

Christof Wolf, S.J.

The Moment Is For Me

An Ignatian Guide to Prayer

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FIRST WEEK: PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION

Ignatius writes at the beginning of the first week of the Exercises: “Man is created to praise God.” We are creatures of God, images of God and created for God. God is our foundation, for our dignity comes to us only from God. No one else can give it to us, no one can take it from us. God invites us to become like him: to love, to do good, to be creative, to shape creation, to meet every situation with a loving gaze. We try to see the world with “God’s eyes.” Then, aware of goodness, I become grateful: I do not owe my life to myself, but to the loving devotion of two people; and ultimately to God.

For Ignatius gratitude is always the starting point of prayer. A discontented person circles only around himself, and wants no change. He makes the world into something like himself — not that the world is really like that, but because his pessimism allows nothing to change.

Often discontent goes hand in hand with envy. Those who are envious only see the greener grass on the other side. But the fact that I want to have what someone else has indicates that the goal I am striving for is not mine and does not suit me and my life. Envy prevents my own creative process from beginning. It keeps me lost in other people’s goals and prevents me from seeing what I am actually called to do. Envious people are not creative.

In the first week I also face my dark sides. This requires courage and strength and above all honesty. Ignatius invites us to look realistically at ourselves, at what we fail to do, even when we know better in our heart. At the end of the first week Ignatius therefore suggests making a general confession, something hard for us to imagine today. However, a radical new beginning requires reconciliation with myself, my fellow men, and with God. The door is open, but the individual has to go through it, in order to take the path towards new inner freedom.

MEDITATION 1

Psalm 139

LORD, you have probed me, you know me:

² you know when I sit and stand;
you understand my thoughts from afar.

³ You sift through my travels and my rest;
with all my ways you are familiar.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
LORD, you know it all.

⁵ Behind and before you encircle me
and rest your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
far too lofty for me to reach.

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
From your presence, where can I flee?

⁸ If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;
if I lie down in Sheol, there you are.

⁹ If I take the wings of dawn
and dwell beyond the sea,

¹⁰ Even there your hand guides me,
your right hand holds me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely darkness shall hide me,
and night shall be my light" –

¹² Darkness is not dark for you,
and night shines as the day.
Darkness and light are but one.

¹³ You formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, because I am wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works![...]

¹⁶ Your eyes saw me unformed;
in your book all are written down;
my days were shaped, before one came to be.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your designs, O God;
how vast the sum of them!

¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the sands;
when I complete them, still you are with me.[...]

²³ Probe me, God, know my heart;
try me, know my thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is a wicked path in me;
lead me along an ancient path.

Comment

Verse 23 — “Search me, O God, and know my heart” — resembles the beginning of the psalm, and yet it is much more active. For the psalmist, prayer is not a one-way street. We have a relationship with God, which is constantly changing, because we too are constantly changing. God has to be active, to recognize my heart. As my Creator, God puts his trust in me. He knows all my ways, even those I will take in the future, because He makes this future possible. “Your eyes saw how I came into being, in your book everything was already written down” (verse 16). God’s book makes my life possible. Therefore God has his place in my heart, where I feel, love, and suffer.

God also creates the relationships in which I live. They are part of my identity. Through my relationships I have become who I am. In them, love is probably the greatest gift I can give and receive. I have often suffered with people who really mean something to me, I have shared with them not only joy but also a lot of pain. I don’t find God in abstract terms, but find Him in my relationships with my relatives and friends.

Suggestions

- The first week has begun. My preparation prayer has been found.
- First I prepare the scene for myself.
- Which verse of the Psalm speaks to me most spontaneously? Why?
- What is the most important thing in life for me?
- What or who determines my life?
- How do I experience my relationships?
- What is my relationship with God?
- What does God mean to me?

Film

The Truman Show

USA 1998, 99 Minutes. Directed by Peter Weir

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