



*The Six Daily Habits for*

# Spiritual Resiliency

An Ignatian Handbook

by Fr. John O'Brien, SJ



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# Introduction

You are reading this because you want to grow in your spiritual life. You are taking seriously one of Vatican II's key points: the universal call to holiness. The basis of holiness is the same as any relationship, whether with spouse, family or good friends. If we want to come to know and love Jesus, we have to spend quality time with him — and on a daily basis. It's the work of a lifetime, but we start with today.

The following are six daily habits that I believe are the best gameplan for cultivating this relationship. They draw heavily from the Ignatian tradition, which in turn draws from the Bible and the witness of the saints and mystics throughout history. They are reliable practices which can become reliable habits. The Latin word *habitus* comes from the verb meaning “to have or maintain”. If you have or maintain these, you do not need to wear a habit, but the habit of them will clothe you in grace.

St. Ignatius of Loyola was a soldier who changed his life from one of egoism and self-glory to one radically based on self-forgetting and serving others for God's glory.

He founded the Society of Jesus in 1540 with St. Francis Xavier, St. Peter Faber and a few other college companions. Ignatius realized that he could notice spiritual movements in his soul which were the result of the influence of good and bad spirits, and by paying attention to these movements and their origin, he discovered how God was speaking. Our discipleship, then, takes its lead from listening to God in real time. Most of us are called, like the disciples, to be contemplatives-in-action, to be “light of the world and salt of the earth”. Growth in holiness is not for its own sake but for identifying our purpose and task in life. If you are someone who wants to bring Christ to others through friendship and witness, these habits will be the means of storing up the spiritual capital to do so.

A few points to note about these six practices. First, they should be embraced gradually, for we are works in progress. You should make them a priority, but add them incrementally. If you tried to swim a 15 kilometre race before lap training, you would wear out prematurely. Come up with a realistic and practical plan to incorporate these habits into your life.

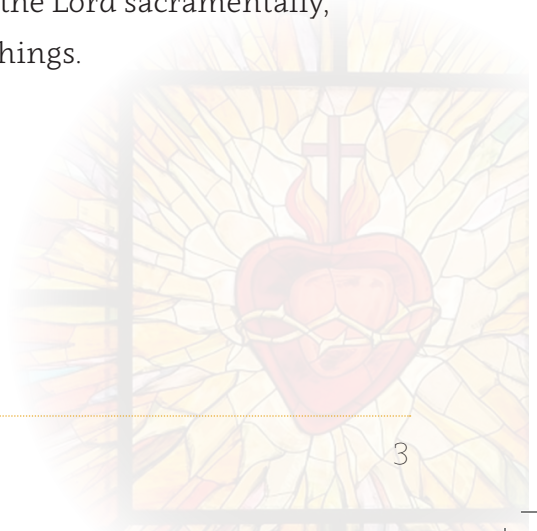
Second, it’s important to remember you are never losing time with prayer. In reality, you are gaining



time. Mother Teresa once told a sister who worried she didn't have enough time for her work that she needed to pray twice as long. God is the Lord of time, which is somehow elastic for him. There is much re-ordering, inspiration, and peace that comes when we pray. I don't know anyone who ever felt they wasted their time by praying. Hurry is the great enemy of the spiritual life in our time. Budget time for prayer without concern.

Finally, I have not included the Sacraments — Eucharist or Confession — in the list of these six daily habits, since I take for granted that you believe the Mass is “the source and summit” of the Christian life and that you already practice reconciliation regularly. But lest there be any doubt, they are by far the most important practices that lead to spiritual resiliency. In them we encounter Jesus in the most powerful and intimate way. The six daily habits proposed here are meant to dispose us to meet the Lord sacramentally, as well as to find God in all things.

- Fr. John O'Brien, SJ



# The Six Daily Habits

To maintain spiritual resiliency





**1. Morning Offering**

**2. Pray with  
Scripture**

**3. Beauty**

**4. The Good Turn**

**5. Spiritual  
Reading**

**6. Evening  
Examen**



# 1. Morning Offering

Morning and evening are the bookends of our day, two “mystical times”, in which we are, in a way, closest to God. Upon waking, you can turn your first thoughts to God and make a prayer, such as the ones that follow. They are more formal, but sometimes that’s helpful when the mind is still waking up: we can lean on their structure to structure our thoughts.

The Morning Offering is our placing ourselves at the service of God. It’s a fundamental act of entrusting ourselves to his power and care, and asking him, since God graciously waits for us to ask, to take and receive us as we are and to make all aspects of our day fruitful.

There are different morning offerings. One invokes the image of the Sacred Heart, which is one of the most well-known and practiced devotions, centred on the image that represents God’s boundless and passionate love for his creatures. One Pope has called it “the foundation on which to build the kingdom of God in the hearts of individuals, families, and nations.” To begin one’s day by offering it over to God under the symbol of his divine love, is a perfect way to begin.

## Morning Offering

O Jesus, through the  
Immaculate Heart of Mary,

I offer to you all my prayers,  
works, joys, and sufferings  
of this day,

In union with the holy  
sacrifice of the Mass  
offered throughout the world,

In reparation for my sins,  
For the intentions of your  
Sacred Heart,

And for the Holy Father's  
intentions for this month.

Amen.

## Morning Offering of St. Charles de Foucauld

Father,  
I abandon myself into your hands;  
do with me what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I thank you:  
I am ready for all, I accept all.  
Let only your will be done in me,  
and in all your creatures.  
I wish no more than this, O Lord.  
Into your hands I commend my soul;  
I offer it to you  
with all the love of my heart,  
for I love you, Lord,  
and so need to give myself,  
to surrender myself into your hands,  
without reserve,  
and with boundless confidence,  
for you are my Father. *Amen.*

## Other good prayers to start the day:

### Take, Lord, and Receive

Take, Lord, and receive  
all my liberty,  
my memory,  
my understanding,  
and my entire will,  
all that I have and possess.

You have given all to me.  
To you, O Lord,  
I return it.  
All is yours,  
dispose of it wholly  
according to your will.

Give me the grace  
to love you,  
that is enough for me.

*("Suscipe", the radical  
prayer of St. Ignatius)*

## Prayer of St. Francis

Make me a channel of your peace  
Where there is hatred  
let me bring your love  
Where there is injury,  
your pardon Lord  
And where there is doubt  
true faith in You

Make me a channel of your peace  
Where there's despair in life  
let me bring hope  
Where there is darkness only light  
And where there's sadness ever joy

Oh, Master grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console  
To be understood as to understand  
To be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of your peace  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
In giving of ourselves that we receive  
And in dying that we are born  
to eternal life.



A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a blue plaid shirt, is sitting at a desk and reading a book. The background is softly blurred, showing a desk with papers and a lamp. The overall tone is warm and focused.

## 2. Praying with Scripture

The second daily habit is to dedicate time praying with scripture. In the Christian tradition prayer is considered to be a pure gift of God. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing.

Prayer is more listening than speaking. The source of prayer is the Trinity, whose three Persons are always at prayer, through which they create the world, and create you through the Word. To enter into this conversation, you first listen to hear the Word that is spoken. Then you enter into the conversation by speaking the Word you have heard. Prayer is more something that you receive than something you do. In the dialogue of prayer, God is always the first one to speak, initiating the conversation which invites your response.

Over time, prayer manifests as an ever-deepening union with Christ and the practical care for others that flows from this relationship. There are various types of prayer, including praise, petition, intercession and thanksgiving.

There are various modes for prayer, such as mental and oral, meditation and contemplation, personal and communal.

Moreover, there are various methods or organized expressions of prayer, such as the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, Lectio Divina and Ignatian meditation.

Most methods should lead us to some form of contemplation. Quoting St. Teresa of Avila, the Catechism says contemplative prayer is nothing less than close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. (CCC 2709)

We can begin this conversation by immersing ourselves in the Word of God, which we are told is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12). The scriptures are no ordinary historical document, but rather a living text that breathes the mind of God to his people in history. Generally we begin by reading and proceed by meditating. Practical questions are: where do I start, how much text, and how do I proceed daily?

You might use any “scripture of the day” or bible-in-a-year program, but I recommend, quite simply, meditating on the Gospel from the daily Mass. The lectionary is neatly divided into prayer-sized Gospel readings. There are many sources of the Mass readings, including printed missalettes, but one useful app is *iBreviary*.

## The 4 “P’s” to Prepare for Prayer

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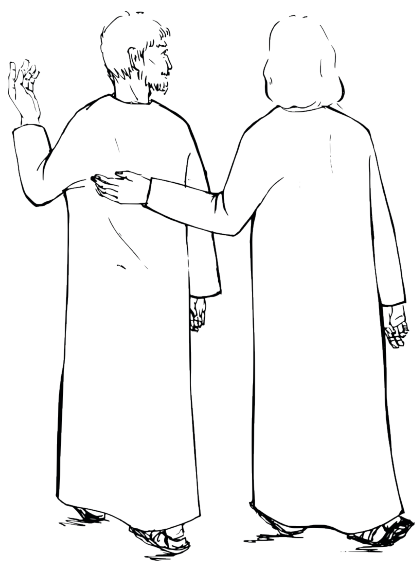
1. **Pick** the scripture you’ll pray with and have it ready.
2. **Place.** Where you are alone and uninhibited in your response.
3. **Posture.** Comfortable but alert, in a harmony of body and spirit.
4. **Presence** of God. Be aware of it, acknowledge it.

Praying with scripture takes many forms. Even praying the rosary is a form of praying with Scripture. But here we encourage one of two approaches, lectio divina and Ignatian meditation.

**Lectio Divina:**  
the basic way of praying with Scripture  
*Steps: Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio*

**Lectio (reading)**

Not treating scripture as a text to be studied, but as the living word to be encountered, you quiet your mind. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps 46:10). Start reading the scripture passage. You might read the text once, twice or even three times.



**Meditatio  
(meditation)**

This second movement involves some meditating and pondering the scripture. When you read the passage it's generally best

not to assign meaning to it right away, but to wait for the Holy Spirit to illuminate the mind as you ponder. You may consider the text from various angles.

**Stop** when something strikes you, e.g.:

- You feel the presence of Christ.
- You find your mind is enlightened.
- You are peaceful and content just to be in God's presence.

You may also feel disturbed and pierced by the Word. That is also an invitation to pause and ponder. This is God speaking to you. Do not hurry to move on. Wait until you are no longer moved by the experience.

### **Oratio (prayer)**

This third step is “prayer”, defined as speaking with God in a conversational way. St. Ambrose, Doctor of the Church, wrote: *“And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for ‘we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.’”* Talk to God about what you have been pondering in your meditation.

## **Contemplatio (contemplation)**

The Catechism states that contemplative prayer is “silence, the ‘symbol of the world to come’ (St. Isaac of Ninevah) or ‘silent love’ (John of the Cross). Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the ‘outer’ man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus.” ...

Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. “I just look at him and he just looks at me” is what a farmer once said to the Curé of Ars, about his silent prayer before the tabernacle. This focus on Jesus is a gradual renunciation of self. His gaze purifies our heart; the light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all. Contemplation also turns its gaze on the mysteries of the life of Christ. Thus it learns the “interior knowledge of our Lord,” the more to love him and follow him.

**Note:**

Don't get discouraged if nothing seems to be happening. Sometimes God allows us to feel dry in order to let us realize it is not in our power to grasp consolation. God is sometimes very close to us in His apparent absence (Ps. 139:7-8). At such times God's Spirit prays from within us.

“

***Because you are children,  
God has sent the Spirit of his  
Son into our hearts, crying  
'Abba! Father'***

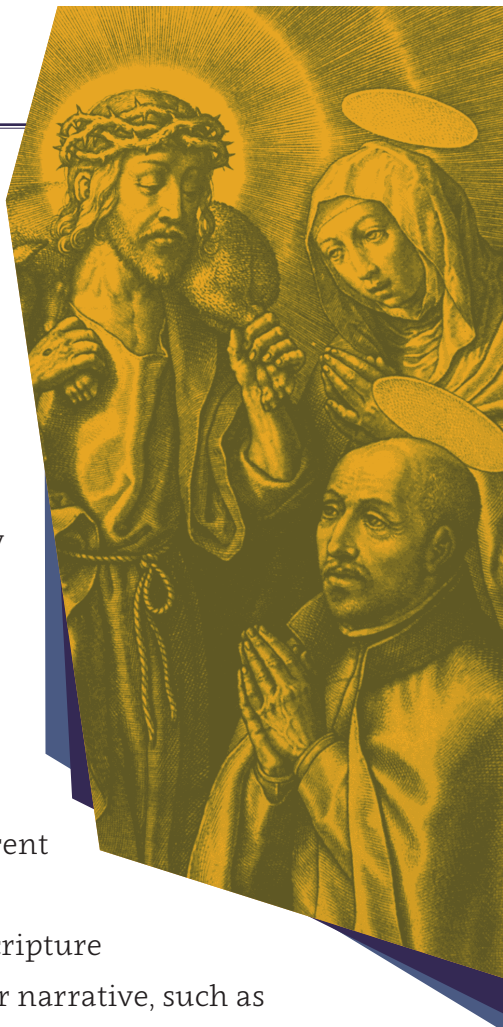
(Gal 4:6)

”

## Ignatian Meditation

In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the retreatant is invited to meet God by imaginatively entering into scenes from scripture. We can pray in this way on a daily basis as well, although we might need to have enough time to settle our minds first. Like all habits, it gets easier with time and practice, and in some ways it is not so different from *Lectio Divina*. Ignatian meditation works best with scripture passages that are “dramatic” or narrative, such as Gospel scenes and parables, as opposed to psalms and canticles.

1. Select a passage from one of the Gospels in which Jesus is interacting with others. Recall that you are engaging with the Word of God.
2. Preparatory Prayer: *Lord, may all my intentions, actions and works be more purely ordered to your service and praise.*





3. Read the Gospel passage twice so that the story and the details of the story become familiar. Close your eyes and reconstruct the scene in your imagination. See what is going on and observe the people in the scene. What does Jesus look like? How do the other people react to him? What are they saying to one another? What emotions fill their words?
4. You may ask God for what you desire. The petition should be made in accordance with the subject matter. If the meditation is on the Passion, ask for sorrow with Christ who is sorrowing, if it is on the Resurrection, ask for joy with Christ in joy.
5. Go back to your mental representation. This time make yourself present in the scene, as a disciple, a shepherd, a young maid, a person in need of healing. As you enter into the scene, perhaps as an observer, or as one lining up for healing, or as one helping others to reach Jesus, allow the scene to unfold.
6. Conversation with Jesus: what does your heart long for? Does it long to witness the wonderful deeds of Jesus? Or does it pine for healing? Does it desire to hear the voice of Jesus? Talk to Jesus in a one-on-one manner about what is on your heart.
7. Close with an *Our Father*, a *Hail Mary* and a *Glory Be*.

Whether you pray with the method of lecto divina or Ignatian meditation, your daily encounter with the “Logos”, the living word of God, is time well spent. As little as 15 minutes will be nourishing, but the longer you spend, the deeper will be your entry into the inner “world of prayer”. Thirty minutes will be good; an hour is the gold standard. It’s also good to take a few moments after you are finished and journal about the fruits of your prayer.

### 3. Contemplate something Beautiful

“The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is the heart of man.”

- Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

This daily habit is not something one usually hears prescribed, but is called for in a particular way in our day and age. As human society drifts from the truth and goodness rooted in the worship of Christ, a certain banality reveals itself more and more. This can be the soullessness of our metropolises or the flashy but fleeting monotony of pop culture. What we long for is to be pierced by beauty, which stirs the heart to greater things.

Along with Truth and Goodness, Beauty is a transcendental which means it is a quality that transcends the ordinary and reveals the divine. We believe that God not only has those as attributes but that he is those in his being and essence.

Every encounter with the good, the true and the beautiful is therefore an encounter with the traces of God.

Whether you are having a “long, loving look at the real” in nature, or spending time with art or poetry, a deliberate encounter with beauty helps offset what is deadening, and is surprisingly restorative to the soul.



## Nature

*“Nature is the living, visible garment of God.”  
- Goethe*

Nature is the place for a natural reset. My mother used to take us on nature walks, observing and identifying the variety of plants and wild-flowers, trees, and the species of birds. One of my brothers could identify a dozen different owls by the sound of their hoot. There was lots of sketching and sometimes collecting. It helped establish us in the groundedness of life, and opened our eyes to the beauty that surrounded us.

Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si* that nature is “like a sister with whom we share our life”. Taking a daily walk, or if that’s not possible, to sit and observe natural things (the “thingness of things”) from the porch or through the windows of our home, is wonderfully restorative. Sometimes you should kick off your shoes and walk on God’s earth in bare feet, a surprisingly grounding experience. Affirming the reality and beauty of the natural order will prepare you for the grace of Jesus Christ.

In any time or season, you can also read some of the powerful reflections and prayers on creation, such as:

- The Canticle of Daniel (Dan 3:29-68)
- Psalm 148
- The Canticle of Creation (St. Francis of Assisi)
- “The Windhover”, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire”, “Pied Beauty” and other poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

## God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

- Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ

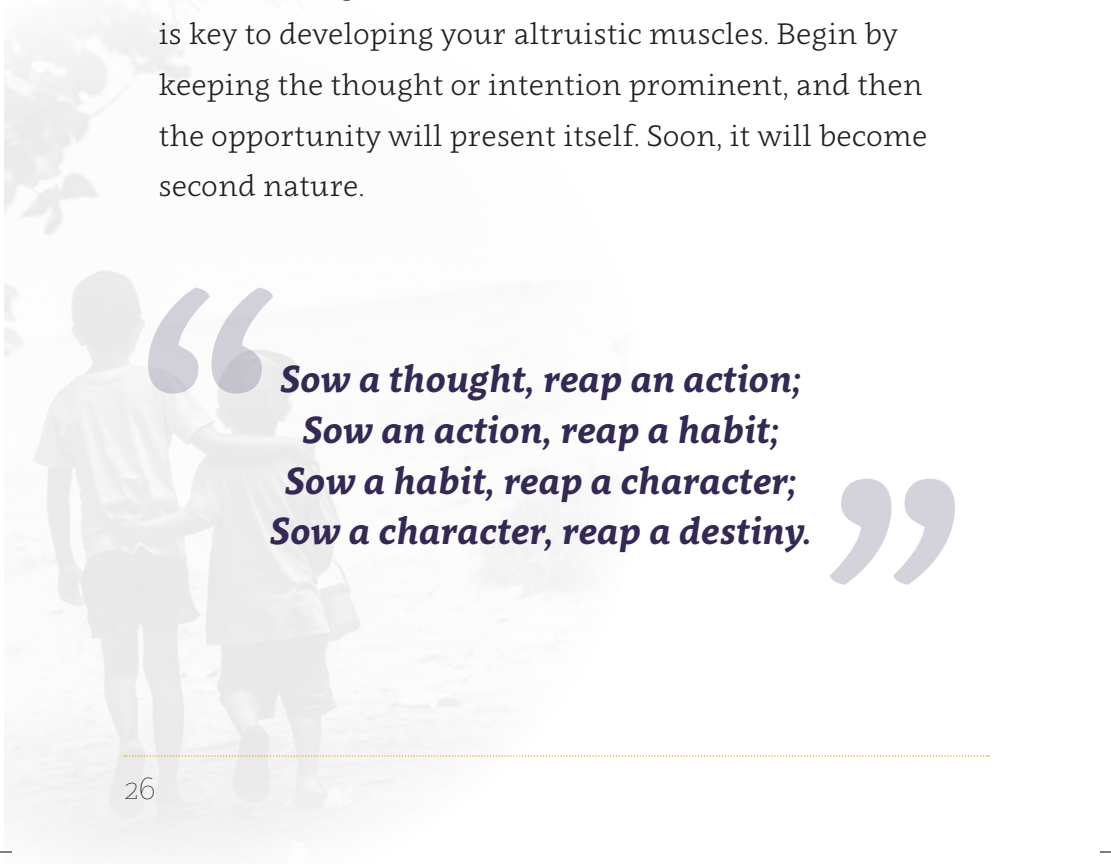
## Music, Art, Film and Literature

You can also discern God's beauty by the contemplation of inspired art, such as a piece of music, a film or a work of good literature. Listening to Mozart's 41st Symphony, for example, can restore the soul to joy. Watching Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* can leave you at the threshold of awe and prayer. At the end of this booklet, I've listed some bucket-list titles of fine music, films and literature that can enhance your spiritual life.



## 4. The Good Turn

This habit is one that is short to describe but powerful in its effect. The Boy Scouts commit to doing a good deed each day, something they call “the Good Turn”. They are taught to do one act of kindness or a little service beyond their daily obligations to form themselves to be generous. If only all Christians did the same! Charity covers a multitude of sins and is an elevator to holiness, but it must be exercised. The habit of doing one intentional “extra” act of kindness is key to developing your altruistic muscles. Begin by keeping the thought or intention prominent, and then the opportunity will present itself. Soon, it will become second nature.



***Sow a thought, reap an action;  
Sow an action, reap a habit;  
Sow a habit, reap a character;  
Sow a character, reap a destiny.***



**“ Love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words. ”**  
– St. Ignatius of Loyola

The Good Turn could be larger commitments such as to:

- A social outreach of your parish
- Helping out at a soup kitchen or shelter
- Getting involved in youth group, bible study, coaching little league, etc.

Or in the daily domestic realm:

- Mowing the lawn or shovelling the snow for elderly neighbours
- Helping a classmate or sibling with their homework
- Driving family members to appointments
- Volunteering to do the dishes
- Giving your time to listen to someone on the phone

**“ Everyone wants to save the world, but nobody wants to help mom do the dishes. ”**  
– P.J. O'Rourke

## 5. Spiritual Reading

Many a saint, it is said, has been made from the practice of spiritual reading. A few moments dedicated each day to this will reap its rewards. Here among all the habits, it is important to not bite off too much, for it is not in the quantity but in the savouring that value lies. For this reason, ten minutes is recommended as the amount of time, although this can vary by person, disposition and the nature of the book. The key is commitment, and the steady drip of spiritual reading over time will effect the transformation you are seeking. A list of good titles also appears at the end.

***“ We become what we contemplate. ”***

- Greek philosopher

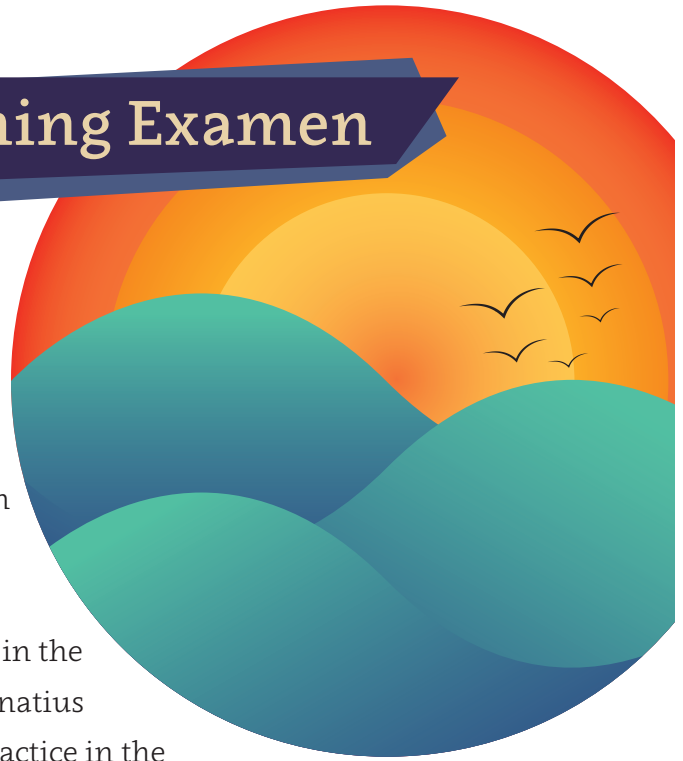


## 6. The Evening Examen

The final habit.

Taking 5-10 minutes at the end of the day to do an examination of the how the day went, gives exponential gains in the spiritual life. St. Ignatius introduced this practice in the

Spiritual Exercises. While he didn't want us to become scrupulous or get lost in spiritual navel-gazing, he recognized that there was value in a temporary taking-stock of my daily life, a brief review. Obviously, if we don't pay attention, we are probably condemning ourselves to endless cycles of the same behaviours. The examen, as it is called, helps increase awareness of the originating impulses (*spirits*, both good and bad) behind your attitudes, thoughts and actions, in order to better discern them in the future, and order your life towards God. It also helps to show how God has been present, and to expand your sense of God's provident goodness. Here is the classic five-step model:



### **The Examen**

1. Give thanks to God for the benefits received. Perhaps identify a few.
2. Ask God for the grace to know my sins and reject them.
3. Ask my soul for an account of the day, hour by hour (or place by place) since my last examen.
4. Entrust my sins to God and ask for forgiveness.
5. Resolve to do better, with God's help, and look forward with hope. Conclude with an Our Father.



For some, doing five steps of anything at the end of the day can be too much cognitive activity. I suggest that anything can become a habit with enough repetition, and ceases to be a memory activity and more of an organic, prayerful process — a living encounter with Christ. If you find it is easier, however, you can reduce the examen to a more simplified three-step prayer:

- 1. Gratitude** for the day's blessings.  
Consider a few of them: life, breath, family, friends, work, food, the conversations that were meaningful, moments of consolation, etc.
- 2. Sorrow** for the missteps. Ask the Spirit to bring to your mind one or two of them for the purpose of identifying causes. Perhaps fatigue or other natural causes are at the root. Perhaps there's something more spiritual such as neglecting prayer, staying up too late, etc. Seek illumination.
- 3. Resolve** how you will act tomorrow and ask for the graces that you want.

In short, the examen becomes the three-step dance of “thank-you”, “sorry”, and “please”, the basis of all relationships.

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## In Sum

Practicing the Six Daily Habits of:

1. The Morning Offering
2. Praying with Scripture
3. Contemplation of something beautiful
4. The Good Turn
5. Spiritual Reading
6. Evening Examen

is the basis of becoming and staying a spiritually resilient person.

You can create your own spiritual life plan, which could be like this:

- Daily: the Six Habits
- Weekly: Mass
- Monthly: Confession
- Yearly: Retreat and Pilgrimage

For a list of retreat and pilgrimage ideas, see the suggestions later in the booklet.

As you practice your faith, you will find you are also growing in the art of spiritual discernment. St. Ignatius is a reliable teacher who provided a method called **rules for the discernment of spirits**, from which proceeds the discernment of God's will. These principles are essential tools in your toolkit for growing in holiness.



# Ignatian Discernment: a Primer

From the Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius of Loyola

## The Principle and Foundation

### Why I exist.

1. I am created to **praise, reverence, and serve** God our Lord, and by this means to save my soul.
2. All other things on the face of the earth are created to help me in the pursuit of the goal for which I am created.
3. From this it follows that I am to use all things as much as they help me attain that end. Likewise, I must rid myself of them insofar as they prevent me from attaining it.
4. Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in so far as it is left to the choice of our free will; in all things we should desire and choose only those things which will best help us attain the end for which we are created.



## The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits

### Understanding the various movements in the soul, identifying them and knowing what to do with them.

When I am basically improving in the spiritual life, “going from good to better”, the spirits that influence the movements in my soul act in the following manner: the good spirit strengthens and consoles, the evil spirit harasses and discourages.

**Consolation:** “some interior **movement** in the soul which causes it to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, such that it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in its Creator.

“Also, when one sheds tears inspired by love of the Lord.” (Strong emotion)

“I call consolation any increase in **hope, faith, and love** and any interior **joy**



that calls and attracts to heavenly things, and to the salvation of one's soul, with quiet and **peace** in Christ our Lord."

**Desolation:** "darkness of the soul, turmoil in the soul, inclination to low and earthly things, restlessness resulting from several disturbances and temptations which lead to loss of faith, hope and love, when the soul finds itself completely lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from its Creator and Lord."

**What to do when in Consolation:** Enjoy and remember your consoling graces by *storing them up* for the future. Journal about them; talk about them with others.

**What to do when in Desolation:** It's good to stay steady and even *increase* your prayer, meditation, penance and examen. Be patient with yourself, for desolation passes.

**Resist firmly** any thought that you are not good enough, holy enough, smart enough, etc. for God or God's purposes. Resist any thought that says "*you can't*".  
*Those thoughts are from the evil one.*

"Rule 5": When in desolation, don't make a major change to previously-made spiritually-discerned decisions. Not a good time, not the right "spirit".

“Rule 13”: When dealing with desolation, it is a powerful remedy to talk to someone who may be of genuine assistance in spiritual matters, what St. Ignatius calls manifesting or “bringing to the light.” Trying to solve things on our own usually doesn’t go too well, whereas the evil one flees rapidly when we share, in whatever form, to friend, guide or confessor.



Above all, when discerning the spirits, remember that in  
God's eyes you are **always**

**1. Beautiful** (Song of Songs 4:1)    **2. Beloved** (1 John 4:10)    **3. Blessed** (Ephesians 1:3)

“God calls all the souls he has created to love him with their whole being, here and hereafter, which means that he calls all of them to holiness. To perfection, to a close following of him and obedience to his will. But he does not ask all souls to show their love by the same works, to climb to heaven by the same ladder, to achieve goodness in the same way of life. What sort of work, then, must *I* do? Which is *my* road to heaven? In what kind of life am I to sanctify myself?... This question: ‘What kind of life am I going to undertake?’ is the question of *vocation*.”

– St. Charles de Foucauld, *Sermons in the Sahara*

## **Three ways we can discern God's will**

There are typically three times or moments that God's will becomes clear to us, depending on the kind of graces we receive.

**First.** When I receive an unmistakable and compelling grace about God's will for me, and I follow it.

**Second.** When my experiences of consolations and desolations are discerned over time and reveal the positive direction of God's will.

**Third.** When there's no major interior movements, I can use my reason to evaluate my self and why I've been created, and weigh the pros and cons of a choice and then bring my decision to the Lord.

If you do a "Third Way" discernment, follow this exercise:

- A. Consider the choice to be made and place it before your eyes.
- B. Keep the "principle and foundation" your main criterion (why I am created).
- C. Ask God to move your will to accept whatever is more pleasing to Him.

- D. Then consider the pros and cons, writing down in a list the reasons for an option, and the reasons against an option, and, reflecting, eliminate the reasons that are of secondary or superficial importance, and look to which option your reason shows you is best.
- E. Pray and offer up your decision to God.

### **Some further thought experiments that can help you discern a decision:**

- Imagine you are at the end of your life, your deathbed. Looking back on your life, what decision today will give you joy and satisfaction then?
- Imagine that you are before the Lord giving an account of your life. What decision now will give you joy in his sight?
- How would you counsel someone else in your shoes facing the exact same discernment?

## Reading on Vocational Discernment

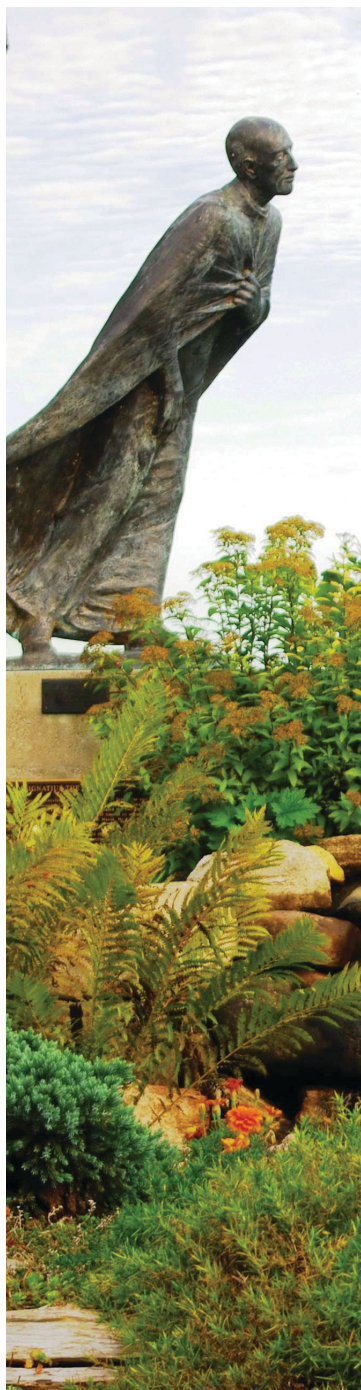
- *Discovering your Personal Vocation*, Herbert Alphonso, S.J.
- *The Christian State of Life / They Followed His Call*, Adrienne von Speyr
- *A Living Sacrifice: Guidance for Men Discerning Religious Life*, Croell & Hofer
- *Discerning Vocations*, Marie Theresa Coombs & Francis Kelly Nemeck

To explore the Society of Jesus: [jesuitvocations.org](http://jesuitvocations.org)

For more on Ignatian spirituality, including meditation, consolation/desolation, the examen, discernment of spirits, God's will, etc, see the books of [Fr. Timothy Gallagher](#).

## Ignatian Retreats

Jesus invites his followers to get away for rest and prayer (Mark 6:31). If you can leave regular life behind, you can hear the voice of God with greater clarity. The following sites offer some retreat options in Canada, ranging from weekend to week-long to month-long retreats. Some retreats are themed with talks. Others emphasize silent prayer. Most are gentle hybrids of both. Feel free to discuss arrangements for personal retreats with the registrar.



**Jesuit Spirituality Apostolate**

Vancouver, BC

[jsav.ca](http://jsav.ca)

**Manresa Jesuit Renewal Centre**

Pickering, Ontario

[manresa-canada.ca](http://manresa-canada.ca)

**Villa Loyola**

Sudbury, Ontario

[villaloyola.com](http://villaloyola.com)

**Ignatian Spirituality Centre**

Montréal, Quebec

[ignatiancentremtl.org](http://ignatiancentremtl.org)

**Centre de spiritualité Manrèse**

Ville de Quebec, Quebec

[centremanrese.org](http://centremanrese.org)

**Ignatius Jesuit Centre**

Guelph, Ontario

[ignatiusguelph.ca](http://ignatiusguelph.ca)

**Martyrs Shrine**

Midland, Ontario

[martyrs-shrine.com](http://martyrs-shrine.com)

*The shrine is not a retreat centre per se, but may allow people discerning a vocation to make retreats at the guesthouse.*



## **Do-it-Yourself Ignatian Retreats**

Ignatian retreats can be as short as a day or as long as a month. Sometimes a person cannot get away to a retreat centre, so St. Ignatius describes a way to pray the Spiritual Exercises in daily life, spread out over several months. The following books are guides for making the retreat from home, varying according to the length of time you wish to commit.

**Abide in the Heart of Christ,**

Joe Laramie, SJ (10-day)

**Ascending with Ignatius,**

Mark Thibodeux, SJ (30-day)

**Do-It-At-Home Retreat,**

André Ravier, SJ (8 or 30-day)

**The First Spiritual Exercises,**

Michael Hansen, SJ (4 weeks)

**Awakening Love: An Ignatian Retreat with  
the Song of Songs,**

Gregory Cleveland, OMV (32 Weeks)

**Forty Weeks: An Ignatian Path to Christ,**

Bill Watson, SJ (40 weeks)

Note: it's still advisable to have a spiritual director when doing a retreat in daily life.

## Pilgrimage

The defining acts of the Christian life are the practices of worship (*leiturgia*), witness (*martyria*), service (*diakonia*) and living a common life together (*koinonia*). Christians have also done pilgrimages from ancient times to today. Making an annual pilgrimage is a powerful grace-giving practice.

To pilgrimage is to follow in the footsteps of the Lord in a very physical way. There's sweat and sore feet. Sometimes you're slogging it in the rain. But it also produces a deep sense of interior renewal, even joy. Why is this? A pilgrimage is a miniature version of your whole earthly life, in which you make an intensified journey of prayer and repentance, of enjoying Christian company, and of arriving at a destination that is often a foretaste of eternity.

The culture of pilgrimage among young adults has always been greater in Europe than in North America, but Canada has a surprising wealth of shrines in every province. Here is a sampling of great pilgrimage destinations.

### **Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, Mission, BC**

The grotto can be visited any time or by joining the annual summer pilgrimage of the Archdiocese of Vancouver. Nearby is the Benedictine monastery of Westminster Abbey and a Poor Clare Monastery.

### **Rose Prince Pilgrimage, Fraser Lake, BC**

In early July, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come together and pray for reconciliation at the tomb of Rose Prince, a Carrier woman with the reputation for holiness and healing at the site of a former residential school.

### **Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta**

Every July thousands of Catholics go to this lake in search of healing and renewal, where it has become the largest annual pilgrimage in Western Canada.

### **Shrine of Our Lady of the Rockies, Canmore, Alberta**

Consecrated in 2020, it is probably the newest shrine in Canada, and features a strong visual arts collection for prayer and contemplation.

**Sacred Heart Shrine Church, Lebret, Saskatchewan**

This fieldstone church is in the beautiful Qu'Appelle Valley, and has a stations of the cross that switchbacks up to a hilltop chapel.

**Mt. Carmel Shrine, Carmel, Saskatchewan**

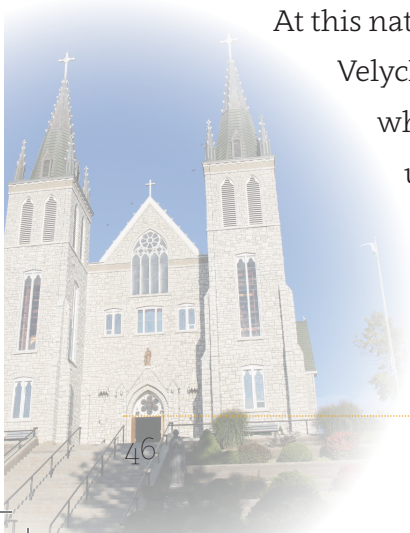
On a hill in the middle of the prairies is a tall stone pedestal and 8-foot statue of Mary and the child Jesus built in 1928. A 12-kilometre walk from the village of Bruno, where you can also visit the grotto at the St. Therese Institute.

**Grotto of Notre Dame de Lourdes, St. Malo, Manitoba**

Site of the annual pilgrimage of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface, this historic regional shrine to Our Lady can be visited year-round.

**Bishop Velychkovsky Martyr's Shrine, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

At this national shrine rests the body of Bl. Velychkovsky (b. 1903), a modern martyr who died in 1973 from injuries sustained under Soviet persecution. He is the patron saint of prison ministry for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.



### **Martyrs Shrine, Midland, Ontario**

National Shrine to the eight Jesuit martyrs who gave their lives during the Iroquois-Huron wars of the mid-1600s. The Martyrs Camino connects from Toronto and Barrie. A powerful day-pilgrimage is the 3-hour walk from the Shrine to the site of St. Ignace, where St. John Brebeuf and St. Gabriel Lalement died.

### **St. Anne's, Cormac, Ontario**

The Ottawa Valley is known for its charming hills and country churches built by the Irish and Polish who settled there. Every summer, young people in the Diocese of Pembroke walk for three days to arrive at this small shrine honouring St. Anne, mother of Mary and patron saint of Canada.

### **Montréal, Quebec**

In this city of churches, St. Joseph's Oratory, Notre-Dame Basilica, Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours, Mary Queen of the World Cathedral, St. Patrick's Church and the Jesuit Gesù Church with its altar to Notre-Dame de Liesse and the oldest Sacred Heart statue in North America, are stand-out shrine destinations. Across the river on the Mohawk reserve of Kahnawake is the shrine and tomb of St. Kateri.

### **Trois-Rivières, Quebec**

Our Lady of the Cape (Notre-Dame du Cap) is the largest Marian shrine in Canada, and has the oldest chapel, built in 1720, that still celebrates daily Mass.

### **Quebec City**

The Cathedral Basilica of Notre-Dame in old Quebec contains the tomb of St. François de Laval. Twenty minutes from the city is the national shrine of St. Anne-du-Beaupré.

### **Mother of Sorrows, Mabou, Nova Scotia**

Often visited by travellers on the Ceilidh Trail in Cape Breton, this small but significant shrine with its pietà is open year-round for itinerant pilgrims.

### **Our Lady of Lourdes, Flatrock, Newfoundland**

Located 20 kms from the city of St. John's, this outdoor grotto was visited by Pope John Paul II in 1984, where he blessed the boats.

A photograph showing the interior of a church, likely the Gesu Church in Montreal. The view is from the back of the sanctuary looking towards the altar. The altar is highly ornate with a large crucifix above it. The walls are decorated with religious art and statues. The floor is polished and reflects the light.

*Gesu Church, Montreal.*

## World

International pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Rome, and the major Marian Shrines were all practices that St. Ignatius praised. Some less known but important destinations include:

- Lyon, France - where the Martyrs of Lyon died in the 2nd century and from which you can also make day trips to Ars, Taizé, and Paray-le-Monial.
- Loreto, Italy - where the holy house of Nazareth is enshrined in a basilica.
- Our Lady of Walsingham, U.K. - which pre-Reformation was on par with Santiago de Compostella as a major pilgrimage destination.

**“** *To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe.* **”**

–Benedict XVI, Santiago de Compostela

# Beauty Bucket List

“It is the way of artistic expression, part of that *via pulchritudinis* — ‘way of beauty’ ... which modern man should recover in its most profound meaning. Perhaps it has happened to you at one time or another — before a sculpture, a painting, a few verses of poetry or a piece of music — to have experienced deep emotion, a sense of joy, to have perceived clearly, that is, that before you there stood not only matter a piece of marble or bronze, a painted canvas, an ensemble of letters or a combination of sounds — but something far greater, something that “speaks,” something capable of touching the heart, of communicating a message, of elevating the soul.”

- Benedict XVI, *On Beauty as a Way to God*

There are personal preferences when it comes to art and music, but a certain canon emerges over time of works of exceptional quality. Here are some bucket-list worthy suggestions, that can also be used in prayer.

## **Music**

- Barber, Adagio for Strings
- Brahms, Piano Concerto No. 1
- Górecki, Symphony No. 3
- Beethoven’s Symphony 9



- Saint-Saëns - The Carnival of Animals: XIII The Swan
- Massenet, Thaïs -Méditation
- Grieg - Holberg Suite
- Corelli, Concerto Grosso
- Schubert, String Quartet no. 14
- Mozart, Clarinet Quintet in A
- Mozart, Piano Sonata 11 in A
- Mozart Symphonies no. 39-41:
  - no. 39 - for encouragement and joy
  - no. 40 - passion and sorrow
  - no. 41 - the whole gamut of human emotions
- Bach, The Violin Concertos
- Bach, Orchestral Suite 3 in D Major
- Sacred Music of Harpa Dei

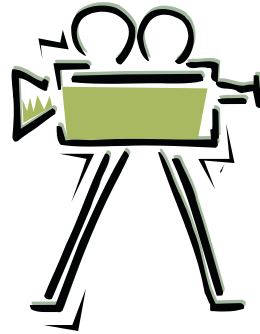


## **Film**

The modern theatre, cinema can lift us from mundane concerns and bring us to what J.R.R. Tolkien called the consolation of “eucatastrophe”, where joy is the result of the ordeal. Here are titles of some great films with more overtly religious themes:

- *Rome, Open City* (Rossellini, 1945)
- *On the Waterfront* (Kazan, 1954)

- *Andrei Rublev* (Tarkovsky, 1966)
- *Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Pasolini, 1964)
- *I Confess* (Hitchcock, 1953)
- *The Scarlet and the Black*  
(London, 1983)
- *A Man for All Seasons*  
(Zinnemann, 1966)
- *Chariots of Fire* (Hudson, 1981)
- *The Mission* (Joffe, 1986),
- *Shadowlands* (Attenborough, 1993)
- *Millions* (Boyle, 2004)
- *Ostrov* (Lungin, 2006)
- *Prince of Egypt* (animated, 1998)
- *Padre Pio* (Carlei, 2000)
- *Of Gods and Men* (Beauvois, 2010)
- *Calvary* (McDonagh, 2014)
- *A Hidden Life* (Malick, 2019)
- *Fatima* (Pontecorvo, 2020)
- *The Chosen* (Jenkins, 2017-)



The following are more implicitly spiritual. Not all are suitable for all audiences.

- *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946)
- *Au Hasard Balthazar* (Bresson, 1966)
- *Babette's Feast* (Axel, 1987)
- *Decalogue* (Kieslowski, 1988)
- *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993)
- *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994)
- *Gravity* (Cuaron, 2013)
- *Magnolia* (Anderson, 1999)
- *Les Choristes* (Barratier, 2004)
- *Up* (Pixar, 2009); *Inside Out* (Pixar, 2015)
- *The Secret of Kells* (animated, 2009)
- *The Tree of Life* (Malick, 2011)
- *To the Wonder* (Malick, 2013)
- *Batman Trilogy* (Nolan, 2005-12)
- *Gran Torino* (Eastwood, 2008)
- *Les Misérables* (Hooper, 2012)
- *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (Stiller, 2013)

“ *Now that Jesus has dwelt among us, nothing can represent him as could the prefigurations of Moses or Prometheus. Christ himself has fulfilled this role. Now only postfiguration is possible. The world's small dramas – whether on the scale of persons or nations, whether real or fictive, whether explicitly Christian or not – play a real part in the primal drama between God and his creation, whose chief actor is always Christ.* ”

– Fr. Jacques Servais, SJ



## Literature

- *Mr. Blue / Dan England and the Noonday Devil*, Miles Connolly
- *Cosmas or the Love of God*, Pierre de Calan
- *Death Comes for the Archbishop / Shadows on the Rock*, Willa Cather
- *Kristen Lavransdatter / The Master of Hestviken*, Sigrid Undset
- *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Walter Miller
- *Till We Have Faces / The Great Divorce / Space Trilogy*, C.S. Lewis
- *The Hobbit / The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien
- *Come Rack! Come Rope! / Lord of the World*, R.H. Benson
- *Brideshead Revisited / Sword of Honour Trilogy*, Evelyn Waugh
- *Fairy-Stories*, George MacDonald
- *A Danger to the State*, Philip Trower
- *Father Elijah / The Lighthouse / By the Rivers of Babylon*, Michael D. O'Brien
- *Diary of a Country Priest*, Georges Bernanos



## Spiritual Reading

Here is a list of titles for daily spiritual reading:

- *My Daily Bread*, Anthony Paone, S.J.
- *Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis de Sales
- *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis
- *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, Brant Pitre
- *Lift Up Your Heart*, John Burns
- *With God in Russia / He Leadeth Me*,  
Walter Ciszek, S.J.
- *Soul of My Soul: Coming to the Heart of Prayer*,  
Catherine Doherty
- *Not Without Parables*, Catherine Doherty
- *Journey to the Heart of Christ*, Robert Wild
- *The Shadow of His Wings*, Gereon Goldmann
- *Abandonment to Divine Providence*,  
Jean-Pierre De Caussade, S.J.
- *The Lord*, Romano Guardini
- *Christian Meditation*, Hans Urs von Balthasar
- *Man Before God / Handmaid of the Lord / Confession*,  
Adrienne von Speyr
- *The Way of the Disciple*, Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis

- *Jesuit Missionaries to North America, Spiritual Writings*, François Roustang, S.J.
- *Transformation in Christ*, Dietrich von Hildebrand
- *Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, Charles Péguy
- *And Now I See / Heaven in Stone and Glass*, Robert Barron
- *Time for God / The Way of Trust and Love*, Jacques Philippe
- *Jesus the Bridegroom*, Brant Pitre
- *Wisdom from the Psalms*, Peter Kreeft
- *A Heart on Fire*, James Kubicki, S.J.  
(Sacred Heart spirituality)
- *Secrets of the Sacred Heart: Twelve Ways to Claim Jesus' Promises in Your Life*, Emily Jaminet
- *I Believe in Love*, Jean D'Elbée  
(Theresian spirituality)
- *The Love that Keeps Us Sane*, Marc Foley  
(Theresian spirituality)
- *Jesus of Nazareth, Vol I-III*, Pope Benedict
- *Letters of Tribulation*, Pope Francis
- *St. Ignatius and You: Learning to Become a Reflective Christian*, Eric Jensen, S.J.

“

***From the certainty that God’s grace is with us comes the strength to take courage in the present moment: the courage to carry forward what God asks of us here and now, in every area of our lives; courage to embrace the vocation which God reveals to us; courage to live out our faith without hiding or diminishing it.***

*- Pope Francis*

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**Fr. John O'Brien, S.J.** was born in British Columbia and has served as the vocations director for the Jesuits of Canada.

***Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam  
For the Greater Glory of God***

