

ADVENT IGNATIAN RETREAT



2021 PRAYER MATERIAL

OUR RETREAT AUTHOR

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The prayer material in these booklets is drawn from Advent retreats Susan originally designed for St. Thomas More Catholic Community.

St Francis Xavier/Bellarmino Chapel Advent Ignatian Retreat 2021

Introduction

This retreat offers an opportunity to experience the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola in a modified format. The Spiritual Exercises were created by St. Ignatius based on his experiences of God following his conversion. He continued to develop and edit them throughout his entire life, based not only on his own experience, but the experience of those he directed in the Exercises. The Exercises aim to help us both deepen our relationship with Christ and grow in spiritual freedom so that we can take our place as co-laborer with Christ in the building the Kingdom of God. Although the Exercises were originally intended to be given as a 30-day silent retreat with an individual director, Ignatius realized that, even in his own time, many people could not absent themselves from their work and daily lives for such a long period. He thus suggested alternate formats in which the Exercises could be made.

The format we will be using for this Advent Retreat is one that is both ideal as an introduction to Ignatian prayer and spirituality, and that can serve as a refresher for anyone who has already made the Exercises in one form or another.

You will be provided with material for your daily prayer during the four weeks of Advent. Each week of prayer will be preceded by a talk exploring the theme for that week of prayer and providing instruction for the prayer. You have the option of participating live via Zoom for the talks, allowing you to ask questions or raise comments, or watching a video of the talk later that day. You will also have the opportunity to meet in small groups each week to share the fruits of your prayer.

We ask you to commit to pray over the material given to you for at least 30 minutes a day. But please do not approach the prayer

material as a homework assignment that you have to complete. If something strikes you, stay with it. Often the prayer material will include questions designed to stimulate your thoughts and reflection. Use them if they are helpful, but you need not feel like you must go through all of them. Just stay with what you are getting some benefit from. Linger with spontaneous movements toward or away from God. You may find it helpful to journal about those at the end of your prayer session.

Some of you may have prayed before with some of the scripture or other material you will pray with in the coming weeks. Please remember that there are layers of meaning in any prayer exercise that speak to us differently at different times in our lives. Therefore, we encourage you to approach the prayer material for each day of the coming weeks as though you were seeing it for the first time, being open to whatever it is God wants to reveal to you now.

With respect to sharing during the small group sessions, in your first session, your group facilitator will invite participants to share a little bit about themselves – who they are, why they signed up for the retreat, what their hopes are. Additionally, although your facilitator will go through these in the first session, here are some guidelines for small group sharing that will help keep the atmosphere of trust that allow everyone to feel comfortable sharing about their faith.:

- Only one person speaks at a time.
- No interrupting.
- No one is forced to speak but everyone is encouraged to participate and share what they are comfortable sharing.
- There is no judging or arguing. What people share should be accepted without judgement or comment, with a reverent, respectful taking in what each is saying.
- After everyone has shared, participants may respond to each other in a contemplative, reverent, respectful manner, that respects each other's experience.
- Everything that is shared is treated as confidential.

A Prayer To Begin our Advent Retreat
Psalm of an Emerging Emanuel (Edward Hays)

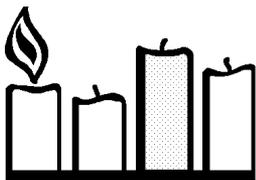
*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
I pray with upraised eyes.
Drop down, O Dew of Heaven,
that God might walk and talk on earth,
might heal and feed our sin-soaked world.*

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
my prayers like searchlights
comb the starry winter skies.
Descend from the black hole of some neighboring galaxy
to green with your grace
our barren earth.*

*Such an Advent waiting prayer
can be a lifelong profession of patient longing,
unless I know, with all my heart,
that Emmanuel not only comes down
but also comes forth and emerges.*

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
come forth from deep within me
with Christmas luminous beauty.
For my heart has become the sacred crib,
the birthing place of God-among-us.*

*Peace on earth and justice for all
will only become manifest in our lives
when enough of your sons and daughters
awaken to your divine design
that has made each of us
an emerging Emmanuel.*



FIRST WEEK GOD'S LOVE AND DESIRE FOR US

Day One of the First Week

Grace: I pray today for the grace of wonder at God's creation, and gratitude for the gift of God in creating me and the world.

As you pray with the Genesis account of the creation of the world, allow God to reveal his divine love to you through the gift of creation. Listen to God declare the creation of humans "very good."

Genesis 1:1-2:3

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters. Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." Evening came, and morning followed—the first day.

Then God said: Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other. God made the dome, and it separated the water below the dome from the water above the dome. And so it happened. God called the dome "sky." Evening came, and morning followed—the second day.

Then God said: Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear. And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land "earth," and the basin of water

he called “sea.” God saw that it was good. Then God said: Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. And so it happened: the earth brought forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning followed—the third day.

Then God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the seasons, the days and the years, and serve as lights in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth. And so it happened: God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.

Then God said: Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky. God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of crawling living creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw that it was good, and God blessed them, saying: Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth. Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day.

Then God said: Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: tame animals, crawling things, and every kind of wild animal. And so it happened: God made every kind of wild animal, every kind of tame animal, and every kind of thing that crawls on the ground. God saw that it was good. Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female* he created them. God blessed

them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth. God also said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the wild animals, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the earth, I give all the green plants for food. And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation.

Day Two of the First Week

Grace: I pray today for the grace of a heartfelt knowledge of God's love for me and desire for intimacy with me.

St. Ignatius believed that it was important to begin the Spiritual Exercises by getting in touch with the extent of God's boundless and unconditional love for us. Your prayer today is to prayerfully reflect on this paraphrase of Psalm 139, written by Rev. Charles K. Robinson, titled "Known."

I know you. I created you. I am creating you.
I have loved you from your mother's womb.
You have fled, as you know, from my love.
But I love you nevertheless and not-the-less.
However far you flee, it is I who sustain your very power of fleeing.
And I will never finally let you go.

I accept you as you are. You are forgiven.

I know all your sufferings. I have always known them.
Please know that when you suffer, I am suffering.

You are beautiful.

You are beautiful more deeply within than you can see.

You are beautiful because of yourself, in the unique way that only you are.

You reflect already something of the beauty of my holiness in a way which shall never end.

You are beautiful also because I, and I alone, see the beauty you shall become.

Through the transforming power of my love, you shall become perfectly beautiful.

You shall become perfectly beautiful in a uniquely irreplaceable way.

Which neither you nor I will work out alone,
For we shall work it out together.

As you sit with the words of the paraphrased psalm, realize that God says those words to you. Really hear God tell you who and what you are in God's eyes.

Day 3 of the First Week

Grace: I pray today for a deeper awareness of God's personal and constant love for me

Isaiah 43:1-7

But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine.

When you pass through waters, I will be with you; through rivers, you shall not be swept away.

When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, nor will flames consume you.

For I, the Lord, am your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior. I give Egypt as ransom for you, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you and nations in exchange for your life.

Fear not, for I am with you; from the east I will bring back your offspring, from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north: Give them up! and to the south: Do not hold them!

Bring back my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth: All who are called by my name I created for my glory; I formed them, made them.

“I have called you by name: you are mine.”

By what name has God called you? What is your “name of grace?” Listen as God calls you by your name of grace.

“You are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you.”

What is God like as God says these words to you? Like a father? mother? friend? lover? creator? something else?

What does God feel as God speaks these words to you?

What are your reactions as you listen to and look at God? Share these reactions with God.

“When you pass through waters, I will be with you; through rivers, you shall not be swept away.

When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, nor will flames consume you.”

Does any past event in your life come to mind in which you felt you were drowning or walking through fire? Listen to God speak these verses to you in relation to that event.

Does any present event come to mind in which you feel overwhelmed at times, as if you are drowning or being consumed in flames? Ask God to walk with you in this event, to help you hear and feel the assurance God speaks of in these verses.

What is God’s presence like as God speaks these words to you? How do you feel? Share your feelings with God and be attentive to God’s response.

Day Four of the First Week

Hosea 2:16-25

“I will allure you: I will lead you into the desert and speak to your heart.”

Enter into God’s heart as God speaks these words to you. What feelings do you sense in God?

How do you feel about God’s desire to lead you into the desert of this retreat to speak to your heart?

“I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and justice, in love and mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know your God.”

Contemplate God's invitation for a spousal relationship. How do you feel about such an intimate relationship with God? Do you believe such intimacy with God is possible?

Knowledge of God in the Jewish Scriptures means a heart-felt, intimate knowledge of God. In what ways do you desire to come to know God more deeply and experientially?

Day Five of the First Week

St. Ignatius begins the Spiritual Exercises with a consideration titled the First Principle and Foundation. It asks us to ponder why God put us on this earth and it meant as a orientation during the Spiritual Exercises and our lives. As you pray with a literal translation of the Principle and Foundation, consider what it means to your life, as well as where you find it challenging.

The human person is created to praise, reverence, and serve God Our Lord, and by doing so, to save his or her soul. All other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings in order to help them pursue the end for which they are created.

It follows from this that one must use other created things, in so far as they help towards one's end, and free oneself from them, in so far as they are obstacles to one's end. To do this, we need to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, provided the matter is subject to our free choice and there is no other prohibition.

Thus, as far as we are concerned, we should not want health more than illness, wealth more than poverty, fame more than disgrace, a long life more than a short one, and similarly for all the rest, but we should desire and choose only what helps us more towards the end for which we are created.

As you reflect on the Principle and Foundation:

What does this tell me about God's love for me and our world?

What difference does it make in my day-to-day life when I remember that the goal of my life is the praise and service of God?

Who or what do I need to surrender in order to entrust my life freely and completely to God and God's love?

Day Six of the First Week

In the Spiritual Exercises, repetition is an invitation to go back over a prayer experience in order to allow for deeper appropriation of the particular mystery. It is not repeating the material in sense of going back and looking for something new. Instead you want to return to the points where you experienced the greatest movement in order to allow yourself to savor, deepen and better appreciate the experience, to allow it to be reinforced.

So today, simply return to the moment in one of your prior prayer periods this week where you felt the greatest movement toward or away from God. The place of deepest affect. Go back there and see what else God wants to share with you.

Day Seven of the First Week

Review of the Week

On the last day of each week during the retreat, you are invited to review and pray back over your journal for the preceding days of prayer this week. As you do, consider

Where was I most moved?

What was God's presence like?

What do I want to share in my small group?



**SECOND WEEK:
OUR BROKENNESS AND NEED FOR GOD'S MERCY**

Day One of the Second Week

Today you will pray with one of the first meditations in the First Week of the Spiritual Exercise, using an excerpt from Joseph Tetlow's rendition of the meditation. The grace you are praying for is in the text.

The Entry of Sin Into the World: Sin of Adam and Eve
*[Excerpted from Joseph Tetlow, *Choosing Christ in the World*]*

I come into God's presence and offer myself to Him. Then, I compose myself in my real world. I am one of many human persons. I hear about many wars, about dictators who make fortunes dealing in drugs. I read about murders every day in my own city. I breathe the air the people have filled with harmful and noxious chemicals.... This is my real world, however secure and safe I may feel in my own situation. Without being lugubrious or silly, I see myself and myself in it – for what they truly are.

And now I ask God what I yearn for. I ask God to let me feel shame at my thoughtless sins and my deliberate sins; I want to feel confounded by the truth that other suffer such dire things because of sin, and I have suffered so little, although I know I have sinned and do sin.

I recall what St. Paul said to the Romans: "Well then, sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned." (Rom. 5:12)

Then I think about this: Even though I may believe that God brought humankind onto the face of the earth through evolution, I have to believe that at some point in time and on some spot on the globe, the earliest humans came into life. They grew intellectually aware of right and wrong, and some among them – the Church has always believed it was the very first – chose to do evil. They abused what was given them. Then chose to use what was forbidden by their consciences. They decided willfully to make their own value system instead of letting the Spirit of God instruct them. From that sin came others, more and more. From that sin came death. So, from this earliest sin came flooding down all of the misery, wretchedness, evil-doing, and death-dealing in the world today.

What they did – some ordinary human action – can it have been so enormously worse than what I have done, and perhaps do? Yet, what comes from my actions? Why does God deal so differently with me? So I consider how I feel about all this.

Finally, I make my colloquy with Jesus crucified. How did you come to this? And the questions form in me: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?

Day Two of Second Week

Pray slowly this guided prayer by Anthony De Melko, titled *The Revelation*, pausing where you are drawn to do so. The text contains the grace you are praying for in the second paragraph.

I imagine myself to be in the presence of Christ and expose myself to it in silence,
For it heals...
creates...
encourages.

I now ask him to give me as complete a list as possible
Of everything he finds in my he finds defective—

Each indication of my selfishness, each area I have yet to grow in,
Each thing in me I need to change.

And, as he speaks I make a mental note of what he says—
I even write it down if I judge that this will help.

Then, I ask him which of these defects, in his opinion,
Needs the most attention.

I let myself go blank for a few seconds and imagine tht he speaks,
And I am careful to be open to the fact that what he says may be
totally unexpected.

I turn my gaze within to see if I have the will to change this defect.
If I do not, then I take this lack of will as the first thing to be
changed.

Now I begin with the most essential element to all change.
Before I take a single step, it is vital that I hear Christ say these
words ot me:

“As far as my love for you is concerned it does not matter whether
you change or not,
For my love for you is unconditional.

Now I see Christ’s power flooding into me
And I imagine I feel strong where before I was afraid,
Relaxed where formerly I was tense,
Outgoing in places where I used to be withdrawn.

I see myself going through the day (or into a situation where this
new power is needed)
Equipped with this power received from Christ.

Finally I reset in his loving presence in grateful adoration.

Day Three of Second Week

The Book of Isaiah opens with what is called the Book of Judgment – a scathing indictment of Israel, a long and bitter attack on the arrogance and hypocrisy of Jerusalem’s leaders. Yet, as harsh as the indictments are, God cannot sustain them consistently.

Pray today with these words of Isaiah, marveling that even in the midst of God’s harsh criticism of the people of Israel for their sinfulness, he invites them back to him, conveying the promise that things do not have to be the way they are.

Grace: A growing awareness that God continually invites me to reconciliation, no matter how (and how frequently) I have fallen.

Isaiah 1:1-20

Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth, for the Lord speaks: Sons have I raised and reared, but they have rebelled against me! An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master’s manger; But Israel does not know, my people has not understood. Ah! Sinful nation, people laden with wickedness, evil offspring, corrupt children!

They have forsaken the Lord, spurned the Holy One of Israel, apostatized. Why would you yet be struck, that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot to the head there is no sound spot in it; Just bruise and welt and oozing wound, not drained, or bandaged, or eased with salve. Your country is waste, your cities burnt with fire; Your land—before your eyes strangers devour it, awaste, like the devastation of Sodom. And daughter Zion is left like a hut in a vineyard, Like a shed in a melon patch, like a city blockaded.

If the Lord of hosts had not left us a small remnant, We would have become as Sodom, would have resembled Gomorrah. Hear the word of the Lord, princes of Sodom! Listen to the instruction of our God, people of Gomorrah! What do I care for the multi-

tude of your sacrifices? says the Lord. I have had enough of whole-burnt rams and fat of fatlings; In the blood of calves, lambs, and goats I find no pleasure. When you come to appear before me, who asks these things of you? Trample my courts no more! To bring offerings is useless; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath, calling assemblies—festive convocations with wickedness—these I cannot bear. Your new moons and festivals I detest; they weigh me down, I tire of the load. When you spread out your hands, I will close my eyes to you; Though you pray the more, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood!

Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow. Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be red like crimson, they may become white as wool. If you are willing, and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land; But if you refuse and resist, you shall be eaten by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken!

Day Four of the Second Week

Grace: I pray today for the grace to feel sorrow for the ways I fail to make a return of God's love.

Luke 15: 11-32

[Jesus told them this parable:]

A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired

himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' "

So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him.

He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'

What are the words you want to share with God about the places you are in need of mercy? About your sorrow for the ways you fail to return God's love?

What do you notice about God? What does God want you to know?

Day Five of the Second Week

Commitment to Transformation

As you read these two short passages, reflect on the Advent invitation to prepare ourselves more fully to welcome Christ into our hearts. That is, we are not simply celebrating the birth of the baby that occurred 2000 years ago. Rather Advent offers us the opportunity for a recommitment to transformation, one based on the reality of Jesus walking among us today.

Grace: I pray today for the grace of a deeper commitment, a recommitment to welcoming Christ through my thoughts, my words and my actions.

In Advent, the Church has traditionally offered the followers of Jesus, those who follow in the footpaths of the Magi of old, three comings to think about – Christ's incarnation 2000 years ago, Christ's continued presence in our midst to this day, and Christ's anticipated glorious return in the future. ... [L]et us focus on Christ's presence in our ordinary lives. For if we miss Christ in our daily lives surely the utter ordinariness of a child born in a manger will pass us by as well.

(Michael J. Daley, A Prayer a Day for Advent (2000))

Come, we cry, and do not delay! Come into our lives; come into our relationships; come into the pain and suffering of these days within us and across our troubled world; come to bring light to the darkness of our minds and hearts so that our lives are more trans-

parent and honest; come to free us from every compulsion and addiction that keeps us captive; come to reveal your deepest desires for us, here and now; come to transform us so profoundly that we will embrace your desires for all your people as our own. So purify our longings and animate our choices that we, by our very living of the Advent mystery, will hasten the day when your promises will be fulfilled.

(Kathleen Hughes, From Past to Future (2006))

Day Six of the Second Week

Repetition

In the Spiritual Exercises, repetition is an invitation to go back over a prayer experience in order to allow for deeper appropriation of the particular mystery. It is not repeating the material in sense of going back and looking for something new. Instead you want to return to the points where you experienced the greatest movement in order to allow yourself to savor, deepen and better appreciate the experience, to allow it to be reinforced.

So on this last day, simply return to the moment in one of your prior prayer periods this week where you felt the greatest movement toward or away from God. The place of deepest affect. Go back there and see what else God wants to share with you.

Day Seven of the Second Week

Review of the Week

On the last day of each week during the retreat, you are invited to review and pray back over your journal for the preceding days of prayer this week. As you do, consider:

Where was I most moved?

What was God's presence like?

What do I want to share in my small group?



**THIRD WEEK:
GOD'S PLAN FOR INCARNATION**

Day One of Third Week

Grace: Today I pray for the grace to understand that God's desire for intimacy with us is so great that God becomes human.

Savor these words from the opening of the Gospel of John.

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world,
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.
But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children
of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by
natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision
but of God.

And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.

What moves you in these words?

*What difference does it make to you know that the Word
becoming flesh was part of God's plan from the very begin-
ning?*

Day Two of the Third Week Contemplation on the Incarnation

The second “week” of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius begins with a contemplation of the Incarnation. There are three points to the contemplation, which Ignatius asks us to cover “in some way or other – by fantasy, meditation, or contemplation – and after I have worked through them, I consider what it all means to me, to my life world, and to the whole of the human race.”

We ask for the grace in this contemplation to know Jesus intimately, to love him more intensely, and so to follow him more closely.

The following points are a paraphrase of Ignatius' three points.

First, I look at all the people on the earth – different races and ethnic groups; some people single, some living in families; some

working in offices, others in the field; some countries at peace, others at war. I see infants being born, growing, dying. I watch God watching all of this, and I wonder what God feels.

Second, I see the realities of the world around me – war, famine, crime, pollution. I watch the Trinity looking down on this. Ignatius says “They look down upon the whole surface of the earth, and behold all nations in great blindness, going down to death and descending into hell.” I consider: what goes on in the heart of the Trinity as they look at the darkness of the world? I feel the Trinity’s love for humanity and their pain as humanity suffers. And I listen to the thoughts of the Trinity: Let us save all these people.” And I see and hear their plan as they send the angel to Mary.

Third, I move in my imagination back to the frantic activities of the world in which I live. I see the good – and the bad. And I see God working busily, initiating the Incarnation, laboring among humankind. And I see the angel announce God’s message and I see Mary acquiesce.

Ignatius invites us, after we consider these three points, to engage in colloquy with the Father, Jesus or Mary.

Day Three of Third Week

Grace: I pray today for a deeper confidence that God’s plan for salvation will unfold and be realized, albeit in God’s time.

Consider both the opening of Matthew’s Gospel and the following quote from Edward Sri.

Matthew 1:1-17

The story of the origin of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac;
Isaac was the father of Jacob;
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers;
Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar;
Perez was the father of Hezron;
Hezron was the father of Aram;
Aram was the father of Amminadab;
Amminadab was the father of Nashon;
Nashon was the father of Salmon;
Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab;
Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth;
Obed was the father of Jesse;
Jesse was the father of David the king.

David was the father of Salomon by Uriah's wife;
Solomon was the father of Rehoboam;
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah;
Abijah was the father of Asaph;
Asaph was the father of Jehoshaphat;
Jehoshaphat was the father of Joram;
Joram was the father of Uzziah;
Uzziah was the father of Jotham;
Jotham was the father of Ahaz;
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah;
Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh;
Manasseh was the father of Amos;
Amos was the father of Josiah;
Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers
at the time of the Babylonian exile.

After the Babylonian Exile,
Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel;
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel;
Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud;
Abiud was the father of Eliakim;
Eliakim was the father of Azor;
Azor was the father of Zadok;

Zadok was the father of Achim;
Achim was the father of Eliud;
Eliud was the father of Eleazar;
Eleazar was the father of Matthan;
Matthan was the father of Jacob;
Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary;
off her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; and from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; and finally from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen more generations.

Excerpt from "God With Us" by Edward Sri:

For most people, reading a biblical genealogy is about as exciting as reading the fine print in an instruction manual. Yet this is exactly how the entire New Testament begins in chapter one of Matthew's Gospel...

I would bet that many readers today do what I did when I first looked at this genealogy: skip the long list of names and pick up again in chapter two! Even the few brave readers who survive the list of 42 generations are nevertheless probably left wondering, "Couldn't Matthew have chosen a better way to begin his Gospel?"

Admittedly, being hit with a family tree of people who lived thousands of years ago doesn't seem to be the most captivating way to lure people into the story of Jesus Christ. As one New Testament scholar put it, "Let's face it: Other people's family trees are about as interesting as other people's holiday videos."

For a Jew in Jesus' day, however, this genealogy would have had more attention-grabbing power than the most popular video or news item trending on social media today. It would have summed up all their hopes and expectations about what God had been promising to do in their lives ever since the time of Abraham.

And it would have triumphantly announced that God's plan had come to completion in their own lifetime! In fact, if there were modern media outlets in first-century Judaism, this little genealogy would have made the top story on CNN.

What lesson does the genealogy of Jesus have for me?

What does it say about God's love for me?

How does it strengthen my hope and trust in God?

Day Four of Third Week

Annunciation

Be with Mary when the Angel comes to her. Experience the passage as though you were present. Hear the Angel's message to Mary and her response. Speak to Mary. Ask her how she feels as she hears the Angel's invitation. Let her talk to you about her prayer, about her confidence in God. Ask her to help you grow your trust in God.

Grace: I pray today for the grace to grow in trust in God, and in the willingness to respond to God's invitation as Mary did.

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great

and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?”

And the angel said to her in reply, “The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.”

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Despite the seeming impossibility of the Angel’s message, Mary demonstrated her faith and trust in God by her acceptance of God’s invitation. Do I say “yes” to God in the small, everyday situations of my life? When the yes is hard, do I ask God for the grace to respond to his call?

We are all challenged to help make flesh the Word of God. How do I respond to that invitation? In what ways do I help birth Jesus into the world?

Where are the places I have difficulty saying yes to God? How can Mary help me in those places?

Day Five of Second Week

As you continue to pray for the grace to grow in trust in God, and in the willingness to respond to God's invitation as Mary did, spend some time today reflecting on this poem by Paul Mariani, titled "I Did Say Yes."

Thou heardst me, truer than tounge, confess...
Gerard Manley Hopkins

The barely prayable prayer as the words fall away,
Words unguessed or unguessable, soft silence only,
Penetrant silence, the pit, then something stirring...
Importunate, unquenchable mind, astray
Or aswarm, attuned for odd moments after, then
Drifting. Then a lull & a lifting, then self flickering back,
As the parched sunflower turns towards the sun...

A woman kneels, head bent forward, each cell attendant
Upon the flame which, consuming, does not consume,
But gently enwraps, caressing, filling herself with itself,
The burning clouds lingering, then hovering off, like
Mist off a mountain, here in this kitchen, this cell, here,
Where the timeless crosses with time, this chiasmus,
Infinity & now, nowhere & always, this cosmos, this fresh-

Found dimension, all attention gone over now, as flame
Flickers and whispers, all care turning to ash, all fear,
All consequence even, all given over, ah, lover to lover
Now, saying yes, yes, whatever you will, my dear,
Yes echoing down the long halls of time, yes,
In spite of all disappointment, of the death of Love even,
The barely sayable yes again, yes again, yes I will. Yes.

Day Six of Second Week

Repetition

In the Spiritual Exercises, repetition is an invitation to go back over a prayer experience in order to allow for deeper appropriation of the particular mystery. It is not repeating the material in sense of going back and looking for something new. Instead you want to return to the points where you experienced the greatest movement in order to allow yourself to savor, deepen and better appreciate the experience, to allow it to be reinforced.

So on this last day, simply return to the moment in one of your prior prayer periods this week where you felt the greatest movement toward or away from God. The place of deepest affect. Go back there and see what else God wants to share with you.

Day Seven of the Second Week

Review of the Week

On the last day of each week during the retreat, you are invited to review and pray back over your journal for the preceding days of prayer this week. As you do, consider

Where was I most moved?

What was God's presence like?

What do I want to share in my small group?



FOURTH WEEK: CELEBRATING THE INCARNATION

Grace for the Week: I pray this week for the grace of a deepened understanding of what it means that God became human for me.

Day One of the Fourth Week

Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each in his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

As you sit contemplating Jesus' birth ask yourself:

What do you see when you look into the manger? Ask the spirit to show you the depths of the riches of Christ, your Christmas gift.

Jesus was born impoverished, placed in an animal's stall, and wrapped in swaddling clothes. Why would God plan

such a lowly appearance for the Word, who had been with him from all time?

What do you want to say to God? To Jesus?

Day Two of the Fourth Week

Luke 2:8-19

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign to you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was a great multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about the child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

What does it say to us that among the first to glorify God for the birth of Jesus were lowly shepherds?

Day Three of the Fourth Week

The Mystery of the God's Entry Into the World

In the letter to the Philippians, St. Paul writes of Jesus that though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

In this, the theologian Michael Himes finds the most remarkable statement about the Incarnation: that Christ chose “to be one with us rather than remaining in the form of God, calling it “the most extraordinary compliment ever paid to being human.” Here is Himes restatement of the incredible claim made in the Letter to the Philippians:

The great mystery hidden from all generations and revealed in the Incarnation is God's secret ambition. From all eternity God has wanted to be exactly like you and me. This is the ultimate statement of the goodness of being human, the rightness of humanity. The immense dignity of the human person is at the heart of the Christian tradition because it flows directly from the doctrine of the Incarnation itself. Indeed, the Incarnation is the highest compliment ever paid to being human. It is also the divine response to our original sin. If the originating sin, the origin of evil, is the rejection of the goodness of being a human being, the Incarnation is the unsurpassable revelation of that goodness.

As you reflect on Himes words, consider the enormity of the Incarnation and what it says about our dignity as human person. How does this understanding affect your life?

Day Four of Fourth Week

What Message Have I Come to Give

As we approach the end of our Advent Ignatian retreat, your prayer today is this exercise titled “The Advent,” taken from Anthony DeMello’s book “Wellspring: A Book of Spiritual Exercises.”

The events of history were controlled for my coming to this world no less than for the coming of the Savior.

The time had to be ripe, the place just right,
the circumstances ready, before I could be born.

God chose the parents of his Son and endowed them with the personality they needed for the child that would be born. I speak to God about [those] he chose to be my parents until I see that they had to be the kind of human beings they were if I was to become what God meant me to be.

The Christ child comes, like every other child,
to give the world a message.

What message have I come to give?

I seek guidance from the Lord to express it in a word or image.

Christ comes into the world to walk a certain path, fulfill a certain destiny.

He consciously fulfilled what had been “written” for him.

As I look back I can see in wonder what was “written” and has thus far been fulfilled in my own life, and for each part of that script, however small, I say, “Thanks” to make it holy with my gratitude.

I look with expectation and surrender at all that is to come and, like Christ, I say, “Yes. Let it be done.”

Finally I recall the song the angels sang when Christ was born. They sang of the peace and joy that give God glory.

Have I ever heard the song the angels sang when I was born?

I see with joy what has been done through me
to make the world a better place
and I join those angels in the song they sang
to celebrate my birth.

Day Five of the Fourth Week

My Christmas Gift

Today follows from the theme you prayed with yesterday. The focus of today's prayer is on the unique gift you want to offer the Christ child, the gift you will kneel and offer before the crèche on Christmas morning.

We are not always good about recognizing our talents. Sometimes we can't see them at all. Sometimes we know the things we are good at but we don't think they are important. They come easy to us, so we don't see them as real strengths. (Kind of like – if I'm good at it, it can't be very worthwhile.)

Spend some time reflecting on the gifts and talents you have been given by God. If you have difficulty viewing them from your eyes, try calling to mind some of the key people in your life – the friends and mentors who have helped you to know who you are and what you can do; people who have been your models of a life lived with joy and integrity; people for whom you are grateful when you look at your life. What have you learned from them about yourself and about the gifts and talents that are special to you? If someone asked them to describe your strengths and weaknesses, what specific ones do you think they would mention? Pretend you are one of these people writing a recommendation letter for you, perhaps the recommendation that got you the job you have now. What would it say?

And then ask yourself

How have I been using my gifts to bring God's light to the world?

*Are there ways in which I have been failing to use my gifts?
Have I hidden my talents under a bushel?*

How might I use some of the gifts I have been failing to be generous with?

What do I need from God to be able to more fully use the gifts I have been given to bring God's light to the world?

Day Six of Fourth Week

Repetition

Pray back over your journal from your prayer experiences of these past several weeks, revisiting various moments. When you reach one where you felt particularly moved, go back to that experience. Simply return to the moment in the prior prayer period where you felt the greatest movement toward or away from God – the deepest affect. And see what else God wants to share with you.

Day Seven of Fourth Week

Appropriation

Spend some time gathering the graces of this retreat experience. Here is one method you might use to do so.

I am present to God, my creator, who has journeyed with me throughout these weeks of Advent prayer. I am present to the Risen Jesus living and growing within me.

1. What am I most grateful for as a result of this retreat?

2. With the help of the Spirit, I let my memory wander over the events of these weeks and ask:
 - a. Where did I feel drawn to God?
 - b. What new understanding do I now have about God and the ways in which God relates to me? What new understanding have I come to about myself? What new understanding have I come to about my relationship with others?
 - c. What is the most significant grace given to me during this retreat experience?
3. How am I looking forward to the future?
 - a. Do I feel drawn to a decision or action as a result of this retreat?
 - b. What difference will the graces of this retreat make in my life?

I pray to respond to God and to the graces of this experience with greater faith, hope, love, humility, courage.

In wonder and awe I express gratitude to God for the gift of this retreat. I allow God to thank me for my openness and generosity during this retreat.



Bellarmino Chapel



SAINT XAVIER
CHURCH JESUIT

Inward Reflection. Outward Action

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