



## How to Pray (Ignatian Mental Prayer Step-by-Step)

Mental prayer, in the tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola, is essentially a **heart-to-heart conversation with God** that engages the mind and will. As St. Teresa of Avila beautifully said, mental prayer is “nothing else than an **intimate sharing between friends**; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.”<sup>[1]</sup> In other words, **God eagerly desires this personal dialogue** with you, and *all the saints became holy through mental prayer*<sup>[2]</sup>. The Church herself urges all the faithful to esteem and practice it highly<sup>[3]</sup>.

This step-by-step guide will walk you through a full Ignatian-style meditation, from how to prepare (even the night before) to how to conclude and carry its fruits into your day. Each stage below can be expanded for more detail (and on the Spiritual Formation Project website, each stage is an interactive, collapsible section). Don’t worry – the method is gentle and **meant for beginners**: it may have many steps, but each is simple in itself. Approach it like spending time with a dear friend: **with openness, humility, and trust**. Let’s begin!

### 1. Remote Preparation: Disposing Your Heart (Night Before)

Ignatian mental prayer actually **begins long before you sit down to pray**. What you do in your daily life and the previous evening can “set the stage” for a fruitful meditation. This remote preparation includes both your **way of life** and a **specific practice the night before**:

- **Cultivate a Spirit of Recollection:** Strive to live your day in a way that favors prayer. St. Ignatius advises removing obstacles like *pride, hypocrisy, and dissipation* (a restless, distracted spirit) and practicing the opposite virtues – *humility, sincerity, recollection, and self-mortification*. In simple terms, **stay humble and avoid excessive distractions or indulgences** so your heart is calm and tuned to God. For example, moderate your entertainment and settle any conflicts, so that by day’s end your conscience is at peace. These habits form a **stable foundation of “solid piety”** on which mental prayer can flourish<sup>[4][5]</sup>.

- **Preview the Next Day's Meditation:** In the evening before your planned prayer, read the meditation for the next day (the primary and secondary readings for the meditations on this website). **St. Ignatius also recommends** that as you are about to go to bed, you spend “**the space of a Hail Mary**” (**a brief minute**) thinking of the meditation you will make next and at what hour you will get up to pray. This simple intentionality places the seed in your mind so it can percolate subtly as you sleep.
- **Perform a Nightly Examen (Particular Focus):** Before bed, many Christians do a general examination of conscience. **St. Ignatius adds a “Particular Examen”** targeting one specific fault or virtue you’re focusing on. This pairs well with preparing for mental prayer, because it purifies the heart. The particular examen has **three small exercises**: (1) **Morning**: on waking, **resolve to guard against** your chosen fault (or to practice a specific virtue) that day<sup>[6]</sup>. (2) **Midday**: after lunch, **ask God for grace to recall how often you fell or fared** regarding that fault so far, then **examine yourself** from morning until that point, marking down (even just mentally) each time you slipped<sup>[6]</sup>. Renew your resolve for the rest of the day. (3) **Night**: before bed, **examine again** from midday to now, noting the number of times you failed and comparing with earlier to see if there’s improvement<sup>[7]</sup>. Express sorrow for any falls and thank God for any successes. *This diligent practice greatly helps to “rid oneself of that particular sin or defect” over time<sup>[8]/[7]</sup>* or grow in a particular virtue.
- **Night Prayer and Repose:** Finally, entrust yourself to God’s protection for the night. A short night prayer (like an Act of Contrition or simply “Lord, thank You for today; help me rest in You”) is fitting. **Go to bed on time** so you can rise for prayer. As you fall asleep, keep a peaceful thought of God’s presence or a line of Scripture in your mind. This creates an “**unruffled and tranquil**” soul by morning, ready for prayer.

By living humbly and “**keeping before your eyes the truths of faith**” daily (as St. Alphonsus Liguori writes<sup>[9]/[10]</sup>) and by making a brief preparation the night before, you’ll wake up already oriented toward God. Remote prep may feel subtle, but it’s like tilling the soil of your heart so that the next day’s meditation can take root deeply.

## 2. Immediate Preparation: Focus Your Mind and Heart (Morning of Prayer)

When you wake up on the day of your mental prayer, **begin to prepare immediately – before** the bustle of the day sweeps you away. St. Ignatius suggests that **the very first thought upon waking** should be of the Lord and the meditation you’re about to do. Here’s how to do your immediate preparation:

- **Turn Your Mind to God on Waking:** As soon as you realize you’re awake, **gently recall why you’re getting up**. Remind yourself, “*I rise to pray and meet my Lord.*” St. Ignatius advises not to give place to any other thoughts first. This may be as simple as making the Sign of the Cross and saying, “*Good morning, Lord.*” In that moment, **renew the resolution** you made to avoid your particular

fault (from last night's examen) or grow a particular virtue and ask God to help you be faithful today[6]. This intention sets a spiritual focus before anything else.

- **Recall the Meditation Topic and Stir Desire:** Still in bed or as you get ready, **bring to mind the subject of your meditation.** For example, if you plan to meditate on a Gospel scene (say, Jesus calming the storm) or a spiritual theme (say, God's mercy), quietly recall it. **Elicit some initial sentiments "conformable to the subject"** – basically, *tune your heart* to what you will contemplate. If it's a **sorrowful subject** (e.g. Christ's Passion or your sins), stir up humility and contrition in your heart. If it's a **joyful or glorious subject** (e.g. the Resurrection), allow yourself to feel hope and gratitude. These preliminary feelings dispose you to meet God with the right spirit. You might whisper an aspiration like "*Jesus, open my heart to understand this mystery*" or "*Holy Spirit, kindle in me the love I need.*"
- **Arrange a Quiet Time and Place:** As soon as reasonably possible in your morning, **go to a quiet place for prayer.** Many do mental prayer first thing (after a quick wash-up) to give God the "first fruits" of the day. **Choose a spot** where you won't be disturbed – maybe a prayer corner at home or a nearby chapel. Minimize noise or interruptions. If needed, **wake a bit earlier** than others in your household. *Remember, Jesus often went out alone early to pray, and the saints all found some solitude for mental prayer.* A calm environment helps you enter into prayer with an unruffled and tranquil mind into prayer. You might light a candle or set out a holy image to foster reverence, but keep things simple.
- **Briefly Ask God to Guide Your Prayer:** Before you officially "start" the meditation, pause for a moment of simple prayer. **Invoke the Holy Spirit.** This isn't the formal *Preparatory Prayer* yet (that comes in the next section), but an informal petition. You are essentially saying, "*Lord, help me to pray; I want to encounter You.*" This humble ask for help finalizes your immediate preparation.

Take a deep breath. You have recollected yourself: your **mind is oriented to God**, your **heart is tuned** to the theme, and your **body is in a quiet, prayerful place**. Now you're ready to begin the meditation exercise itself. Don't worry if you still feel a bit groggy or distracted – that's normal. Simply offer God your goodwill and move into the prayer time, trusting Him to lead you. "*Without Me you can do nothing,*" Jesus said, so we rely on Him from the outset[11]. He will not fail to bless the time you give Him, however feeble it may seem to you.

### 3. Commencement: Enter God's Presence

Now we enter the formal start of Ignatian mental prayer, often called the **"Commencement"** of the meditation. This stage has a few simple actions to put you in God's presence and set the context for your meditation. Proceed step by step:

1. **Place Yourself in God's Presence:** Stand quietly and **acknowledge that God is here with you.** St. Ignatius recommends that a person about to pray should "*stand for the space of an Our Father, with mind raised on high, considering how*

*God our Lord is looking at me". You might pray, "My God, I believe You are here, with loving attention on me."* This act of the presence of God is important – you're not just about to think about God; you are **with** God, who sees and hears you. Let any **restlessness or worry subside** as you focus on the reality that you are before your Lord who loves you.

2. **Make an Act of Humble Adoration:** Next, kneel down (if you are able) and **adore God** to honor His majesty and acknowledge your dependence on Him. In your own words, **worship Him**. This can be very brief. The key is a posture of *humility and reverence*. St. Ignatius would even lie prostrate on the ground at times[12], but a simple kneel is sufficient. By this act you imitate the saints and angels who eternally adore God, and you **humble yourself** before entering into conversation with Him as a servant approaching his King.
3. **Pray the Preparatory Prayer:** St. Ignatius composed a short prayer to be said **at the beginning of every meditation** – we call it the *Preparatory Prayer*. You can use his traditional wording or something similar from the heart. The classic form is: "*I ask the grace of God our Lord that all my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty.*"[13] In other words, "*Lord, I offer this prayer and myself entirely to You – guide me so that everything I think, feel, and resolve in this meditation will be for Your glory and my soul's good.*" Say this *slowly and sincerely*. This is an acknowledgment of the Supreme Power of God and our own nothingness. This prayer is **always the same** in Ignatian meditation – a steady anchor at the beginning[14].
4. **Make the Preludes:** After the preparatory prayer come **the Preludes**, which are like setting the stage of your meditation. St. Ignatius usually has two or three *preludes* before each exercise.
5. **First Prelude – “Composition of Place”:** This prelude is decided upon the night before and generally is aligned with the primary reading for this mediation. The meditations on [catholicmentalprayer.com](http://catholicmentalprayer.com) include a recommended prelude image to use as a guide. The idea is to use your imagination to put yourself in the situation of the mystery. For example, if the reading is The Beatitudes, you will imagine yourself present at the Sermon of the Mount hearing the beatitudes. You will see Jesus teaching, the people listening, the apostles by His side. You will hear the words He speaks. Feel the weather. Etc.

If the meditation is more abstract (e.g. a teaching or a truth like Heaven or sin), you can still *imagine some representation* – for example, picturing your soul standing before Jesus, or envisioning a symbol of the concept.

This first prelude engages your **memory and imagination** to concretely **set the scene**. Take only a minute or two for this visualization. (*Don't worry if you're "not good" at imagining – just do your best to get a sense of the subject. Even recalling a simple image or concept is enough.*)

6. **Second Prelude – Beg for the Grace You Seek:** Now explicitly ask God for a ***particular grace or fruit*** from this meditation. St. Ignatius always attaches a specific grace to each exercise. St. Ignatius says we should “**ask for what I want... the particular grace relevant to the matter**”[\[16\]](#). This helps focus your intention. It’s a humble acknowledgment that any enlightenment or devotion in prayer is **God’s gift**, not our own doing. So ask boldly and sincerely, like a child requesting from the Father.

This will usually be tied to the sin you wish to destroy or the virtue you wish to obtain. This should be particular, not general,

7. **(Optional) Third Prelude – Disposing Affections:** Sometimes a third prelude is mentioned: ***to orient one’s affections***. In practice, this third point is often combined with the first or second prelude. It means ***stirring the heart toward what you seek***. You actually began doing this when you elicited sentiments upon waking. If you haven’t already, take a moment to renew those feelings appropriate to the meditation.

At this point, you have **prepared the way**: You acknowledged God’s presence, humbly prayed for His aid, visualized the context, and asked for a specific grace. In sum, you’ve “**set the table**” for the meal of meditation. All these opening steps may only take a few minutes. Don’t rush unduly, but neither should you drag them out too long – do them earnestly and simply.

**Tip:** If at any point during the preparatory steps your heart is already moved deeply – for instance, you suddenly feel God’s closeness or a strong devotion – **you can pause and savor that**. St. Ignatius notes that if you “*find what you desire*” even while kneeling or making a prelude, you **don’t have to force yourself to go on immediately**[\[17\]](#). Stay with the grace God is giving. Mental prayer is not a checklist; it’s an encounter. The method serves you, not vice versa. So if, say, in imagining the Nativity you are overcome with love, you might *remain* in that affection (that *is* your meditation!). Only proceed to the next step when the intensity fades or you feel prompted to continue. Always be docile to the Holy Spirit’s lead.

Now the actual meditation – the core conversation – begins.

## 4. Body of the Meditation: Memory • Understanding • Will

During the **body of the meditation**, you will ponder the chosen subject in God’s presence and respond from your heart. St. Ignatius teaches a classic pattern using the faculties of **memory, understanding, and will**[\[18\]](#)[\[19\]](#). In simpler terms, you will: **(a) Remember/Imagine** the content, **(b) Reflect** on its meaning, and **(c) Respond** with personal feelings and resolutions. These often blend together organically, but it’s helpful to know the general flow:

1. **Recall the Scene or Truth (Memory):** Begin by **recalling the facts or narrative** of your meditation subject. This will be similar to the first prelude, but directly about the point of meditation and more personal. In our example using The

Beatitudes as the prelude image, you could now focus in on the specific beatitude that we are meditating on. You will hear the words as Jesus speaks that beatitude, but instead of to the crowd, He might be speaking it directly to you.

Engage the senses if you can. (St. Ignatius sometimes encourages meditating with all five senses, especially for Gospel scenes[20][21].) If your subject is a doctrinal truth or something without a “scene” (say, a meditation on death or on God’s goodness), *recall any illustrations or examples* you know, or a scripture verse about it. The idea is to **lay out the raw material** in your mind: *What are we talking about here?* Take a few minutes for this step, essentially **setting before your eyes the entire mystery or teaching**.

If you are having trouble, you might do this by slowly reading a short Scripture passage relevant to the topic, or by visualizing step-by-step. Be attentive and *stay with the scene* until it’s clear in your mind. This is an **active meditation** – you are not daydreaming, but **actively calling to mind** the sacred matter.

In the meditations on [catholicmentalprayer.com](http://catholicmentalprayer.com), we offer usually 2-3 meditative points. These are suggested points to build off of and use for that meditation. Feel free to add your own if you’d like!

2. **Consider with Your Intellect (Understanding):** Now engage your **understanding** – this means **reflect deeply on the meaning and lessons** of the subject. Ask yourself gentle questions: *Why* is this important? *What* is God saying or doing here? *What truths* shine out? *What does this reveal about God? About myself?* **Apply your reason** to draw some holy insights or convictions. For example: “Jesus, You accepted the Cross out of love – what does that tell me about how I should accept my daily crosses?” or “God’s mercy toward the prodigal son is so generous – truly He will forgive me if I return to Him.” You can compare the *ideals vs. your life*: “Our Lady said ‘yes’ with total trust – do I trust God’s will like that?” Mull over any **spiritual truth** until it touches you. This step is basically a **meditative dialogue in your mind**: reasoning in God’s presence. **Feed your soul with the truth** – like a bee gathering nectar, go through the points of the story or topic and extract sweet lessons or **practical principles**. It may help to **personalize Scripture** by inserting yourself: e.g. imagine Christ speaking directly to *you* the words from the Gospel, or imagine *you* are one of the people in the scene – how does it feel? What do you learn? You can also make acts of **faith** in the truths: “Lord, I truly believe You are here in the Eucharist” (if meditating on the Eucharist, for example). During this consideration, you might spontaneously form some **short prayers or “affections”** – follow those (that leads into the next step). Aim to draw at least one light or “**practical conclusion**” from your reflection: some realization about *how you should think, believe, or act differently now*. (For instance: “God resisted the proud (like the Pharisee) but lifted the humble (like the tax collector) – I see that I must cultivate humility if I want to please Him.”) If your mind wanders, gently come back to the subject – perhaps re-imagine the scene or re-read a line of Scripture to refocus.

**Take your time;** there is no rush. The goal is not to cover many ideas but to let **one or two truths** really sink in. As St. Francis de Sales said, “*It is better to ponder a little in depth than a lot superficially.*”

3. **Elicit Affections and Resolutions (Will):** As you reflect, allow your **will and heart** to respond with **devout affections**. This means any movements of love, desire for God, sorrow for sin, joy, admiration, gratitude, awe, etc., that arise. **Ignatian meditation especially values these heartfelt responses**, because prayer should engage love more than knowledge.

These affectionate prayers – sometimes called “*acts*” (acts of love, faith, repentance, etc.) – are the precious fruit of meditation. **Speak to the Lord simply, from the heart.** This spontaneous conversation is often called a *colloquy* – essentially, a **heartfelt dialogue with God** in response to what you’ve contemplated. St. Ignatius describes a colloquy as talking “*as one friend speaks to another, or a servant to a master – freely, lovingly, about whatever is on your heart: asking for grace, seeking forgiveness, giving praise, or seeking counsel.*”<sup>[22]</sup> Throughout the meditation, let your heart *freely alternate* between thinking (consideration) and these *affections/colloquies*.

The second part of the will is to form good resolutions. In particular, **focus your will on making a practical resolution** – a firm decision of something you will **do** (with God’s help) in response to this prayer. This is **crucial**: every genuine meditation should translate into action, even if interior. Ask yourself, “*Given what God has shown me, what change or concrete step is He inviting me to make?*” It might be a **tiny step**, but it should be real and specific. Your **resolution** should also be to avoid a sin or to work on a virtue – ideally related to the goal of your meditation. **Make it particular, attainable**, and oriented to the “**present circumstances**” of your life. A good resolution is “*practical (truly efficacious), particular (one concrete thing), suited to current circumstances, founded on solid motives, humble (relying on God, not self), and accompanied by a prayer for God’s assistance.*” So, formulate your resolution **in God’s presence**, ask Him **for the grace to carry it out**, and **truly intend to do it**. This firm **act of the will** is one of the most important fruits of your mental prayer – it’s where love translates into life. Even if you forget everything else, **keep hold of your resolution.**

Each meditation day of [catholicmentalprayer.com](http://catholicmentalprayer.com) has the option of showing an example resolution for that day. These are generally generic and can be added to the particular resolution you are making for that day if desired.

These three aspects – **remembering, understanding, loving** – aren’t strictly sequential; they intertwine. You might bounce back and forth: recall a detail, then it sparks an affection, then another thought arises, and so on. **That’s okay.** The structure is just there to help if you get stuck. In practice, any meditation is basically **reading or imagining something about God, reflecting on it, and talking with God about it.** **It’s a conversation:** sometimes you’re listening (pondering His word or example),

sometimes you're speaking (praying from your heart). Aim for about **15–30 minutes (or more, as you grow)** in this actual meditation phase. Don't worry if your meditation feels dry or your mind wanders frequently – simply and gently bring yourself back. The Lord sees your effort and is pleased with your perseverance. Even the saints had dry prayers; what matters is **fidelity and humility**. If you find your mind totally blank, you can go back and **read a verse or two** from Scripture to jump-start reflection, or use a good devotional book's points. But try not to let distractions discourage you. Keep turning back to the Lord: “Sorry, Lord, back to You – as I was saying...” Over time, you'll find more recollection and even delight in this sacred exercise. Many saints describe mental prayer as **lighting a fire** in the soul: “*Mental prayer is the blessed furnace in which souls are inflamed with the love of God,*” says St. Alphonsus Liguori, “*and all the saints became saints by mental prayer.*”<sup>[2]</sup> So even if you feel little flame now, know that **each moment in this furnace is enkindling your heart slowly but surely.**

Continue in this way until your allotted time for prayer is nearing an end (or until you feel finished). In Ignatian practice, one does not rush out of meditation but **ends with a formal colloquy and summary** – a gentle closing of this sacred conversation.

## 5. Conclusion: Recapitulation • Ejaculatory Prayer • Colloquy

When you sense that your meditation time is ending – either by schedule or an interior sense that you have received what God wanted to give – it's time to **conclude** the prayer. The conclusion has a few simple parts: **a brief recap (to solidify your resolutions), a final colloquy (conversation) with the Lord, the Blessed Virgin, or a saint, and a closing prayer.** Here's how to do it:

- **Recapitulate the Highlights:** Take a minute to **mentally review what transpired in your meditation.** This is the *recapitulation* or *summary*. Go over the main **points or inspirations** you had, and **reconfirm the good resolutions** or insights given. It's like tying together the threads so you don't forget them. Ask yourself: “*What touched me most during this prayer? What do I want to carry with me now?*” **Seal these points in your heart.** You can even write them in a journal after finishing prayer, but for now just **restate them to God.** This recapping helps “**confirm the good resolutions adopted**” and keep the whole meditation in memory.
- **Choose an Ejaculatory Prayer:** An **ejaculatory prayer** (also called an aspiration) is a **very short phrase or verse that you can easily repeat during the day** to recall this meditation. It's like a spiritual “sticky note” for your heart. It is a prayer that serves during the day to briefly bring to mind the entire meditation. Some examples: after a meditation on trust in God, you might take Jesus' words “*Jesus, I trust in You*” as your little prayer for the day. If you meditated on God's mercy, maybe “*O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*” If on love, “*Lord, You know that I love You*” or “*Sacred Heart of Jesus, I adore You.*” **Repeat it now** as you end the prayer, and resolve to **repeat it periodically later** – especially if you face challenges, or at your habitual routine times (like every hour, or when transitioning tasks). This little dart of prayer will keep the flame of your meditation glowing through the day and **call your mind back to God** in an

instant. It's a way of "praying always" without formal prayer. (You might jot the aspiration on a small note or set it as a reminder on your phone.)

Ideas for ejaculatory prayers for each meditation are given for each day on [catholicmentalprayer.com](http://catholicmentalprayer.com).

- **Final Colloquy (Prayerful Conversation):** Now end with a loving talk directed to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the saints. Often, St. Ignatius would have the person address **Jesus Christ**, or sometimes the **Blessed Virgin Mary**, or a patron saint, **as one would speak to a dear friend at parting**. This colloquy can include: **thanksgiving**, if the meditation went well; **petition**, asking for help to live out what you received; **adoration and praise**, affirming God's goodness; and any **final thoughts or feelings** you want to share with the Lord. Be honest and **speak from the heart**. If your meditation was dry or difficult, you can even tell that to God. End on a note of **hope and humility** – knowing that any good that came is from God, and you rely on Him to continue it.
- Often, St. Ignatius recommends making a colloquy "**to Jesus, to the Father, and to Mary**," especially in certain meditations (he calls this a *triple colloquy*<sup>[23][24]</sup>). For daily practice, you can keep it simple: perhaps address Jesus, then ask Our Lady or your favorite saint for their intercession to carry out your resolution. This brings in the Communion of Saints to support you.

As with ejaculatory prayers, ideas for a final colloquy are given for each meditation day on [catholicmentalprayer.com](http://catholicmentalprayer.com).

- **Formal Closing:** End the meditation with a formal prayer to **close the time**. Traditionally, many pray an *Our Father*, Hail Mary, and Glory Be to conclude<sup>[25]</sup>. You can do that, offering those perfect prayers for the intentions and resolutions that came from your meditation. This final act entrusts all the fruits of your prayer to God's providence. **Sign yourself with the Cross** and let *Amen* seal the prayer time.

Now your **meditation "exercise" is finished**, but its effects are *only beginning* in your life. You've communed with God; *He has spoken to you and you to Him*. Savor the peace or clarity you may feel. Even if you feel nothing, trust that **something good has been planted in your soul**. Like Our Lady, "*keep all these things, pondering them in your heart.*"

Before you rush off to your duties, St. Ignatius suggests a final brief step: **spend a few moments reflecting on how the meditation went** (this is more of an *evaluation*, whereas the earlier recapitulation was more about content). We treat that in the next section, which transitions into living out the day.

## 6. Reflection: Examination • Recapitulation

The period **immediately after your meditation** is important. Think of it like a gentle cool-down after exercise or the "**Amen**" at the end of a heartfelt conversation, where

you take a breath and process what just happened. St. Ignatius explicitly advises spending about **15 minutes after prayer in quiet reflection on the prayer itself** – this is part of his “*Additions to make the Exercises more effective.*” Specifically, “**after finishing the exercise, for the space of a quarter hour, seated or walking quietly, look how it went with you in the meditation. If it went poorly, seek the cause and be sorry (resolving to improve next time); if it went well, thank God our Lord and do the same another time.**”<sup>[26]</sup> In practice, here’s how to **live out the fruits of your mental prayer throughout the day**:

- **Review Your Prayer (Prayerful Self-Examen):** Right after you finish the formal prayer, remain in a recollected state a few minutes longer. **Examine how the meditation went:** Did you experience distractions? Strong consolations or difficulties? Were you able to stick to the method? This isn’t to fret over performance, but to become aware of *what helps you and what hinders you*. For example, you might notice “*I spent too much time on the initial imagining and ran out of time for the resolution,*” or “*When I prayed kneeling it helped me focus better than when I slouched,*” or “*Thinking of that Scripture verse really struck my heart – that was from God.*” Gently note these things. If you discover a “cause” of dryness or distraction (perhaps you were very tired, or you rushed and skipped the prelude, etc.), **acknowledge it** and express regret to God if appropriate. If your mind wandered because of negligence, ask pardon; if it was just human weakness, don’t be upset – but maybe you’ll find a way to mitigate it next time (like getting more sleep or choosing a quieter spot). Conversely, **recognize what went well by God’s grace – and give thanks.** Maybe you remained faithful despite no sensible consolation – *thank Him for sustaining you*. Maybe you received a beautiful insight – *thank Him for that light*. This humble post-prayer *examen* will, over time, help you learn how you personally pray best and how to deepen your meditations. It also continues the spirit of prayer, keeping you “in tune” with God a bit longer instead of rushing off. (Some people like to jot a few notes in a journal at this time: key thoughts, their resolution, how the prayer was. This can be very beneficial, though it’s optional. It externalizes the review and gives you something to look back on to see progress.)
- **Carry Your Resolution into the Day:** Mental prayer doesn’t end when you stand up from your place of prayer – it’s meant to **affect the rest of your day!** So now, **implement the resolution** you made. Consciously recall it as you go about your tasks. Perhaps **write it on a sticky note** or put a reminder on your phone at midday. The true test of prayer is in **action**: “*By their fruits you shall know them.*” Even if you forget some of your meditation’s content, **try not to forget the concrete resolve** you felt called to. Throughout the day, **renew your desire** to live that resolution, especially when the moment comes. For instance, if you resolved to be patient and a trial hits at 3 PM, **remember your morning prayer** – say your aspiration, quickly ask Jesus for strength, and *practice that patience*. In this way, your meditation continues to bear fruit and gradually transforms your life. You might also find moments to *recollect yourself briefly* and mentally return to the scene you prayed about, to draw further strength or inspiration.

- **Use the Ejaculatory Prayer Frequently:** The little **aspiration** you chose – use it! Say it in your heart (or even aloud) **whenever you can**: during a break, while walking or driving, in a moment of temptation, or just randomly to reconnect with God. This keeps you in a conversation with God all day. For example, if your aspiration is “*Jesus, I trust in You,*” saying it when anxiety hits will remind you of the lesson from your meditation about trusting God. The aspiration is a mini **“check-in” with God**, keeping the flame alive. It literally “*re-capitulates*” your meditation by bringing your mind back under the influence of that grace. Many people find that a single short prayer repeated often becomes almost like background music of the soul, creating a habit of **unceasing prayer** in a simple form.
- **End the Day with Examen and Preparation:** At night, as part of your prayer before bed, **do the general examen of conscience** (reviewing your whole day in God’s presence, asking pardon for faults, etc.). Include in that examen a checkpoint: “*How did I do with my resolution today? Did I remember and try to live it? Did I repeat my ejaculatory prayer? Where did I succeed or fail in what I resolved during my meditation?*” If you succeeded even a little, **thank God**; if you fell short, **ask His forgiveness and resolve to try again**, perhaps adjusting the resolution if needed. This nightly examen, coupled with the particular examen mentioned earlier, will show you how your mental prayer is impacting your daily growth. Finally, **look toward tomorrow**: read or decide the material for next day’s meditation, and fall asleep with that gentle thought of God. In this way, the cycle continues, each day building on the last.

Remember, growth in mental prayer is **gradual**. Some days will feel dry and distracted, others richly consoling – be faithful through all. The important thing is to **persevere daily** in this prayer, even if some days are short or challenging. Over weeks and months, you’ll notice that you come to prayer more readily, and that **virtues are taking root in your life** thanks to these daily encounters with Christ. You are essentially **walking with God** like the disciples on the road to Emmaus – talking, listening, and feeling your heart burn within you as He explains the Scriptures[27][28]. If you ever feel like giving up, recall the words of the saints: *mental prayer is to your soul what water is to a garden*. Without it, the flowers of virtue wither; with it, they flourish. **So don’t lose heart**. If you miss a day, start again the next day. God is patiently waiting for your next meeting, eager like a friend who has your best interests at heart.

Finally, **Maintain a spirit of humility and dependence** on God’s grace. The fruit of prayer is ultimately His work. Our job is to show up and be open. As Pope Pius XII taught, the practice of mental prayer among the faithful is proven valuable “*by the custom and practice of the saints*”[29] – meaning all those holy ones struggled at times just like us, but they persisted, and God made them radiant. He will do the same in us, in His time.

## 7. Using the Spiritual Formation Project Website to Grow in Prayer

The Spiritual Formation Project website ([catholicmentalprayer.com](http://catholicmentalprayer.com)) is a valuable tool to help you follow these steps and remain consistent in mental prayer. It's designed to guide you through the entire process we've outlined, making it easier to stick to a routine and deepen your prayer life. Here's how you can make use of it:

- **Guided Prayer Modules:** On the website, you'll find a **daily guided meditation module** corresponding to the Ignatian method. Each major stage of prayer (preparation, meditation, conclusion, etc.) is presented as a **section** – much like the sections of this guide. Essentially, the website acts as a gentle “**prayer coach**”, walking alongside you as you pray.
- **Meditation Content and Prompts:** The site offers **pre-selected scripture passages or themes for meditation** each day (or allows you to choose one). For instance, it might present the Gospel scene for you to meditate on, complete with the text to “**recall in your memory**” and an image to help your *composition of place*. It often includes a few **reflection questions or points** (drawn from Scripture and the wisdom of the saints) to stimulate your **understanding** phase. These prompts can be expanded if you need inspiration during meditation, or disregarded if you prefer to meditate without aid. This way, even if you're new and unsure what to meditate on, the site provides solid material. It's like having a small “**meditation book**” built in, so you can prayerfully chew on the provided points or scripture verses. Of course, you remain free to follow the Holy Spirit's lead beyond the prompts – the aids are there to support, not confine, your conversation with God.
- **(Coming soon!) Interactive Journaling and Resolution Tracking:** After the meditation, the website encourages you to **write a short reflection**. There's typically a journaling section where you can note the key inspirations you received, the resolution you made, and your chosen ejaculatory prayer. Writing these down on the site serves two purposes: it **cements them in your mind** and creates a **spiritual log** you can revisit. The platform might even send you reminders of your resolution later in the day (if you opt in), or pop up your chosen aspiration at set times – a helpful nudge to remember your commitment. Over time, your digital prayer journal on the site will let you see patterns of growth, recurring themes, and answered prayers, which can be very encouraging.
- **(Coming soon!) Particular Examen Support:** The Spiritual Formation Project site also integrates the **Particular Examen routine**. It allows you to **set a specific virtue/fault** you're working on (for example, “patience” or “avoid gossip”). You can log each day how many times you succeeded or fell in that area. The site might prompt you at midday: “*It's time for your midday examen – how are you doing with your resolution to, say, speak charitably?*” and you can quickly note your progress (some use a simple counter or a checkbox system provided by the app). Then at night, it will guide you through the evening

examen, asking you to reflect and mark if you did better than yesterday[30][31]. This practical tool transforms Ignatius's somewhat complex dot-chart into an easy digital format. By following these prompts, you'll find the particular examen much easier to practice consistently – and consistency brings results in overcoming faults with God's grace.

- **(Coming soon!) Resources and Reminders:** Aside from the daily guided prayer, the Spiritual Formation Project site has a **resource library** (articles, short videos, Q&A) on prayer and spiritual growth. If you ever feel stuck, you can explore those to find answers (for instance, “*What if I get distracted?*” or “*How do I know my resolution is from God?*”). Furthermore, you can set up **email or phone notifications** for key times – e.g. a morning reminder: “*Time for mental prayer – your meditation today is on the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Remember to start with the preparatory prayer!*”; a noon reminder for the examen; and an evening reminder to do night prayer. These little pings can greatly help you build the habit until it becomes second nature. The site essentially serves as a **personal spiritual assistant**, keeping you on track gently.
- **Adaptability:** Whether you're a busy parent with just 15 minutes or you have a luxurious holy hour, the site's structure can adapt. You can collapse sections you don't need and spend longer on others. The important thing is that by using the tool regularly, you develop a **consistent rhythm: Examen – Preparation – Meditation – Application – Examen** (cyclic, day by day). The Spiritual Formation Project is there to **integrate this rhythm into your daily life** so that prayer and life truly become one harmonious whole.

In summary, the Spiritual Formation Project website takes everything you've learned in this guide and **puts it into an easy-to-follow, interactive format**. It's like having St. Ignatius as a coach at your side, but with the convenience of your device. By availing yourself of this resource, you can feel more confident that you're “*doing it right*,” and when discouragement or forgetfulness creeps in (as happens to all of us), the site is ready with a prompt or encouragement to keep you going. Ultimately, the goal is to help you **encounter Christ daily** in mental prayer and to be gradually **transformed in Him**. The website is a means to that end – a modern help for this ancient practice.

---

**In closing**, remember that learning *how to pray* in this Ignatian way is a bit like learning an instrument: at first you're focused on the mechanics (the “method”), but with practice you'll start to make **beautiful music of the soul** almost instinctively. Don't be afraid of the structure – it's there to free you to love God with your whole heart and mind. And the structure will become delightful once you experience the friendship with Jesus that blossoms through it. As you persevere, you'll echo the sentiment of the disciples, “*Were not our hearts burning within us as He spoke to us on the way?*” And you will come to know in lived experience that **mental prayer is indeed the breath of the soul** – drawing in the grace of God and sending out praise – without which our spiritual life cannot thrive.

May God bless you as you begin this journey of Ignatian mental prayer. **He is already there, waiting for you** each day in the silence of your heart. Happy praying!

**Scripture for encouragement:** “*But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*” (Matthew 6:6).

Go with God – He will surely go with you.

---

[1] Between Friends: The Feast of St Teresa of Avila - St. Josemaria Institute

<https://stjosemaria.org/between-friends-the-feast-of-st-teresa-of-avila/>

[2] [9] [10] Alphonsus Liguori on Mental Prayer

<https://www.ourcatholicprayers.com/alphonsus-liguori-on-mental-prayer.html>

[3] [29] Mystici Corporis - Papal Encyclicals

<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius12/p12mysti.htm>

[4] [5] [27] [28] Progress Through Mental Prayer | EWTN

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/progress-through-mental-prayer-12610>

[6] [7] [8] [12] [13] [14] [15] [16] [17] [20] [21] [22] [23] [24] [25] [26] [30] [31]

[https://www.catholicmentalprayer.com/docs/readings/St\\_Ignatius\\_of\\_Loyola\\_Spiritual\\_Exercises.pdf](https://www.catholicmentalprayer.com/docs/readings/St_Ignatius_of_Loyola_Spiritual_Exercises.pdf)

file://file-5w6pM2jDHzuJWDPNXj7x3v

[11] [18] [19] Practice of Mental Prayer — Paulatim

<http://www.paulatimway.com/practice-of-mental-prayer>