



***Guidelines For Prayer
from the school of St Ignatius***

Bethy Oudot



Supplement N° 47 48* 49*
November 1997*

PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY
C.P. 6139-(Borgo S. Spirito, 8)-00195 Rome-ITALY
English-Spanish-French Editions
Editor: Roswitha Cooper

Guidelines For Prayer

from the school of St Ignatius

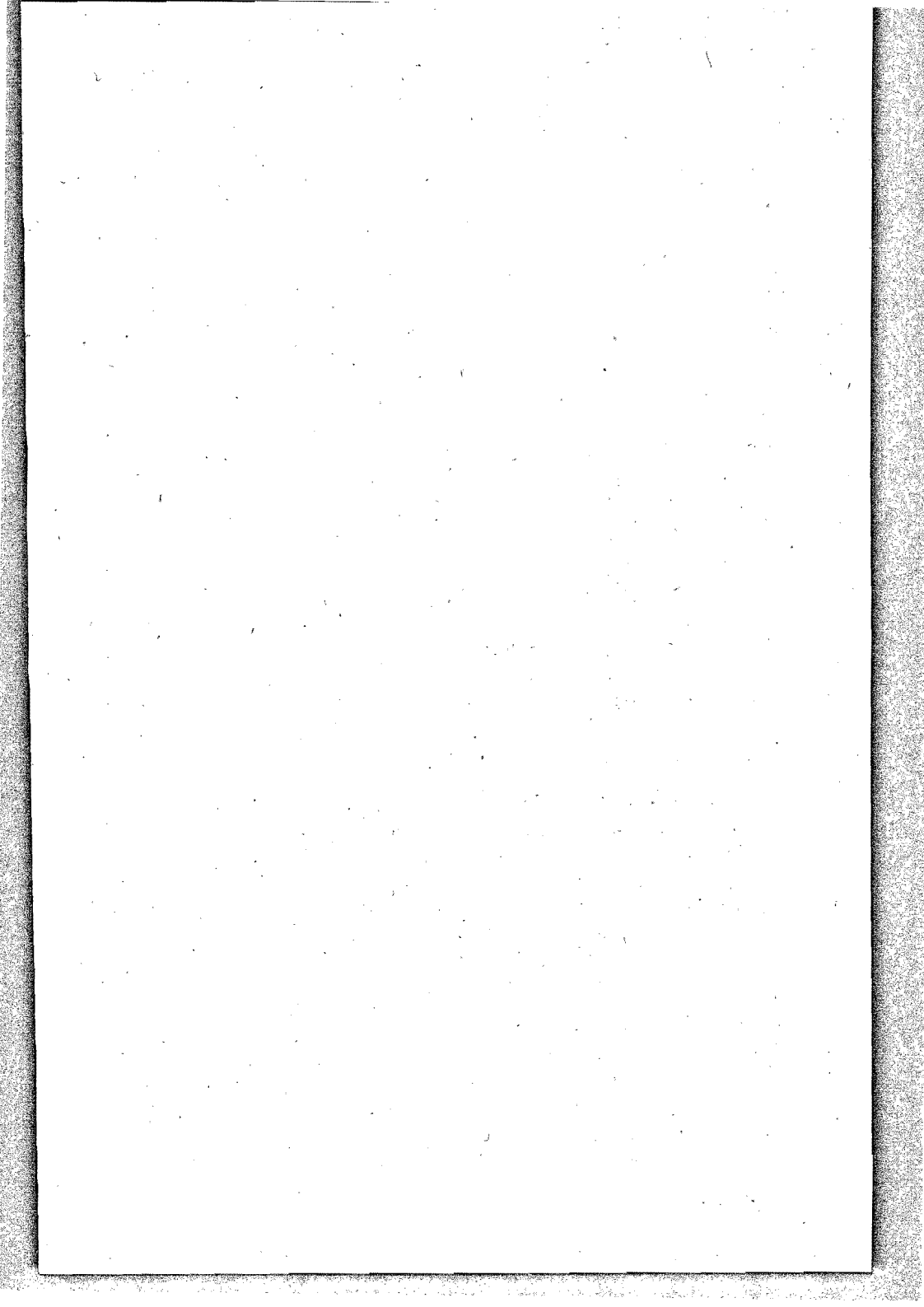
by Bethy Oudot

Original French language edition published
by VIE CHRÉTIENNE
14 rue d'Assas, 75006 Paris

Translated from the French
by Patricia Kane, New Zealand
and Theresa Cademartori, USA

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
First part: Ignatian prayer	4
Preliminaries	4
Preludes	11
Meditation	22
Understand and savour interiorly	25
Speaking with the Lord: the Colloquy	28
Review of the prayer	31
The prayer of repetition	34
Contemplating a Biblical scene	36
Application of the senses	41
The daily review or Examen	45
Three methods of praying	53
Find your own way of praying	58
Second part: Exercises for praying	61
Recapitulation of the method of preparation for prayer	61
Elijah on the way to Horeb (1 Kings 19:1-16)	62
Psalm 139 (138)	66
Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:1-15)	72
Deuteronomy 8:7-20	77
The Principle and Foundation of the Exercises	81
Cure of the blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52)	84
The parable of the two sons (Lk 15:1-3; 11-13)	88
Jesus in Nazareth (Lk 2:39-40; Mk 6:3)	93
The sons of Zebedee make their request (Mk 10:35-45)	96
First miracle of the loaves (Mk 6:30-44)	99
The road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-36)	102
The appearance on the shores of Lake Tiberias (Jn 21:1-14)	108



Introduction

Lord, teach us to pray! Only Jesus could really answer the disciples' spontaneous request, offering his Spirit and his words, so that all of us could personally speak to the Father as his child.

In this world hungering for meaning and for a foundation, this request continues today in many different forms. As disciples, we have been entrusted with this task of giving our brothers and sisters the means, both great and small, of letting themselves be formed in the image of Christ, of offering themselves to the experience of a God who is the source and goal of their daily lives, and of basing their decisions on him.

It is true that the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius are not, above all, a school of prayer but rather a dynamic way of offering oneself in response to a recognized call from the Lord. But it is through prayer: its framework, its methods, its objects of meditation or of contemplation (life, Scripture) that this "admirable exchange" of two freedoms comes about — that of the person within that of his God. It is an exchange that tends to be more than dialogue and communion — a "colloquy" where the Word of God is spoken in the words of man.

Who would suspect that all the "paraphernalia" of the Exercises (may Ignatius forgive this expression!), the method and the material of the prayer, aims at and leads to this unification of those who by their words commit themselves to serve God and the world? How can we bring some of this journey into our daily lives? How can we set some beacons for others? That is the aim of *these guidelines for learning to pray according to Ignatius*.

Certainly not everyone has need of this way to find God, but everyone *does need* concrete methods for preparing their hearts to seek and find God. The methods of Ignatian spirituality are a treasure to be shared extensively.

How was this document born?

An unexpected fruit of a personal retreat, made according to the Exercises, was a call to enter through prayer into an intimate experience of

God, a way of sharing the gifts received through the years. How could this be done? A first request for points for daily prayer based on the texts of the month gave birth to a call from many members of the CLC: help us to pray as Ignatius did! A dozen or more chapters in the French magazine *Vie Chrétienne* redoubled the thirst for a progressive, pedagogical manual, for personal or communitarian use, able also to help those who had the task of educating or of accompanying others in following Christ.

For what purpose?

Faithful to the pedagogy of the Exercises, it was necessary to have a document ***not to be read but to be lived***, which would enable each person to ***exercise*** at their own rhythm, which would make everyone pray as much about life as about Scripture. We needed a document which would also allow us to become conscious of the issues hidden behind certain resistances such as to "ask what I want and desire," "to make a colloquy" or "to recognize our way of feeling and savouring interiorly." Or again, to ***advance by stages*** in the examen of the day, ***to clarify the sense and the way*** of meditating a text, or to contemplate a gospel scene.

The method

The evolution is simple. It follows the ***steps of the prayer outline*** proposed by Ignatius while trying to clarify a bit of the "why" and the "how" of each or some of the more important points.

The second part of the book suggests a method of "retreat" for the person or a group according to dynamics that we will recognize as being linked with that of the Exercises. Some points are more developed than usual in order to assist us to discover how Scripture is Word.

How to use it?

- For personal use: for example, some will take one stage. They will experiment with it, and go back to it as often as necessary, then they will add the following stage and thus will progressively put into action the unfolding of prayer. Others will renew their practices and above all, the sense of these practices.
- In our new CLC communities or those just taking root.

- Religious communities and some formation directors have deepened some of the basic issues renewing a certain spiritual intelligence of the “*means*” for the “*end*.”

- Catechists, chaplains, vocation services, spiritual guides — whether or not they follow the Ignatian spirituality — have adapted such “*exercises*.”

Some precautions

- As with all exercises, *the risk would be to take everything according to the letter* without knowing the spirit which regulates it, thus giving so much importance to it that we either expect everything from it or condemn it.

- The means and the guidelines are at the service of our liberty: they should neither bring about a sterile imprisonment nor an absence of structure. It is in the rereading of what the exercises bring about (the movements) that the way of experience is truly opened.

- Therefore, it would be necessary for the one who intends to use the proposed guidelines seriously, to meet with a guide.

- As for passing this pedagogy on to others, adapting it to reach others where they are, it is necessary that the guide *have already had this experience*.

Deeply grateful to all those who have “guided” my own experience of the Spiritual Exercises and of prayer, and have allowed me to have a certain knowledge of the spiritual life and the practice of accompanying others, I dedicate to them this “Guidelines for prayer from the School of St. Ignatius.”

My special thanks to the Jesuits of St. Ignatius Church, of Villa Manrèse, and of the Centre Sévres in Paris.

Bethy Oudot

The First Part

Ignatian Prayer



Preliminaries

You prepare for a meeting! The time, the place, the reason for the interview, what to expect from it, questions to ask, proposals. Then you get ready and set off for the meeting place. Perhaps on the way you realise that the other person is making the same preparations as you are.

This is a metaphor, but it reflects the reality of prayer for a Christian. Going to pray clearly means going to an encounter involving two people: the Lord and I, and, as an indirect result, everyone else.

Even if prayer is first and foremost the work of the Spirit in us, it cannot happen without us. It is our task to make ourselves available by preparing ourselves and the prayer.

I

How to Prepare for Prayer

Plan when and for how long

- *I pray when I feel like it, or when the mood takes me.* In that case, I run the risk of confusing God with my inclinations or my moods. I will be dejected when I do not find anything rewarding enough! Good-bye prayer when I am busy - and I will always be busy if I do not pray!

- *I pray as long as I feel like it, or as long as I am not bored.* Thank you on God's behalf! The gift is not in praying when I want to, for my own pleasure, but in being there for the Lord. It means giving a minimum of time to the Lord in my daily 24 hours or my weekly 168, giving myself a chance to recognise Him as the source of my being, and giving Him the opportunity to convert me to His Life.

- *So, plan the time and the length; why not put it in your agenda, like any other appointment? Planning ahead helps prepare your interior readiness. Set a length of time sufficient to pray a text: 20 or 30 minutes, and not more than an hour. Too short a time lets you only begin the prayer; you need to take your time (e.g. on the text), and to bring it to a conclusion.*

Choose the place

*When you pray, go to your room, close the door,
and pray to your Father who is unseen*

(Mt 6:6)

- *It is best to choose a place conducive to meditation.* Use some simple means to support your prayer: a cross, an icon, a candle, unless you are able to find a suitable place near your work or your home.
- If I pray in the middle of my papers, near the telephone and everything that reminds me of what still has to be done, I should not be surprised by distractions and interior hubbub.

Plan the support for your prayer

Even though it is good to put myself in the presence of God using my heart and my faith, it would still be detrimental to pray without an objective support: a scene from the Scriptures, a psalm, something experienced during the day, an event or a prayer of the Church (Glory be to the Father, Our Father...)

- Choose the topic for prayer in advance
- *What text?*

Taking the liturgy of the day or of the Sunday can be a way of praying with the rhythm of the Church.

A prayer of the Church that I know well can help me to savour better its meaning.

Take a Biblical text that you love, or one which came to mind during the week, or a text that can throw light on what is happening in your life at present..

- Do not hesitate to use the same text several times (cf the prayer of repetition).
- Read it ahead of time, for example the evening before; prepare the points which seem good to reflect on, the grace I am asking for. Read the notes in the Bible so as to be free of them!
- To choose a support for prayer is :

To recognise that I am only human, and to believe that God speaks through these means.

To prefer the objectivity of the Church's faith to my own feelings, my habits, or my subjectivity.

Even a prayer of adoration, of heart to heart, can only be experienced by using in turn silence and words, structure and creativity, activity and passivity. It is for the Lord to lead us on from the text to Himself, if that is His grace for today.

II

Prepare Myself for the Encounter

Prepare your heart and begin.

A step or two away from the place where I will make my contemplation or meditation, I will stand for the length of an Our Father, I will raise my mind and think how God our Lord is looking at me, and other such thoughts. Then I will make an act of reverence or humility. (Sp.Ex.75)

Let us keep this preliminary pause, proposed by Ignatius in his method, to prevent us from coming to prayer as if it is just another thing to do during the day, like threading pearls one after another (even if they are the Kingdom's!). This pause allows me to recognise the greatness of the One to whom I am about to pray.

- ① It is a matter of a living encounter with the living Lord.
- ② He is not an object, nor a "chum," nor my reflection. He is the Other, Lord, Friend, God, Father-Son-Spirit. He is the One who looks at me first, and I, I look back at Him.

③ I gather together my whole being and focus again on God.

Each of us is invited to *prepare one's own small liturgy* that best leads me to the encounter with my God: a gesture or a word to greet the Lord.

Choose the attitude best adapted to the respect that I want to show during the prayer, but also, to my present physical or psychological state.

- It is not a matter of practising asceticism during the prayer; that would be a different exercise.
- Nor am I just relaxing in the blessed gardens of the Lord!
- I do not have to stay frozen, paralysed during the whole prayer in the attitude I have chosen: praying is not about being transformed into an ice block in the refrigerator. Praying is continuing to live! Simply and humbly.
- I also have to pray with my body, through my whole body.
- I have to use the means best adapted to what I am seeking.

Be silent, physically (place, breathing). The silence of an encounter, a silence of respect that comes when I am truly there, present to someone, available with all that I am. An image of the earth offered up... just as I am, not as I dream of being.

The absence of external noise is not enough. It can even reveal our inner hubbub. It would be an illusion to hope to empty our mind of all its clutter by all sorts of preliminary techniques. Praying is not about *creating a vacuum*! Praying means to be authentic and present. It means to be united with the living God, just as I am, with all that I am and all that I carry with me. *God doesn't join us in a "sterilised" part of ourselves.*

I become calm, quiet, and in faith, I become aware of Him Whom I want to encounter in love.

III

To Become Present to God



It is surprising, but Ignatius does not speak about "coming into the presence of God" as we do so often today. He multiplies his recommendations on how to prepare for prayer (points on how to pray a text, times of preliminary pauses) and takes care of the beginning with the help of a number of effective proposals which he calls **preludes**, and which we will describe later: *preparatory prayer, recalling the history,*

composition of place, asking for grace. This method has the advantage of showing that coming into God's presence is not reduced to an act just at the beginning. It is rather an inner orientation, a desire embodied in these acts, which underlies the whole prayer.

Since the formula is used a great deal today, let us say something about the fundamental purpose of coming into God's presence, whatever form of prayer is used.

Once I have planned the time, the length, the place and the support, which for Ignatius are already a consideration of the One Whom I come to meet, then the moment arrives for a more personal relationship with God: I place myself in His presence. The quality or spirit of the whole prayer will depend on the care taken at the beginning. Many people, when questioned about their difficulties in prayer, admit that they begin with the content before entering into a relationship with the Lord. Result: they are looking for that instead of looking for God.

This coming into God's presence takes place *in faith*. Without it, the time spent in prayer may be "about God," but not "with and before God." It is similar to someone who reads a letter without realising that the writer is present. Certainly, God is present for us at every moment, including during our active life, but it is our task to "realize" this (in the sense of becoming aware of it and acting on it).

How is this achieved

The expression *to become present to God* seems more exact than *to come into God's presence*.

- I place **myself** there.. Me, *with the totality of my being*: my strengths and my limitations, my worries, exactly *as I am* at this moment, tired, happy or heavy-hearted, with my desire to pray or not to pray.

- To **become present to** ... to be present *to myself* certainly means to live the action I am about to perform: to pray to the Lord. To become present...: this is a *movement towards another*, and not a set attitude which exists in itself, whether we achieve it or not. It is a movement which is alive; one to be maintained. *To become* speaks of that total liberty of action, but also the total emptying of self put into the prayer. The coming into God's presence thus goes far beyond a purely mental or psychological exercise. In a few seconds it pulls together the whole journey of faith and life. Perhaps that is what makes it so simple or so difficult.

- Present **to God**... Praying is not self-centred. It is surrendering myself to the encounter with the Other who is Living. It is realising that I stand in the presence of He who is truly the Living God: whether the Father, the Son, God the Creator or the Risen Christ... I can help myself by means of the cross, or the tabernacle or a picture, but the help *par*

excellence is the Spirit, God present in me and not behind a wall. He gives life to the very movement of this prayer towards Him.

- ***Present to God Who is present to me:*** be aware of this reversal. I came here, I took the necessary means. Yet it is He who preceded me, who is there waiting for me, wanting to be united to me and to give Himself to me.

- ***If necessary, make use*** of a personal phrase, a prayer of praise which focuses on God rather than on myself, a gesture (a bow, open hands), a passage from the Psalms rephrased in "I... You" (*You are my shepherd, nothing shall I want... You make me lie down... Lord You know everything...*)

- Spend ***sufficient time***, but ***with faith***, without expecting a particular "feeling" except a real awareness of myself and of God Whom I am addressing. Then, go on to the next stage.

- In this becoming present to God, if your soul finds more than it was looking for, stay with this grace as long as there is something to savour then go on quietly with the rest of the prayer.

- If I do not "feel" anything, I give thanks for this opportunity to live a more disinterested faithfulness and true love for God, and remain "like a sentinel"... while going on with the rest of the prayer.

Why

- The coming into the presence of God is like the river bed whereon the water of prayer flows: clear or muddy, calm or rough, it does not matter much about the water, since I am trying to *order all my actions and operations purely towards God*. Therefore, it is necessary not to rush through this basic relationship.

- Without this relationship, chances are that I may manipulate the text (or my ideas) with dexterity, by a relationship of: "myself/text/myself...*in relation to God!*"

- Coming into the presence of God, done with care, will allow me to return to Him, no matter what happens, and to maintain the relationship of: "God/myself...*in relation to the text*".

cf Ps 139, p.66

The Preludes



I

Preparatory Prayer

How

Ignatius proposes starting to pray with the following preparatory prayer:

The Preparatory Prayer is to ask 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.
(Sp.Ex.46)

It is our task to understand its profound attitude and to rephrase its spirit in our own words and according to our own experiences. For example: Lord, may I be there for You and not for myself. May I be there to know You, freely and not for the "treats" that I have already experienced in praying, or for the answers that I seek. May all that I do be only for Your service and praise, and not for my own...

Why

- Turning towards God and opening myself to Him is very much a grace. And it is in recognizing it as a grace that I ask for it.
- *It is good to know ourselves*, we who are so quick to look for selfish benefits in prayer: a result, an answer to our problems. Be there for Him, because He is God.
- It is also good to recognize the *personal part* that prayer contains: intentions (wishes, enlightenment), actions (external works), activities (reflecting, loving, questioning, enjoying,...).

- **Praying** means going to God with all our human frailty and, centring ourselves entirely on Him, receiving from Him this ability to be united with Him; this movement of the Spirit who, from within, turns us toward the Father.

- This preparatory prayer is a fundamental act, and it depends on the attitude of the one who prays. It is of no importance whether I feel pleasure and enlightenment afterwards or dryness and aridity - battling for faith or the joy of union - none of these are important in themselves.

In prayer as in my daily life, the essential lies in uniting my will to the will of God, in that orientation of desire which reunites and is in communion with the Spirit within me.

II

The Composition of Place

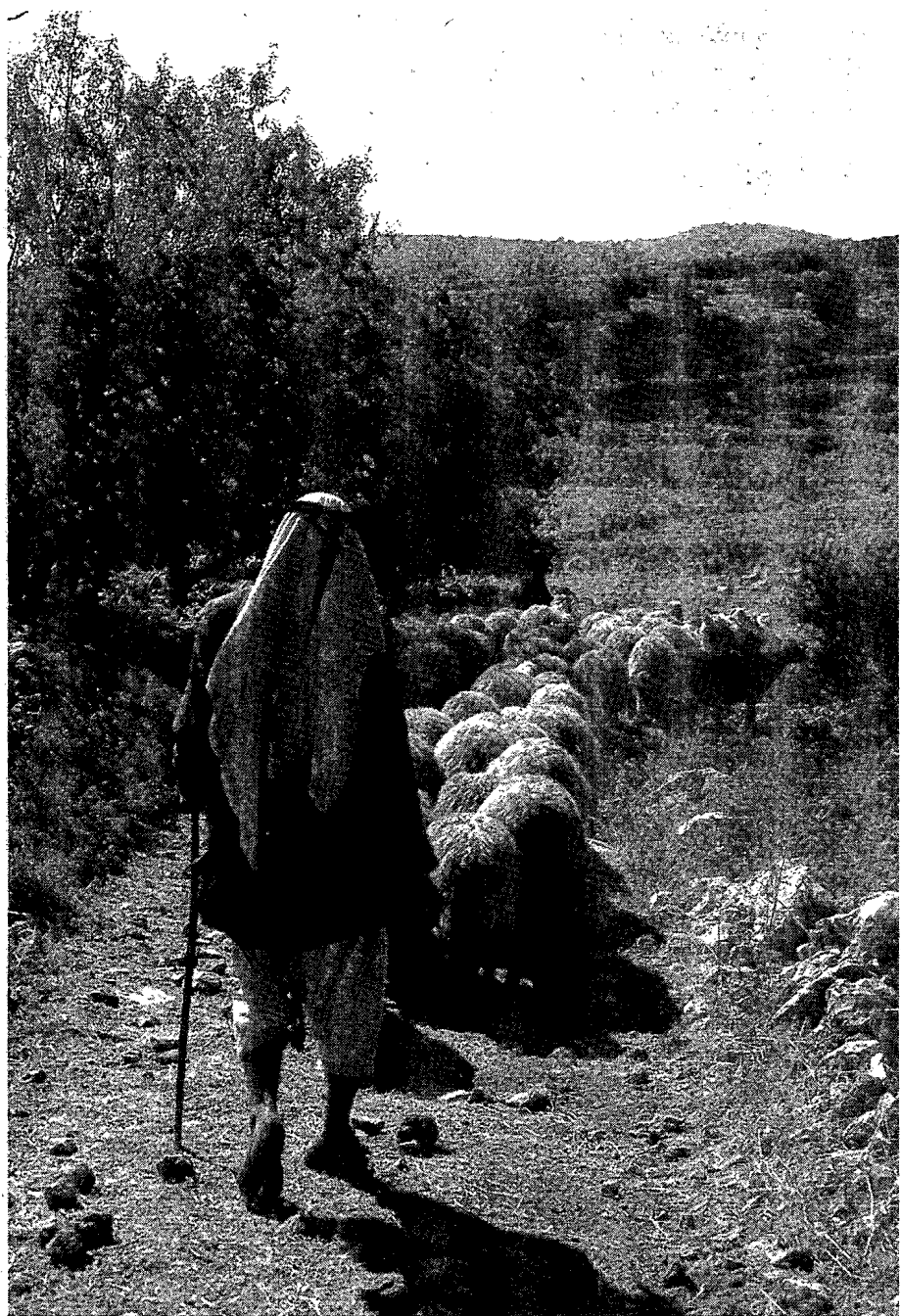
When a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition consists of seeing in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place. By physical place I mean, for instance, a temple or a mountain where Jesus Christ or Our Lady happens to be... (Sp.Ex.47).

How to do this

The imagination pictures ***the place*** where the event takes place, or a ***symbolic visualisation*** of the subject contemplated. Thanks to this place, this tangible point of entry, I already have an understanding of the mystery of God that I have decided to pray on; mind, heart, memory or the senses have only to tranquilly set to work in their own turn.

We can use:

- ***actual pictures*** of the countryside (the Holy Land or others) in order to imagine *the synagogues, towns and villages where Christ preached*, or the lake of Tiberias or the mountain. Images caught by a painter or a sculptor can also help us enter into the place or the mystery contemplated.



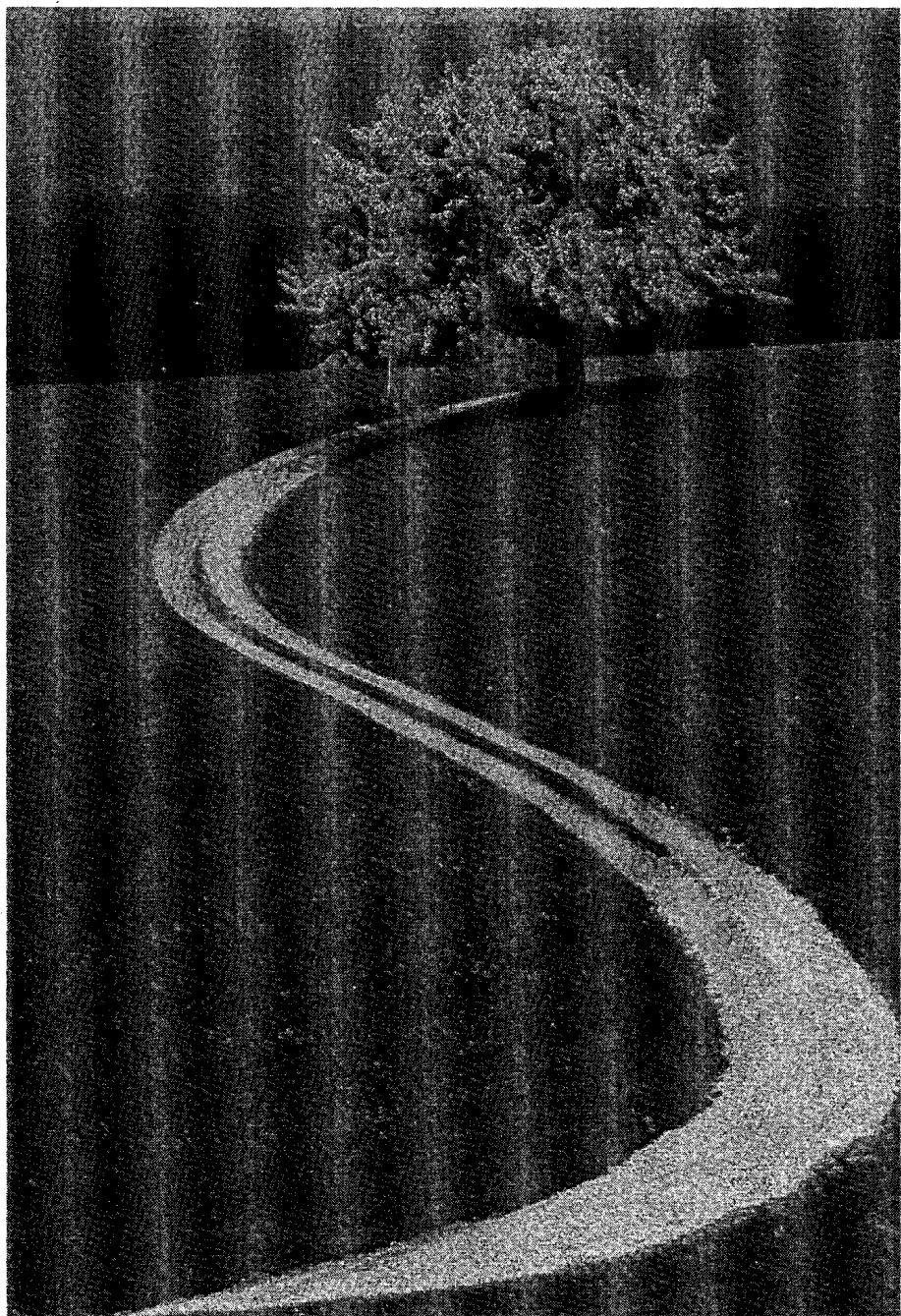
- **symbolic images** to help us pray about **invisible realities** such as the tenderness or the creative love of God (Is 43 or Hos 2:16-22), or sin (*consider the body and soul imprisoned or exiled*, suggests Ignatius).

Why allow this time in my prayer

- **To focus** my imagination is a good means of placing it, along with my whole being, at the service of prayer. To visualize the place helps with interior silence. In case my attention wanders, I can come back to this anchor point, this image.
- What I am praying (a text or a mystery) is **a reality** and not the product of my imagination. Composing a place is not an historical reconstruction, but a symbolic one.
- Fixing a **time** in my prayer is welcoming **a particular and specific place** where the mystery of God among us took place. Like Ignatius, I become a **"pilgrim"**, trying to see and touch the places in our world where God revealed Himself.
- Just like my feelings, my understanding, or my will, my imagination also has the "right" to be evangelized, directed, and creatively involved in my search for God.
- All of this happens **in faith**, even if imagining the place adds weight to the reality of what I am contemplating.
- Imagining the place is believing that **God has come into history** and today touches my history.
- When I imagine the place, I create a point of encounter between what I am and the *Word*.

Places of people, place of God

Every scene in the Bible uncovers "God among us" who reveals Himself in the reality of our humanity, in our neighbourhoods. So the region where we live takes on a biblical, divine dimension. The composition of place helps us discover God, not in thin air but in our reality (houses, roads, towns, deserts,...)





For example, let us recall a few points:

- **Jesus** was a man from Nazareth, He passed through the towns of Galilee or along the edge of a lake, He spoke from the top of a mountain, He visited Zacchaeus or such and such a village.
- The Old Testament **people of God** were established in geographic, cultural, and political realities, just as significant for their times as ours are for us today. And that is where God revealed Himself.
- The **psalms** are formed from all the experiences of individuals in search of their God: entreaties, desires, sufferings and despair, joys, consolations, faith and hope. Told and retold by the people of that time, they are like polished stones that my present-day reality continues to shape and to refine. It is for me to see what each psalm refers to in my own history of abandonment, or of rejoicing... (*Your altar, Lord... The heavens declare the glory... Like a deer...*).
- **To meditate** on *sin or hell*, I must start from where I am, from the experiences lived in the depths of my being, from these signs (quagmire, confusion, vain hopes, mist hiding the dawn...).
- To meditate on *the depth of God's love*, or His creative power, I will draw the image, the visualisation from what I know in my heart about God: an ocean that always renews itself, the hand of tenderness (cf picture page16).

While I am looking with the eyes of my imagination at the house, the synagogue, the road and the crowd, where Jesus is passing, there is a good chance that, little by little, I will recognize my house, my place of celebration, my road, my crowds, as places where the presence of Christ passes today in my life, with as much significance as in those days.

cf. 1 Kings 19, p.62

Ex. 3, p.72

III

To Ask for the Grace

After I have prepared myself for prayer and have fixed my imagination on a "composition of place", I will ask God for the grace that I want to receive from this prayer:

Ask God our Lord for what I want and desire. (Sp.Ex.48)

What to ask for

"Ask for what I want and desire": not "ask for anything at all", but *look at your desire, be attentive to what you want, your real needs, and tell Him...*

What I want or wish: rather than begging or putting your hand out, it is a matter of really living in the prayer, of being someone who knows what he/she wants, who has the right to "want" something for his/her life; someone who yearns, who has longings: in other words, an authentic human being. Therefore, I have to make a quick tour of the profound desire of my heart, and **to ask God for this grace**, for it is a grace, not a right or the result of my efforts..

The graces to be asked for may be extremely diverse:

- In harmony *with the mystery meditated or the text contemplated*, someone's attitude, the cure described or a specific word I may be prompted to ask God for something I need to live better as a Christian (availability, enlightenment, peace, knowledge of the Lord...)
- These graces may also become clear *from my actual needs, my state of mind, the stage of my spiritual journey.*
- My desires may change in the course of the prayer or during the year: sometimes being more general, sometimes more focused; sometimes turned more towards myself, at other times turned more outward towards others. This shift of desire would be interesting to write down.

Why ask

- Asking is putting myself in the position of **receiving**: receiving the Word, the Spirit, enlightenment from God, showing in this way that prayer places me before an Other.

- Being face to face with God in a **state of desire** is already forgetting oneself and surrendering to the action of the Spirit, allowing this Spirit to pray, speak and act in us. Indeed, we ask grace from God not for our personal interests, but *in order to submit ourselves more and more interiorly to the Lord*, so that we can praise and service Him more.

- Asking is an **act of faith** in the Lord who is all gift. It is acknowledging that *everything comes from Him*, not from our acts, acknowledging that even prayer is a gift from God. It is believing that God (as He has told us) wants to fill us to overflowing with the best there is, and to send us the *Spirit*.

- Asking God is accepting **our condition as created beings**. It is daring to exist before Him, as an upright person who “wants” and who “desires,” just as God Himself wanted us to be: free to exist before Him. If I have desires, it is because I am a living being, a unique person in the eyes of God.

- Asking forces me to **sort** through my desires and to recognize humbly the one I need today in order to be open to God. It is **directing** my desires towards God, listening to what is really in my heart, and looking beyond myself to find the Lord, the Source of all desires. In asking for the grace I need I can no longer cheat either myself or God.

- Little by little, the Spirit will change my petitions, helping me discover what I need and what I truly want. My petition **will become closer and closer to the will of God in me**.

- In the Scriptures, **Jesus lets the people He meets express** a desire and He respects it; He Himself questions others or the Father. He waits for the individual to open up before He acts and grants the request at its deepest level. (*What do you want me to do for you?; Ask and you shall receive; What do you want?*)

Ask nothing from the Lord: a mistaken attitude.

To be able to ask from the depths of our heart we need first to overcome some pious objections and resistances:

① “*I do not want to ask for something for myself, because it is selfish or unimportant*”: then do I need others? Will their petition be important? If I ask nothing, how can I really understand what others

ask for? And how can I say to others that God hears our prayers if I have not had the experience of asking for myself? Let us call to mind the Pharisee: he is full of himself and, under the pretext of thanksgiving, is closed to God. Only the Publican, expecting everything from God, went away justified with his prayers heard.

② *"I want a free, disinterested relationship! God is not my spare tire!"* Certainly, but God Himself has established a covenant with us, a relationship founded on reciprocal desires and demands. He is counting on us. To work with Him, it is good for us to experience that we **receive** everything from Him. (When members of a family ask nothing more from each other, then death is at work; the breakdown of the family is imminent.)

③ *"God knows better than I do what is good for me!"* True! But I am not asking in order **to inform** God but **to conform myself** to His will. It is in stuttering out my demands, that He helps me discover and share what the Spirit inspires in me. *May Your will be done*, yes, but what is it?

At the heart of every petition, there is hidden praise, the acknowledgment that He can give what is asked for. Never asking God for anything is a way of making myself His "equal" (wrongly, because He asks). If I live a life of self-sufficiency, a way of "having nothing to do with Him in my human nature" and look for Him somewhere else, a false image of God creeps in. Unless it is the fear of having our wishes granted...

"Leaving everything to His will" could hide a rejection of God, a way of being attached to **my own will**: It is up to God to act to show me if He wants something different from what I want. A sort of whim: I sulk, turn in on myself after a disappointment or setback in love; "He did not give me what I wanted; well, I will not ask for anything else!" This is making God answerable to my will. Unless this resignation indirectly conceals a giving up of my freedom. Asking is entering, as Jesus Christ did, into a reciprocal relationship of two desires, which seek each other and listen to one another. If I desire nothing, I have lost some of my human nature...

Is God going to answer?

- **Yes**, to what conforms to the Spirit within the petition, and is, therefore, for my good...



- ***In a different way***, to what is not yet in harmony with the “vital” point where I meet God within me. Jesus modifies the request of the sons of Zebedee, who want to sit to the right and left of Him, by saying: “*You do not know what you are asking, can you drink the cup that I must drink? - Yes*”. Each of them discovers later on that the request is fulfilled beyond all expectation.

- ***The silence of God***, an apparent non-response, ***modifies*** and harmonizes our desire to what is most essential. If I have not expressed anything, I will never make progress in this discovery.

cf. Mk 10:46-52, p.84

Mk 10:35-45, p.96

Meditation



This way of praying requires a simple “work” by the one who prays. It can be applied to a biblical text, a letter of St Paul, a theme for meditation (sin, creation), a text of the Church, the Credo, a Eucharistic prayer, etc...

How is this done?

- I take care of the beginning of the prayer as before (coming into God’s presence, composing an inner image of the place or theme, asking for the grace).
- I divide the subject of the meditation into different points, or 2 or 3 stages.
- At each stage, (successively, if necessary) I
 - apply **my memory** to the subject
 - use **my understanding**
 - move **my heart, my will**
- Finish each stage or the whole period of prayer by expressing to the Lord what has come out of the meditation.

① **Apply my memory:** What does this point bring to mind? How does my personal history relate to this point? Let the images come. This means taking all aspects *of the story*, recalling events, the reality that I know, *remembering* what the Scriptures say about it, or what my own history knows of it (emotional, physical), or everyone, or the Church... For example: in meditating on the Creed, I may recall everything that lets me say: “I believe in God, the Father almighty...”



② **Use my understanding:** What do I understand about this? What are the implications of this point? Reflect... When memory involves my history, and my reality, my intellectual faculty sets to work to understand better the reverberations, the implications, the extent of the mystery. It draws on its ability to make comparisons, to reason, to note the ambiguities or the questions which this point asks of my life, of the Church, the images of God that it changes...

③ **Move my heart by my will:** let myself be touched, involved. What does this meditation commit me to live or to express to the Lord? Stirring my memory, and rousing my understanding on a point will only be a kind of oratorical contest unless it leads to "*moving my heart*." It is not a question of playing with an article of faith, but of belonging to the Lord Himself, without cutting off memory and understanding, the other inner dimensions of faith. But since the heart is not always swayed by wise feelings, the will must take up the race. Everything that I am comes together in my heart, in my ability *to make the decision for God*. Strengthened by this memory, by what I have understood, I orient myself today, I pledge my liberty in a faithful love. This may be done in two ways:

- "naturally": love, thankfulness or another feeling springing from the meditation and expressed in a heart to heart talk.
- "by the will" (desire for the desire) for a more resolute conversion, or a decision on a specific point, or a renewal of faithfulness, even in the subconscious... This more "willed" way of belonging to the Lord is as authentic and fruitful as the first way.

Attention

"Memory, understanding, heart-will" must not be put into separate categories. Each person must ensure that the prayer of meditation does not take place only in memories (in the past) or just in the head, nor even in the emotions alone. The mysterious action of God touches the whole individual. It is "I" in my wholeness who welcomes and reflects on this word of God, and becomes involved in a dialogue with the Lord (colloquy).

cf. P. and F., p. 81; Dt 8, p. 77

Understand and Savour Interiorly



For, what fills and satisfies the soul consists, not in knowing much, but in our understanding the realities profoundly and in savouring them interiorly. (Sp.Ex. 2)

Why should praying always be tedious, without enjoyment, dull and tasteless? Is it not written in the Scriptures: *"This word is on your lips and in your heart", "Taste and see...", "Open your mouth, and I will fill it", "Eat, drink freely..."*

Knowing God (in the Biblical sense) is not the same as having knowledge, but is a personal experience of God.

How is this done

Although the taste for the Word remains a gift of God, for my part, I can facilitate this in-depth reception of the Word and, through it, the mystery of God. To do this, in the way you would enjoy an appetizing dish or a fine wine you must:

- *take a little at a time*: a word, a verb, an attitude;
- *take the time*: to relish, savour and discover all its facets, to reflect on its significance, to let the word release its flavour; to stay with it until this word sinks in, resounds and is really welcomed and understood.

Take care to:

- prepare yourself for a real openness, while avoiding rambling, fluttering about or passing ceaselessly from phrase to phrase without *giving them a chance to "speak"*.
- avoid looking for new insights or for seeing many things, but *stay with a phrase long enough to "savour and understand [it] interiorly"*.

- avoid forcing yourself to feel, to make the taste emerge in order to savour it; *do not believe that you must feel extraordinary things!*

If savour comes:

- welcome it and stay with the word, as long as you find something in it...
- do not try to interpret it straightaway ("If that word speaks to me, I must do this");
- keep on following the Lord for Himself, not for the savour;
- the savour is not an end in itself, it is a sign.

Some forms which this interior savour can take.

The interior savour may take several forms, according to the individual or the moment: strong or subtle, but always discernible:

- A *foretaste*: in preparing the prayer or listening to the Gospel at Mass, a whetting of appetite or resistance may occur; "my mouth waters"... It would be good to pray about this passage!
- Astonishment, admiration, new inner understanding.
- A consciousness of *agreement*, of *participation* in such and such a passage, a character, a word, which reveals a part of me or an aspect of God, a call, a desire of mine.
- A consciousness of the *presence* of God or simply being in His presence experienced as peace, rest, tranquil faith or in the experience of Truth, of the Living Word.
- A word that *envelops me, carries me away, and conveys more than any explanation*.
- The powerful echo of a certain word that rekindles the desire to live, to serve, to imitate...
- There are also *more painful forms*, for example, in meditating on the difficulties and sufferings in the life of Christ or in my own life:
 - A sentiment of *compassion*, of *contrition* that is turned genuinely towards God or others.

- *Suffering, tears* in remembering a hurt or a part of my history, but without bitterness, in a certain peace of mind.
- *Dryness, thirst, pain of unreceptiveness*: it is good then to remain in calm fidelity. In my inability to savour by myself, God speaks.

Attention

To feel and to savour: it is not by chance that *the language of the senses* can evoke this reality: that God truly touches and changes us in prayer. For it is truly in our reality - body, emotions, understanding, and not in the imaginary - that God speaks, and communicates with us. And it is through this reality that I become aware of this fact.

What I feel and savour is not God Himself, but *a sign, an indication* that His word is working in me, touching me. In internalizing such a passage, *in taking it to heart*, the Word nourishes me, "becomes incarnate" and enlightens me.

Feeling and savouring interiorly the things of God *does not depend solely on us*; that would be an illusion. God's initiative (which may be felt as much in His presence as in His absence) meets our own, but is revealed first. After a certain amount of work, the individual who savours and feels these matters interiorly discovers that the harvest surpasses the personal effort involved.

Speaking with the Lord: The Colloquy



A colloquy is made, properly speaking, in the way one friend speaks to another, or a servant to one in authority - now begging a favour, now accusing oneself of some misdeed, now telling one's concerns and asking counsel about them. (Sp.Ex.54).

How to do this

- Thus, it is a matter of *a simple, familiar and respectful talk with the Lord*. At the end of the prayer, I tell Him what is in my heart, the fruit of the prayer or a request, a regret, a discovery, thanksgiving, a worry, enlightenment, a joy, a desire.
- This *usually takes place at the end of the prayer time* after we have left time for the Word of God to work in us. Our expression is a response, an echo, the fruit of what has touched us.
- We may talk to the Father, to Jesus, to Mary or even to a saint to whom we have a particular devotion, or to one of the characters contemplated in the gospel scene (John the Baptist, Peter...).
- Speak to Him *as one friend speaks to another, or a servant to one in authority* or a son or daughter to father or mother... a creature to the Creator, to his/her Saviour; according to the inner attitude that I feel like revealing right now.
- Even if this expression is respectful, it should be simple and friendly. It is a matter of *speaking the truth*, even in one word



To finish the time of prayer, return to *vocal prayer*: for example, the Our Father, the Anima Christi, the Hail Mary, or any other prayer that allows me *to take leave* of the Lord with the prayer of the Church.

Benefit and meaning of the colloquy

The colloquy helps us to progress in a more personal, true and humble *relationship* with the Lord.

It is accepting that *God makes us His sons and daughters, friends...* with whom He establishes a relationship.

It is *responding* to the Word and letting it *take shape*, expressing it in these few words or in this silence...

It is *preferring the relationship itself to what I have or have not received*. It is loving.

Never speaking to the Lord *would make Him a non-person*, an abstraction, a kind of invisible wholly-other. It would be to make God just a distributor of gifts, and to forget to look at the *Giver Himself* as we leave. It is becoming aware that the same Lord contemplated in the Scriptures is with me *here and now*.

What I express or fail to express to God *shows me more clearly what I want* and what I am not yet living. Thus, it is a way of progress. I can *compare* what I express to God in the colloquy with what I asked Him for *as a grace at the beginning*: is there any change, alteration, confirmation? Perhaps the Lord has already granted the grace asked for in the beginning.

Attention

It is not a matter of living the whole prayer verbally: *I let His word speak to me*, resonate in me; but *at some time or another or at the end, I speak to God Himself*. Is it not the nature of God to give us the Word?

cf. Lk 15, p.88

Review of the Prayer



After finishing the exercise, for a quarter of an hour, either seated or walking about, I will examine how well I did in the contemplation or meditation. If poorly, I will seek the reasons; and if I find them, I will express sorrow in order to do better in the future. If I did well, I will thank God our Lord and use the same procedure next time. (Sp.Ex.77)

How to do this

After praying a biblical text, it is useful and rewarding to make a "review of the prayer" for a few minutes and to note down:

- ① The general atmosphere of the time of prayer (in 1 or 2 words)
- ② How I went about it (way of doing it: well, or needing improvement, on what point?)
- ③ What I have experienced:

- *points in the text* or images which have affected or touched me.

- *feelings I had about these* (name them, specify) (This is often what is left as profit).

- ① **Atmosphere of the whole.**

In one or two words, describe how I experienced the prayer and its effect on me: how I felt at the end.

- ② **How did I set to work?**

On my part, how did I ensure proper conditions for prayer, the management of this time:

- **How did I prepare** myself (reread the text? the points? chose the place, time and duration?).

- **Place, positions chosen**, did they help me or do they need changing?
- **How did I start off?** (with my heart prepared, my desire made clear, my imagination fixed on an image?)
- **Did I keep to the set time?** How did I **cope** with distractions?
- If the texts said nothing to me, or spoke to me: **how did I react?** (welcome, retreat, greediness?) Did I pray with my whole self, with my head, with my heart, on the ideas?
- **Did I speak to the Lord?** Did I stay silent?
- **How did I finish off** the time of prayer (in a precise way or did it just peter out?)

Without passing everything in review each time, note what was fruitful and what needs improving.

③ **What I have experienced** (what is less my impulse)

- What **words, characters** in the story caught my attention, moved me or were an obstacle?
- What did I **feel** about them:
peace, joy, strength to go on, trust...
darkness, opposition, aversion, fear, doubt, resistance...
- What eventual **insights**: about Jesus, my life; enlightenment, respite...
- What **preferences**, what **desires** appeared: for example, an attraction for one aspect of the Christian life, for Christ, or something else...

Benefit of this review.

- It enables me: to take seriously God's gifts and His word, as well as my freedom in regard to them.
- It enables me to **acknowledge** these gifts, these insights, to **remember** them, to come back to them because they were noted, and to **adapt** my daily life accordingly.

- It allows me to make real progress, not based on my “feelings” or my “opinions”, but on the reality I have experienced.
- It allows me to become aware of my **strong points**, to see the spiritual constants, as well as the weak points I need to work on.
- It allows me to begin a **spiritual discernment**, to receive my true spiritual personality from God: the path of **my specific vocation**. I discover the way in which God speaks to “me”, what the Spirit instills in me... I do not know WHAT God has said or done during the prayer, but I find His footprints. The pathway will appear in the end.
- It enables me to **unite** prayer and life gently, through the effects produced by His living word.
- It facilitates the exchange with a possible guide.

Attention

- Make notes **after** the prayer time, not during it.
- I do not decide whether I have “prayed well” or “prayed badly”(!!!) I just observe.
- Do not try **to write down everything** (just a few words) or to remember everything.
- Do not **begin to pray again** while writing; take just a few minutes.
- I do not watch myself praying in order to see what I should remember. Trust in the Lord for what I will remember afterwards!
- I am **not** writing a biblical or theological treatise; or a composition with all the loose ends tied up.
- **Sort out** what affected me and what I myself experienced in hearing this word, and not what I think I should have seen!
- Do not note only “for what reason” something happened, but **what** actually happened.

cf. Lk 24, p. 102

The Prayer of Repetition



Instead of always going on from one text to another, it is very fruitful to pray the same text several times in order to let it express all that it has to say to us. But the prayer of repetition is rather more precise than that for Ignatius. It is a matter of staying with a word already prayed, a word which *has already* said something to us (in whole or in part!) The element in the text which caused savour or resistance is giving me a *sign*: I let it work in me.

How to do this

- In the review of one or several preceding prayers, *I note the verses which have most affected me* (by the time spent on them, or by savour or opposition...) even if they are in different texts.
- Specifying them clearly, even jotting them down, I make these verses the *substance* of my prayer.
- Begin the prayer in the usual way.
- Take the first verse chosen, its content: I go deeper into it, I interiorize it.
- This word may say something more to me, or something else, or in another way, or nothing more.
- I will not try to repeat (or change) the feeling experienced before.
- If I do not find as much savour, I will stay with this word in faith, peace, and silence without obvious consolation.
- If I experience savour this time, I will stay with it.
- Concerning what I experienced or discovered last time I prayed this text, I will keep what has been clarified or strengthened or what challenges me.

- Talk with the Lord about all this.
- Then, go on to the next selected verse.

Sometimes, it may be a good idea to pray a second or third time on one or another of these verses if I again feel savour or resistance!

Why make the prayer of repetition?

- The emotions (joy, savour, stress, resistance...) experienced while praying a verse are signs.
- The verse has revealed privately an aspect of my life, a side of myself, of my vocation. It changes me, touches me.
- The repetition perfects the act of listening to God; it allows time for the Word to sink in, to become incarnated, "to continue His way in me".
- It simplifies my prayer and clarifies my emotions.
- It refines my relationship with God, with my feelings, my ideas. It highlights the constants, the gifts of God.
- It allows me to recognize the essential message the Lord wants to speak to me.

Avoid

...beginning with vague images or memories of the verses concerned. It is better to mark or define these verses so as to return to them objectively.

...wanting to "experience" the same feelings as before.

...beginning this prayer of repetition without first coming into God's presence: be there for Him and not for what you want to feel.

Contemplating a Biblical Scene



In everyday life, contemplating means to remain without talking, to observe, to listen, and to leave oneself open (to a work of art, a landscape, the sound of water, the movement of the waves). Savouring, admiring, being moved by the sight or sound of things. In this context, it is a matter of contemplating Christ Himself, His life, His words. Even though there is a method to help you do this, it is more than *a way of praying*, it is *a way of being with Christ*.

One way of doing this

This way of praying is suitable for biblical scenes where there are people to look at and listen to.

The usual *preludes* thus take on a heightened meaning:

- **Briefly recall the story.** This episode of scriptural history is not a simple holy picture, but an echo of reality lived and reread: the Lord in the history of His people.
- Direct your attention to the actual or symbolic *place* (mountain, sea) or to the human atmosphere (the Last Supper, Easter) where the episode takes place.
- **Asking for the grace** may be formulated as: *ask for an interior knowledge of our Lord... that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely.*

Then, *see the persons... listen to what they are saying, look at what they are doing... and draw profit from this.*

This gives a triple approach to the scene enabling us to savour it more profoundly, and thus come to know the Lord better.

See the Characters

Listen to or consider What They Are Saying
Consider or look at What They Are Doing
... and at each stage Reflect To Draw Profit From This

① The Characters in the scene

Try to visualize **who they are** (they have names, histories, characters, sufferings, demands, goals... men and women just like us today!)

Contemplate them, not like a collection of holy pictures, or a somewhat imaginary story, but as an adventure of actual men and women. Try to understand, feel, know from the inside, like John who says: *what we have seen with our own eyes;... what we have touched with our own hands: the Word, who is life — this is our subject. Become permeated* by the scene so as to savour the mystery of it a little, let it reverberate in you.

Risk becoming **involved** in the scene: put yourself in the boat, in the crib, in the skin of the paralysed man, so as to **see** better what they felt about Jesus, what they lived, to **understand** better...

② The Words (and the silences)

Try to **understand** them as if you were present, or as if they were addressed to you personally, or as if you had spoken them. Be aware of the intonation, the meaning.

Weigh their implications, what do the words spoken by this person reveal about him or her. (*Give me a drink!... Today I am coming to your house!... I know very well who you are... Are you going to wash my feet?*)

③ What the persons are doing

Their **gestures, attitudes, actions, reactions** (words). Are these acts God's, or those of men and women (therefore, mine) in relation to God?

I can experience their meaning or some sense of my own, my desire, my denial, or discover there another face of God. I can touch them, rather than merely theorize about them!

Perhaps I may embrace these gestures: *Stretch out your [withered] hand...* and I discover that I am withered, thirsting to be cured; I am paralysed or walking along beside *Jesus, tired by the journey, sitting down by the well*, near Mary, who bowing her head says: *I am the handmaid of the Lord.*

④ I Reflect within myself and draw profit

When something moves me, I should **stop**, stay with it, savour it, let it echo.

I should **reflect** to draw **profit** from this: after each of the steps, or at the end, I become aware of how seeing these persons, hearing their words, or watching their gestures has affected me: I draw profit.

I reflect in the way a mirror does: something of the mystery is **stamped** on me, leaving an "impression," a savour, a spiritual experience through which I **understand or know** something about God and His way of acting, or about the individual or myself with regard to Him.

It is possible that at the time, this "**echo**," this "reflection" is made almost without words; it is in the final dialogue with the Lord, or in the review that I will put it into words.

At the end I converse with the Lord or one of the characters.

It may happen that on picking it up again, **repeating** a passage of a certain text, I will find peace in living the scene close up, to the point that I am not just seeing and hearing what I am contemplating, but **touching, smelling, tasting** everything as well. All my senses are praying, a sign that my prayer is simplified, unified, that my body and my whole being are **letting the Word of God speak through them**.

A way of being with Christ

Contemplating Christ is more than a method, it is a way of "being with" Christ and becoming present to His mystery. God became Man one day to touch me, and the Spirit within me today makes me a contemporary of this story and of His grace.

Scriptural contemplation is characterized by the following points:

- An ability to **contemplate the Other**: thus, to be free of myself.
- A movement **from the exterior to the interior** of the mystery, and from the head to an "inner knowledge".
- A contemplation **in faith and with the Church**. It is because I believe, that I see, not the other way round. It is in ecclesial discernment that I authentically receive this mystery, its enlightenment for my life and its calls.
- God **lives today**. In the same way as the Lord proclaims to Moses that He is *the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob*, so He proclaims: "I am, today, this God of Moses, of Zacchaeus, of John the Baptist, of the sinner, whoever you are contemplating...; what happened to them will happen to you, I will come into your life as I came into theirs". He is the bridge between them and me, He grafts me onto the long lineage of this Sacred History.
- A **work of the Holy Spirit**. The Spirit who was at work in the mystery being contemplated lives in me today and makes me know Him.
- The **Word was made flesh**, the unique and definitive word of God; the only pathway to union with God. Today in His **body** the Church, and through my body that contemplates it, this Word becomes incarnate in my life. It speaks; to "me" and "about" me.
- Contemplating Christ **transforms me from within** into His image. By embracing little by little His love, His way of being, I will live, not the same experiences, but in the same Spirit. "You become what you contemplate", says a proverb, so let us contemplate Christ!

Some stumbling blocks and advice.

Do not believe that scriptural contemplation is reserved for "professionals" in prayer!

Do not confuse the scriptural contemplation proposed here with the mystical prayer of union, although it may be a pathway to it.

Do not set a hierarchy of values: meditating, and praying with your breathing are equally important.

Do not wish to "experience spiritual matters": it is not greediness that will help, but simplicity in forgetting yourself. Just "look, listen".

Spend the time that is needed, *without wanting to see everything* or go over the whole scene.

Do not cut short the "seeing" or "listening" if this approach brings harmony. The steps are there to be a help not a strait-jacket.

Do not aim too high: do not get involved in biblical or theological questions.

Do not aim too low: do not stay at the level of pious feelings, of sentimentality (this little baby Jesus in the crib...is God our Saviour!).

Our understanding, our theological intuition and the faith of the Church are good guarantees for the use of our imagination when we use this approach to pray through the senses.

Being preoccupied with personal matters may prevent my contemplating the Lord. It would be better in that case to pray on my life or to meditate the text, rather than praying "apart" from my problems.

cf. Mk 6, p. 99; Jn 21, p. 108

Application of the Senses



In scriptural contemplation, the approach to the scene and the mystery that is related is made through the senses of seeing and hearing (look at the characters, listen to their words).

The other senses will be used in *successive approaches* to the scene, by repetition, going from an overall view to a more specific one, from the external to the more interior, from the head to the body and the heart.

In fact, by using the five senses, we move from the furthest to the closest: we **see** what we cannot yet hear (a person far away, without the sound of footsteps); we **hear** what we cannot yet smell; we **smell** before being able to touch (a flower, food); and **tasting** brings the object even closer than touching. We move from the exterior to the most intimate.

In the same way, we use the *inner senses* for contemplating spiritual realities.

When it is done in faith and by the grace of the Spirit, this inner, intuitive understanding of the contemplated mystery depends on an activity (of the imagination, the senses) and a passivity (I receive what is hidden/revealed by the scene). The Mystery takes flesh.

How to do this

- By *preparing* my time of prayer: *on a text already contemplated*. Looking at the characters, listening to their words or feeling it interiorly has already brought me into the scene.
- By beginning the prayer in the usual way: imagining *the place* by which I want to enter and taking the path from the exterior to the interior.
- I enter into what I **see** and what I see enters into me.



- I let the words and the silence penetrate my inner **ears**. I try quietly to **enter more and more profoundly into the mystery** through the physical aspects of the scene.

- I **feel, touch, taste** as if I were present: objects, the atmosphere, the “sweetness and charm” of God according to the character that I am contemplating.

- I **stay** in this inner knowledge, truly responsive but respectful of the Lord. *Using the sense of touch, I will, so to speak, embrace and kiss the places where the persons walk or sit. I shall always endeavour to draw some profit from this.* (Sp.Ex.125)

- I can stay, **freely**, in this profound yet simple relationship with the mystery of God who gives Himself to me in this scene. **Savouring what has been given to me**, available, open, without reaching out to take the gift.

- Through my senses I take in **what emerges from the scene**.

- I **end** with a concrete gesture: a personal prayer to the Lord, an act of thanksgiving, or a prayer of the Church.

This is the way St John of the Cross defines contemplation in contrast to meditation:

*The difference is that which exists between working at a task, and
enjoying the completed work,
or receiving, and profiting from what I have received,
or tiring myself out following a road, and resting at the end of the road,
or, if you like, between preparing a meal, and savouring the meal already
prepared.*

(*La montée au Carmel*: L. 2. ch. 14 n. 7)

Some points to watch

- It is not a matter of looking for sensations, but of *seeking the Lord and drawing profit*.

- The contemplative path bears *fruit in daily life*: this is the touchstone for the validity of my prayer. If what I receive from God leads me away from the path of the Church and the world, surely I have mistaken the effects of my own feelings for divine truth?

- Spiritual imagination *receives and does no injury*. It is not a pulling out of everything in the imagination. At the heart of contemplative prayer exists a kind of chastity and renunciation, always to be *ordered purely to the service and praise of God...*
- The inner knowledge that I gain always has *to be verified* by what the Lord has revealed to His Church and what we profess in faith.

Why apply our senses to a biblical scene?

Praying with the senses about a biblical scene is based on some tenets of our faith:

- The Word became *flesh and blood*. His living word can only be united with us through our *human faculties*, including our bodily ones through which we discover spiritual reality.
- The application of the senses is the sign of a simplified prayer which has touched the heart. If authentic, it brings peace, humility and simplicity; if forced, it brings fatigue, or a deviation.
- Little by little, the prayer of repetition and the application of the senses *bring unity*. My whole being is centred on the essential and harvests mature fruit.
- God answers the prayer for the grace of *better knowing Him interiorly... that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely*.

The Daily Review or Examen



Why this daily prayer?

More than just a simple method, the review of the day (or examen or evaluation of the day) defines and allows a movement of encounter, which is rightly called by some: "a prayer of covenant". This covenant - in which God has the initiative and which is always manifested through our daily life - calls for a response, an acceptance from each of us.

The starting point is that **God is the first to give**. He gives us life, increase, everything, and lives within our history. At the very heart of my life, *God suffers and works for me*.

Secondly, it is in this use of daily events and not "elsewhere" that **our response of covenant**, our fidelity to the Lord, is expressed or denied.

Thirdly, we must "not forget", but "remember," that God is our source. We must celebrate this not only liturgically but by living in harmony with this reality of our faith. It is our task to **review the past in order to give thanks and orient the future**. *Remember, Israel, do not forget... it is I who have...* How many times this invitation appears in the Bible! In fact, the Scriptures are but a rereading in faith of how the living God reveals Himself in the history of His people.

Fourthly, regular and frequent use of the review enables me to **discern** how God is working in me and how to respond better each day.

In addition, it is good to **renew** this covenant every day. To do this, the daily examen will be *first of all a personal encounter with my God*, and not firstly an examination of conscience. It is from within this relationship of faith, as from within the bed of a river, that **with Him**, and as far as possible **with His eyes**, I will examine my day, or some

episode of my history. Little by little I will **discern** His presence, His faithfulness, His gifts, His Spirit working in me, and how I can respond to them and adjust myself to them.

What the review is not.

- A self-centred relationship concerning my day:
I/Me on the subject of...God or of my life.
- A listing of events on which I pass a moral judgment:
I/my life... according to my criteria.
- A simple "taking stock" such as everyone makes at the end of the day.
- A framework of different points proposed to review my day.
- A sterile return to the past.
- A search for "what I have done wrong"! A detailed examen of my faults!
- An infallible remedy for finding God and His grace "like an object" marked out clearly in the course of my day.

Ignatius' method of making the review (Sp.Ex.43).

The First Point is

to **give thanks to God** our Lord for the benefits I have received from him.

The Second is

to **ask the grace to know my sins** and rid myself of them.

The Third is

to **ask an account of my soul** from the hour of rising to the present examen, hour by hour, or period by period; first as to thoughts, then words, then deeds...

The Fourth is

to **ask pardon** of the Lord our God for my faults.

The Fifth is

to **resolve**, with his grace, **to amend them**. Close with an Our Father...

The usual approach.

- Choose the right time and a suitable position (if I am in bed and it is midnight, I may fall asleep).
 - Set a time limit (10 to 20 minutes).
 - As with all prayer, become aware that I am *in the presence of God*, and turn my heart and my intentions toward Him, *just as I am at the end of this day*.
- ① *I give thanks* to the Lord for all that He has done and given me today.
 - ② *I ask for enlightenment*, an openness of heart, so I can review the way I need to change to correspond to His gifts.
 - ③ *I observe*: I look at what made up my day, events, activities, words, thoughts. This is the time of discernment.
 - ④ *I ask pardon* for my faults and omissions.
 - ⑤ *I offer myself* to the Lord, perhaps deciding on a point to correct tomorrow.

A progressive variation for getting into the examen.

Each one should adjust this form of prayer according to where he or she is spiritually (rhythm, place).

Beginners or those who find it hard *to give thanks* to God might like to spend several weeks on the first 3 stages to avoid turning this prayer into "self-centredness" (A).

Others will set their sights on the *conversion*, that the examen makes possible (B).

They may then progress to the high point of this form of prayer: *discernment* (C).

Make use of the following proposals freely and judiciously, but also with generosity and the desire to make progress.

(A) - For Beginners

For several weeks, practice, first of all, an **act of thanksgiving**. (This is especially for those who have difficulty in giving thanks, or who are inclined to look just at themselves at first, or to see only the negative).

1st stage: **become present to God**

More important than the past, what matters now is this moment with the Lord... By means of a gesture, a simple prayer, I turn toward the One who is the source and the goal of my life. At the end of this day, I come back to the covenant that the Lord never ceases to offer me.

2nd stage: **ask for His enlightenment**

He is the only One who can reveal the true meaning of what I have lived through.

I ask Him to let me see my day through His love and His eyes. It puts me back on the right wavelength, with faith in a merciful God, God of life, of love, of truth...

Diving straight into what I have done, either good or bad, would be judging according to my criteria and risk being self-centred. To orient myself better to God, I start by celebrating Him and His gifts.

3rd stage: **Give thanks to God** (or acknowledge His gifts and thank Him)

Look at everything that I can thank God for in what I have lived through, and express it to Him.

- I may do this by letting the film of my day *unroll* in my mind, recognizing God's gifts or how He was at work in me for the Kingdom.
- Or by letting *rise in me* all that has given joy, gratitude, peace... and thanking God who is the source of all. Do not be afraid of being "simplistic" or having "naive" reasons for thanking God, because giving thanks opens the way for thanksgiving.
- Or in looking *more closely* at one aspect, a moment or an episode lived: anything that speaks to me of God, of His love, or the coming of the Kingdom, or the Gospel. Perhaps I will be able to find

comparisons with what Jesus or the people of God have lived through: being set on their feet again, reconciliations, cures...

- Or by remembering things that I have witnessed, including *world* events. I will look for the presence of God there, how this touched me, and what course of action it called me to.

4th stage: strengthened by this review, become open to the future.

I *entrust* the day of tomorrow to the Lord, and *ask for His grace*. Now that I am more aware of God's love and presence in my life, I might see *some aspect* that I should work on tomorrow. I *decide on it and ask* God for His help.

Conclude with an Our Father or another prayer.

Attention

This time of thanksgiving in the review is essential. It is only this fundamental attitude that allows me to reread accurately the progress and content of my life. It is advisable, then, to stay with it, to spend weeks, even months, in developing this turning to God, to His covenant and *discovering how He has remained faithful*.

This time of thanksgiving *does not mean* always being in a state of praise or joy. The act of thanksgiving is returning to God, acknowledging His gifts; as the Son did. This can be accomplished even in difficult situations.

If I am *agitated, tired or confused* when I am doing my review, I can still come into God's presence just as I am, with all my woes, and try simply to turn away from myself and put all my troubles before Him again. Entrust to Him what troubles me; and repeat to myself how He is love, peace, faithfulness.

(B) - How to reach the Stage of Conversion through the Daily Review

After having gone through the ³ previous stages... for a few minutes...

4th stage: I examine the way I have lived the covenant.

Once I have rediscovered God present, loving, discreet, merciful, humble, authentic, from whom come all the joys of the day as well as all gifts, then I look at *what I have done*: actions, thoughts, words... systematically or more flexibly, according to my needs.

In the light of God's gift
I look at my reactions (from me to You)
I let Him get rid of my transgressions
I entrust myself to God's mercy

When I review my day "holding onto God's hand", it is easier for me to discover His gifts and His presence there. I also perceive more clearly my infidelities:

- either by the *gap* between what I believe the Lord to be (loving, just, true...), and my attitude in such and such a circumstance (unloving, unjust, untruth, etc...),
- by my inner *confusion*: when I see His faithfulness and how much He has given me, I feel all the more abhorrence, the non-sense of my sin, and of a particular attitude today.
- by a *different way* of looking at things later on: for example, my behaviour seemed justified this morning, but this evening, before God, I see some self-centredness or a lack of respect for someone else...
- by the *feelings* of regret or sadness, or of having a closed mind right now.

There is room in God's heart for all these omissions and sins. *I ask His pardon and entrust myself to His mercy.* The Spirit has prevailed over struggles, lies, betrayals; Jesus knew how to revive everything that was withered and dying. My day is ended: I cannot live it over again. If I have taken the time *now* to conform myself in faith to the true dimensions of God's heart, to His loving presence and His gifts, the awareness of my sinfulness will be trusting and serene.

5th stage: **finish** by asking for help on a specific point where I need conversion, then an *Our Father*...

(C) - To go further in Discernment

Three conditions are necessary:

- Being more *oriented toward God* than myself so as to look at the film of my day *without* prior intellectual or emotional *judgment*. Now it is the relationship with the Lord that matters: a relationship of love and union, a prayer.
- Being "tuned in" to God, thus having a positive image of Him, and being more *inclined toward the act of thanksgiving* than to psychological guilt.
- Once the heart to heart relationship begins, *I try to "feel" what the memory of the day's events triggers off in my heart now that I am face to face with God. These feelings may be very different from those I felt during the day.*

*I am present to God Who has renewed,
in me and in this world today, the history of my salvation.*

*I am present to Christ living
and working through His Spirit.*

1st stage: welcome

God's gifts, His favours (see above). Experiences, encounters, happenings, the reality that surrounds me, from which I have received much, or anything that helps me see more clearly that my whole life is a gift from God.

2nd stage: ask

for enlightenment from the Spirit so that I may see where I have followed His graces today or where I have gone astray.

3rd stage: record

Remembering what I have experienced (seen, heard, done, thought) today, I become attentive to the *spiritual impulses*, to the feelings of my heart now, in the presence of the Lord:

- ***What impulses (feelings) am I aware of now?***
 - Those I experienced - on waking, this morning, this afternoon; in my relationships with others; in my relationship with the Lord.
 - Can I discern *where they come from* (what caused them)?

where do they lead me? (praise, sadness, turning in on myself).

- ***How did I respond?***

- What was their influence on my thoughts, my words, my actions, my plans? Did I control them?

4th stage: discern

What frame of mind was I in?

- Were the *impulses* more in the sense of *consolation*: peace, tranquil joy, praise, dynamism, gratitude: sign of a certain *harmony* with the Spirit of God. If so, I can thank the Lord for letting me be shaped by the Gospel.

- Or were the impulses more in the sense of *desolation*: confusion, anger, discontent, sadness, isolation (that prevents my giving thanks, perhaps), etc... A sign that I am not (or was not) in harmony with the Spirit of God, that there is some *lack of unity* between my attitude and God, perhaps an inordinate affection, a bit of appropriation or denial of life, of others...? Speak to God of this and entrust it to His mercy.

- If I my *feelings are unclear*; if I am confused because of a difficult situation, or of a choice to make, or when in pain, I place myself in the heart of the Father, and "*unwrap*" a bit of what I feel. Put names to these multiple feelings and accept, in truth, what they reveal: ties, fears, violence... *Talk* to the Lord about them and entrust them to Him.

5th stage: decide for Tomorrow.

Starting from this acknowledgment of God's gifts, or of sinfulness thus revealed, *how do I go on?* What steps do I take tomorrow, what vigilance, what attitude, or what approach?

I choose one small, real point for tomorrow, through which I will live more in union with the Lord. Tell the Lord about it and *ask for His help*.

Three Methods of Praying



Ignatius proposes three simple methods of praying, accessible to all, useful at different times either in preparing for prayer or the examen. These methods unify prayer and daily life, and promote an intimate union with the Lord which is firmly rooted in our human reality.

Here they are, brought up to date a little. It is up to each of us to practice them and to discover what to do to become more open to the Spirit of God.

For each of the 3 methods:

- Prepare yourself first of all for the encounter with God: calmness, suitable physical position.
- Make the preparatory prayer and ask for grace.
- Then begin the exercise based on *a framework* and *a method*.

1st Method:

On a Series of Points

Framework: a list or a series

Choose a series, for example (Ignatius' propositions): the 10 commandments, the 7 capital sins, or the 7 virtues, the 3 powers of the soul (will, memory, understanding), the 5 senses. Everyone is free to make up their own lists: why not the 8 Beatitudes, the 3 theological virtues (faith, hope and love), the 3 or 5 members of my family, the 7 colleagues at work, etc...

Method: on each element of the list, question myself, pray, conclude.

- *I question myself:* for example, how have I experienced this point today...
- *Pray:* what can I *give thanks* for on this point? What do I need to *ask pardon* for? How can I make progress *tomorrow*?
- *Conclude* by a short prayer: the Our Father or Hail Mary, or other prayer. Go on to the following point.

Example: ***Praying on the 5 senses***

① ***Sight***

- What have I seen with my eyes today? How have I looked at others, the world, myself?
- What have I seen to give thanks for, or to wonder at?
- What did I shut my eyes to, whom or what did I refuse to see? Ask pardon.
- How will I see tomorrow, whom, and with what aim?
- Short vocal prayer, then go on to the next point.

② ***Hearing***

- How have I listened, and what have I understood today?
- What have I heard to give thanks for? What have I understood, or refused to understand?
- What have I shut my ears to, or what will I open them to tomorrow?

Example: ***Praying on the 3 or 5 persons in my family, in my office, in my place of mission, those with whom (or against whom!) I strive.***

For each one, ask myself:

- What can I give thanks for with regard to this person? (in faith, if my feelings are the opposite).

- What do I need to ask pardon for in this relationship? What should I ask of the Lord for myself in relation to this person and for her/him?
- How do I continue the relationship in the days to come?
- Short concluding prayer, then go on to the next person.

Example: *Praying on my body*

My hands:

- What have I done with my hands today: built, welcomed, hugged, touched...?
- Give thanks, ask for pardon, decide for tomorrow on something.

My feet:

- Whom did I go toward today? Who came to meet me? From whom did I turn away?
- Whose footsteps did I follow? Did I have my feet on the ground?

My head:

- What was I thinking of? Was I preoccupied? What or whom did I not think of enough? Do I live only in my head? What have I created, devised?

On each point you can also: contemplate or imagine *Jesus or Mary*; how did they look at people? To whom did they listen and how? What did they do with their hands? How did they live each of these points, this beatitude, this commandment?...

Going back to the Gospel in this way throws light on my life and helps me orient it or discover it wholly as prayer and the place of my relationship with God.

Example: Praying about the 5 continents!

This gives me the opportunity to pray about the world as it is in reality, to have a more universal prayer, but on condition that I am always *personally involved*. Start from what I know of actual events in a particular country (or from someone I know there): What do I give thanks for, what do I ask pardon for (for them, but also for myself in regard to them), what conversion do I make in my life, by what specific step or concrete gesture, even if it is only a small one?

2nd Method:

Contemplate The Meaning Of The Words

Framework: A prayer, biblical text or psalm known by heart.

Method: Contemplate the meaning of each of the words.

- I choose a prayer I know well, for example: Our Father, Hail Mary, the Creed, Anima Christi... This could be the chance to memorize a psalm, a short passage from the Bible, some words of St Paul, part of the Eucharistic prayer, so as to pray it better.
- I choose *the most helpful attitude according to where I am, the place and the time of praying*: kneeling, sitting, walking about, the eyes closed or fixing our gaze on one point, the attention held or lightly floating *accordingly as one feels better disposed or finds greater devotion* (Sp.Ex.252).
- I say *the first word or phrase and stay with it as long as meanings, comparisons, relish, and consolations connected with it are found* (Sp.Ex.252). For example: "Our Father"... consider this word "Father"... "Our"...; dwell on these words, knead them as one kneads dough, observe the unexpected, the hope, or the mystery, or what they reveal about God, myself, us. If these two words are rich in meaning, do not be anxious to move on, even if they takes up the whole period of prayer. If not, go on to the next word.
- *At the end of the time planned*, I conclude by saying aloud the prayer chosen, turning toward the one to whom it is addressed, and

expressing, (this time in my own words), the grace or the needs that seem important to me.

- *The next time*, I will recite the first words which I have previously prayed over and then contemplate the meaning of the word or words following them using this same method.

3rd Method:

On Rhythmic Breathing

Framework: A prayer known by heart

Method: Praying to the rhythm of my breathing

- *Choose a prayer* usually recited by heart: Our Father, Hail Mary, or other. The prayer of the Eastern monks is also very suitable: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a poor sinner".
- *I calm myself* (body, mind, breathing) and turn my mind and my will toward God in a short preparatory prayer.
- *I recite* the chosen prayer *mentally, very slowly, to the rhythm of my breathing*: at each exhalation, I pronounce, or interiorly "slip in", one word or a few words.
- Or, in the brief silence following and accompanying the *inhalation*, I keep my mind and my heart centered *on the meaning* of the word I have just said, or *on the person* I am addressing (the Father, Mary, the Son...), or *I let the feelings* aroused by this word *ascend to God*: admiration, love, my own smallness...
- I then conclude the prayer time.

This method of praying encourages concentration and recollection, especially during the times when I have difficulty in meditating or contemplating a text because I am upset or tired. It can also be used when I am travelling, on foot, or on public transport.

If prayer truly becomes my soul's respiration, my daily life will benefit from this vital oxygen.

In Conclusion

With Ignatius' Freedom Find Your Own Way Of Praying



Means to an end

These guidelines for praying according to the school of Ignatius are far from being iron cast moulds which one must fit in perfectly at any price, as if we had at last gained the spiritual jewel that will enable us to find God like a fish on a hook. As each person discovers through experience, these means have one end in view; to transform from within our way of living. They mark out *a sure path* to a relationship with the Incarnate God, taking into account what men and women are, and also the permanent features, the steps and the pitfalls in prayer and in the spiritual journey. *Linked to the dynamics of growth*, experienced through the Spiritual Exercises, these Ignatian methods of praying help us *"to seek and find God in all things*, by drawing us more closely to Christ and freeing us from all disordered attachments.

From the outside to the inside

The way these frameworks of prayer in the spiritual evolution of each person are used, could be compared to the role of the skeleton in animal evolution. Every mollusk (pardon the unflattering comparison!) has only a soft body and needs an external shell for protection so that it can eat without being eaten or carried away by the waves. With the help of evolution, the external restraint becomes replaced by an internal vertebral column which allows much greater freedom of movement. In the same way, each method of praying is necessary in order to acquire suppleness and creativity, development and autonomy.

Liberating means to be internalized

Once the "*skeleton*" is in place (and this takes time!), each one may *personalize* their prayer, but without forgetting certain unchangeable facts of the faith and the spiritual experience. When you have practised your scales, when you have savoured inwardly the message brought by the School of Ignatian Spirituality, then you may *use and update it* without worrying.

As an illustration, here is a proposal for praying on your life and finding God at work there. It has allowed some people to pray even when their hearts were not in it; so, why not offer it to anyone who would like to try it? It can be a variant of the review. It can offer an inner, intimate relationship with the Lord about my life. It can help me to perceive from within how God is present in all aspects of my being.

Prayer of the heart to find God present in my life

① I make myself present to the Lord; if that is too difficult, I recollect myself, and such as I am, descend within me.

② I choose quietly one of the following dimensions of my life: love/friendship, joys, sufferings, work, relationships...(for example, one that is most on my mind, or the most comforting at the moment...)

I ask the Lord for the grace of having Him with me in this part of my life and recognizing Him at work within me.

③ I recall the people and events concerned with this part of my life, allow myself to be touched and moved by what I feel now that I am more aware of them. For example, I *go back to the situations*: where I love, or am loved, or feel unloved, etc... where I am suffering, where I see others suffering, etc... where there is work, labour, activity in my life, etc...

④ With all this and from this, I turn to God and let Him come to me, offering this aspect of my life to His gaze, His love. I allow God to clarify this aspect of my life. I savour how much He knows and loves me, at the very heart of what I experience; observing how He works

there, where He is present or gives something of Himself to me... observing how this personal point unites me with others, with the world, with God the Creator, the Saviour...

I stay with this "to and fro" movement between God and this part of my life as long as I experience sáavour, comfort, peace, enlightenment...

⑤ From what I have experienced, I answer the Lord and offer myself to Him, expressing something of what I felt or understood, giving thanks, or asking for enlightenment, strength or forgiveness.

I conclude with an *Our Father* or another short prayer.

Afterwards I can select another aspect of my life, to find out how God is at work there.

The Second Part

Exercises For Praying



Recapitulation of the Method of Preparation for Prayer

① Preparation of the prayer

- Choose a text, a place, some points or a prayer of repetition (points already prayed on)

② The beginning of the prayer: come into God's presence

- Preludes: *Preparatory prayer*
Imagine the place
Ask for the grace

③ The substance of the prayer

- *Meditate* a text (using memory, will and understanding), trying to *understand and savour it interiorly*.
- Or *contemplate* a scene (visualize the people, listen to what they are saying, look at what they are doing, let it sink in and draw profit from it). (Apply the senses in contemplating the scene: feeling, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching interiorly).

④ The end of the prayer

- I Talk to the Lord about what I discovered during the prayer (colloquy).
- End with a vocal prayer (Our Father, for example).
- Keep to the set time.

⑤ After the prayer

- *Review* what went on: regarding what aspect? how?

Elijah on the Way to Horeb

(1 K 19:1-16)



Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."

³ Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. ⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, o Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again.

⁷ The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."

⁸ He got up, and ate and drank;

then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. ⁹ At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

¹¹ He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance



of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

¹⁵ Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place."

I turn to God, just as I am (invigorated or depressed, happy or sad...) Ask the Lord that all my actions during prayer be oriented (journeying) towards Him. Then, enter into the biblical scene through the image that seizes my imagination: in the desert or on the mountain.

Visualize the place.

1st image: the desert, Elijah's way but also God's way (vv.1-8)

Imagine the desert (nothing, dried ground, a few gorse bushes), then what this symbolizes for me today (silence, loneliness, tiredness, dryness, fears, thirst, emptiness, the unknown, death..?). An opportunity also for a personal encounter with God. Call to mind my desert experiences..

Look at Elijah's behaviour: he walks, he stops, lies down, sets off again for Horeb. What are the similarities with my life?

Consider Elijah's feelings: feelings of failure, desire to give up, escape... What deeper longing do these reveal? What quest?

Pay attention to Elijah's words and God's words; words of death and of life. *"I have had enough. Take my life... Get up and eat."* If need be, add my protest to Elijah's: thus it becomes prayer. Consider God's words of comfort. Recall to mind the nourishment, God's angels who have helped me cross the deserts of my history, and give thanks.

2nd image: Beyond the desert, an intimate encounter with God (vv 9-14)

Imagine the crevice of the rock to which Elijah retires and endures *his night*. (Do not be afraid of these symbols)

Let **the words of the text** resound as if they were addressed to me, personally, or as if I had spoken them:

What are you doing here? The word of God that reaches Elijah in the hidden retreat: what are you searching for? What are you frightened of? Elijah tells his story, his desires, his fears. Do the same.

Go out! The piercing word of God; hearing it dislodges me. From what retreat, fears, seclusion, images does it want to free me?

The rustling noise of a held breath, the sound of a delicate silence, an imperceptible breath: this is how God allows Himself to be known at the end of the desert. Gone are the images of the powerful wind, of fire and earthquake, images of a God Who would come to upset everything here and now. There is nothing more to be seen. An absence and an intimacy: Has Elijah sharpened his hearing? Let the images of God that I have known and desired surface; and offer myself, like Elijah, to God Who passes silently through my history.

Elijah... went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Available and defenceless, Elijah in his turn surrenders to this presence, where each one speaks. The same question, the same answer?

3rd image: The fruit of the encounter with God: "Go... and anoint"
(vv 15-16)

Look at Elijah receiving his mission and note his feelings.

Go back by the same way to the desert... The same path, but in a different way? Express to the Lord what that evokes for me.

You are to anoint... Elisha... as prophet to succeed you. Does this not answer Elijah's prayer and his complaint, while safeguarding his life and God's plan for His people?

Hear anew the mission given to me today as I go on my way, whatever it is, even if it passes through the desert, and express my trust in a God Who will fulfil what He promises and will remain faithful. Or express what arises from this meditation.

Psalm 139 (138)



O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and
settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and
your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts,
O God! How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ I try to count them: they are more than the sand;
I come to the end; I am still with you.

¹⁹ O that you would kill the wicked, O God, and
that the bloodthirsty would depart from me.

²⁰ those who speak of you maliciously, and
lift themselves up against you for evil!

²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

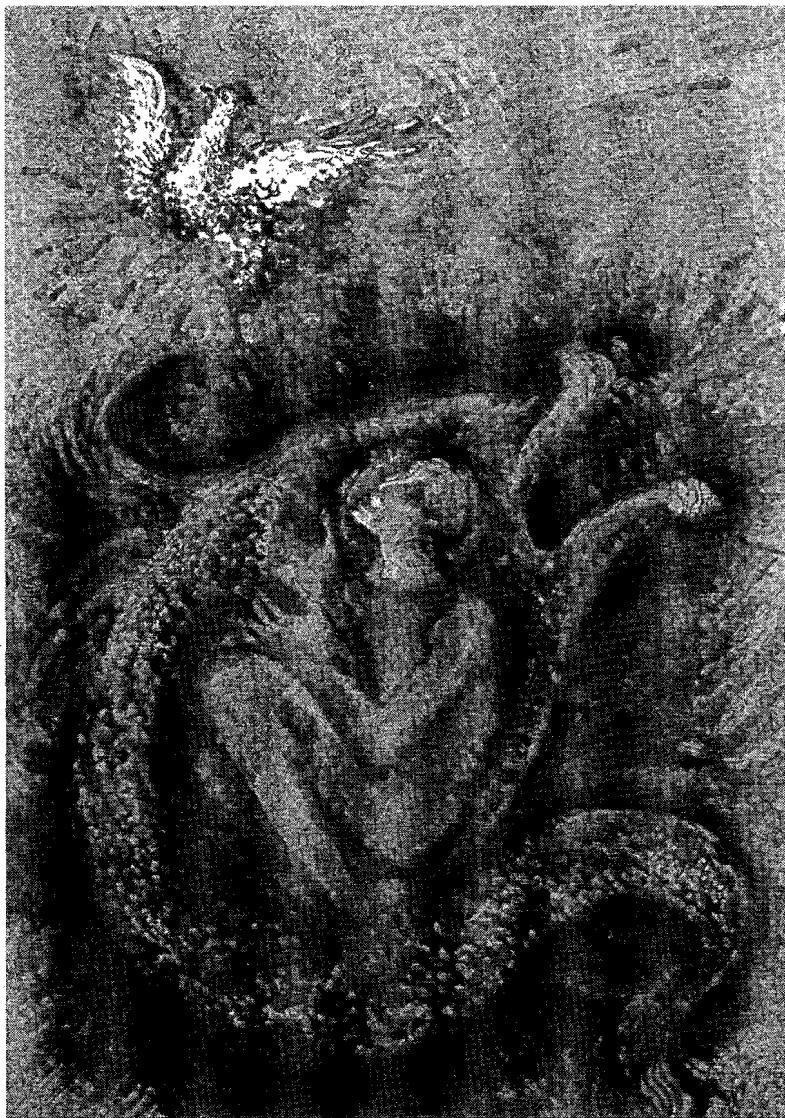
²² I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any wicked way in me, and
lead me in the way everlasting.

Attention

This psalm expresses the fundamental attitude of the creature before the Creator. It is a psalm of trust (not of fear) in a God who wants only my good and watches over me all the days of my life, as a unique being at the heart of all creation. It is the psalm of a creature who, in these words plays hide-and-seek with God, sure that God will find and protect him or her wherever life's story leads them.



Varied methods for praying it

- In order to make this authentic and loving relationship our own, ***read over and over again*** this psalm, even learning some of the stanzas by heart, so that these human words become those of my own experience.

- If ***my history makes access to this psalm difficult for me***, because my mental pictures of God, of myself or of my parents have been distorted, it may be possible, after a particular stanza, *to express to the Lord what I cannot bear in these words*, or *ask for the grace to be able to say them some day in total truth and trust*, or replace the difficult words with my own. It may also be a help *to imagine them being prayed by Jesus or Mary themselves*.

- If these words bring sweetness and trust, the first verses can help, ***at the beginning of the day or of prayer***, in bringing about simplicity, offering, respect or love toward the Creator. "*You, Lord, You know me and you love me just as I am, You are always with me, even in my darkness*".

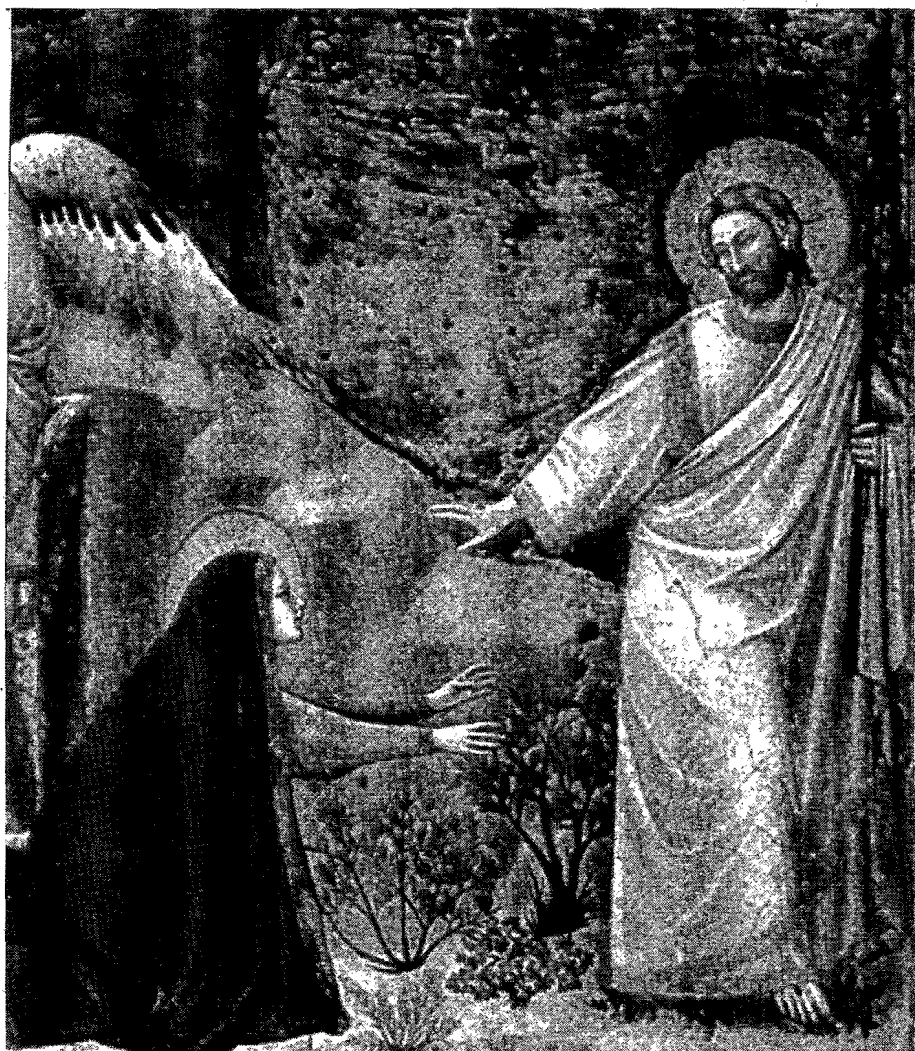
- I can also turn it into a ***personal dialogue*** with the Lord, remembering His presence in my history or in today's world.

- I can also ***stay with the point that touches me and meditate on it***. Here are some suggestions; feel free to make them personal or to find your own way of praying:

vv 1-6: ***God, You know me from A to Z. Nothing can separate You from me nor me from You***

- "*All my ways are familiar to You*"... The God I am seeking is not far from me, is more intimate to me than myself, is present in the simplest events of my day, in my human desires, in all the physical and mental attributes of my being: I rest on that, for I have no need to be other than what I am to be united with God. Consider my daily life inhabited and loved by God.

- "*You hold me close, You put Your hand on me*". How do I imagine the hand of God? Whose hand would I like to feel on me? Tell the Lord about it. Think of Jesus' hands in a scene from the Gospel. In response, how do I put my hand on others, on things?



vv 7-18: *In the infinite as well as in the tiniest part of my being, You are with me.*

- The sky, the sea, the earth, the highest, the lowest, the furthest in the past, the furthest in the future: seek everything that recalls the Creation story (Gn) in this psalm and taste all of God's love at the heart of this creation for me, and not against me.

- *It was You who created my inmost self, and put me together in my mother's womb, formed, knitted me together... even my bones, my thoughts, my dreams. Here I am still with you.* As Isaiah says: *for had you hated anything, you would not have formed it* (Is 11:25)

- In spite of all my resistance, I shall try to receive all that I am from the One who created me out of love, that I may have life to the full, just as I am. Dare to say, in the light of the way God sees me, (like Mary): *for all these mysteries I thank you: for the wonder of myself... true marvel that I am!* Otherwise seek all the reasons for praise that God may find in me.

vv 19-24: *I must fight to stay in this creative love*

- The more I discover the creative and loving presence of God, the more I want it to be absolute, and the more I become aware also of the struggle I have to take up against all that would destroy it.

- *Do I not hate those who hate you?* To be linked in love with God is to confront the same adversity He does: the stake of life and death. But the enemies are also within me: in what form? I recognize them, am disgusted by them, that I may be converted. May I not be one of those who want to serve two masters! What are my idols still, my false gods?

vv 23-24: *My one true desire*

- Come, Lord, examine my heart and put order into it, *make sure I do not follow pernicious ways, and guide me in the way that is everlasting.*

- End by expressing in words or gestures my "yes" to this gift of life, just as it is, and make an offering of my life and all that I am, confidently, in the ever-faithful presence of God.

Moses at the Burning Bush

(Ex 3: 1-15)

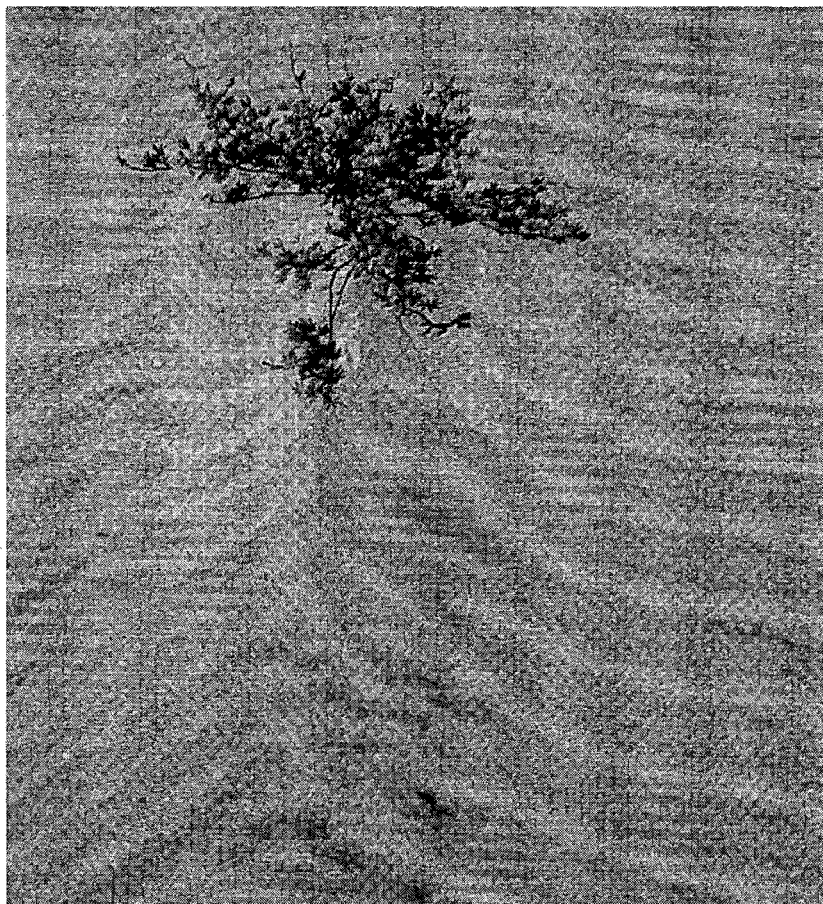


¹Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."

⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when



you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

¹³ But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He

said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Become present to God who is the completely Other, but who nonetheless calls me by name.

Imagine the place: the mountain on the far side of the desert, the silence, the vegetation, the bush...

Express my desire to the Lord: based on what the text suggests, ask for the grace: for example, to put myself honestly in the right place before Him, hear him express His care for humanity.

1st method, vv 1-6: *An encounter that leaves one barefoot!*

Take the time to consider the following method by imagining Moses first of all, then letting myself be drawn and called as he was. Consider what this reveals about God and about our human history.

[On] the far side of the wilderness [he] came to the mountain of God...There was the bush blazing, but it was not being burnt up. The fire of a God who reveals Himself without destroying, who astonishes and enkindles the desire to seek Him more. Moses wants to see and understand, therefore, he goes out of his way to look more closely. But God wants to enter into a relationship with this man, and calls him by his name: "Moses"!

Moses, *available, strips off his sandals*: what else does he strip himself of? Enter into his interior attitude, or even his bodily one.

The place on which you stand is holy ground: this earth (ours) is at one and the same time simply human and the place where God reveals Himself and is at work.

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob: a God who speaks to all the generations, who pervades human history. The God, who speaks to Moses in this text, is the same one who speaks to me today, here and now. Become aware of this.

I draw profit from what I have considered, reflected on, seen in these first images. Share with the Lord what I have felt, my questions, my insights.

2nd method, vv 7-12: *A personal encounter, but for the salvation of a whole people*

Starting with one phrase or another, stop to:

- become aware of God's nearness to His people's sufferings,
- realize how much God is involved in our history,
- hear, once more, the call to cooperate in His work of salvation, or find God's presence in what I see and do.
- Express all this to the Lord, anything that comes up.

Try to reflect more deeply on who God is through what He says

And Yahweh said, "I have seen the miserable state of my people... I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes. I am well aware of their sufferings. This is a God who is not an abstract concept but is near, who shares our sufferings, suffers because of our slavery.

For a moment follow His gaze on all those people who today are crying out, distressed, wretched, imprisoned, oppressed. Contemplate "God's heart" concerning them.

I mean to deliver them... and bring them up ... to a land where milk and honey flow. In the light of Christ the Saviour (the new Moses), who came down to our waters of death and hell to bring us up and lead us into His life, consider how God is so involved in our history that He comes down to set us free.

Hear, once more, this sending and this promise of God

I send you... I will be with you! The encounter with God, on the mountain (in prayer), makes us espouse His project for His people. God enters into partnership with Moses, and with each of us, to bring about this work of liberation. Consider also how this mission once given comes to graft itself onto Moses' personality and his growing awareness of it (preceding chapters).

The sign that it is really I who speaks to you here? The authenticity of the encounter with Me will be verified by the fruit it bears for the world in your daily life. For, I will be present in your service to your brothers and sisters. Review my activities enlightened by this presence.

3rd method, vv 13-15: *Even in His nearness, God remains Mystery*

What is your Name? asks Moses. Together with him, let this question rise from the heart of our prayer, this expectation of a more intimate relationship. Those who find it difficult to experience silence, the unknown, the remoteness of God can express it to Him and receive this revelation from Him:

I am who I am or I am who I will be or I am: I AM. God does not limit Himself to a human name nor to a felt experience; His mystery eludes us at the very moment He shows Himself.

How do I accept the fact that I cannot manipulate God? I AM...*This is my name for all time.* The experience of God, who is **present** to all generations, past or future, is lived in the present. The only place where I can know God is in my history, and the history of all peoples, because He comes down into it.

End by **thanking God** for revealing Himself personally, calling me by my name and coming to live in our history.

Deuteronomy

(8:7-20)



⁷ For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹ a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. ¹⁰ You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.

¹¹ Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today.

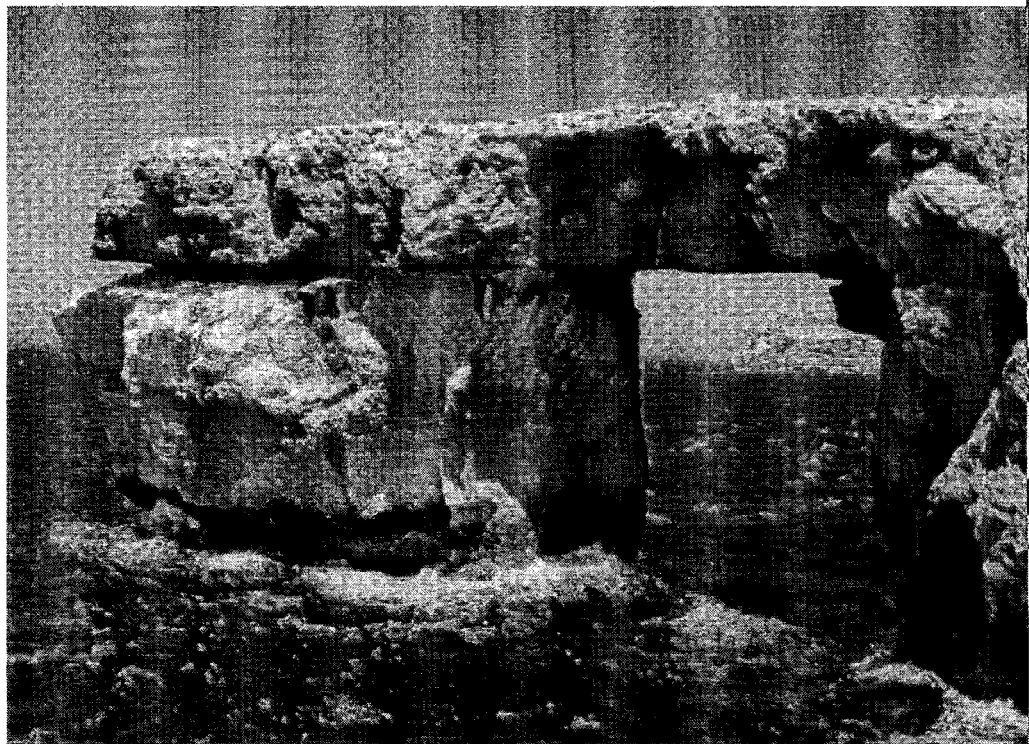
¹² When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of

Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions.

He made water flow for you from flint rock, ¹⁶ and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. ¹⁷ Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth."

¹⁸ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

¹⁹ If you do forget the Lord your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. ²⁰ Like the nations that the Lord is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.



After the liberation from slavery in Egypt and the crossing of the desert, the people are on the point of finally entering the Promised Land. This speech, just before the crossing of the Jordan, reminds the people how to accept the gifts received in order that this Land remain a place and a sign of the Covenant and the fulfilment of God's promise.

Remember again that I am in the presence of God, who gives me everything, express my desire to live completely oriented towards Him.

Imagine the place, either this fertile country beyond the Jordan, promised by God, or my own "country" with all the goods that make up my life: home, riches of all kinds, everything I have at my service...

Ask for the grace to accept them afresh from the Lord, and, in this way, clarify their proper usage.

vv 7-10: ***Contemplate the primary aim of the Lord: the happiness of every individual***

- Listen to these words of Yahweh and visualize the abundance of His gifts, savour this promise and wish of God: *Yahweh your God is bringing you into a prosperous land: streams, springs, bread, minerals for your work; you will want nothing. You will eat and be filled in this prosperous land he has given you.*

- Listen to and savour this promise with all the people; take a moment to look at all the riches of the earth, made for all men and women, signs that God is faithful to His promise, and an opportunity to *glorify God and give Him thanks.*

- Offer no resistance to any awareness, prayer, desire, joy, this text might evoke.

vv 11-18: ***Contemplate all the gifts I have received and the way I relate to them***

① ***The gifts received***

When you have eaten and had all you want, when you have built fine houses to live in, when you have seen your flocks and herds increase, your silver and gold abound... (your vital material wealth)

- Look at these people spoilt by the promise of God, and make an inventory of all that I have been given, without preconceptions, giving thanks for all; not only for the material things, but also for my successes, my responsibilities, everything in my history that has led me to where I am, that I have escaped from or that I have been through: *my burning deserts and the unknown manna.*

- Let God know what this panorama or this remembering prompts in me.

② ***The way of living all these things***

Take care you do not forget Yahweh your God, neglecting his commandments...[and forgetting what He saved you from, by

saying] My own strength and the might of my hand won this power for me. or by following other gods.

- Look at this prosperous people who will yet forget that Yahweh, is the source of the good they have received. They will neglect the law of the Covenant, keep their goods for themselves, follow other gods: so many ways of misusing God's gift and leaving the Promised Land.
- Consider also what I have done, what I build with the strength of my arm, the sweat of my brow: "*Remember Yahweh your God: it was he who gave you this strength,*" it is God who builds and maintains His Covenant.
- In the light of this gift of God, discover where I live more in the covenant and thanksgiving, and where I have a tendency to keep things, people, or successes for myself, where I idolize them or make my own laws. What do I need to accept afresh from God?

vv 19-20: *In the way of using these gifts rests the stake for Life and Happiness*

Be sure that if you forget Yahweh your God, if you follow other gods, if you serve them and bow down before them... you will most certainly perish like the nations [have perished] for not having listened to the voice of Yahweh your God.

- Try to accept and understand these words, not as the threatening decrees of God, but as the revelation of who we really are, and the deadly effects of losing the relationship with the Giver in the very use of His gifts.

Consider, perhaps through my own experience, how much a relationship to a certain thing, when cut off from God, leads only to confusion, sadness, and ruin.

- To *listen to the voice of the Lord*, is to follow it: to put myself "below", in obedient listening. This voice is to be listened to by accepting things as *signs*, as getting in touch; not as taking the gift and forgetting the One who offers it and what He wants *to say* in offering it. It is a creative Word that gives life, and gifts of life that speak of God. It is up to me to remain in the "word," that is, in a Covenant relationship with the Lord. Whence come true happiness and life!

Meditate the Principle and Foundation of the Exercises of St Ignatius



Human being are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord,¹⁵ and by means of this to save their souls.¹⁶ The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings, to help them in working toward the end for which they are created.

From this it follows that I should use these things to the extent that they help me toward my end, and rid myself of them to the extent that they hinder me.

To do this, I must make myself indifferent¹⁷ to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to my freedom of will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on my own part I ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters.

I ought to desire and elect only the thing which is more conducive to the end for which I am created.¹⁸

(Spiritual Exercises n° 23)

Take time to make your own the following proposals. It is not enough just to read them; you need to practise them to experience them fully.

I. Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God, and by this means to save their souls.

• **Remember** that I do not give myself life. I receive it from God through love. He gives me the gift of myself, free to exist, in His image, in relationship with Him and all of creation. (Gn 1)

- **Reflect** on this indelible mark of a being created by God, and its consequences. Just as a fish is made to live in water, I can find my whole fulfilment as a human being, and the perfect health of my soul, only by living according to God's will. At the deepest level (even unconscious), my desire is God's desire.

What images of God does this reality of faith release in me? What reactions with regard to my life: joy, fear, resistance, a call...?

Consider how much my life owes to God and is a response to His love which always comes first. It is God, first of all, who praises, reverences, and serves us by creating us. (cf Jesus in the Gospel). Ponder the phrase of Irenaeus: "*The glory of God is the human being truly alive*". God takes pleasure in my happiness. To be truly myself: that is what it means *to praise, reverence and serve God*

These three attitudes form one to express *the right relationship of a created being to the Creator*, a relationship where each one is fully him/herself and in the right place.

What is evoked in me by each of these three verbs: to praise, to reverence, to serve God (experiences, attitudes, dreams, constraints)?

- **Raise my heart** to the Creator, expressing to Him what is stirring in me at the end of this meditation: reluctance, desire to comply with my human vocation, the things I understand well or badly about this reality of faith. I turn to God more for what He is than for what He gives me. I desire to serve Him as child, friend, companion, out of love.

II. The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings to help them work toward this end.

- **Recall to mind** everything that is "given" for the service of humanity, and in particular that which is given to me: both the human, emotional dimensions, and material things (character, body, abilities, money, work, responsibilities, other people...) *And God saw that it was good* (Gn 1:10).
- **Reflect on this:** all these things are neither good nor bad in themselves; it is the way I relate to them which gives life to or restrains my human vocation. "*...all belongs to you, but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.*" (1 Co 3:23). I can only reach God through created

things. My relationship to God does not take place in my head or only in prayer, but in my relationship with the created world. All is at the service of men and women, and is an opportunity to live through and for God.

- **For an understanding of the heart:** look at the Lord who has given me everything and wants to give me Himself. Then look at how I relate to the things He has entrusted to me: do I act as if they had nothing to do with God, or do I treat them as gifts received? In my history and my daily life, see what brings life, praise and service for God, or what is deadly, imprisoning. Give thanks or confide in God.

III. From this it follows that I should use these things to the extent that they help me toward my end, and rid myself of them to the extent that they hinder me.

- **Remember** that God has created me free, that is, able to choose, to say yes to life. Remember an experience where my freedom was involved, where choosing Good set me free.
- **Reflect.** Look again at the end for which I was created: God, and the fruits of salvation. Consider how it is up to me first of all to make a decision for that and then to take the necessary means. To say yes to what will lead me there, and no to what will lead me astray. Note how I live my affective or professional relationships, how I deal with material good, or a particular commitment. Is there anything that I make an end in itself (success, wealth, knowledge, an emotional relationship, an apostolic mission...)?

How do I choose to live the things I cannot make a choice about (because of being already committed, or forced by circumstances: health, social milieu, etc.)?

- **To move my heart and will to choose.** Acknowledge before the Lord how much this freedom is a part of His image. Express to Him what comes from my heart. For example: ask Him to show me where my affections are disordered and to grant me the grace to free myself from them, to learn to *seek and find God in all things*. Make the decision to commit every part of my life more fully to Him. Perhaps taking the necessary dispositions for making better choices in relation to Him.

In this way I can continue the meditation on the text of the Principle and Foundation of the Exercises.

Cure of the Blind Bartimaeus

(Mk 10:46-52)



They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." ⁵² Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well. Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

After reading the text, I orient myself toward the Lord, who is already on my road. I offer myself to Him as I am today: begging, blind, sitting at the edge of the road, or moving along the road.

Imagine the road leaving Jericho, going in the direction of Jerusalem.

Ask God for what I want and desire. As with Bartimaeus, Christ Himself asks me: *What do you want me to do for you?*

Look at what this text evokes as my desire, and ask the Lord to answer: for example, that He enlighten my darkness and allow me to see His mercy? That He will let me know my sinfulness, my areas of blindness? That I may hear His call and a profound desire to follow Him?

Then stay with the passages that speak the most to me among the following suggestions.

1st scene vv 46-49: *Desires on the road.*

① Contemplate **the people**: look at them, be aware of how they feel.

- **Jesus**: He is leaving Jericho, going up to Jerusalem where all will be fulfilled. He has a name, God saves.

- *A crowd*: nameless people, some disciples. I slip in among one group or the other. Are they all begging for something? Or have they opened their eyes on Jesus? A crowd that moves, walks, follows or surrounds Jesus. A rumour spreads that Jesus is passing:

- *A blind man*, a beggar, on the edge of the road, sitting imprisoned by his infirmity. Imagine his darkness, his dependency, his exclusion. He is called Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus).

Express to the Lord what all of this evokes or calls into question.

② Listen to ***the sound track***:

- Bartimaeus' cry: "*Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me!*" Hear everything he puts into that demand.
- The crowd wants him to keep quiet. Ponder what this tells me about the disciples, the people still on the way, myself among them, the world today.
- *Jesus hears*. With Him, listen once more to all that has gone before.

What cries, what infirmities, what darkness do I express to the Lord *who hears the cry of the poor* (Ps 34). What hopes also?

2nd scene vv 49-51: *Jesus comes to meet the desire of each person*

Still considering the words and gestures.

- *Jesus stops*. Observe how He comes to meet this man in his immobility and in his cry...
- "*Call him here!... Courage... get up; he is calling you!*"

Observe this crowd that, just a moment ago, was trying to keep the blind man quiet. Jesus makes use of the crowd as an intermediary to carry His gaze and words to Bartimaeus. I place myself in this crowd, contemplate this image of Church that we are. Or hear as a personal call: "*Courage, get up, he is calling you!*"

- Contemplate Bartimaeus' gestures and what they express about his "resurrection". ...*throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went* even before he could see.

- Reflect on what that evokes about Christ's call, about how to respond, even without seeing, while still a sinner... Through what intermediaries has this call come to me? To what encounters; to what cries for help does it lead me, to what stripping of myself?

The meeting of two requests.

- Look at Jesus, in front of blind Bartimaeus (in front of me), asking him *"What do you want me to do for you?"* Listen to this question that Jesus addresses to me, His desire, what He begs for in His turn and how this calls forth my own request.

- Listen to Bartimaeus' response, what his cry has become: *"Master, that I may see!"*

- Compare it to our generous attitudes such as *"Jesus, what do You want me to do for You?"* and observe how serving Jesus is, first of all discovering that I am being served by Him. Express my deep request: do I want to be cured, and of what?

3rd scene v 52: *On the same road as Jesus: the road of faith*

"Go, your faith has saved you. And immediately his sight returned and he followed him along the road."

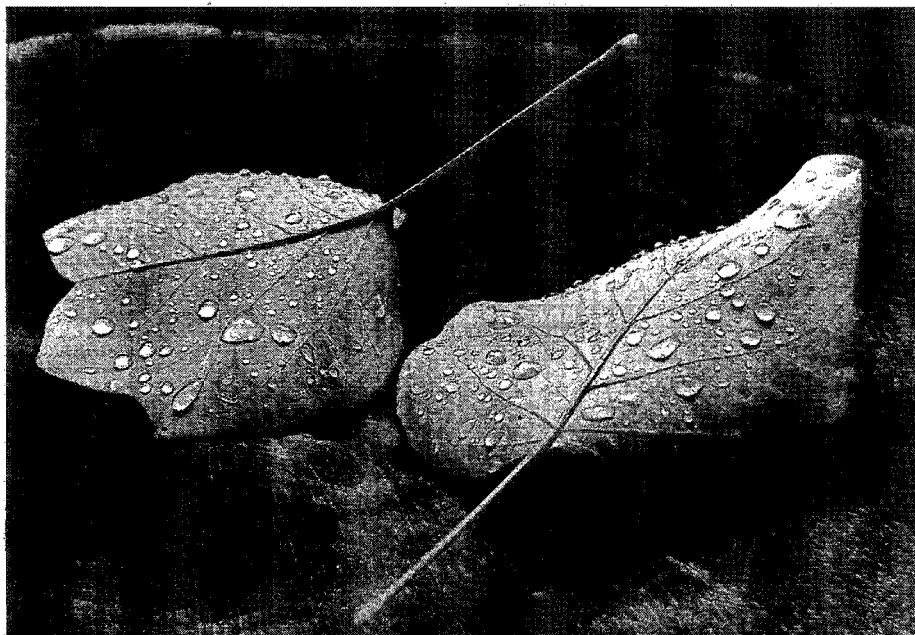
- Accept this word of Jesus, in my turn accept how He sends me and those He sends me to.

- Call to mind Bartimaeus at the beginning of the scene, look at him now that he *sees because he believes*. He follows Jesus with all the others, all those who let themselves be moved and cured by the word of Jesus.

In a heart-to-heart with the Lord, express how this Gospel passage has cast light on my life, on my true desire, on the Church or on Christ. Express once more a petition and, if need be, compare it with my petition for grace at the beginning: is it the same?

The Parable of the Two Sons

(Lk 15: 1-3; 11-13)



¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable:

¹¹ "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said

to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father.

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us

eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.

²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!'

³¹ Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'

I turn myself wholeheartedly to God the Father, source of every gift.

Ask for the grace to recognize the immensity of His merciful love, and in the light of this, take the measure of my sin.

vv 1-3: ***"This man... welcomes sinners and eats with them,"*** complained the Pharisees.

"So he spoke this parable to them".

- Look at the publicans and sinners around Jesus listening to him... like the younger son on his return. The Scribes and Pharisees stand apart like the elder son, complaining about Jesus and the others. In the centre is Jesus who came forth from the Father, image of the Father.
- Prepare to listen to this parable, this mirror of my own behaviour.

vv 11-13:

① ***The younger son***

- Consider his history in his Father's house, *accepting everything* freely as a gift (not as a due or a right or the result of his efforts). Apply this to myself, too.
- Listen to his demand, to his illusions of independence, and to my own.
- See him *go far away, into a life of disorder*: reflect on this "disorderly" use of gifts received, under the guise of more life. What is the outcome of using gifts outside a relationship with the Giver? With my experience of being a sinner, feel him spiralling into *this deterioration, this slavery, this non-sense, this debauchery*. Death at work.
- Look for the first sign of his return to freedom: *Then he came to his senses*, this is already coming back to the Father in as much as he comes back to himself. With him, seek and find again the memory of the true child of God who lives in me.

② ***The elder son***

- What sin is concealed in his apparent fidelity and his awareness of being in the right? Certainly, he is not ***outside the law, but outside love***. In what areas am I respectful of the Law, the Constitutions and the commandments? Is my motivation always love, and for whom?

- Take the time to decipher all the consequences or the forms of his sin: in his relationship with material things (a due? sensual pleasure?); with his Father (a distributor of goods? The chance to flatter his own image?); with others (*your son* and no longer *my brother*, jealousy and envy under cover of making do with little?). Check the places where I feel the same way.

- Look at him *outside* the house, yet shut in, isolated from the feast. Have I experienced that? What steps can I take?

③ ***The father of these two sons***

- In contrast with the two sons, look at and ponder the father's inner attitudes: [he] *divided the property between them... a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly*. Watch him also go out to save the elder son from his deadly behaviour, answering his reproaches with tenderness *My son... all I have is yours*, his appeal to brotherly love, to joy.

- Savour this joy, this impulse to give back to his son all his dignity, his freedom (*a robe, a ring on his finger, sandals, kill the fatted calf, eat and celebrate*).

- Let me be seized by that love, let the Father *embrace* all my history of guilt, and thence, feel the disorder and the true extent of my sinfulness. Discover thus, in this renewed Covenant, how the child that I am *was dead and has come back to life; was lost and is found*. Give thanks with all those who have entered the house of the Father in the joy of forgiveness asked and received.

④ ***Jesus, image of the Father, way of the son and the brother***

- Stay with ***the way Jesus speaks of Him in this parable***. He, image of the Father, has gone out *to search for and save*



those who were lost, to the point of leaving Himself and uniting Himself to us in our death so that we may enter into His life.

• ***Consider this journey God has made to reach us,*** I stop in wonder and weigh this at the foot of the cross: from being the Creator and Giver of every gift, *He became man* in Jesus (image of the true son and the true brother), to the point of sharing our deaths and dying on a cross for me, and for my sins. In this way, going over the history of God, with Christ on the cross, let the echo of my own history that it draws forth from me, come to mind. *What I have done for Christ, what I am doing for Christ, what I will do for Christ.*

Jesus in Nazareth

(Luke 2,39-40; 51-52; Mark 6,3)



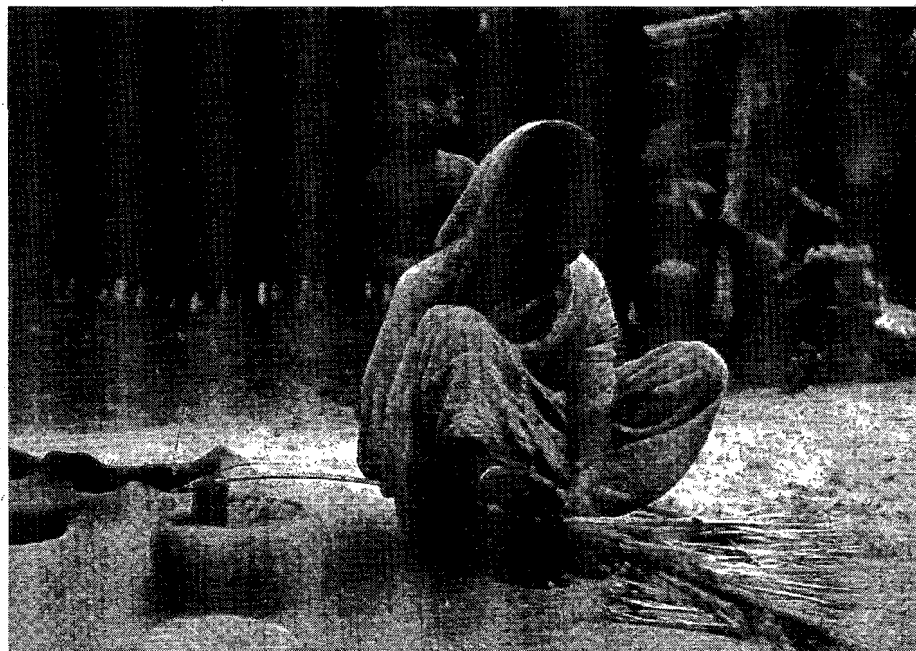
³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother

treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

(Mark 6,3) Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"



Only a few verses of the Gospel speak of the thirty years spent by Jesus in Nazareth, a man among others. And yet, the whole of His public life, His teaching, His knowledge of people, of the Father, of the world, were moulded by this experience and are an expression of it.

To pray:

Beside the coming into the presence of God made man, **the composition of place** will be essential here: a little village of a few hundred inhabitants similar to many others in the Holy Land, houses leaning against or even built in the rocky shapes. There is an escarpment from which they wanted to throw Jesus one day. A place of ordinary daily life, with its relationships of neighbours and cousins, artisans, its synagogue, the spring from which water is drawn. Mary and Joseph's house, the workshop... the religious rhythms, feasts and marriages...

Ask for what I desire as I contemplate Jesus as a man among others

For example: *...ask for an interior knowledge of our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely.* (Sp.Ex.104). Or else, to be able to accept and understand more clearly the importance of my daily life through Jesus the Man.

Then inwardly visualize and contemplate Jesus as a child, growing, learning from His mother and His adoptive father everything that makes a man authentic, independent, dutiful, wise... a typical Jewish education of the time.

1st possibility: See Him in His social surroundings, His environment, His relationships; **follow Him** as He grows.

It could be helpful to see what Jesus' teaching reveals about His attention to and understanding of things simply human. If He speaks about them, it is because He has seen and savoured them, and if He speaks in this way, it is because He considered everything a parable of the growing Kingdom of God: the sheep carried across His shoulders, the vine grower pruning his vine, the leaven that a woman (like His mother) puts in the dough, the neighbour who finds the lost coin, the wheat fields, the birds and lilies of the fields... His cousins whom He will call later on to be His companions...

If it is easy for me, use these images to find the **inner attitude** of Jesus, His way of looking at everything, His nearness, His pleasure in being human, and His relationship with the Father in everything. Abba!

Let this contemplation echo within me; then express what I feel, or what it reveals to me about God, Christ, Mary, or my own life.

2nd possibility:

① Contemplate how Jesus **receives His life** from His parents, and those around Him. Fed, cared for, educated, He adopts the ordinary laws of human life in everything. He receives the Word, and the faith, through His Jewish education. Look at this experience of childhood which He speaks about so often as a Beatitude and a reference to the experience of the Father's Kingdom. Observe Him *allowing Himself to be loved*, and learning from Joseph and Mary to be, humanly, the image of the Father.

② Contemplate also how Jesus lives **the experience of growth**.

- He learns from others; His family, His social and political environment. He learns to talk, to pray the psalms, to find His own place.
- He learns all secular things and His *professional work* as a carpenter, with all the relational and economic implications. What meaning does He give to His work?
- *Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in grace...* Try to see the wholeness He lived in His relationships with others and with the Father. How His way of being Son of the Father grows; how He is able to say, at 12 years of age: *I must be busy with my Father's affairs* and not "the" Father.

See how the whole of Jesus' life at Nazareth is already fully God's salvation at work, God's will fulfilled, and the perfect image of humankind according to the mind of God.

③ Contemplate Jesus in **His submission and obedience**. Submissive and yet so free! See how, from His earliest childhood, *He obeyed* the rules (social, religious, and physiological laws): salvation is being fulfilled already. Look at Him, for thirty years, *being obedient to God's love and favour* for Mary and Joseph, favour that led Him to remain there, among us. Observe that *I must...* be busy with my Father's affairs, rising up within Him; He is already doing this at Nazareth!

End with a colloquy with Christ or the Father or Mary and Joseph. With Jesus of Nazareth, become aware of the whole meaning of the words of the Our Father.

The Sons of Zebedee Make Their Request

(Mk 10:35-45)



³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" ³⁷And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

³⁸But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" ³⁹They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Before praying, read the preceding passage of the Gospel as well.

Imagine the road leading up to Jerusalem.

Like the two sons of Zebedee, **ask** for what I desire: the desire to follow Jesus more faithfully; to hear myself being invited to be with Him and live like Him, right to the end?

① **Contemplate the characters:**

- These two brothers, the ten others, and Jesus walking along the road.
- *James and John*: their affection for Jesus, their feelings, their boldness and their enthusiasm toward Jesus, their Master. Walk

alongside them... and try to feel their deep desire and what they have not yet understood.

- *The ten others*: walking behind, who overhear and are indignant; though they will adopt the same behaviour: (*Who is the greatest?*).

- *Jesus*: walks straight to His Passion. What desire does He feel? Savour His bond of affection with the disciples, His acceptance of the two brothers just as they are.

② **Let the words resound, listen to this dialogue:**

- James and John make their request for grace in this way: "*Master... we want you to do us a favour*". At the point where I am now in following Christ, hear Him ask: "*What is it you want me to do for you?*" and feel my true desire.

Allow us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory! Try to hear all that is positive in their request and everything that is involved in "following Jesus right to His glory". Does this mean taking my own place? Or letting myself be moved by Jesus?

You do not know what you are asking! Can you drink the cup that I must drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I must be baptised?

See how Jesus redeems their request, by going to the fundamental desire which underlies it. *Drinking from the same cup*, being nourished with the same food, immersed in the same water, is that not "being with" Jesus and sharing His life, but in the here and now? There is no kingdom without walking the road leading to it... Being by Jesus' side; let my needs, acceptance or fears come to the surface, and express them to Jesus.

③ **Understand what is at stake in the scene by looking at the attitudes:**

The Zebedee brothers *approach*: *Jesus calls the ten to Him*: an intimacy within which He unfolds the mystery of His way of life.

Take the time to *visualize and experience the meaning of the attitudes* from which the disciples or ordinary people speak, in contrast with Jesus' attitudes.

**According to
our human viewpoint**

Seated (be installed)

Reign

Glory

On your right and on your left

Commander

Making their power felt

*Being the great ones in this
world*

Can you do something, for us?

For us

**According to
God's viewpoint**

Share my life, my journey: *drink
from my cup*

*Communion, intimacy,
relationship, baptism*

Jesus' throne of glory: the cross

*The two thieves on their crosses;
being with Jesus in every situation*

Jesus the Servant

*Serving, giving one's life in
ransom*

The slave of all

Are you able yourselves...?

For all

Together with the disciples, hear again Christ's invitation to share His life, His project and His way of accomplishing it, not according to the world's viewpoint, but by sharing His way of being the servant of all. Express to the Lord everything that this contemplation arouses in me.

First miracle of the loaves

(Mk 6:30-44)



³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

³⁵ When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat."

³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?"

³⁸ And he said to them,

"How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties.

⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all.

⁴² And all ate and were filled; ⁴³ and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Ask for an interior knowledge of Jesus, that I may love and serve Him better.

Set the scene in my imagination: a deserted place with rolling hills, near the lake.

The characters

The apostles returning from mission, they had “done and taught” as Jesus did. Look at them gathered around Jesus after this first experience, notice their feelings. They have come to rest, away from the others.

The crowd arrives before them, on foot. Slip in among them to feel their expectations, their needs...

Jesus: His welcome to the apostles, His awareness of their tiredness. Notice what this reveals about Him. His welcome to the crowd, His gaze on *these sheep without a shepherd*, His compassion and response by speaking to them: *He began to teach them at some length.* Become conscious of that and let it sink in.

Contemplate the scene through the dialogue.

Slip in among the various characters to experience the mystery of Jesus. It is late and the crowd has stayed with Jesus. Contemplate them, as well as the apostles' initiative. Worried, worn out, they venture to approach Jesus to put forward a solution, a “temptation”: *send them away!* Feel what this reaction reveals. Let some human, apostolic or economic situation echo within you.

Contemplate Jesus' reactions and what they reveal about Him, about what He expects from the apostles. *Give them something to eat yourselves! Go and see what you have!* Experience with the apostles what this shift in responsibility means to them, what it changes in them.

Contemplate the gestures.

Observe how Jesus takes the organization in hand and gets the apostles to cooperate.



Observe the apostles making a tally of the picnics: 5 loaves, 2 fish.

Contemplate **Jesus' feelings** through **His actions, the meaning** He gives them: *he puts order* among this people without a shepherd who are no longer separated. He *takes the five loaves...., raises his eyes to heaven and says the blessing; then he breaks the loaves and hands them to his disciples to distribute among the people.*

Contemplate **the disciples** while they distribute the food, what they note and feel. Slip in among them to help. Experience how Jesus thus wants to nourish the whole person, and all human beings.

The crowd: see them sitting down in small groups, on the green grass (Ps 23), becoming one people organised and led by their shepherd. Accept this new manna in the desert with them, see all these nameless women and men becoming satisfied, according to their hunger. Look at all the leftovers: a sign of superabundance and of an ongoing sharing.

The Road to Emmaus

(Lk 24:13-36)



¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he

said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.

¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them,

"What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them

the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.

²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

*B*ecome present to the Lord,
for example to Christ walking by my side on this road.

Ask for the grace I want to receive through this text:

- For example, to recognize the Risen Christ in my life,
- or to pass from sadness to the faith and joy of Easter.

Enter into a contemplation of the text by imagining *this stony path* which *descends* from Jerusalem to Emmaus, two hours on foot; it is late afternoon. At the end of the journey is their house that Jesus enters, and from which they will set out again.

The way of the Scriptures (vv 13-27): *Conversion of Mind and Heart*

Look at the characters.

The two disciples. They had followed Jesus closely. His death makes them sad, disappointed.

Try to enter into their feelings; what are they hoping for? What image of Jesus did they have? Imagine their conversation going round in circles, restricted; being unable to give credence to all the rumours they have heard: "*some women said that angels said to them but...*"

Let any resemblance to them echo in me, a call, an actual grief. If my behaviour has something in common with theirs, look at the cause (what unfulfilled expectations, or images); what statement do I cling to, what words do I not believe in enough, what aspect of Christ do I reject; but also with whom do I walk? Enter into the contemplation of the Risen Christ walking beside them.

Jesus and His way of acting

He overtakes them and travels with them. Enjoy this daily nearness, step by step. Discover His desire and His pedagogy for making them pass from sadness to joyful recognition.

What were you talking about as you were walking along... What events?

See the change that Jesus sets in motion for them, His interest in what they are feeling.

Listen to what they relate: for Jesus and for them the events are the same but the meaning is different. Let this question throw light on what occupies my conversations or worries, or on events in my life.

Draw profit from this while noting what I talk about with the Lord, how I review my life and that of others, what events in my history still need a meaning. What is the Risen Christ inviting me to do about His life and my own?

Jesus and His words. Review everything in the light of His Resurrection.

You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Let us accept these facts. Jesus brings to light the real obstacle to the transforming of our lives by His own: our lack of faith, faith in what He has told us, through the Scriptures, through others, through the Church.

Then, starting with Moses... HE explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that referred to HIM..

That made them understand what was happening to them now. Jesus is the key to the right and definitive reading of the whole of Scripture, and of our lives. He does not explain what affects ME in the Scriptures. But in understanding what happened to HIM, I understand the meaning of what happens to me when I follow Him.

Draw profit from the difference: when I am absorbed with my own life, I see only meaninglessness, but when I open to contemplating Christ's life, I find enlightenment, meaning, strength and joy. How can I let myself be led by this detour where Jesus is taking us? The Gospel is a review that starts with the Resurrection: do I need to base my life more firmly on that.

A Way of Communion (vv 28-31)

Stay with us... Can I make this prayer, this desire, my own? Understanding the Scripture is not enough, the road *continues*. What do I want in my relationship with Christ? Tell Him and see how He answers me.

So He went in to stay with them. Savour this decision of Jesus which affects me also.

He took the bread... Contemplate this action by which He says everything: His life, His sharing, His presence as nourishment, the fulfilment of the Scriptures... Where is He leading us by this action? Join in this intimate meal, in these actions, accept this bread from the hands of the Risen Christ.

And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. The bread once eaten, Christ is neither before nor outside, but within the intimacy of their being. Is not the Spirit in the act of illuminating everything? Compare this with Gn 3:7 "*Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realised that they were naked.*" Has not a new life, a fresh start begun with the Resurrection? Could what was a setback, a death, have been already brought back to life? If the Lord's absence is my present condition I ask myself whether His presence is no longer "beside" me or "before" me, but within me, or in my service to others.

Live The Resurrection:

A Journey Of Review And Mission (vv 32-36)

Look at the transformation which is at work, the fruit that shows how it is through the driving force of the Spirit of the Resurrected Christ that they are acting (inner movements, beginnings, conversion).

Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?

Look at the two disciples reviewing what they have **experienced** (sadness, discouragement, then a burning sensation, enlightenment, joy, energy). They find in this a confirmation of their experience of the Risen Christ who leads them, too, from death to life.

Remember, like them, the "burning", vivifying passages that some event or word of God has provoked in my history; compare these with death filled moments. What change of heart must I make to adhere to the Life-giving Spirit of Christ rather than to the forces of death?



They... returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, "Yes, it is true..." Then they told their story...

Observe how their experience of the Risen Christ turns them around, sends them, places them in the Church, where this is confirmed by the disciples. What light does this throw on my own experience of Jesus Christ?

They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them... At the heart of this sharing of news in the community gathered together, Jesus is present, and communicates Himself. Some of the women had told them what the angels had *said*... and now they in their turn *tell*... Let me also enter this experience of the Risen Christ which is the proclamation of the Good News, of all that He has done for us. How can I become "this stranger burning with Easter" who slips into the journey of others as they go on their way, to help them, too, pass from death to life?

End with a personal prayer to the Risen Christ.

The Appearance on the Shores of Lake Tiberias

(Jn 21:1-14)



¹ After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.

² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.

⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the

Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

See the setting: the lake of Tiberias, the shore at dawn; a place full of memories for the disciples: the preaching, the walking on the water, the calming of the storm.

Jesus comes into our history (vv 1-3)

See the characters.

Five men, each with his own personality, his own more or less glorious history with Jesus. Remember all this. Two unnamed disciples: there is room for my history with Jesus.

These seven are the Church. Consider seriously all that they have lived in common. For the moment, Jesus seems absent to them, while continuing to hold them together *by His very absence*.

The Risen Christ transforms ordinary life (vv 4-8)

See: *It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore ...* He is on the border between sea and land, between darkness and light, because He has already passed through death. He is risen, alive, the same and yet Other. It is daybreak, outlines are still indistinct, like in the dark light of faith; I can see and yet not see, I know and yet not know.

What is my experience of God at this moment?

Jesus is going to help them cross this barrier by means of faith in His word and by the sharing in His bread.

Hear: *Have you caught anything, friends?.. No. ..* God asks for what He wants to give us in abundance (cf water from the Samaritan woman, the loaves).

Their real and admitted poverty prepares them to accept everything from Christ, an extraordinary fertility, which is that of His own death.

Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something. Am I going to trust Him? What do I lack? What actual step, even if small, is God suggesting to me today? It is I who shall find, but what, in reality? Am I going to stop at the fish?

It is the Lord! The sign is there, quite simple, and John knew how to read it. What sort of relationship do I have with the Lord and with what I am experiencing? Do I make the connection between the two?

Recognize in my history, in that of the Church, a part of the history of Jesus, who died and rose again — a part of His fruitfulness.

What apparently barren situation am I going through now or have I gone through in the past? What Easter victory have I witnessed, for which I can give thanks, shouting: "It is the Lord" ?

Look at what they are doing: some stay put, John too; Peter, on the word of another, *jumped into the water*. Nothing counts anymore except joining his Lord on the land which has now become the place of the Living Christ, and this action washes and clothes him again like a baptism.

Vision of the Pascal Church (vv 9-14)

Look at how this fisher of men and women acts now to gather together humanity in the Kingdom. Unity is not broken. The net is put into our hands, we who are at one and the same time those who fish, and those who by the mercy of God are recovered, pulled out like fish in a net.

See the charcoal fire with some fish and bread.

Hear Jesus speaking to us: *Bring some of the fish you have just caught... Come and have breakfast.*

They could not do anything without Christ and yet nothing gets done without them. United to the bread that Jesus is going to give them, this work for the Kingdom becomes their food.

Here in this "barbecue" on the beach, see both Jesus' intimacy and the celebration of the mystery of the Real Presence of the Risen Christ in His Church.

Savour and reflect on this meal served to His friends by the Risen Christ. Am I aware of the Eucharistic dimension of my life? What shall I bring to the Mass, to the offertory, that may be given back to me as food by Christ?

None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, "Who are you?; they knew quite well it was the Lord. Even if His presence poses questions, it is no longer the time for them, because the disciples share His life.

Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. Approach Him; He is already waiting on the shore.



The author, Bethy Oudot, has been a member of the Christian Life Community since 1986. She has a degree in theology from the Centre Sèvres (a Jesuit university centre of formation) and has a diploma in Pedagogical Science.

She is a guide of the Spiritual Exercises and a spiritual accompanier of individuals and groups. Since 1989 she has been a permanent member of the formation staff for the CLC France and has been called upon by various centres, especially the Spiritual Centre of CLC-France at St. Hugues de Biviers.