

Faith Formation Prayer Routine

S T . I G N A T I U S L O Y O L A P A R I S H

THE DETAILS MATTER

- DAILY PRAYERS
- SOMETHING SPECIAL
- ASKING FOR HELP
- RITUALS
- ENVIRONMENT
- MUSIC
- ART
- SENSES
- COMMUNITY

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

The Details Matter	1
Pray-As-You-Go unpacked	1
To Ponder & To Share	4

I don't know how many of you are athletes and have a regular exercise routine. An exercise routine begins with a regular time and place, a little planning to make sure your clothing and/or equipment is good, stretching and warmup. Depending upon your needs, you may do a little bit of cardio, some weights, sprints, isometrics and maybe even a little yoga. Afterwards, many do a bit of a cooldown as well as evaluation of their workout. You might consider what worked well and what needs more work. Whatever the routine, consistency is a key element to keeping in shape.

This may have been part of what St. Ignatius had in mind when he

decided to call his manual on prayer and retreat the "Spiritual Exercises". This manual includes many "tips" for those "doing" the exercises. They even include rules for eating. Now these rules may seem over-the-top for us more spur-of-the-moment folks, but take a listen and learn not just the rules but the reasons behind the rules.

We are embodied people. What is happening with our bodies affects our prayer. If you are upset, it is often difficult to focus on God. If you are in pain, again, that affects your prayer. Likewise, what we do with our bodies can influence our inner selves. A few deep breaths can help to center

(Continued on next page)

Pray- As- You- Go unpacked

HowStuffWorks.Com has been a staple website for me, especially when I was teaching technical material. This included questions like "Why can't I use a cellphone while on an airplane?" or "What's the difference between a CD, DVD or Blu-Ray?" Well, this is good for technical stuff, but not much of a

help for understanding and/or practicing prayer. There is another website developed by the English Jesuits called Pray-As-You-Go. Designed originally as a prayer podcast for those commuting to work in the morning, the site has branched out to include online retreats and guided meditations. Recently they

introduced a new series entitled "[Practising Prayer](#)." Although not yet complete, it begins with this comparison between exercises for physical health with exercises for spiritual health similar to what has been described above. Although this series is not yet complete, I would

(Continued on page 3)

The Details Matter (cont.)

and focus. Likewise, posture aids our attention. Music can calm us down or lift us up, depending upon our selection. Some of us even focus better when our hands are wrapped around a warm cup of coffee, tea or hot chocolate.

The notion of an embodied self in prayer is not to be prescriptive, but to help you notice what might help and what might distract you in your prayer. One spiritual writer wrote of a situation where an individual always found herself getting upset when she began prayer. Turned out, she was sitting in the same place where she would watch the evening news. The body was conditioned by the space and

place. A simple change of location made a big difference. So, paying attention to place, posture, preferences and predispositions may help you to pick what works best for you.

As an added “assignment”, consider what we do at a Sunday liturgy. How does “time before” affect your ability to pray? How long does it take to settle down if you were rushed and harried just getting to church? Do you have little rituals that help to settle you in place, whether that’s a genuflection, sign of the cross, kneeling down, routine prayer or just a



shrugging off of a heavy coat? How does the opening hymn and/or procession help you to focus, get into the mood? How does standing together for the reading of the gospel or the prayers for one another help us to sense our prayer and attention as communal? Does kneeling after communion help you or is it better to sit? How does holding hands enhance the “Our Father”? The dynamics of the liturgy is more than an exercise, it is supposed to be an aid to prayer. Let it help you to understand and develop a routine for your self.

The details do matter.



Pray - As - You - Go unpacked (cont)

would like to point out some of the techniques they have embedded in their daily podcasts to create a “routine of prayer”. <https://pray-as-you-go.org/> is the general website with a calendar of daily podcasts. When you click on a particular day, you will first hear a bell tone and a announcement of the day’s date and feast. While it may seem Pavlovian, there is something to a regular “trigger” that it’s time to begin. And, like our liturgies, the podcast

begins with a song. Song selection is both to match the theme of the liturgy and to set the tone or mood for prayer. It is impressive that PAYG selects music that covers the gambit of the Catholic Tradition, from Gregorian chant to modern day compositions.

Within the song is a brief introduction to the prayer, what Ignatius would call “the grace to pray for.” How different a reading about fasting might touch you if you are looking at this from the perspective of sin

versus the perspective of preparation for a grand celebration. The same “focus” for the feast is often presented at the beginning of our liturgies as the presider introduces the feast between the greeting and the penitential rite.

Yet the real context for prayer is the “reading of the day”. Although taken from the day’s assigned readings, the selection is usually just one of the readings and sometimes only a portion. Read slowly



What time of day is best for your prayer?

What place has been fruitful for you?

Have you ever tried to enhance your environment with a candle or music?

and distinctly (albeit with a British accent), the pace of reading is to help us to listen deeply, to notice phrases, to relish images or sensations. This is the proclamation of the word and not a reading of a recipe or train schedule.

What happens differently is that the reading is followed by a short period of just music—a chance to let the reading settle into us. We often have a tendency to rush onto the next thing—whether that’s the next commercial or the next daily task. The pauses allow us to simply breathe in the word of God.

And as one would expect, this is a period of reflection on the readings. A couple of

questions are offered to stir our contemplation and consideration. We are not given the answers, we are asked to find how the readings speak to us.

Strangely, or at least strange to many of us, the reading is repeated. Why? Well after listening to the podcasts a number of times you come to see that we “hear” things differently after this period of reflection. This second reading sets us up for the core of the prayer routine, speaking with God. This is our opportunity to share our experience of the reading as one would speak to a friend after discovering a wonderful plant while out hiking, or relishing the tastes of a delightful meal or sharing what troubles you after hearing distressing news. All is geared towards this conversation.

So, even though the prayer experience is only about 12 minutes long, it contains a structure that is meant to help one build a prayer routine.

Now that you have seen the details, now that you know what the routine is going to be, ask yourself, what has been helpful and what has not. Then maybe you can develop your own prayer routine that matches you, your body, your needs and your relationship with God. This is just one routine, one that may or may not match your needs.

Now, go back and consider what you may have seen others do or have heard works for other folks. Some will sing religious songs while cooking or cleaning. Others will speak of meditating while running. Some prefer the quiet of mornings or the satisfaction of evening when all is complete. Consider, try, practice and then choose what works best—at least for this time in your life.

Practice.

To Ponder and to Share

What are your favorite prayer places?
Why are they special to you?

- Outdoors — God's majesty
- In Church — sense of the sacred
- Retreat Center — companionship in prayer
- Back porch in the morning — God gives me another day

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Finding God in All Things

Pray-As-You-Go

Daily Podcasts

Prayer Tools

- Common Prayers
- Guided Meditations
- Mysteries of the Rosary
- Breathing/Body Exercises
- Lectio Divina
- Examen

Retreats & Series

- Practising Prayer
- Walking Prayer
- Pray-as-you-Stay
- Earth Sessions
- Marriage
- Imaginative Contemplation
- Acts of the Apostles
- St. Ignatius & the Spiritual Exercises