
WAYS OF PRAYER

IN THE IGNATIAN TRADITION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT IS PRAYER.....	3
PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE	3
THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES.....	4
IGNATIAN WAY OF PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURES.....	5
DIFFERENT HUMAN FACULTIES	5
METHODS: THE HOW OF ENGAGING THE TEXTS	6
IGNATIAN MEDITATION.....	7
METHOD OF IGNATIAN MENTAL PRAYER	7
MEDITATION REVIEW QUESTIONS	8
COLLOQUY.....	9
IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION– (IMAGINATION) - 2 METHODS.....	9
IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION (SCENES) <i>COMPOSITION OF PLACE</i> (SE 47).....	10
IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION <i>APPLICATION OF SENSES</i> (SE 121-126)	10
3 WAYS OF ENCOUNTERING SCRIPTURE.....	11
DRYNESS IN PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE.....	11
ONE POSSIBLE CAUSE OF DRYNESS	12
THERE IS A TIME TO STUDY, TO READ, AND TO PRAY WITH SCRIPTURES.....	12
IGNATIAN PRAYER PERIOD.....	13
THE BEGINNING: PREPARATORIES	13
THE MIDDLE: THE ASSIGNED EXERCISE	14
THE END: CLOSING PRAYER.....	15
REFLECTION AND REVIEW TIME	15
THE REFLECTION	15
<i>Savoring the Graces of the Exercise.....</i>	15
THE REVIEW.....	16
<i>The Importance of the Review.....</i>	16
JOURNALING.....	17
<i>EXAMPLES OF WHAT GOES INTO A SPIRITUAL JOURNAL.....</i>	17
<i>GUIDELINES.....</i>	17
IGNATIAN MENTAL PRAYER.....	18
MENTAL PRAYER: A DEFINITION	19
COMMENTARY ON MENTAL PRAYER	19
DISTRACTIONS AND ATTENTION IN MENTAL PRAYER: UNDERSTANDING OUR GOD-GIVEN BRAINS.....	20
<i>Prayer: Where our heart meets Heart.....</i>	20
<i>The Brain/ Body Mind.....</i>	20
THE EXAMEN.....	21
PRACTICAL NOTES FOR THE EXAMEN	22

WHAT IS PRAYER

Prayer raising of one's mind and heart to God¹ CCC2559

Prayer is in relationship with God. Though impossible to summarize the vastness of such a subject, I will attempt to address a few points of how our life with God comes into expression. Prayer is not a method; it is encountering grace received.

It begins with God's promoting, where we then turning our attention with intention with Him – be it a moment as in passing by friend to say hello or a thank you, or an hour of intentional attention with or without conversation. It is as wide and varied in passive and active activities as in our human relations, and more.

It's in this relationship where we can simply sit before God's creation or in Adoration responding in awe and wonder, or share our response to a gift we received, or ask for a need we have. We can imagine walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus and experience Him with us, or having our hearts lift in joy and gratitude in the reality of receiving Him in us through the Eucharist. Prayer as being with (contemplative-mental prayer), listening for the whispers of the Holy Spirit, or as petition, thanksgiving, repentance, and adoration is when we recite the Our Father with an intentional awareness of each word; or when we use our own words to give thanks or share our hopes and desires as in a colloquy.

Categorizing or classifying prayer or defining in the Catholic tradition spans from active to passive, vocal, mental (interior) to contemplative. Here I will be focusing on the active 'methods' from the Spiritual Exercises.

PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE

Prayer, when entering the Scriptures, is the way to come to know Who we desire to love and Who desired and continues to love us. For in Scripture, we enter into God revealing God's very Self to us in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh the One who we received in the Eucharist.

¹ Catholic Catechism CC2559

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

“IGNATIUS’S MASTERPIECE THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES ARE MEANT SO MUCH TO BE READ AS TO BE DONE. IT’S NOT REALLY A TREATISE OR A WORK OF THEOLOGY BUT RATHER A MANUAL DESIGNED TO GUIDE BOTH THOSE WHO ARE DIRECTING AND THOSE WHO ARE FOLLOWING IGNATIUS’ PROGRAM.” THE OVERALL PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISES IS TO PREPARE US TO MAKE A DECISION REGARDING OUR VOCATION OR THE BASIC DIRECTION IN LIFE.”²

Out of his personal experience and his experience with others, Ignatius mapped out a journey which he called The Spiritual Exercises. The purpose and ultimate goal of the exercises is to come to discern God’s will through freedom from inordinate attachments in coming to know Christ more clearly, to love Him dearly, and to follow Him more nearly in the context of our vocation and daily life encounters. And that knowingness, a gift of grace comes from encountering the scriptures through prayer.

Over the decades, as Ignatius was helping souls as a layperson, he taught people how to commune with God and to find true freedom (from their attachments) to follow God’s will in allowing their life to come under influence of grace.

He shared from the Church’s tradition the different ways of prayer, which engaged those God-given mental faculties such as thought, feeling, imagination, memory, will, perception, reason, and sensation. We do not need a neuroscientific or psychological understanding of these different methods, yet a basic awareness that there is knowledge of how our mind-body/brain works can bring us to an awareness of how our interior life –the affective self and soul integrates.

Spiritual knowingness is different from knowledge or a thought knowing or a felt emotion (emotions are multidimensional as subjective feelings + cognitive element of thoughts + automatic expressive components + physiological and motivational urges). Knowingness is a result of an intimate encounter of the Mystery – God.

² Bishop Barron: Pivotal Payers Video

IGNATIAN WAY OF PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURES

How we come to know God's Self deeply, through God's revealed Self in the person of Jesus, is by entering into the scriptures by praying with intention and attention using all of our God-given faculties of intellect, memory, imagination and will.

St. Ignatius was gifted in understanding how the mind and heart connect to be able to listen and experience the presence and action of God sharing God's Self through the scriptures, in our daily encounters with others, and in nature, in addition to the sacraments.

He noticed through his own experience and by working with others, how we have been designed by our Creator within an interior affectivity or what I referred to as the physiology of the soul, (soul as in anima, the whole person) and by using different methods one may come to a profound 'felt knowledge' of God in our desire to become more like Christ.

St. Ignatius also understood the importance and process of reflecting upon our experiences so as to lead one into a deeper knowledge of Christ, beyond just our thoughts. It is as if our soul speaks this knowingness from listening to the whispers of the Holy Spirit residing within us.

(Allowing for reflection time, savoring brings the experience into our long-term memory, thereby transforming our minds. One of the aspects of mental or called interior prayer.)

DIFFERENT HUMAN FACULTIES

We have: 6 mental faculties - imagination, intuition, will, perception, memory, and reason; and 5 senses- see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. What human faculties will naturally come into play depends upon the text in prayer, reading or studying. Ignatian prayer methods are all active and intentional and incarnational. During our prayer time in encountering the word to encounter the Word – images, thoughts, memories, and feelings usually spontaneously emerge.

Depending upon the scriptural text, we will be naturally inclined to use more of our *imagination* when there is Jesus in action. This if used formally is called *Ignatian contemplation (two methods- the 'composition of place' and 'application of senses')* using our God-given imagination to construct the scene and engage our senses so as to experience being there with Christ.

The method of composition of place and application of senses is a practice that is deeply incarnational. "*It prevents prayer from being merely an exercise in abstraction and it assures that the whole person's body-mind will senses imagination is involved in the communication with God. It constitutes I think one of the greatest gifts Ignatius has given to the spiritual tradition.*" Bishop Barron: St. Ignatius Pivotal Player

In the praying with Gospel parables or some of the Letters of the Apostles, we come to reflect upon how God might be speaking to us (in our mental or also called interior prayer) going through a discursive process stimulating *memories, words, and/ or images* –when formally used it is an *Ignatian meditation method* using our intellect and will in seeking what insights God had for us.

The term Contemplative is used in the Carmelite tradition as related to prayer to refer to mental (interior prayer) as active contemplation where one's disposes themselves in silent prayer to be open to what graces may come and infused contemplation refers to the gift of union with God that only God can give. In the Ignatian tradition contemplative term is used to describe a person of prayer in action "a contemplative an action." It's a way of being and proceeding.

METHODS: THE HOW OF ENGAGING THE TEXTS

These methods are primary and important to review. Especially the Composition of Place and Application of Senses.

The Ignatian Way Praying with Scriptures

<https://www.karenshieldswright.com/post/praying-with-scriptures-introduction>

Ignatian Meditation

<https://www.karenshieldswright.com/post/ignatian-meditation-lectio-divina>

Ignatian Contemplation – Composition of Place and Application of Senses

<https://www.karenshieldswright.com/post/copy-of-ignatian-contemplation-imaginative-prayer>

Note: Remember there is no right or wrong way to pray. These methods are what have been passed down to us helping one communicate with God. It's not the method that counters but the content of our hearts. Methods are ways to dispose ourselves, our human activity yet prayer is always first God's invitation to us and grace.

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IGNATIAN MEDITATION

Discerning & Listening To The Heart Using Our Intellect & Memory

It is a **Mental Prayer** in reading and re-reading a selection we seek to discover on each reading more of an understanding of what God has for us. In this discursive process, we reflect upon what thoughts, images, memories, or insights were brought to mind by the Holy Spirit.

METHOD OF IGNATIAN MENTAL PRAYER

Read a passage 3 times. After each time you read, ask a question, reflect and respond. You may read the scripture passage aloud to hear with your ears the words.

1st Time Reading *The Literal Level. Read to understand.*

The Head

- o Question: Ask yourself what is happening in the passage? Who is there, what is being said, where it is etc.?
- o Notice a word, phrase, or image that has resonated within you.
- o Take a moment to savor the insight, or a new understanding of the passage.
- o Note down those in few words or phrase or image what it was about.

2nd Time –Affective Level – Read to Connect

The Heart

- o Questions: What does this passage say to me or connect with my current situation? What are my thoughts and feelings upon reading this a second time?
- o Notice how the rereading has affected you.
- o Take a moment to savor the insight, feeling, or a new understanding.
- o Note down a few words to describe how it has affected your thoughts or feelings

3rd Time –Level of the Soul – Read to be Led

The Spirit

- o Questions: What is the message for me? What is God trying to say to me?
- o Reflective Listening: Sitting in silence, await the Holy Spirit. Allow God's initiative to speak with a prompting: *It comes up into you... as a new thought, feeling, an image, word, or phrase from scripture, or through a poem or song.*
- o Response: Share with God, follow the prompting of your heart, it could be through words or just sitting with Him in gratitude and love.

MEDITATION REVIEW QUESTIONS

Reflect: What was God saying to me through the text?

Respond: What do I want to say to God about the text?

Result: What do I want to do based on this prayer time?

Request: What God's graces I need to help me commit and follow through

COLLOQUY

A colloquy is a formal conversation, in prayer it is as if we have a conversation between friends, we speak but we also listen; speaking with God the Father, Jesus or Mary, and the saints (#54 Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius). Such is used throughout the Spiritual Exercises. Another term used to describe this is mental prayer or interior prayer.

<https://www.karenshieldswright.com/post/colloquy-prayer-as-conversion>

IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION– (IMAGINATION) - 2 METHODS

God speaks through our imaginations as well as through our understandings, memories, thoughts, intellect, desires, feelings, and emotions.

It is an Imaginative Prayer where we use our imagination to bring to life the experiences of being there, as we allow ourselves to be caught up as in a movie or a book. Jesus used imagination in his teaching on how to live life –here we imagine (make present) a mystery of Jesus' life in a way it becomes real, as it is.

It is in quiet reflection, patient noticing – is how we sense God who is ever-present.

There are two methods he prescribes - *the 'composition of place' and 'application of senses'*) to construct the scene and engage our senses so as to experience being there with Christ. – Ignatian Contemplation.

Jesus knew how important one's imagination was for he taught in parables – i.e., the prodigal son, the widow's mite, the rich young man, the good Samaritan, the one lost sheep. He asks us to be with the Gospel passage as if it is happening now for the word of God has life... words live eternally in the past, present and the future... they will always be present, alive in the moment.

We flow into using our faculty of *imagination* when Jesus is in action when praying on a passage.

“It prevents prayer from being merely an exercise in abstraction and it assures that the whole person's body-mind will sense imagination is involved in the communication with God. It constitutes I think one of the greatest gifts Ignatius has given to the spiritual tradition.” Bishop Barron: St. Ignatius Pivotal Player

Most of the Exercises are scenes of Jesus doing, on the move, ministering, healing, speaking, interacting with others. Ignatius doesn't want us to just think about Jesus but wants us to experience the Word made flesh. He wants Jesus to fill your senses. He wants you to meet him.

Note: In this prayer time, Holy Spirit will make present for you a mystery of Jesus' life in a way that is meaningful for you now when praying this way. The method of composition of place and application of senses is a practice that is deeply incarnational.

IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION (SCENES) *COMPOSITION OF PLACE* (SE 47)

To grow more fully in faith knowledge

- **Reconstruct** the scene as in a movie using your imagination.
- **Observe** what is going on in the scene.
 - What does Jesus look like? How do the others react to him? What are the people saying to one another? What emotions fill their words? Is Jesus touching someone?
- **Place yourself** as you visualize the scene, note your desire to be there.
 - As an observer, or as one lining up for healing, or as one helping others to Jesus.

IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION *APPLICATION OF SENSES* (SE 121-126)

This is a prayer form in which one applies one's senses to the Composition of Place [seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling in another imaginative way, thus making the scene become more real and alive.

In praying the scripture scene, we place ourselves right in there – we now add our senses to imagine - seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting as a bystander or a participant – ex: The Passover, The Last Supper.

To grow more fully in felt knowledge

- **I see** the people, and what is going in the event in scripture verses.
- **I hear** what the people are saying, volume and tone of their voices, the noise of the street, etc.
- **I feel** the objects around me – the soil under my feet, the breeze, the clothes I am wearing, the sun on my face.
- **I taste** the fish he is cooking at the sea of Galilee; I taste the wine at the wedding of Cana.
- **I smell** the sea air, the spring flowers on the Mount of the Beatitudes.

Contemplation Review Questions

In Composition of Place or Application of Senses, by imaging the place as in a movie, we come to experience God in action.

- Where am I in this scene?
- Where does Jesus want me to be?
- What do I see, hear, smell, feel, taste?
- What is this experience like for me?
- What is God sharing with me?
- What do I want to share with God?

3 WAYS OF ENCOUNTERING SCRIPTURE

There are three different ways we can come to the scriptures – study, read or pray. We:

- **Study** the scriptural text for historical or contextual understanding in a Bible study; or
- **Read** the daily Mass reading followed up by a commentary for understanding and new insights of the author; or
- **Pray** with the text to listen directly from God through the His word –Lectio Divina – holy reading.

DRYNESS IN PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Many come to spiritual direction sharing this distress. They wonder why their prayers leave them feeling dry, they feel distant from God or God distant from them or feeling desolate. *“Something is missing, but know not what”*, they share, or *“God is distant out there”*. *“I really do not know Jesus!”* *“I must not be doing it right. I must not be praying enough, the more I read, the less I feel, can you give me more things to do.”*

Though they had moments, something had happened as if they were touched by Jesus or had an insight from the Holy Spirit but ended up doubting or dismissing those experiences (doubting or dismissing is another topic to be addressed). These dry experiences tend to leave one with a sense of going nowhere, or so they believe.

Their solution was adding more of the same 'way' thus leaving them with even more heartfelt aloneness, even frustrated and some a bit angry (if they dare admit it) with God for He seemingly was not listening. This led them to question their relationship with God and God's relationship with them, particularly about not being loved, or not even worthy (not experiencing being loved or worthy are two other topics to be addressed shortly).

After asking more about how they prayer, most often it's become all 'head work' which is exhausting, the heart's motivation was there yet something was missing.

When we explore this 'dryness' I find there has been a misunderstanding on several levels.

First a brief clarification on how God 'speaks' through Scripture. How God speaks to us (how we 'hear' the God speaking to us) is: it is in a word, words, or phrases within the scriptural readings that God the Holy Spirit prompts in us that has some connection to and or a meaningfulness in our life that day or in general, when we are 'reading in a prayerful way' (prayer). That is God speaking directly to us (His words) through the scriptures.

ONE POSSIBLE CAUSE OF DRYNESS

I came to realize retreatants (myself included before I learned from studying St. Ignatius) **were using the ‘study’ or ‘reading’ methods as ‘prayer’** with scripture and expecting the results that accompany the grace of prayer. Study and Reading are the methods to feed our minds that will help us to understand and grow in virtue, they help form us in putting on the mind of Christ. Yet, they are not a prayer method, though are a prelude and support to the life of prayer.

We all know the importance of understanding what we are praying before we begin to pray, yet we find ourselves stuck in the study or read mode. Without realizing it, or we were never taught, there is another simpler way. God speaks across time through His words, and He will speak personally to us, if we engage our different faculties, that He created for us to use.

What can one do?

Though we cannot control the movements of God in our lives, we can take steps to make ourselves more open and receptive to how God speaks to us.

THERE IS A TIME TO STUDY, TO READ, AND TO PRAY WITH SCRIPTURES.

Reading, studying, listening, and praying using different parts of our brain. Thus, we have different experiences. That is God’s design.

We cannot expect to have a heartfelt experience when we are analyzing or investigating, such as when trying to put a particular scripture in a context such as its location: was it in Galilee or Jerusalem? Who is speaking? How does it connect to what may have happened before? Was it before or after the Resurrection? Those require different mental functions.

Once we have a grounding of such knowledge, we can settle into a spontaneous prayer moment or a formal prayer period. *We need all 3 – studying, reading, and praying, but we cannot expect one to substitute for the other.*

Based upon my training and experiences with working with directees, and in my own experience, I found it is not just the ‘what’ we are praying with which we need to know about, but the ‘how’ and having *expectations* (which is a whole other topic, to be put aside for the moment).

Moreover, beyond methods with scripture, there is so much more to learn about the ‘*how and what to listen for*’ in the different ways God speaks and acts in our life (more to come on this, too) when it comes to contemplative prayer (other terms: interior prayer, mental prayer, the Colloquy).

IGNATIAN PRAYER PERIOD

The Ignatian Prayer Period format is used during The Spiritual Exercises, it is structured with a beginning, middle, and end. When praying with the scriptures it naturally has the movements found in Lectio Divina: with a preparatory (beginning), then naturally flowing into Lectio (middle section) and ending with a formal close) followed by a Reflection. This same structured format of praying is what we can use for the daily Mass readings.

Presupposition: We are to read and if need be study the scripture beforehand to address questions for understanding. Studying, reading, and praying are different ways we encounter scripture, but not the same.

THE BEGINNING: PREPARATORIES

Compose Self

Turn our attention towards God.³

Image the reality of God's gaze of love upon you (Looking at God looking at you)
(This time of gaze is in and of itself is a contemplative prayer 'of being with')

Preparatory Offering Prayer – a surrendering, offering of your complete self

- In your own words or
- use St. Ignatius' Prayer

Receive, O Lord, all my liberty. Take my memory, understanding and entire will. Whatever I have or possess, You have given me; I restore it all to You, and surrender it wholly to be governed by Your will.

Preparatory Petitionary Prayer – it's a grace request – deepest desires, needs, hopes

- In your own words
- Use your imagination Jesus asking you "What do you want me to do for you?" Mark 10:51

Formal prayer: "I ask for this grace _____ (specific) and that all my intentions, actions and operations may be ordered purely to the service and praise and greater glory of God my Creator and Savior"

³ A common phrase used to begin prayer is: "Let us enter into God's presence". Since God is always present within us and all around us, using those words contradicts the Church's teaching, and in fact the reality. Our brains register this as a dissonance, a conflict reinforcing the concept that God's is distant (even though we may feel that at times, and/or how we have come to believe we have to do something to 'get there' (which is a false and often a belief that is so distressing where one must do more and more, for nothing we do is enough to receive His acceptance, love , embrace. It becomes a downward spiral of exhaustion leaving a crisis of an abyss).

THE MIDDLE: THE ASSIGNED EXERCISE

- o Praying with an assigned Scripture* as the Exercise; or
- o Praying with an assigned Meditation as the Exercise ie. Two Standards

Depending upon the Exercise either a Scripture or a specific Meditation it will elicit either more of a discursive mental method- Ignatian meditation (using mental powers of intellect, memory, and will) or imaginative methods of entering into prayer- Ignatian Contemplation - Composition of Place and Application of Senses.

*During this Prayer of holy reading (Lectio Divina), we enter into different levels of experiences while praying with scriptures or non-scriptural based holy writings, depending upon the 'method' we use. In the beginning we need to learn the different methods and practice them intentionally, so they become natural and intuitive. This is the human side of the activity, to help us be disposed, all the time remembering that all is gift, we have been drawn by God desiring to be with us.

The Movements of Lectio Divina are:

- Reading – Lectio
 - Receiving – in order to move through to the next phrase – we need to let the word of God be received into us before we begin reflecting on what just entered into us.
- Reflecting - Meditatio
- Responding - Oratio
- Resting – Contemplatio

We enter into 'reading' – lectio; we become aware, we consider – meditatio; we enter into a dialogue, respond – oratio; we come to a place of rest – contemplation. These are these movements with different levels of accompanying experiences that may seem mechanical at first - a step-by-step pattern (Scholastic method of intentional movement) yet we allow the Spirit to move us through each phase as the Spirit will (Monastic method) in a back-and-forth movement in different patterns.

Though we begin prayer in Lectio, we may be drawn immediately into contemplation, or be filled spontaneously with an oratio, as we allow ourselves to be led.

Ignatian way of praying with Scriptures is with intention and attention; it takes 'work' on our part. That is why he used the term Spiritual Exercises

THE END: CLOSING PRAYER

3 Ways to Close our Exercise

- Formal Vocal Prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary ...)
- Colloquy (Personal prayer or the Exercise Colloquy)
- Gestures (Sign of Cross, Kneel)

REFLECTION AND REVIEW TIME

THE REFLECTION

SAVORING THE GRACES OF THE EXERCISE

Without a recalling and noting down of the experiences of grace, those moments are left at the unopened door of our memory, and will thereby be forgotten, yet not forgotten by God. You may write it down directly after your prayer closed, or as part of your Colloquy, or before taking that walk or break St. Ignatius recommends. You may find it best in the evening before or during your Review of the day's Exercise close to the Examen.

Reflection is writing on the gifts of graces – insights – received during your prayer times within the Spiritual Exercise of the Day

Outside of our prayer period, we are to come to reflect upon our experiences during the “Spiritual Exercise” where we begin to learn - to be aware, to understand, and to ‘discern’ where God met us so as to move towards taking actions.

Though it is difficult to put such an encounter into words, it will help us remember and imprint this within our mind and soul, thus transforming our minds and soul forever. .

This is also a time that can spontaneously turn into another moment of oratio.

- What came up in this prayer time:
 - From me - What stood out as the significant interior movements*?
 - From God - What were the insights, promptings, and or graces received?

THE REVIEW

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE REVIEW

*"The prayer review is an intentional conscious inquiry of our prayer period, (as important as Repetitions) for an affective assimilation of and deepening personalization of our previous interior experiences."*⁴

These questions have a similar focus as the Examen – noticing, reflecting, responding in a colloquy.

- How was I when I came to prayer:
 - Was I rested, tired, hungry, distracted, contented, excited?
 - What were my desires, requests, needs?
 - What were my expectations? One of anticipation, hesitating or not sure about trusting?

- Was my prayer:
 - More in my head (thoughts, analyzing, searching) or heart (felt senses, responding) or moving between both?
 - Was I engaging my imagination?

- Where am I now after this prayer time:
 - **Feelings of consolation, dryness (desolation)?

These questions help with one's noticing, attention, intention, and commitment, and when noting down the specifics on what was shared with God and shared by God with you.

This is different than *journaling in prayer* yet it is an aspect of journaling when you write them down, and with these it can lead to an extension of the prayer at another level of prayer, to something else connected in our memories or insights.

Later when you review your notes you may see a theme or themes have developed.

Should we do this review after every prayer period?

Yes and No.

During the 30-week *19th Annotation Retreat in Everyday Life of the Spiritual Exercises* yes on most days.

You may find during praying the daily readings of Mass, you found one, in particular, stood out, review that one; or may find yourself drifting back to one prayer moment that was filled with such abundant graces that you desire to return again. Return to it, use these review questions to savor the graces even more.

⁴ George E. Ganass, SJ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*

JOURNALING

Devotional Journaling, as a spiritual practice, is simply noting down your experiences and reflections from your daily life in and about God and you, which you share with God.

It can contain notes as simply as your experience of the bird's song one morning, to a complex systematic study and reflection project on a biblical passage. It about you and God in relationship, through all your encounters with and through God with people, places, and all things.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT GOES INTO A SPIRITUAL JOURNAL

- **Reflections about what you have sensed around you or observed during your everyday or places you have been (travels, retreats)**
 - o Your experiences, and insights you had along the way
- **Reflections on what others have said or written that inspired you.**
 - o What was it about that moved you?
- **Your experiences when meditating on your daily readings of biblical passages or other spiritual writings.**
 - o What happened, what insights you had, and your feelings – positive or negative?
 - Prayers you've prayed
 - o Formal (prayers by others)
 - o Your personal prayers (requests, thanksgiving)
 - o Your cries out to God
- **Letter writing to; talking to and with; or just being with God.**
 - o What you have experienced when sharing with God {when writing, meditating, during one of your mental chats, or just being with God during the day}?
 - o What insights did you come away with about you and God, what promptings did you sense were from God?
- **Write about the ways you've surprised yourself, such as what you've discovered while looking back in your journal.**
- **Your or other's photos, drawings, doodles**

GUIDELINES

- The most important is to be honest with yourself and God, by being open to the gentleness of the Holy Spirit who will guide and enlighten you towards the truth.
- Have a sturdy notebook, keep it handy, write in it at the same time each day, and when you have been prompted. Also, note the date for each entry.
- Look to connect it with the liturgical year or seasons of the year or the spiritual program you are taking.

IGNATIAN MENTAL PRAYER

The practice of mental prayer is a time where we are with God in solitude and outward silence for sharing love in loving communion. Mental prayer is an interior action, in which we share with God where we naturally engaging the three powers of the soul - memory, intellect, and will (followed by resting). It is for anytime, or it may occur spontaneously or intentionally after Lectio Divina. There is no formula. It can be preceded or not by other formal vocal prayers and reading scripture.

St. Ignatius' mental prayer methods within the Spiritual Exercise use a chosen subject encased with a prayer format: beginning with recollecting what we are going to do, with moments of adoration in honoring God, with offering every faculty and action (interior and exterior) to be of service and praise. This preparatory begins (in silence and gaze), moves through reading, reflecting and ends in a formal prayer or a Colloquy. This way of meditation on the Mysteries and other Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius *is formalized in a process to dispose the heart, is a 'mental' prayer, that is mystical for it is ultimately what God does in us.*

One may use imagination to construct a scene as a prelude to entering into the meditation. Then a brief petition for special graces one hopes to obtain, then the 'meditation' begins. Our faculty of *memory* recalls the subject, repeating recalling, if necessary, using the act of faith until our *intellect* understands the truth during this a process of consideration, reasoning and studying on how it may apply to our life, and the desires that rise up in us on what we then are resolved to do using our faculty of the *will*. Ending with a recall (reflection) of a leading thought, motive, or affection to take with us.

Other aspects of Mental prayer as prescribed in the Exercises for example are: the time of the day, a specific length of time, or intermittent spontaneous recalling with conversations throughout the day or where we may find ourselves reflecting and listening out of pure love.

Ultimately it is an encountering that moves through with a personalized conversation as if with a friend.

Contemplative prayer, mental prayer, interior prayer, colloquy are different terms for the same practice. Exterior or Vocal prayer is what is expressed in words or gestures while Interior or Mental prayer – the word mental tends to denote left brain thinking, so best to use Interior which has a broader meaning as it relates to prayer, for prayer is an act of loving much (St. Teresa of Avila).

MENTAL PRAYER: A DEFINITION⁵

“The form of prayer in which the sentiments expressed are one's own and not those of another person and the expression of these sentiments is mainly, if not entirely, interior and not externalized. Mental prayer is accomplished by internal acts of the mind and affections and is either simple meditation or contemplation.

- In mental prayer the three powers of the soul are engaged:
 - the memory, which offers the mind material for meditation or contemplation
 - the intellect, which ponders or directly perceives the meaning of some religious truth and its implications for practice; and
 - the will, which freely expresses its sentiments of faith, trust, and love, and (as needed) makes good resolutions based on what the memory and intellect have made known to the will.”

Note: As meditation, it is a loving and discursive (reflective) consideration of religious truths or some mystery of faith.

As contemplation, it is a loving and intuitive (immediately perceptive) consideration and admiration of the same truths or mysteries of faith.

COMMENTARY ON MENTAL PRAYER⁶

Fr. Jacques Philippe book *Time for God* he states mental prayer is not a technique “True contemplative prayer is a gift that God gives freely, we do need to understand how to receive it.”pg9

“(T)he human mind is forever tempted to try to make life, including human life, including spiritual life, into something to manipulate out well.”...It is false because it leads us to cling to methods that depend ultimately on human effort, where is in fact, as Christianity sees it, everything is Grace, a free gift from God.”pg10

“There is room for a certain amount of initiative and activity on the human side, the whole edifice of the life of prayer is built upon God’s initiative in his grace. We must never lose sight of that fact for one of the permanent and sometimes subtle temptations of the spiritual life is to rely on our efforts and not on God freely given mercy.” pg11

⁵ *<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=34845>

⁶ Time for God by Fr. Jacques Philippe

DISTRACTIONS AND ATTENTION IN MENTAL PRAYER: UNDERSTANDING OUR GOD-GIVEN BRAINS

PRAYER: WHERE OUR HEART MEETS HEART

Many times, I hear from directees who say they have trouble sitting for an hour for mental prayer. And during that time, they describe having many distractions, and are exhausted in trying to control what is happening and feel discouraged for not doing it right.

THE BRAIN/BODY MIND

In looking at how the brain and the mind functions, there is much we do not know, for it will always be a mystery. Yet today we can observe more how God designed us - for there are many clinical or non-clinical considerations that affect one's initiative and activity. There may be health reasons where pain or certain disabilities prevent a lengthy time frame of sitting in silence.

We have to remind ourselves as Fr. Phillippe writes, all is grace for prayer is not a method or ever restricted to time.

Time: Interior (Mental) prayer can occur at any time, and for any length of time for it rises from the heart from the grace of the invitation where the heart and Heart meet. Beginners to certain prayer methods, may need to become familiar with a few physiological limitations. There are neuroplastic changing that must take place in the brain over a period of time. It takes practice for the brain (with the mind) to build up to a length of time to stay attentive quietly. That is why it is an iterative process starting with 10 minutes and adding additional time little by little.

Attention & Distraction: Our brains naturally wander, it's called mind wondering where the mind easily slips back into the past then forward into the future, into the present, makes a detour on a different topic and starts another journey into the future. It takes a practice of awareness to notice where we've been, and how we can bring ourselves back to the center, the center of our soul where hearts(the soul) touch. (The more we practice, the time between the wandering and noticing becomes less and less.) Soon those wanderings are less frequent, and those intrusive thoughts become less distracting.

Distractions and Discernment of spirits: Thoughts and images will always flow in and out because our brain is always working in the background, it's never sleeps. We need be aware – the discernment of spirits is operational here. If these are thoughts are of God we respond in interior conversation; and if they are our own and distraction, we let them flow in and flow out -if not a distraction we bring them to God; and if the thoughts are of the enemy, we are to ignore them and say a prayer, then give no notice and return to the place that you last felt consoled.

Many are able to listen attentively or notice more interiorly while externally focusing on an icon or attending adoration; and find it is as if time stands still – it is two different sections of our brain are operational.

THE EXAMEN

The Examen a daily prayer of consciousness of ‘finding God in all things’.

Found in the “first week of the (Spiritual) Exercises... (it) is known as the consciousness exam (though) it sounds like an examination of conscience but the practice that Ignatius urges is far deeper and wider than simply looking at our sin. It’s an attempt to look at all the ways that God has been present to us in the course of the day and all the ways He’s offered His grace is to us. Now to be sure we also look at the way we resisted that grace when sin or attachment has gotten the better of us. It is not self-reproach but gratitude.” Bishops Barron ⁷

The Examen is a window of time for prayer, where we reflect upon how we encountered others in God in the everyday. It is a simple daily prayer, with God, who offers us gifts of transforming grace. Also called the prayer of Consciousness or the prayer of Reflection in which we take a journey into the recent past, to savor the present, and to look with hope towards the future.

The Examen is the prayer of graced awareness in reflecting upon encountering God’s presence and action in our everyday: to see the day as it was through the eyes of Christ; to discern the Holy Spirit’s leading direction for us; and to respond to the Father’s loving invitation for renewal and rejoicing.

It is for us to notice more of God’s activity in their daily life, and to grow in virtue and holiness day by day. And to know thy self.

The Method has 5 Movements

1. Gratitude
2. Desire
3. Review & Reflect
4. Response
5. Request

How to Pray the Examen

1. Offer thanksgiving for the day.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the day through God's eyes and for what is most important to take note of.
3. Review and reflect. Share your thoughts and feelings about what come up.
4. Ask for help to know what God would want for you.
5. Share your concerns about tomorrow and ask specifically for what you need.

There are many examples of the Examen to use on different apps or in books. Here are a few:
<https://www.karenshieldswright.com/post/the-examen>

⁷ Bishop Barron Word on Fire Pivotal Players St. Ignatius

PRACTICAL NOTES FOR THE EXAMEN

- Allow God to show you the day. Let Him bring up what He wants to show you.
- Review the section on what does consolation and desolation feel like, and the Rule #2.
- Listen for the prompts within your intellect, will and affect – those interior movements.
- Look at your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions through God's eyes.
- Was your head, heart and hands aligned.
- Remember not all the thoughts are your own; it's what you pay attention to and move with that counts.
- Best to do this when you are not tired.
- Depending upon if you are a night person or a morning person. Some people will reflect early evening, or part of their night prayers, or part of your morning offerings.

The words of this Examen were taken directly from the Jesuits of South Africa Video

“The Daily Examen is a prayerful experience of God. Experience alone does not teach us much, it is when we reflect on our experience that we really begin to learn. The Examen can help us see God’s hand in our daily-lived experience. It’s a simple prayer that has the capacity to transform our lives by helping us become more aware – of the gifts”

Step 1 Preparation

- Slow your mind and calm your body and gently relax into God’s presence. Imagine God welcoming you.

Step 2 Review the Day with Gratitude

- Ask God to show you the day through God’s eyes. Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God.
- Notice any joys and delights; and focus on the day’s gifts.
- Look at the day, look at the work you did, look at the people you interacted with. What did you receive from them? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

Step 3 Review the Day Again Notice Your Feelings

- Notice moments when you were fully alive, times when you felt at peace, joyful, happy, comforted, whole, your best self, and moments when you feel close to God. Allow some of these moments to come to mind. These are times of consolation.
 - Pick a moment that you feel **most grateful for** and stay with it, savor it.
 - Notice how God is drawing you to more of those experiences. Take some time to give thanks to God.
- Now remember anything that you are **less grateful for**. Experiences that caused you to feel drained of energy, frustrated, irritated, angry, sad, alone, isolated, unaccepted, fragmented...less than your best self.
 - Bring these memories before God; ask God to bring you the healing you need.

Step 4 Choose one feature of the day and pray from it

- Asked the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling - positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person, or moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may seem something that’s rather insignificant. Look at it.
- Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart. Whether it be intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude

Step 5 Look Forward to Tomorrow with Hope

- Look forward to tomorrow. Ask God to give you grace for tomorrow’s challenges.
- Pay attention to the feelings that surface as your survey what is coming up. Are you doubtful, cheerful, apprehensive, full of delightful anticipation.
- What do you think you particularly need for tomorrow, strength, energy, patience, courage? Asked for that gift.

The more you practice the Examen way of prayer, the easier and more clear it will become shedding light on the path that God has dreamt for you.

<http://www.jesuitinstitute.org.za/>