant will become manifest to him.

Sample