

**WEEK TWO HANDOUTS**

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**PRAYERS ABOUT GOD’S ONGOING CREATION**

God creates not at just one point in time, but continually. God's creative, life-giving Spirit animates us and all of creation. During his convalescence at Loyola, Ignatius encountered God in nature. In his autobiography, dictated in the third person, he writes of himself***: "The greatest consolation he received at this time was from gazing at the sky and stars, and this he often did and for quite a long time".***

For these prayers, I suggest that you pray with our ancestors in faith as they marvel at the goodness and ongoing activity of God in creation. You may choose to make one or more of your prayer periods outside, soaking in the natural beauty of creation. Use all of your senses to experience the world. As you walk the streets and go about your daily tasks, be attentive to the variety of God's creations, especially in the people you encounter.

**PRAY for the following graces: wonder at God's ongoing creation; gratitude for the gift of God creating you and creating the world.**

**Read and pray** Psalm 8. Marvel at the dignity of the human person. Give thanks to God for particular people who reveal God's loving presence to you. Consider: Who has helped me get to this point in my faith journey?

**Read and pray** Psalm 104. God is revealed in the natural world. All is a gift to us. With the psalmist, give thanks for the glory of God's creation. Consider: Where do I see this awesome glory revealed in my life and the larger world?

**Read and pray** Genesis 1:26-2:9. Consider these two accounts of the creation of humanity. Listen to God declare creation "very good." Consider yourself as God's creation, as an incarnation, or image of God in a particular time, family, and place. Rejoice in the fact of your existence as God's creation, even amid the complexities of human life.

**Read and pray** Romans 8:18-25 (All creation is unfinished and yearns for fulfillment in God). Consider: What are the particular high­lights or milestones of my life, including my life of faith? Note both the highs and the lows, the times of great hope and of challenge or "groaning."

**Read and pray** Jeremiah 18:1-6 (We are like clay in the potter's hands). Consider: How do I find myself being shaped and molded by God now? How am I pliable or resistant?

**PRAYER TO THE CREATOR**

The Hebrew/Aramaic word ruah translates into breath and spirit.

God-like, I blow life into the shiny soapy water taut within a slim wand in my hand. Hollow planets appear. Each perfect sphere bears my breath for its given lifespan. I donʼt own them, yet without me they couldnʼt float silently through space. I smile with delight as each bubble takes shape, its thin skin a canvas that mirrors light and unrepeatable pinks or blues. Is that how it was for you, Holy Ruah, breathing over the chaos at the dawn of time; breathing life into the dry bones?



Spirit-source within all that exists, Your breath has animated creation from its beginning, empowering beings to contain divine life ever more consciously. Clothe us in hues of compassion and respect for galaxies, atoms, bubbles and bones. Quicken our awareness that all “others” radiate your presence. They are mirrored in me and I in them. May we reverence, display, and delight in our God-life.



**Meditations on Sin**

At the conclusion of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius recommends that we consider the nature of sin. By "week," Ignatius does not mean seven calendar days, but a particular movement or phase of the retreat. Most broadly, the First Week focuses on our experience of sin-personally, communally, and globally. Sin can be described in many ways: as a breakdown of a relationship with God and others; as a failure to love God, others, and self; as a turning away from God.

Sin is an inescapable reality of the human condition; we abuse the freedom God gives us and make choices that hurt God, others, and ourselves. God does not punish us for our sins; instead, we suffer the natural consequences that flow from our sinful choices and the sinful choices of others. We see the effects of sin in the disorder of our individual lives and in social structures that dehumanize, marginalize, oppress, and hurt people.

Ignatius proposes that we look at the history of sin in an epic, panoramic way. We consider the cosmic battle between good and evil and watch how it plays out in every human heart. Because we can sometimes deceive ourselves or be blind to our own human frailty, we ask God to reveal to us our sins. Our aim is not to become mired in guilt, self-hate, or despair. Instead, we ask for a healthy sense of shame and confusion when confronting the reality of sin. Knowing how good God is to us, how and why do we still choose to sin, still choose to respond so meagerly to God's generosity?

Even as we recognize these hard realities, we remember the graces of the past few days of prayer. **Particularly, we recall that God loves us unconditionally and wants to free us from anything that blocks our growing into the people God calls us to be.** We don't get very far just by counting our sins and trying to overcome them by sheer force of will. Instead, we need to keep our eyes fixed on God's ever-present mercy, which is the ultimate source of our lasting liberation from sin.

We seek healing. Just as bodily healing often begins with some physical pain, healing of the soul begins with a graced awareness of our disordered loves and self-preoccupations.

**PRAYER GRACE**

**I pray for the following grace: a healthy sense of shame and confusion before God as I consider the effects of sin in my life, my community, and my world.**

**PRAYER SESSIONS RECOMMENDED FOR YOU**

1. **Read Luke 15:11-32** (The parable of the prodigal son and his brother). Consider: How does ]esus' parable help me understand my own estrangement from God and others? How does it help me appreciate God's welcome to me, a sinner? In this parable, Jesus tells us who the Father is. Notice that the father in the parable is also prodigal-that is, extravagant-with his love. God is always trying to overcome separation. Notice the festivity of the parable. Realize how much joy it brings God when we return home.
2. To deepen our understanding of the nature of sin and its effects, **Ignatius proposes a meditation on the sin of the angels.** In the Christian tradition, Satan and his minions were the first to reject God's love. This failure to praise and honor God the Creator had cosmic implications. Although there are few biblical references to the fall of the angels (see, for example, Luke 10:18: "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning"), theological reflection and the Christian imagination (such as in art and literature) have informed our understanding of evil's reality.

The bottom line is that the angels, as creatures of God, enjoyed the gift of freedom and were given a choice. Some of these pure spirits chose to put themselves before God, rejecting God's love and God's offer to share in divine life. These angels could not stand it when God chose to become like us (not them), taking the form of a human being in Jesus Christ. For our prayer, Ignatius suggests the following:

***I will call to memory the sin of the angels: how they were created in grace and then, not wanting to better themselves by using their freedom to reverence and obey their Creator and Lord, they fell into pride, were changed from grace to malice, and were hurled from heaven into hell.***

Spend some time considering the radical choice of the angels. Use your imagination. Feel God's sadness at this rebellion. Consider the angels' self-isolation. Recall your own rebellions, those times when you have chosen self before God.

1. Continuing this reflection on the history of sin, Ignatius moves us to a meditation on the sin of Adam and Eve. Biblical scholarship has long held that the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis is not history but a theological reflection by the people of Israel on the reality of good and evil. This story speaks a timeless truth known to all humanity: human beings, like the angels, enjoy the gift of freedom, yet we sometimes choose to abuse that freedom by trying to put ourselves at the center of creation and displacing God. This is the essence of original sin.

**Prayerfully read the story of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel (Genesis 2:4-4:16).** What do you learn about the nature of sin and the effects of sin? Notice how subtle evil can be and how alluring the temptation to avoid responsibility. Consider some of your own sinful choices. In your journal, note any emotional responses to your considerations of sin.

Rev. Michael Himes of Boston College has an interest­ing take on this age-old story. The first chapter of Genesis tells us that human beings were created in the image and like­ness of God and that God called our creation very good. The temptation of Adam and Eve is to disbelieve that good news and refuse to accept our innate goodness and the goodness of others. Instead, they think that they must do something else to become like God or become valuable in God's eyes. Consider all the evil effects that flow from not accepting the inherent goodness and dignity of each person.

1. The cosmic battle between good and evil is played out in each person's heart. Ignatius offers a final consideration of sin: the sin of one person who chooses definitively against God

**Prayerfully read Luke 16:19-31**, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. How does Jesus' parable help you understand what sin is and how it affects us? What would it be like for a person to be totally closed off from God's love? You may want to craft a parable of your own, replacing the rich man and Lazarus with modern-day counterparts based on the current century's sad history of sin, violence, genocide, and injustice.

Ask: When have I failed to notice or respond to the needs of others? When have I felt isolated from God or others by my own sin?

1. **Read Romans 5: 1-11** ("God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us"). Now use your imagination to place yourself before Jesus on the cross, which is a reminder of God's faithfulness and mercy. You may want to meditate on an artistic rendering of the familiar scene at Calvary. Follow Ignatius's instructions:

***Imagine Christ our Lord suspended on the cross before you, and converse with him in a colloquy: How is it is that he, although he is the Creator, has come to make himself a human being? How is it that he has passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for my sins?***

In a similar way, reflect on yourself and ask:

**What have I done for Christ?**

**What am I doing for Christ?**

**What ought I do for Christ?**

In this way, too, gazing on him in so pitiful a state as he hangs on the cross, speak out whatever comes to your mind.

During this week of the retreat, you may feel yourself called to seek Reconciliation with God. If you choose to experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation, you may consider preparing for it by reflecting on the ‘long view’ of your ingratitude for God’s unconditional love of you: a list of the ingratitude in your life for as far back as you may remember. Reflect on your ingratitude towards your family and friends, your husband or wives, your parents or children, your co-workers, your neighbors; how you have been ungrateful for all the gifts of creation—food, water, material resources, the natural wonders that are gifted to you each day. If you choose to write a list of them, it could easily fill many pages!



**The Two Standards of St Ignatius**

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Jesus contrasted his way to the way of the world quite emphatically: “He who is not with me is against me” (Luke 11:23). Master Ignatius helps us apply this to ourselves in a key meditation in the [**Spiritual Exercises**](https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/) called “A Meditation on the Two Standards”—a “standard” meaning a flag.

Stand with Jesus or with the Way of the World

All disciples have to choose where we are going to stand—with Jesus or with the world. No matter what life the Spirit has drawn us to, once we are baptized and confirmed we are called to stand in Jesus’ company under his flag.

We begin to move under Jesus’ standard when we join him in the living conviction that everything we have and are is God’s gift. However much or little we have, we say gratefully, “Look at all God has given me.” Then the way opens through the smoke of self-satisfaction and approval of others. “How can I help?” becomes a daily preoccupation. And through a life of love and service, the Spirit leads us to live as meekly and humbly as the Lord lived—whether we are a famous ballerina or an anonymous computer programmer.

The way of the world differs entirely. The starting point is getting as much wealth as you can. You say, “Look at all this stuff I have.” When the world’s way opens before you, you shift your focus, saying, “Look at me with all this stuff.” As those around you grow more deferential, you start saying, “Look at *me*.” You become convinced that you are the center of your world. You may not have sinned yet, but it is only a matter of time.

**Three Forms of Collusion with the World’s Standard**

Even without subscribing to theories of the subconscious, we can see that the world’s standard is as inviting to Christ’s disciples as it is to anyone else. In a way, even after we have made a solemn, lifelong choice to follow Christ’s standard, we have to purify our daily life of collusion with the world’s standard. The collusion comes in three forms.

First, there is benign secularism. Certainly, there are people who do not know Jesus Christ who lead deeply good lives. But even the baptized can live in a benignly secular way. We join civic movements and help the needy because that’s what our neighbors do. We are good to our families and honest in the workplace. There is no immediate harm in this way, but neither is there anything more than a secular spirit, even though people today call it spirituality.

The second form of collusion, seen particularly in the affluent first world, is the search for pleasure. We are surrounded by people who live what St. Paul describes as the way of the flesh. Those who follow this way are the target of advertising; they need to have whatever everyone else has right now. Their less lovely side manifests self-indulgence, lust, envy—all seen as acceptable social mores. The flesh has its own laws, and those who follow this way will readily obey those laws into sin.

Finally, there is the collusion of succumbing to darkness. Think of the report of an adult who forced a twelve-year-old to kill another and then drink some of his blood. It is evil manifest. But most of the works of the dark are not manifest. Hatred, vengeance, violence, self-destructive habits—these flourish in the dark corners of the sinful human self.

In your heart of hearts, you may loathe the dark and leap to the light. But in everyday life, you will find yourself in the twilight of benign secularism or the flesh over and over again. You will find safety in Christ’s standard only if you resolutely begin everything with thanks to God and keep watching what you are doing and why you are doing it.

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**MEDITATION ON THE TWO STANDARDS**

Begin with a preparatory prayer to ready your heart for the meditation. Take some time to play these scenes like a movie in your mind. Let your imagination bring you to these places. Afterward, close with the suggested prayer.

**Setting:** Jesus, Lord of all that is good, stands in a plain desiring and calling everybody to be under his standard (i.e. banner). Simultaneously, the evil spirit stands in a different plain and his voice is heard calling everyone to be under his standard.

**Scene 1:**The evil spirit is standing in a great plain in the region of “Babylon”—a place of terror, evil, pollution, and pain. He is using his power to harm and influence human beings. He summons spiritual forces and sends them to cities around the world, infiltrating every place. The evil spirit speaks to the demons under his authority and tells them to ensnare people. He commands the evil powers to tempt people to greed, coveting, empty honors, and pride. The evil spirit tempts all human beings to place value and identity in anything except God.

**Scene 2:** The Ruler of All, Jesus Christ our Lord, is standing in the region of “Jerusalem”—a place of beauty, kindness, healing, and peace. The Lord chooses many people—disciples—and sends them throughout the world to spread the good news of freedom to every people in every nation and in every condition. Jesus speaks to his followers urging them to help all women and men by drawing them to the things of God, especially humility. Out of humility come all the other fruit of the Spirit. Jesus is heard saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those that find their identity and meaning in God and not worldly things.” Jesus urges his followers to help others who have been trapped by the evil spirit.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, I ask for discernment to recognize the evil spirit’s deception and guard against it. Please enlighten my heart and mind to the true life revealed by Jesus and the grace to imitate him. May I be filled with a spirit of humility and endurance to face hardship for the sake of your Kingdom.