

Praying the Ignatian Way

Despite the fact that your life can be hectic at times, you don't need to go to a monastery or search for a deserted place in the woods in order to pray. You simply need to make a transition of focus so that you can become more in tune with God's presence in your activities. St. Ignatius of Loyola taught a form of reflective prayer, also known as meditation, that invites you to use your mind and imagination to engage in prayerful conversation with God and to recognize his presence in your daily life. Reflective prayer involves the following simple steps.

- **Find a quiet place where you can be alone for 10 or 15 minutes.**

Assume a comfortable position and, if you wish, close your eyes or focus on a religious picture or a lighted candle. If you wish, play soft background music to help establish a prayerful mood. Become aware of God's presence and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer.

- **Take two or three minutes to practice rhythmic breathing.**

Counting to three slowly and silently while breathing in and counting slowly to five while breathing out—to help concentration. If you become distracted, return to concentrating on your breathing and let the distractions go by so that you can turn your heart back to God. Likewise, you can choose a special word or phrase, such as *Jesus* or *My Lord and My God*, and repeat it when you are distracted to bring your attention back to God's presence.

- **Select a brief passage from Scripture and prayerfully read it.**

If the passage you select is a Gospel story, use your five senses to imagine yourself as a participant in the story (What can you see? What sounds do you hear? What can you feel?). Imagine a setting in which you can talk with Jesus and listen to him speak to you. You can respond to what Jesus is saying or doing in the story, or you can simply talk about something that has happened to you recently or about a forthcoming event in your life.

- **In addition to using Scripture in your reflection, you can also use writings from or about the saints as well as other inspirational literature or prayer books.**

Likewise, you can choose to concentrate on a sacred object such as a crucifix, or reflect on a sacred image, such as an icon of Jesus or a favorite saint. Take this time to talk to God as you would to a friend.

- **Close with one or two minutes of contemplation, time to rest silently in God's presence.**

As adults, we come to recognize more and more that God speaks to us using the language of silence. Take a few moments at the end of your reflection to enter into a few silent moments with God.

Through reflective prayer you can begin to more readily recognize God's presence in your daily life.

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