

Living the Discerning Life: The Spiritual Teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Text of the Rules of St. Ignatius

Rules for becoming aware and understanding to some extent the different movements which are caused in the soul, the good, to receive them, and the bad to reject them. And these rules are more proper for the first week. (313)

First Rule. The first rule: in persons who are going from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures to them, leading them to imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons the good spirit uses a contrary method, stinging and biting their consciences through their rational power of moral judgment. (314)

Second Rule. The second: in persons who are going on intensely purifying their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, the method is contrary to that in the first rule. For then it is proper to the evil spirit to bite, sadden, and place obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, so that the person may not go forward. And it is proper to the good spirit to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing and taking away all obstacles, so that the person may go forward in doing good. (315)

Third Rule. The third is of spiritual consolation. I call it consolation when some interior movement is caused in the soul, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and, consequently when it can love no created thing on the face of the earth itself, but only in the Creator of them all. Likewise when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one's sins or for the passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly ordered to His service and praise. Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord. (316)

Fourth Rule. The fourth is of spiritual desolation. I call desolation all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to low and earthly things, disquiet from various agitations and temptations, moving to lack of confidence, without hope, without love, finding oneself totally slothful, tepid, sad and as if separated from one's Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts that come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts that come from desolation.

Fifth rule. The fifth: in time of desolation never make a change, but be firm and constant in the proposals and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation; or in the determination in which one was in the preceding consolation.

Because as in consolation the Good Spirit guides and counsels us more, so in desolation the bad spirit, with whose counsels we cannot find the way to a right decision. (318)

Sixth rule. The sixth: although in desolation we should not change our first proposals, it is very advantageous to change ourselves intensely against the desolation itself, as by insisting more upon prayer, meditation, upon much examination, and upon extending ourselves in some suitable way of doing penance. (319)

Seventh Rule. The seventh: let one who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, so that he may resist the various agitations and temptations of the enemy; since he can resist with divine help, which always remains with him, though he does not clearly feel it; for the Lord has taken away from him His great fervor, abundant love and intense grace, leaving him, however sufficient grace for eternal salvation. (320)

Eighth Rule. The eighth: let one who is in desolation work to be in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which come to him, and let him think that he will soon be consoled, diligently using the means against such desolation, as is said in the sixth rule. (321)

Ninth Rule. The ninth: there are three principal causes for which we find ourselves desolate. The first is because we are tepid, slothful or negligent in our spiritual exercises, and so through our faults spiritual consolation withdraws from us. The second, to try us and see how much we are and how much we extend ourselves in His service and praise without so much payment of consolation and increased graces. The third, to give us true recognition and understanding so that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to attain or maintain increased devotion, intense love, tears or any spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord, and so that we may not build a nest in something belonging to another, raising our mind in some pride or vainglory, attributing to ourselves the devotion or the other parts of the spiritual consolation. (322)

Tenth Rule. The tenth: let the one who is in consolation think how he will conduct himself in the desolation which will come after, taking new strength for that time. (323)

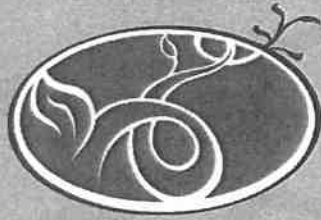
Eleventh Rule. The eleventh: let one who is consoled seek to humble himself and lower himself as much as he can, thinking of how little he is capable in the time of desolation without such grace or consolation. On the contrary, let one who is in desolation think that he can do much with God's sufficient grace to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord. (324)

Twelfth Rule. The twelfth: the enemy acts like a woman in being weak when faced with strength and strong when faced with weakness. For as it is proper to a woman, when she is fighting with some man, to lose heart and to flee when the man

confronts her firmly, and, on the contrary, if the man begins to flee, losing heart, the anger vengeance and ferocity of the woman grow greatly and know no bounds. In the same way, it is proper to the enemy to weaken and lose heart, fleeing and ceasing his temptations when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things confronts the temptations of the enemy firmly, doing what is diametrically opposed to them; and, on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself begins to be afraid and lose heart in suffering the temptations, there is no beast so fierce on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in following out his damnable intention with such growing malice. (325)

Thirteenth Rule. The thirteenth: likewise he conducts himself as a false lover in wishing to remain secret and not be revealed. For a dissolute man who, speaking with evil intention, makes dishonorable advances to a daughter of a good father or a wife of a good husband, wishes his words and persuasions to be secret, and the contrary displeases him very much, when the daughter reveals to her father, or the wife to her husband his false words and depraved intention, because he easily perceives that he will not be able to succeed with the undertaking begun. In the same way, when the enemy of human nature brings his wiles and persuasions to the just soul, he wishes and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to one's good confessor or to another spiritual person, who knows his deceits and malicious designs, it weighs on him very much, because he perceives that he will not be able to succeed with the malicious undertaking he has begun, since his manifest deceits have been revealed. (326)

Fourteenth Rule. The fourteenth: likewise he conducts himself as a leader, intent upon conquering and robbing what he desires. For, just as a captain and leader of an army in the field, pitching his camp and exploring the fortifications and defenses of a stronghold, attacks it at the weakest point, in the same way the enemy of human nature, roving about, looks in turn at all our theological, cardinal and moral virtues; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and attempts to take us. (327)



BEING DISCIPLES

*Teach me to do your will, for
you are my God. Let your good
spirit lead me on a level path*
Psalm 143:10

*God our Lord would have us
look to the Giver and love Him
more than His gift, keeping Him
always before our eyes, in our
hearts, and in our thoughts.*
St. Ignatius of Loyola

*My soul is satisfied as with
a rich feast, and my mouth
praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my
bed, and meditate on you in
the watches of the night; for you
have been my help, and in the
shadow of your wings I sing for
joy. My soul clings to you; your
right hand upholds me.*
Psalm 63:5-8

*We had the experience
but missed the meaning.*
T.S. Eliot

*For all who are led by the Spirit
of God are children of God.*
Romans 8:14

Prayer of the Examen *The examination of consciousness*

The prayer of the examen, or examination of consciousness, is a practice intended to bring us into a deeper awareness of God's presence and leading in our everyday. It highlights God's concern with the minutia of our lives: the big events and small, our thoughts and activities, what we do to others and what is done to us, and even our emotions. The examen acknowledges God's willingness to use all of these to lead us into deeper relationship with him and greater partnership in his kingdom.

When we pray the examen, we review our day with God. There are various questions we can ask to facilitate this review, but at its heart, the examen is sharing our day with Jesus and seeking his direction in prayer. The faithful practice of the examen will cultivate a deeper awareness of God's presence and his voice in our everyday lives.

It is not an examination of conscience, which is a reflection on sin. The prayer of the examen is an examination of consciousness. It may lead us to confession of sin, but it has a broader focus. It is a detailed reflection on the presence and movement of God in our ordinary lives.

The prayer of the examen not only helps us identify God's presence in our lives but also helps discern his leading. Ignatius of Loyola taught that recognizing God's presence should lead us to act accordingly. The result of the examen for Ignatius was God's active direction in our lives. We should practice the examen with an intent to be what Ignatius call his order to be, "contemplatives in action."

PRAYING THE EXAMEN

Become aware of and rest in the presence of God
Take a breath. Remember God is always present. He is in and around us. He is in the air we breathe. Take another breath. Breathe in the presence of God. Pay attention to your breath if it helps. Trust in the presence of God. Rest in it. Don't rush through the opening of the examen. God is with you. He is in you. He loves you right where you are. Take another breath and just be.

Review the day with gratitude
Think about the time between now and your last examen. What are you thankful for in the last 24 hours? What gifts has God given you? Think through the last day and pause to give thanks to God for each gift.

Review the day in God's presence
Reflect on the specific events of the day. Think through hour by hour. Pay careful attention to your emotions along the way.

When did you feel a strong sense of love? What made you angry? Did you experience a deep sense of joy? What about excitement? What scared you today? When did you feel sad?

Engage your emotions. Where is God in the emotion?
Remember God is with you. If it helps, imagine him seated with you.

Respond
Choose the emotion, moment, or experience that stands out. Which moment, experience, or emotion God is inviting you to explore more intentionally? Is one shouting for your attention? Is there one you are particularly anxious to engage?

Talk to God about the one you choose. What do you want to ask him or tell him about it? What is he saying? Enter a conversation with him. Speak and listen. Is there something you need to do or stop doing? Ask God for direction. When you leave the examen, what action will you take as a result of your conversation with God?

Looking forward
Look forward to the next twenty-four hours. What is coming in the next day? What feelings surface? Where do you need to be especially aware of God's presence? Pray for your day to come.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE EXAMEN

When did I feel strong emotions today? When did I experience joy? When was I angry? What scared me? When was I sad? When did I feel love?

Examining our emotions

When did I sense God's presence? When did he feel absent?

Examining God's presence

When did I move toward God? When did I move away from him?

Examining God's direction

How did God speak to me today? When did he seem silent?

Examining God's voice

What did I think about today? What thoughts were pleasing to God? What thoughts were not?

Examining our thoughts

RESOURCES

Rummaging for God: Praying Backward through your day
by Dennis Hamm, SJ

Consciousness Examen
by George Aschenbrenner, SJ

A New Liturgy no. 6 The Examen
<http://www.anewliturgy.com/06.html>

The Examination of Consciousness, a video from Father Albert Haase
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkrVT5PEptU>

Prayer
by Richard Foster

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Armand M. Nigro, S.J.

GOD SPEAKS TO US FIRST

This fundamental truth makes it possible for us to pray to God. He has been concerned for each of us long before we became concerned for ourselves. He desires communication with us. He speaks to us continually, revealing Himself to us by various modes:

- through Jesus Christ, His Word;
- through the Church, the extension of Christ in the world (because we are joined together in Christ, God speaks to us through other people.);
- through visible creation around us, which forms the physical context of our lives. (Creation took place in His Son, and it is another form of God's self-revelation.);
- through the events of our lives;
- through Holy Scripture, a real form of His presence. This is the mode of communication we are most concerned with in prayer.

HE INVITES US TO LISTEN

Our response to God's initial move is to listen to what He is saying. This is the basic attitude of prayer.

HOW TO GO ABOUT LISTENING

What you do immediately before prayer is very important. Normally, it is something you do not rush into. Spend a few moments quieting yourself and relaxing, settling yourself into a prayerful and comfortable position. In listening to anyone, you try to tune out everything except what the person is saying to you.

In prayer this can be done best in *silence* and *solitude*. Select a favorite passage from Holy Scripture, 5 to 10 verses. Put a marker in the page. Try to find a quiet place where you can be

alone and uninhibited in your response to God's presence. Try to quiet yourself interiorly. Jesus would often go up to the mountain by Himself to pray with His Father.

In an age of noise, activity, and tensions like our own, it is not always easy or necessary to forget our cares and commitments, the noise and excitement of our environment. Never feel constrained to blot out all distractions. Anxiety in this regard could get between ourselves and God.

Rather, realize that the Word did become flesh -- that He speaks to us in the noise and confusion of our day. Sometimes in preparing for prayer, relax and listen to the sounds around you. God's presence is as real as they are.

Be conscious of your sensations and living experiences of feeling, thinking, hoping, loving, of wondering, desiring, etc. Then, conscious of God's unselfish, loving presence in you, address Him simply and admit: "Yes, you do love life and feeling into me. You do love a share of your personal life into me. You are present to me. You live in me. Yes, You do."

God is present *as a person*, in you through His Spirit, who speaks to you now in Scripture, and who prays in you and for you.

Ask God the grace to listen to what He says. Begin reading Scripture slowly and attentively. Do not hurry to cover much material.

If it recounts an event of Christ's life, be there in the mystery of it. Share with the persons involved, e.g. a blind man being cured. Share their attitude. Respond to what Jesus is saying.

Some words or phrases carry special meaning for you. Savor those words, turning them over in your heart. You may want to speak or recite a Psalm or other prayer from Scripture. Really mean what you are saying.

When something strikes you, e.g.,

- You feel a new way of being with Christ. He becomes for you in a new way (e.g., you sense what it means to be healed by Christ.)
- you experience God's love,
- you feel lifted in spirit,
- you are moved to do something good,
- you are peaceful,
- You are happy and content just to be in God's presence,

This is the time to ---- *PAUSE*.

This is God speaking directly to you in the words of Scripture. Do not hurry to move on. Wait until you are no longer moved by the experience.

Don't get discouraged if nothing seems to be happening. Sometimes God lets us feel dry and empty in order to let us realize it is not in our power to communicate with Him or to experience consolation. God is sometimes very close to us in His seeming absence (Ps. 139:7-8). He is for us entirely in a selfless way. He accepts us as we are, with all our limitations -- even with our seeming inability to pray. A humble attitude of listening is a sign of love for Him, and a real prayer from the heart.

At these times remember the words of Paul: "The Spirit, too, comes to help us in our weakness, for when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words." (Rom. 8:26-27.)

Relax in prayer. Remember, God will speak to you in *God's* own way: "Yes, as the rain and snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out *my will* and succeeding in what it was sent to do." (Isaiah 55:10-11.)

Spend time in your prayer just being conscious of God's presence in and around you. If you want to, speak with Him about the things you are interested in or wish to thank Him for, your joys, sorrows, aspirations, etc.

SUMMARY OF THE 5 "P'S"

1. *Passage from Scripture*. Pick one and have it marked and ready.
2. *Place*. Where you are alone and uninhibited in your response to God's presence.
3. *Posture*. Relaxed and peaceful. A harmony of body with spirit.
4. *Presence of God*. Be aware of it and acknowledge and respond to it. If nothing happens turn to the
5. *Passage from Scripture*. Read it very slowly aloud and listen carefully and peacefully to it.

Read *aloud* or *whisper* in a rhythm with your breathing -- a phrase at a time -- with *pauses* and *repetitions* when and where you feel like it.

Don't be anxious, *don't* try to look for implications or lessons or profound thoughts or conclusions or resolutions, etc. Be content to be like a child who climbs into its father's lap and *listens* to his words and his story. When you finish, remind yourself that God continues to live in you during the rest of the day.

PRAYER: A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO GOD'S PRESENCE

Armand M. Nigro, S.J.

We hear a great deal about Religious crisis, don't we? There are crises of authority and obedience, of Community life, of personal identity, of Religious poverty, etc. I am convinced that at the basis of it all is a crisis of faith. But there is no hope for improvement here unless individual persons begin to respond better to God in prayer. This is true, I think, both of lay people and of us religious.

The single, most important conviction I want to share with you is that Prayer is a Personal Response to God's Presence.

May I try to explain this? Either you and I are more important than God or God is more important than we are. The answer is obvious, isn't it? He is more important than we are. Further, if what God wants and does is more important than what we want or do, then more of our attention should be focused on what God is and does. Again, what God wants to say to us is more important for us than anything we may have to say to Him. And God does want to speak and communicate Himself to us.

When prayer becomes too self-centered, even if it is centered upon noble and holy desires, if the focus of our prayer is I, me, or my, we are going to be in difficulty.

Prayer is a personal response to God's presence. This means that God first makes Himself present to us. Prayer is our awareness and acknowledgement of God's presence. It is what God does to us, rather than anything we do. St. John reminds us that genuine love means first of all not that we love God (which may or may not be true), but that God first loves us. His love for us is more important than our love for Him. He wants and appreciates and is grateful for our love; but since His love for us is more important than our love for Him, His love deserves more of our attention.

It seems to me that there are three aspects of genuine prayer that we should keep in mind. First of all, if prayer is a personal response to God's presence, then, the beginning of prayer is to be aware of that presence, simply to acknowledge it, to be able to admit: "Yes God my Father, You do love life into me. Yes, You love life and being into the things around me and into all that comes into my senses. You love talents and these longings into me. etc." The focus is on God and what God does.

I want to make a distinction. I know that the terms meditation and prayer are used interchangeable and that they are used differently by different authors. By religious meditation I mean thinking about God or what God does or about anything good, holy, or pious; but this is not prayer. When I am thinking about you, you are the focal point of my thoughts, but that is not communication with you. Prayer is a person-to-person communication with God. If I am thinking about God or the life of Christ and what he has done, that is holy, meritorious, good and helpful for prayer, but it is not essentially prayer.

Prayer is when "He" becomes "You", when I say, "Yes, God my Father, You love life into me," When I say to myself, "God loves life into me," that is meditation. Do you see how I am using the words? When there is a You-I relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit, I call this response genuine prayer. If there is a consideration of what He is and does, but not a You-I relationship, it may be helpful, good and holy, but it is not essentially prayer.

The First Step - Awareness

The basis or first step in prayer is for me to wake up and to face reality; to realize that He is present to me, that He loves breath and being a share of His own divine life and all my capacities into me, and to be able to say, "Yes, God my Father, You do love all this into me. Yes, Jesus my Brother, You do. Yes, God my Spirit, You do." That is to pray. If in the few minutes that we have during the times of private prayer, we do nothing else but merely make ourselves aware of the God who is already making Himself present to us, that experience in itself is profound prayer; it is fruitful prayer; it is even the beginnings of mystical prayer. This is a genuine opening up to God who communicates Himself to us if we only give him the opportunity.

There is a difference between persons and things. God is present to things; God saturates things with His presence, because He loves life and being into them. But there is no acknowledgement on the part of non-personal things; they are incapable of prayer. You and I, however, because we are persons, can acknowledge that presence; and that is the first step in prayer.

The Second Step - Gratitude

The second step, it seems to me, is that once we realize what God is to us, what He does for us and how much He loves us, the only decent, and polite, obvious and spontaneous response is not only to say "Yes, You do," but also "Thank You, God my Father, for loving life, being, and a share of your own nature into me. Thank You, Jesus, God the Son and my brother. Thank You God the Holy Spirit, for living on in me." Gratitude is an obvious, spontaneous outflow of being aware of what God is and is doing for us.

As an analogy, if a person is very good to me and unselfish and financially supports me, but I do not know him or realize this, I cannot respond to his goodness and love. But if I find out that my support is coming from him, that many good things that make my life much better are coming from him, personally, uniquely to me, it is one thing when I begin to realize and acknowledge it: "Yes, he does. Yes, you do; and something more when I say: "Thank You."

Do you notice the focus of this response? It is essential for gratitude that there be an awareness of receiving from another. No one opens a door into a strange and dark room where he sees nothing, and begins to converse into the room just in case there might be somebody there. Rather, we are first conscious of someone; we look into someone's eyes; we are assured that if we talk into this microphone, there is a radio audience waiting on our words; or if we look into that camera there is a T.V. audience present; or if we put our words on tape, somebody will listen to them. We speak and respond only to some kind of personal presence.

Prayer is like that. Sometimes in our good and holy desires to communicate with God we "junk-up" our prayer. We begin immediately to make acts of faith, hope or love, of contrition or sorrow; we ask for things or just say something, because, after all, we can't just sit there and let nothing happen; so we do something, we say something! I call this "junking-up" prayer. If we do that before we are really conscious of God being present to us, it is like opening up a dark room and talking because there might be somebody there who might just possibly be listening. It is important that we take time peacefully and quietly (even if we have only a few minutes to pray) first to make ourselves aware of the loving, creative, sustaining, divinizing presence of God, because prayer is a personal response to God's presence.

Third Step – A Loving Response

The first step then, is to acknowledge God's presence; the second is to thank Him. The third is a loving response. A person responds to love freely given by saying, "I love you, too." When we say this to God it implies that we first become aware that He first loves us. To say, "God my Father, Christ my Brother, God my Holy Spirit, I love You, too," is our response at its best.

With regard to asking God for favors, I hope we don't misunderstand it as imperfect prayer. When we beg God for sunny weather, or pray that our bursitis will go away, or pray for something more holy or important such as international peace and justice we pay a great compliment to God. This is an expression of "becoming as little children" which Jesus recommended, and honored. A child who comes to his parents and asks for things is paying them a big compliment. What is the child saying but, "You are good and can fill my needs. Please, may I have a candy bar?"

When we approach God with this sense of our absolute dependence, and need, we are conscious of being precious and important, but without Him of being nothing, because all that we have is loved into us by God. In this consciousness, we are profoundly acknowledging what He is and what we are. Did not Jesus Himself say "When you pray, face God and say Abba, (Hebrew baby talk for Papa or Daddy) give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our offenses, lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil." Notice how much of the "Our Father" is petition. Our Lord teaches us to pray this way. If the prayer of petition is made correctly, it says "God, you are everything: Creator, Sustainer, Divinizer, Forgiver, Merciful Lord of the Universe, Provident God of all, and I belong completely to You." When we pray for any favor we mean, of course, "Thy will be done." We are not trying to blackmail or fool God into giving us something by groveling in His presence. No, we presuppose "Thy will be done" ...but we still would like to have a sunny day tomorrow, etc.

Difficulties in Permitting God to Communicate Himself

To return to an earlier point: what God does is more important than what we do. And God longs to communicate Himself to us. The tragedy is that so few of us permit God to communicate Himself to us in prayer. One reason for this failure is faulty teaching or education in prayer. A second is a lack of trust or faith that He really wants to and is going to communicate Himself personally and uniquely to us. Since we feel uncertain about this, we do most or all of the talking or meditating, or we fill in the time with spiritual reading or something "profitable"; but we are reluctant to empty ourselves and abandon ourselves to His presence and movements so that in silence He can communicate Himself to us the way he prefers.

A third reason is that we are afraid of failing, afraid of trying this kind of prayer and finding out that it doesn't work for us. It will always work, if we remove obstacles and give God a chance, because God longs to communicate Himself to each of us personally. He wants to make our prayer more and more mystical. And this is not in any dangerous, quietistic, way-out, extraordinary sense. God wants us to be normal, ordinary, everyday healthy mystics. By mystic, I mean the sort of person who opens up to God's presence, who lets God fill his consciousness with His presence. The older we grow in our prayer life, the more aware, sensitive, attuned, docile, responsive to God's presence we become; because all genuine prayer is a personal response to that presence.

We have developed or been given two different kinds of capacities or facilities with which to respond or act socially or otherwise. One set of habits we call virtues. These are active capacities; they enable us to do things, and through our activity we perfect these habits. They are acquired by activity; sometimes the beginnings of them are infused, but at least they can be perfected and made stronger by exercise and they render our virtuous activity easier. They are the "can-do" of our operating capacities, and are very important. But there are also capacities loved into us by God which enable us to be receptive. A radio station not only has a transmitter, but it also has a receiver; they are both important. These receptive capacities become more and more important in our prayer life. They are called gifts of the Holy Spirit. They make us aware, and receptive, attuned, sensitive, responsive, docile to God's communicating presence; and He wants us to pray more and more that way.

Final Reminder

All growth in prayer, then, is rooted in our conviction that God is present to us, that His presence is personal, loving and provident, uniquely saturating us; that God is and wants more and more to be our Father and that like every good father, God wants to speak and communicate with us. He keeps trying to speak to us through all the experiences of our life, through his Church, through His living word in Holy Scripture, through His Eternal Word Jesus Christ, in whose Holy Spirit we are invited to be sons and daughters. God, I repeat, longs to communicate Himself to us and He invites us to listen and to receive. But He will not force this on us.