



Praying the Ordinary

Continuing his series celebrating the 500th anniversary of Ignatius's conversion, Dutch Jesuit **Nikolaas Sintobin SJ** explores the practice of praying the 'fifth gospel'.

Every day Ignatius spent a long time in prayer. He had a special sensitivity to God's presence. As is often the case with true friends of God, Ignatius was sparing in speaking about the intimacy of his prayer. At the end of his autobiography, however, he tells the following about his inner life:

'... that he had rather grown in devotion – that it's easy to find God – and that he now had it even more than ever in his entire life: no matter when he wanted to find God, he always found Him.'

Ignatius indeed had an exceptional sense of God's presence. Together with his art of discernment, it was at the basis of his policy as superior general. This solidarity was especially nourished and strengthened by a form of prayer that was very dear to him, the prayer of life. It is a very simple form of prayer. It consists of three parts, each of which can be summarised with one word: *thank you*, *sorry*, *please*.

Prayer is more than just introspection. So it is important, at the beginning, to take some time to place yourself in the presence of God. You can also ask him to look back on your life with you.

The first part of life's prayer is *thanksgiving*: to look back at the

events of the past day that have given you joy, strength, courage, rest. Take a moment to let an event come back to you and taste it in your heart and thank God for it. This consolation, however small and insignificant it may seem, says something about how you experienced God. These small details are more important than eye-catching events. Our lives are full of ordinary events. If you learn to distinguish God's presence in these events, then you are on a journey that offers continuous insight. Thanksgiving helps us to become aware of these, often minuscule, pearls in your life.

Is it not characteristic of us humans that we often first look back at what has gone wrong? Ignatius invites us to give priority to thanksgiving, to know where God was present, rather than where God was absent. In concrete terms, if you have little time, you can limit your life's prayer to thanking.

Then, it makes sense to say *sorry*. Where were you sad, empty, irritated, angry, hopeless? The intention is not to lead to desolation, but to become aware of the dead ends in life. Understanding your sin, says Ignatius, is a grace from God. It can help you to avoid pitfalls in the future.

This part of the prayer of life can become a springboard to growth.

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Repentance makes you a freer person. After all, it opens the door to a personal choice to do things differently and to grow in the direction of the beautiful person you are called to be.

This brings us to the third part of the life prayer: please. 'Please' has a double meaning. First, what do you intend to do, what particular point of attention comes to the fore? It does not make sense to want to change everything right away. It is better to limit yourself to one or two achievable concrete points: paying attention to the relationship with a person, to one aspect of your job, to the way you eat

or drink. You can only move forward step by step. This also applies to your spiritual life.

'Please' also has another meaning. In this third stage of life's prayer, you can also ask God for his help. We are strong and weak at the same time.

You can spend a longer or a shorter time at the prayer of life. Five minutes of life prayer before going to bed can really make a difference. Ignatius himself ended every hour of the day with two minutes of prayer. That is why sometimes this is called praying with the fifth gospel: the gospel of your life. ❤️