

GOD IN THE EVERY DAY

Ignatian way to be aware of God's presence in my everyday life

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1. TO BE GRATEFUL¹

Saint Ignatius, in the “Principle and Foundation” of Spiritual Exercises, first deals with God’s loving creation in each one of us, to move onto a list of the essential attitudes we should all have, and which lead us to salvation, that is, to a fulfilling life. The first one is “to praise”. With all due respect I will translate the Ignatian “to praise” into our concrete and daily life as the attitude of “being grateful”, to live from gratitude, gratefully.

To praise should not only be an action only said with our mouth, but something lived in our heart; gratitude is this praising from our heart as an habitual attitude and not an isolated action. The Ignatian way of life invites us to make gratitude the fundamental attitude of our existence as loved and gifted creatures by God.

At the very beginning, when the Exercises are proposed to us, and with the general examination of conscience (“examen”), Ignatius reminds us that the “first point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the benefits I have received” [234], that is, the gratitude to which we are invited every day. At the end of the Exercises, with the “Contemplation to attain love”, the author reiterates that “the first point” is to “call back into my memory the gifts I have received”, and that it is “interior knowledge of all the great good I have received” and the capacity of understanding and giving thanks (“stirred to profound gratitude”) “to love and serve ... in all things” [233].

Gratitude as a fundamental attitude in life is to understand and be aware every day of what is being granted to me: the benefits received and the people that come to my encounter. It is not to live looking forward to what you deserve and are not granted, but all that I am granted day after day without being worthy of it, unexpectedly and without asking for it. Undoubtedly, the majority of us who listen these words will have many reasons to be grateful as there is much that we have received, and that we receive day after day. We are privileged as such, and much more if we compare ourselves and take as a reference millions of human beings. However, and in spite of this fact, we do not find it easy to live a life of gratitude.

It is also true that all of us can keep count of the issues (bills) in life: for those things not granted to us, for what has hurt us, for what we lack... it is also true that these issues are a burden and may have determined our life, overweighting all that we have received. It is also a fact that there are moments and circumstances in life that we live our deficiencies, difficulties, problems and frustrations so intensely that we find it hard to be grateful. For all this to happen is only natural, but what is neither natural nor good is that we become forgetful and unaware of all that we have

¹ Extract of *Darío Mollá Llácer, sj*, Horizontes de vida. Vivir a la ignaciana. “Horizons of life. Living in the Ignatian way”). EIES 54. pp. 13-14

received and continue receiving day after day as regards to affection, possibilities, sense and resources in our life, and that we forget to be grateful, even if it is only during one day.

Our culture of environmental awareness does not encourage this “being grateful” from the bottom of one’s heart, this living with gratefulness. We are encouraged to live more aware of what we lack than of what we have in abundance; it is a culture that encourages and enlivens our dissatisfaction in favor of the commercial profits of others. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to our gratitude, to keep it alive and active; consequently, this daily “examen”, proposed by Saint Ignatius at the beginning of Spiritual Exercises of all the good received, is very important. This short and simple exercise will be highly beneficial for us and it will change and focus our daily life in a different way.

Gratitude is enriching and fruitful as it generates a great number of positive attitudes, but, on the other hand, to live thinking about what life owes us is useless, frustrating as well as very dangerous for us. It is useless and frustrating, as these are “bills” which are not usually paid for even if we insist on the payment of the debt; it is dangerous because if we live in a regretful way we become installed in frustration and resentment, preventing us from appreciating all that is given to us. Moreover, if we persist in this attitude, this may lead us to an unfair treatment towards others, as we make them “pay” for what they cannot or should not do so, and thus, we distort and impoverish our relation with them.

A falling tree makes more noise than a forest that's growing.

I have mentioned before that to make gratitude a basic attitude in our lives makes it possible to live our daily life with another “flavour”, with another “air”. From gratitude there sprouts a state of interior bliss, of availability and agility in responding to the demands of life, a more vivid understanding to see all that is a gift in our daily life, a greater generosity as a vital attitude in our lives, and less tension for not receiving compensations or rewards for our actions.

Regarding our activity, our job... it all develops in a more natural way when we live out of gratitude, and thus, it is not forced on us as much, it is an effort which is not as tiring; and moreover, we live our task not as something imposed from outside, which must be done, which is a burden... but putting into practice all our given gifts and capacities in a natural, logical and spontaneous way.

In our “helping” others, whatever it may be, we are not paying attention to the reply of others to our dedication and service. This makes us less “dependent” on others and allows us to do things with more spontaneity, more generosity and less calculation; and it also allows us to look for and to find satisfaction in our inner self rather than in our exterior life, which is always safer and more everlasting.

Hence, the Ignatian exact words and intuitions in “Principle and Foundation” telling us that “to praise”, “to be grateful”, is one of those attitudes in which a creature, that is, in which that creature within us may “save his soul”, “save his life”, not because it guides him or her to afterlife but because it satisfies our everyday living on earth with human and divine meaning and fullness.

2. "TO LOVE AN SERVE IN ALL THINGS" [SpEx 230-237]

Four ways to find God in our daily life:

1.- His memory (SpEx 234).

To discover our history out of love: Loved by the One who has given me life (creation). Loved by him in this or that occasion (and always) as he has always been "my Saviour" (redemption). Loved by persons and by God through these persons. Also loved in "the nights and silences of God". All this is a gift (creation, redemption and other gifts particular to me). God is in our reality giving and giving himself. We sometimes have the rare ability of giving in order not to give ourselves. What is an eccentric and giving God asking from us? That I be like this, that I may generate company where there is loneliness, life where there is death, hope where there is apathy.

>> *Magnificat: Mary of Nazareth is aware of "all the good received" (Lk 1, 46-55).*

Which is my magnificat today?

2.- His dwelling (SpEx 235).

He does not only grant us the gift, but his presence. Love is never far away. It is following the notion, "I'll be with you", as many times as it appears in Jesus' mouth. It is to observe "his presence" in the things and people around me. God appears in these gifts by dwelling in them. He dwells in what I am and do. We have to give ourselves entirely.

>> *Temples of Christ and the Spirit: (1 Cor 3,16; 6,19-20).*

3.- His labours and work (SpEx 236).

He does not only grant us gifts and dwells in all of us, but he is *doing so for me*. Remember with love all those people who have given you a gift that they have made *thinking about you*. This can be seen in people, events as well as in darkness: the loving God that *secretly labours* so as to help me in the end. He has taken care of me all my life. The work of God is the creation; it is his Son, Jesus Christ, and the suffering of his children.

>> *"In everything, as we know, he co-operates for good with those who love God" (Rom 8: 28-39).*

4.- All is a gift (SpEx 237).

All the good things and gifts descend from above. There is no other source of goodness but God and what he gives me is a part of Himself, *just as the rays come down from the sun, or the rains from their source...;* for this reason, there is the emotion of those whose *eyes are enlightened from the heart*. God is descending so that the smallest may be at his height. To what is he inviting us? He is inviting us to descend, to go down, not to domineer, to be with the smallest.

>> *Where I invited to descend?*

3. DAILY EXAM

A great way to pray is to look for God's presence in your life. More than 400 years ago St. Ignatius Loyola encouraged prayer-filled mindfulness by proposing what has been called the Daily Examen. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us. Try this version of St. Ignatius's prayer.

1. **Become aware of God's presence.** Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

>> What happen today? My ups and downs along the day... Where has God been present?

2. **Review the day with gratitude.** Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with.

>> What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

3. **Pay attention to your emotions.** One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions.

>> Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Joy? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

4. **Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.** Ask 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 a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

5. **Look toward tomorrow.** Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God.