

Through Lent with Pope Francis



**A Retreat for Lent based on the
reflections of Pope Francis
since his election in 2013**

Ignatian Spirituality Centre

Through Lent with Pope Francis

A Retreat for Lent 2024

Retreat available online with music
www.onlineprayer.net

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Contents

Introduction to the Retreat	4
Review of Day	5
Awareness Prayer	5
Praying with Pictures	7
Lectio Divina	8
Imaginative Contemplation	9
Through Lent with Pope Francis	10
Acknowledgements	104
Resources	105



A Suggestion on how to Pray this Retreat

Since his election in 2013, Pope Francis has visited many countries, reformed the Vatican curia, appointed Cardinals to new and less 'important' places and written many letters and Encyclicals to encourage Christians and other people of goodwill in their faith. His major themes have been care for the environment, anti-war, more compassion and mercy for those who find the Church's teachings hard to follow, encouraging all to live in love and joy, and a desire to allow ordinary Catholics to have an input into Church practice and teaching through a policy of 'synodality'. In this retreat we choose a daily quotation from the writings of Pope Francis, to which we add a suitable quotation from Scripture. We then offer you a picture to help stimulate your prayer and finally a suggestion for pondering over this subject matter. Take as much as you find helpful. You don't have to use everything, sometimes less is more.



Photo by Rachel Strong on Unsplash

Choose what speaks to you

Consider which attracts you most, which speaks to you - the picture, the words of Pope Francis, the thought, or the Scripture? Concentrate on the one element that most strikes you.

Ways of Praying

With Scripture: On the next few pages we have a few different ways of praying. If you wish to pray with the Scripture, then you may choose Lectio Divina, Imaginative Contemplation or repeating a word or phrase that seems to stand out for you and letting it sink in deeply.

With a Picture: We have suggestions for how to pray with a picture. Some of our pictures are more suited to prayer than others, and some will no doubt strike you while others won't.

Creative Art: You might even see if you are inspired to create your own art work based on the subject of the day's prayer.

Review of the Day

We suggest this is done at the end of every day.

- Be still, remember God who loves you is present now.
- Look back over the day. Ask God to shine a light into your heart so that looking back you may be able to see God at work.
- Pay attention to your emotions: What brought you joy? Is there anything you feel unhappy about?
- Talk to God about your day: For what do you feel most thankful? Give thanks.
For what do you feel least thankful? Hand this over to God.
What have you learned from the day?
Look forward to tomorrow. How might you make the best of the day?

Awareness Exercises

The following awareness Exercises can be used at the beginning of each prayer period to help you quieten down.

1. Mantra

A mantra, *a repeated short phrase*, can help us to settle down.

Sometimes we think about the words, but mostly we let go of thinking and trust that simply

saying the words is sufficient. We can repeat the words in time with our walking or breathing or to the rhythm of music. There are many suitable phrases such as,

‘Come Lord Jesus’, ‘The Lord is compassion and love’ etc.

One of the most famous mantras is ‘The Jesus Prayer’:

‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner’.

Photo: Savvas Kalimeris on Unsplash





Photo: Larry George II on Unsplash

2. Awareness of Sounds

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds inside and outside the room. Identify each sound as you are able. Don't stay with any one sound. Gently, slowly, without judging sounds as good or bad, focus your attention on each one then move on. If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

When you are ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing. Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation.

3. Awareness of your body

Beginning at the top of your head and passing down through the body to the feet be attentive to each part of the body in turn.

Gently focus in turn on each part ... head ... face ... eyes ...neck ... shoulders etc.

For each part, allow a few moments to become aware of what is being felt, without making judgement upon it.

Feel temperature, clothing, moving air, tension, pain, tingling etc.

Move on in turn until you have given attention to your whole body.

Then consider your whole self you as a person made in God's likeness ... you in whom God chooses to dwell.

4. Walking

Walk slowly with awareness of whatever comes to you: the surroundings, thoughts, feelings, how your body is. It usually helps to walk more slowly than usual and to pay attention to what is around you.

Praying with Pictures

Each day during this retreat we provide a picture to ponder which in some way links to the person we feature. If you would like to use pictures to stimulate your prayer, then we suggest you:

- Settle down quietly into a comfortable yet attentive position. Wherever you are, you are in the presence of God, acknowledge this.
- Offer yourself, your time and your imagination to God.
- Ask God for what you need today, what you desire.

This could be for a greater love of Jesus, in words such as: Jesus, may I know you clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly.

- Ask God to inspire you and let the picture reveal what God wants you to see.
- What do you feel overall about the picture. Do you like it or dislike it? You may appreciate the colours, the mood, the composition etc.
- Pay careful attention to the picture. If there are people in it, see how they relate to each other. How do you imagine the people are feeling? Are there significant signs or symbols in the picture?
- Spend some time just contemplating the picture.
- What does the picture say to you? Does it challenge you in any way? Does it introduce you to a new way of seeing things? Perhaps you don't like the way the artist or photographer sees things and you imagine things very differently.
- You may want to talk to God about the picture, or about something in your life that the picture has evoked. You may want an imaginary conversation with one or more of the characters in the picture.
- Finish with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



Photo: Pine Watt on Unsplash

Praying with Scripture

You may like to ponder in the 'Lectio Divina' style, or where there is a Gospel story you might like to imagine you are one of the characters in the scene - Imaginative Contemplation, also known as Ignatian Contemplation. If you are part of a prayer group then your group leader should give you some more guidance on both of these, but here are the basic outlines to get you started.

A Prayerful Pondering—*Lectio Divina*

This is suitable for use with psalms, wisdom literature and letters etc.

- **Read the passage slowly** stopping wherever a word or phrase seems to say something. Let the words speak to you.
Let the passage touch your own life, your memories.
There is no one right meaning; the same passage will say very different things to different people.
- **Meditate on the words.** It often helps to say the words or phrases to yourself several times, ideally out loud. Ponder, ruminate!
- **Speak to God in your own words.**
Imagine God speaking back to you. Express your own deepest desires.
- **Contemplate; be in silence with God.** Be quiet and open before God. Rest. Let the mind be still. When your mind starts to wander then turn back to the passage and continue reading.

Allow this fourfold process to continue until the period of prayer is over.

Finish with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

Journaling

After your prayer it is good to jot down in a journal the subject of your prayer and what happened during the prayer, your feelings, thoughts etc. This will help you remember; particularly useful if you are sharing your prayer with a group or spiritual guide. Journaling will also help you notice patterns in your prayer.

Imaginative Contemplation

This is suitable for use with the gospels and other stories.

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses in his book, *The Spiritual Exercises*, is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories alive for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if our imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

Post prayer reflection is important to draw out the implications.

- **Choose a passage**, read and familiarise yourself with the story.
- **You are in the presence of God**, acknowledge this.
- **Offer yourself**, your time and your imagination to God so that whatever you imagine will be inspired by God.
- **Ask God** for what gift or grace you need, what are your deepest desires.

This could be for a greater love of Jesus, in words such as: Jesus, may I know you clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly.

- **Set the scene from your scripture passage.**

Take your time, see all that is around, hear, feel, taste and smell. What is the setting of the story in your imagination? You may imagine it in the present day, or 2000 years ago. You may be involved with people you know.

Become a character in the story..... Who are you?

You may be a central character or someone on the side-lines.

Let the scene unfold naturally. The story might depart from the Gospel scene and take on a life of its own; that's fine, trust God; everything human is appropriate material for prayer.

- **Conversation (colloquy):** When the story has finished talk in your own words to Jesus, God the Father, Mary or one of the characters in the story you have contemplated, imagine how they might reply.
- **End the prayer** with a formal prayer like the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.