

## Prayer According to Ignatius of Loyola

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**S**piritual Exercises of St. Ignatius which were composed by him by the grace of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit will give us various principles and methods of prayer. To understand the way St. Ignatius prayed one need to read his Spiritual Journal and Autobiography. Besides it will be also good to read the letters of St. Ignatius addressed to different persons (we are told that he wrote more than ten thousand letters) for different occasions and persons of different walks of life. In this article I shall restrict myself for the basic instructions given by St. Ignatius about prayer.

- A. **Love of God and His goodness:** In Ignatian prayer one need to cultivate an awareness of Gods love for self, for the world and ones dependence on God. In one of his letters to one of the religious he suggested to focus on the love of God and his mercy and not to worry so much of one's weakness. After he founded the Society of Jesus to his nephew he wrote" I have no confidence in my own strength to carry this burden successfully, but I have every hope in the infinite power and goodness of God." Love of God and His mercy is fundamental in prayer for St. Ignatius.
- B. **Prayer is an Exercise:** For St. Ignatius prayer has different meanings. In the Spiritual Exercises (SE) he

mentions “By the term Spiritual exercises we mean every method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal or mental prayer, and other spiritual activities, which will be mentioned later. For just as taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running are physical exercises, so is the name of SE given to any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then after their removal, of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul.” (SE.1)

- C. **Service and the praise of the Divine Majesty:** St. Ignatius, knowing fully well the fickleness of human heart at the start of the every prayer has placed small but very effective prayer and for me it is the summary of the SE. “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 the Divine Majesty” (SE 46). After founding the Society of Jesus he writes to his nephew “Regarding our affairs here, you will be glad to know that we have seriously determined in our Lord, after weighing the matter again and again , that it will be advisable and even necessary to lay a firm foundation and take deep root if we are going to build for the future.” (Letter to his nephew Bertram).
- D. **“Ask and you will receive”:** One of the important prayer methods he is using and recommending is that of prayer of intercession. Therefore at every prayer after the starting of prayer he will state “The second prelude is to ask God our Lord for what I want and desire. What I ask for should be in accordance with the subject matter” (SE 48). To receive graces which are very important he will suggest to make prayer petitions to three persons (SE.62, 63). The **first petition to our Lady** that she may obtain for me the grace from her son which and it is concluded by reciting the Hail Mary. The **second petition** is made to **Jesus** asking him to

obtain the graces for me from the Father and it is concluded by reciting the prayer 'Soul of Christ'. The **third petition** is made **to the Father** that he may grant me the graces I am asking for and concluded by reciting the Our Father.

**E. "Finding more readily what one desires"**  
**Transformative preparation for prayer: St. Ignatius**

given two principles to have a lasting impact and focus in prayer: "Upon going to bed at night, just before I fall asleep, I will think for the length of a Hail Mary about the hour when I should arise, and for what purpose; and I will briefly sum up the exercise I am to make" (SE 73).

"Upon awakening, while keeping out any other thoughts, I will immediately turn my attention to what I will contemplate in the first exercise....I will strive to feel shame....using many examples ....etc (SE 74). In the first principle, the person is focused totally through the whole night even in his sleep about the prayer and the grace what he is seeking for. In the second principle the affective memory is channelized towards what one is searching so desperately. These principles are used very much by people who take up different professions in the secular world and find resounding success.

**F. "Examen of Consciousness":** another transformative exercise St. Ignatius proposes is that of Examen of Consciousness (SE 43). It was so important for him that he seems to have said one may get up during prayer for some emergencies but not during the Examen. In this exercise, at the end of the day the person looks at oneself and confronts oneself whether one lived for God or for oneself. A few years back a research team from Oxford University did an experiment with the new recruits of WIPRO one of the IT giants of India placed in Bangalore. The new recruits were divided into two groups. The group one was given a few questions to evaluate their work performance at the end

of each day. After 3 months it was discovered the work performance of the group which evaluated itself at each day performed 22.8% better than the group which did not evaluate its work performance at the end of each day. Continuous and consistent focus on one's goal and activity indeed brings about splendid results both in secular and religious world.

**G. Role of Mother Mary:** St. Ignatius gives important role to Mother Mary in most of his prayer exercises. In his Spiritual Journal we see how desperate he was when he failed to give proper attention to Mother Mary. After he receives her visitation he concludes with much gratitude in these words “ I could not but feel and see her, as the one who was cause and channel of such a grace which I felt in spirit” (Spiritual Journal 31).

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## Conclusion

One may not find Spiritual Exercises useful for oneself but in the process of doing the Spiritual Exercises one may find them useful for others.

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In this article I have touched upon some of the basic principles of Ignatian prayer. Nothing substitutes from doing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius at least once. One may

not find them useful for oneself but in the process one may find them useful for others. It will be good to have a guide under whom one may go through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.