

## Introduction to Ignatian Prayer: Part 1

St. Ignatius of Loyola was born Inigo Lopez de Loyola in 1491. He was born into a family of some nobility and therefore was exposed at a young age to the romances of courtly life, including gambling, sword fighting, and women. At the Battle of Pamplona, Inigo's leg was shattered by a cannonball, seemingly ending his life of excitement and adventure. While he was recovering at his family castle in Loyola his boredom led him to begin reading about the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. These books introduced him to a new kind of noble adventure, an adventure with God. Upon an unsuccessful pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he stopped in the town of Manresa. He had only intended to stay there for a few days, but he ended up living in a cave for ten months. This is where Inigo developed the Spiritual Exercises, a series of *Spiritual Disciplines* that are dedicated to growing in intimacy with Jesus.

The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius are made up of four "weeks," each "week" dedicated to a contemplation of a different aspect of the Gospel. The first week being personal sin and the sin of the world, the second week being the life and ministry of Christ, and the third and fourth week focused on Christ passion that culminates in the apprehension of Divine Love. The complete retreat is often completed in a one month block, where a participant leaves his or her home, spends time in a retreat center or monastery or over the course of 9 months where one dedicated 1 hour a day to a spiritual exercise.

Each individual meditation calls the participant to use several faculties of the mind in engaging with scripture passages and theological truths. The imagination is key in Ignatian prayer. The participant must offer his or her imagination to the Holy Spirit and allow the Spirit to bring the Scriptures to life and personal relevance. This allows the participant to experience the life and work of Christ more completely in his or her life.

Unlike many other retreats, this one necessitates a highly qualified spiritual director. The retreat may seem counter intuitive at times, so a director is very important for the interpretation of experiences. For this reason, Metamorpha is not promoting a self-guided Ignatian retreat. We do however see the benefits in Ignatian prayer concepts and it is these that will be introducing over the next several months.

Ignatian meditation involves several key spiritual disciplines: lectio divina, Ignatian contemplation, reminiscence, and the examination of consciousness (notice: not conscience). Each of these disciplines play a role in one Ignatian meditation. Fortunately, they are all also highly beneficial to integrate into our own prayer life apart from a complete Ignatian Meditation.



## The Practice of Lectio Divina

### Context

Lectio Divina is Latin for Sacred Reading, and is a term used to describe a four part regimen of Scripture reading that has been used in churches and monasteries for centuries. It was often done communally and aurally because Biblical texts were scarce. When we consider Lectio Divina, it is good to remember that widespread literacy is a relatively new phenomena, and mass printing has only been pervasive for around five hundred years. Recognizing these facts gives context for this particular Spiritual Discipline.

In the age of mass media, the church has replaced the slow, contemplative, process of Lectio with the study of Bible commentaries and internet resources. While these are not bad things by any means, they are no substitute for the intimacy that can be found when opening oneself to the Scriptures and to the Holy Spirit. We hope that this discipline is a blessing to you.

### Practice

#### *Choosing a passage*

Begin by choosing a passage that is fairly familiar to you (you know who wrote it or said it, who it was spoken to, and a basic context for that discourse). We ask you to do this because the weakness of Lectio Divina is that there is potential to take a passage completely out of context. Early church participants in this practice would have guarded against this by choosing a large chunk of text, perhaps even an entire book. Choose a passage that is a complete thought. Consider a parable of Jesus (noting who the parable was being spoken to), a psalm, the creation account, or another other passages that has a clear beginning and end. This is best to start with.



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## *4 Steps of Lectio*

**Lectio**—Simply read the text, perhaps several times. If you are doing Lectio in a group, you may try having several different readers.

**Meditatio**—As you feel yourself beginning to take notice to a particular verse or word within the passage, allow your mind to find its focus there and meditate on that small piece of the passage.

**Oratio**—Talk to God about what has emerged in your reading and meditation time. Feel free to ask questions. Tell God what strikes you about this part of the passage. If you are unsure about why this particular aspect of the passage stood out to you, ask God to give you insight.

**Contemplatio**—As your comments and questions fade to silence, allow yourself to remain there. Acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is at work in you. Open your heart and mind to receive whatever the Spirit would like to give you.

