

Contemplative Prayer
at
Integritas

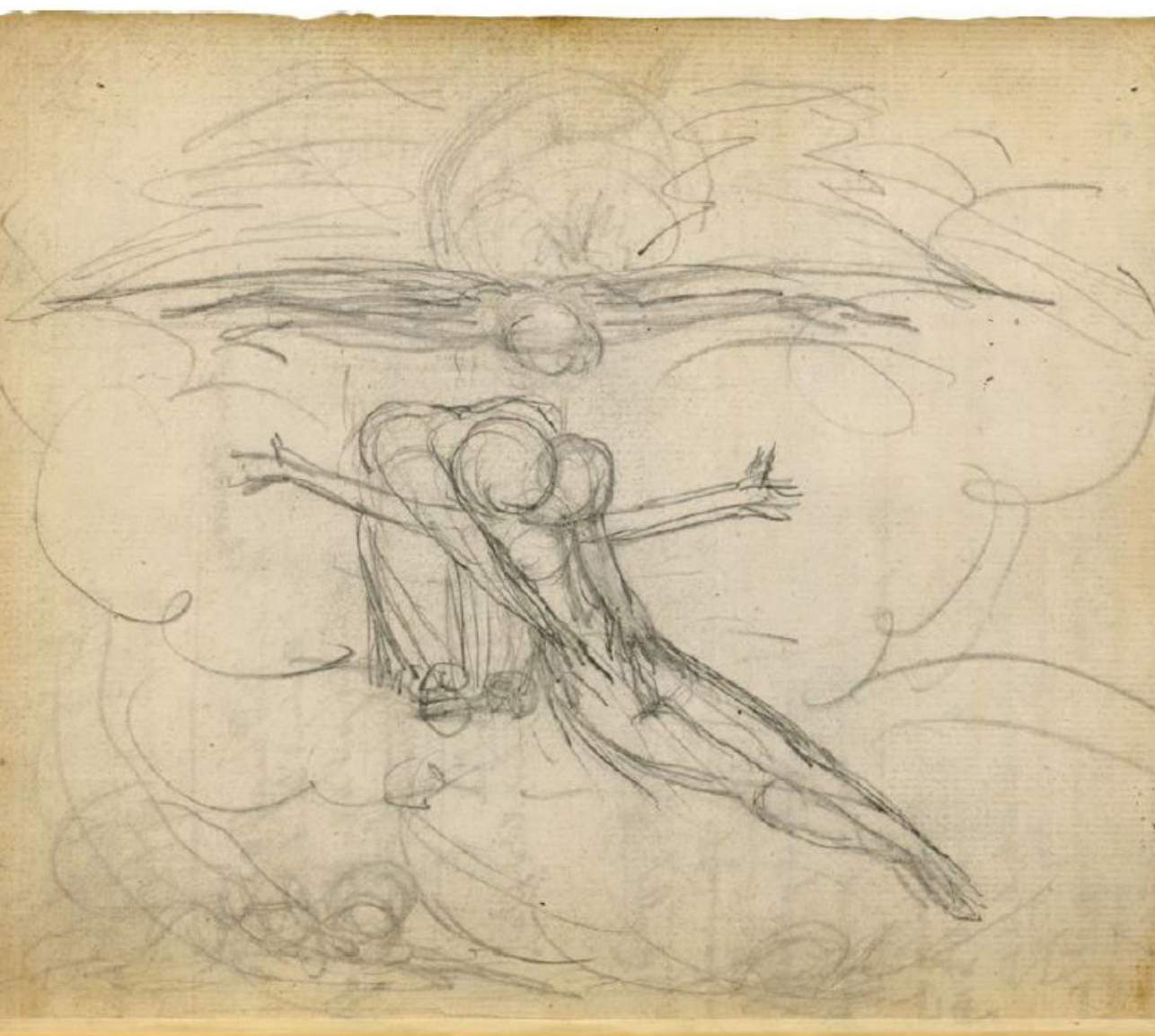
A domestic centre of Christian faith

Wednesday evenings, at 8.00 p.m. (except during July and August)

As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God is essentially an inexhaustible history of mutual self-surrendering love.

Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, (2004), 81.

Next page: Sketch of the Trinity, William Blake, (circa 1787-1818).



The glory that you have given me I have given them,
so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me,
that they may become completely one,
so that the world may know that you have sent me
and loved them even as you have loved me.

(John 17 : 22-23)

Perhaps the time has come to say farewell to the idea of traditionally Catholic cultures. Maybe we are facing a new and different epoch in the Church's history, where Christianity will again be characterised more and more by the mustard seed, where it will exist in small, seemingly insignificant groups that nonetheless live an intensive struggle against evil and bring the good into the world, that let God in.

Pope Benedict (1997)

We must start out again from the new generations to make the Church fruitful: to generate many domestic Churches in which a Christian style of life is lived, where one feels familiar with Christ, where one learns how to listen to those who are next to you, just as Christ listens to us.

Pope Francis (2024)

The emptiness of the transcendental creature exists because the fullness of God creates this emptiness in order to communicate himself.

Solitude before God and being at home in his silent immediacy is indispensable to all humans.

The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist.

Karl Rahner SJ

In appreciation of
Peter Hannan SJ
(1934 - 2023)

Integritas is a domestic centre of Christian faith based in the family home of Linda Rainsberry and Patrick Treacy at Ennisnag, Stoneyford, County Kilkenny.

Integritas (*l. integrity*) is a name chosen to reflect the dynamic truth of Christian faith, which is that the self-surrendering love between the Father and the Son draws all of us to them and into one body as the Holy Spirit proceeds from them. Through their mutual, reciprocal and eternal love, they never cease to gather us to themselves and envelop us in their divine love.

Our deepest desire is to surrender to the movement of their love, which is realised in our lives when we honour four key and sequential relationships, being with:

- God, the persons of the Holy Trinity
- one's own nature and calling
- family, friends and the local Christian community
- the universal Church, humanity and creation

The programme at *Integritas* concentrates upon these four relationships by focusing on:

- I **Contemplative Prayer** as a way of becoming attuned to God, the persons of the Holy Trinity, with evenings of Christian prayer being held each Wednesday at 8.00 p.m. (except during the months of July and August);
- II **Missionary Discipleship** as a way of becoming aligned with one's own deepest nature and calling so as to lead to a Christian life, with an ongoing course entitled '*The Integrity of Christian Life*' held on Saturdays;
- III **Familial Love and Friendship** as a way of being attentive to one's family, friends and local Christian community, with ongoing seminars entitled '*Love Revealed*' held on Saturdays;
- IV **Christian Anthropology** as a way of understanding the universal Church, humanity and creation, so as to be authentic in how one works for a Christian society, with an ongoing lecture series on the Christian vision of humanity, entitled '*Christian Reflections on Being Human*', held on Saturdays.

Integritas Prayer

May we enable each other to trust entirely
in the provident love of God.

May we form family, community and a deeper identity
in the gentle attraction of Jesus Christ.

May we support one another
in responding to the unique call of the Spirit
and serve as one in realising the dream of the Spirit for all;
so that in this covenant,
may we remain in Christ
and with Christ in each of us,
may we come to be at One.



Contemplative Prayer

And if two of you are gathered together – then there is a whole world,
a world of living love. Embrace each other tenderly and praise God,
if only in you two His truth has been fulfilled.

(Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*, Book Six: The Russian Monk.)

... where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.

(Matthew 18 : 20)

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF CONTEMPLATION

The following is an extract of an address given by Archbishop Rowan Williams to the Synod of Bishops in Rome on 11 October 2012, whom he was invited to address by Pope Benedict XVI.

To be fully human is to be recreated in the image of Christ's humanity; and that humanity is the perfect human 'translation' of the relationship of the eternal Son to the eternal Father, a relationship of loving and adoring self-giving, a pouring out of life towards the Other. Thus the humanity we are growing into in the Spirit, the humanity that we seek to share with the world as the fruit of Christ's redeeming work, is a contemplative humanity. St Edith Stein observed that we begin to understand theology when we see God as the 'First Theologian', the first to speak out the reality of divine life, because 'all speaking about God presupposes God's own speaking'; in an analogous way we could say that we begin to understand contemplation when we see God as the first contemplative, the eternal paradigm of that selfless attention to the Other that brings not death but life to the self. All contemplating of God presupposes God's own absorbed and joyful knowing of himself and gazing upon himself in the trinitarian life.

To be contemplative as Christ is contemplative is to be open to all the fullness that the Father wishes to pour into our hearts. With our minds made still and ready to receive, with our selfgenerated fantasies about God and ourselves reduced to silence, we are at last at the point where we may begin to grow. And the face we need to show to our world is the face of a humanity in endless growth towards love, a humanity so delighted and engaged by the glory of what we look towards that we are prepared to embark on a journey without end to find our way more deeply into it, into the heart of the trinitarian life. St Paul speaks (in II Cor 3:18) of how 'with our unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord', we are transfigured with a greater and greater radiance. That is the face we seek to show to our fellow-human beings. And we seek this not because we are in search of some private 'religious experience' that will make us feel secure or holy. We seek it because in this self-forgetting gazing towards the light of God in Christ we learn how to look at one another and at the whole of God's creation.

In this perspective, contemplation is very far from being just one kind of thing that Christians do: it is the key to prayer, liturgy, art and ethics, the key to the essence of a renewed humanity that is capable of seeing the world and other subjects in the world with freedom – freedom from self-oriented, acquisitive habits and the distorted understanding that comes from them. To put it boldly, contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter.



It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

INTRODUCTORY MUSIC

During the introductory music, as we wait for people to gather, you may wish to read and reflect upon these words from the Gospel of St. John. They express the essence of what God, the three persons of the Holy Trinity, profoundly desire for each one of us – that we abide in their love.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.
If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.
I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be complete.

(John 15 : 9 -11)

I Relaxation of the Body and Awareness of the Breath

We begin the evening with a short exercise helping us to become aware of the body and to make it as comfortable for prayer as possible. We then concentrate upon the breath and upon a change in our awareness from the usual understanding that I am breathing, to the deeper and more truthful appreciation that I am being breathed. This exercise ends with these words from the Gospel of St. Matthew:

Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.
Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy
and my burden light.

(Matthew 11 : 28)

II Centring Prayer

Be still and know that I am God. Psalm 46 : 10

The source of centring prayer is the indwelling Trinity : Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Gregory the Great (6th century) in summarising the Christian contemplative tradition expressed it as "resting in God".

- i Choose a sacred word that resonates within you and has one or two syllables, such as the name of Jesus in English or other languages : Iosa, Jesu, Ie-sum.

- ii Become aware again that I am not breathing, I am being breathed.
- iii Allow the sacred word to be said repeatedly in rhythm with each breath.
- iv When distracting thoughts arise, simply return to saying the sacred word in rhythm with the breath.

A short period of silence follows.

Lord Jesus Christ,
meek and humble of heart,
you offer to those who follow you
a yoke that is good to bear,
a burden that is light.
Accept, we beg you, our prayer and work of this day,
and grant us the rest we need
that we may be ever more willing to serve you,
who live and reign for ever and ever.
R./ Amen.

Isaiah 2 : 3

Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths.
For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit
and we shall be created.

**R./ And you shall renew
the face of the earth.**



III Prayer seeking God's mercy

For no one can confess his sin without having at the same time confessed God. It is neither a preliminary nor an effect. They happen together, in one unique spiritual intuition. Against all expectation, at the moment when God pardons it and when it is so to speak made good and restored in grace, sin becomes the place where God makes himself perceptible to the heart of man.

It must be added that there is no way to encounter God truly and to know him besides this way of conversion. Before it God is a word, an analogical concept, a presentiment, a desire, the God of the philosophers and poets, but not yet the God who reveals himself through an excess of love. The Lord came for sinners, to live and to eat with them and not with the just, to find what was lost (Matt. 9.13; 18.11). God makes himself known in pardoning. As for the sinner, it is in measuring the pit of his sin that he discovers the abyss of mercy, at the moment when the one fills up the other and engulfs it.

(Extract from *Repentance and Experience of God* André Louf, Abbot of the Abbey of Mont-des-Cats, France)

A PSALM OF REPENTANCE

(read in alternate verse)

Psalm 51 : 1- 4, 6, 10 - 12

Have Mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

**Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.**

Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight.

**You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.**

Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

**O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
let the whole earth tremble before him.**

A PSALM OF THANKSGIVING

Psalm 100 : 1 - 5

O be joyful in the Lord, all the earth;
serve the Lord with gladness
and come before his presence with a song.

**Know that the Lord is God;
it is he that has made us and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.**

Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and bless his name.

**For the Lord is gracious;
his steadfast love is everlasting,
and his faithfulness endures from generation to generation.**

IV Introduction of the theme for the evening's prayer

A short explanation is given of the theme for this evening's prayer and why it is chosen. The theme follows the pattern of the content of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* and is in harmony with the current theme of the liturgical calendar of the Church.

REFLECTIVE MUSIC

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies ... the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

(Rom 8 : 22 -23, 26 -27)

V Contemplating the Word of God

The most important fact in all of Theology and Spirituality is that the three persons of the Trinity want to reveal themselves to each person. (Karl Rahner SJ)

READING

(related to the theme for the evening's prayer)

The following way of praying with the word of God assumes that the Bible is the story of the Trinity's passionate desire to reveal themselves to you. Each part of this story will reveal some aspect of the Father's love that Jesus makes visible and that the Holy Spirit gives you an intimate knowledge of. The following steps can be used to converse with God in a psalm, for example, or with Jesus in a story from the Gospel.

1. Quieten yourself in whatever way you wish, such as by listening to the sounds you hear around you. Then focus your attention on God's presence by repeating a word or phrase that helps you to do this.
2. Read a piece of God's word and notice what aspect of God's love it reveals to you. Choose a word or phrase to express and savour this love.
3. Spend time letting the attractiveness of this aspect of God's love grow. It may help to ponder the way someone you know radiates this kind of love.
4. Put words on what, in effect, God is saying in this piece of scripture and then let Him say this to you using your own name. The more intimate, challenging and creative the words you choose are the better. Let God say these words to you a number of times so that the love they express may sink in.
5. Tell God how you feel about what He says to you. You may find that one part of you resists this while another part welcomes it with gratitude, hope or joy.

*Neither painting nor sculpture will be able any longer
to calm my soul, now turned towards that divine love
that opened his arms on the cross to take us in.*

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)

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VI Reflecting on your prayer

The purpose of reflection is to become aware of the fact that the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit reveal themselves to you in prayer. It is also meant to help you to become familiar with how they want to do this by means of the Holy Spirit enlightening your mind and attracting your heart. Therefore, when you reflect on your prayer, dwell with the reality that it is the Holy Spirit who leads you into an intimate knowledge of God's love. Then, notice and record, however briefly, anything that struck you about this love during this prayer such as:

- what aspect of God's love you stayed with;
- what you found attractive about this love;
- what words God used to express this love to you;
- how you felt about what He said to you.

Begin your next period of prayer by reading what you have written. This will give continuity and lead to a build-up of what is being revealed about God's love to you. From this a true vision of who God is for you and who you are for God will take shape. In this way you will be answering Jesus' call to repent and believe the Gospel of his Father's love for you. (Mark 1 :15)

VII Prayer for Families

Jesus compares our entry into the love that He and His Father have for us to a home they come and make in us. 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.' (Jn 14 : 23) In a home the members of the family are drawn into a holding environment by the love of their parents and by their growing capacity to receive this love and respond to it. The bond Jesus establishes with us is even closer. Jesus calls the union He wants to establish with us 'complete' as He draws us into His own union with the Father and the Spirit (Jn 17:22-23). In drawing us to Himself, He reintegrates (*l. integritas*) all that is within us and all that is without, gathering 'into one the dispersed children of God'. (Jn 11 : 52)

[The remembrance of family, friends and members of the local Christian community who have died or who are in need of prayer at this time.]

Following this period of silent prayer and intention, we say together:

Psalm 16

Preserve me, God, I take refuge in you.
I say to the Lord: You are my God.
My happiness lies in you alone.
He has put into my heart a marvellous love
for the faithful ones who dwell in his land.
Those who choose other gods increase their sorrows.
Never will I offer their offerings of blood,
never will I take their names upon my lips.
O Lord, it is you who are my portion and cup;
it is you yourself who are my prize.
The lot marked out for me is my delight:
welcome indeed the heritage that falls to me!
I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel,
who even at night directs my heart.
I keep the Lord ever in my sight:
since he is at my right hand, I shall stand firm.
And so my heart rejoices, my soul is glad;
even my body shall rest in safety.
For you will not leave my soul among the dead,
nor let your beloved know decay.
You will show me the path of life,
the fullness of joy in your presence,
at your right hand happiness for ever.
Give praise to the Father Almighty,
to his Son Jesus Christ the Lord,
to the Spirit who dwells in our hearts,
both now and forever.
Amen.



VIII Compline (abbreviated)

V./ O God, come to our aid.

R./ O Lord, make haste to help us.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was
in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

(read in alternate verse)

Psalm 91 : 1 – 2, 5 -6, 10 – 12, 14 -15

Those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High
and abide in the shade of the Almighty
say to the Lord: "My refuge,
my stronghold, my God in whom I trust!"

**You will not fear the terror of the night
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the plague that prowls in the darkness
nor the scourge that lays waste at noon.**

Upon you no evil shall fall,
no plague approach where you dwell.
For you has he commanded his angels,
to keep you in all your ways.

**You set your love on me so I will save you,
protect you for you know my name.
When you call I shall answer: "I am with you."
I will save you in distress and give you glory.**

NUNC DIMITTIS

The Song of Simeon

**A./ Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep;
that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.**

At last, all-powerful Master,
you give leave to your servant
to go in peace, according to your promise.

For my eyes have seen your salvation
which you have prepared for all nations,
the light to enlighten the Gentiles
and give glory to Israel, your people.
Give praise to the Father Almighty,
to his Son, Jesus Christ, the Lord,
to the Spirit, who dwells in our hearts,
both now and for ever.

R./ Amen.

**A./ Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep;
that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.**

Visit our homes, we pray you, Lord:
drive far away from them all the snares of the enemy.
May your holy angels stay with us and guard us in peace,
and let your blessing be always upon us
through Christ our Lord.

R./ Amen.

**A./ In your mercy, Lord,
dispel the darkness of this night.
Let our households sleep in peace
so that at the dawn of a new day
we may, with joy, waken in your name
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

The Lord grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.

R./ Amen

CONCLUDING MUSIC

May he support us all the day long,
till the shades lengthen
and the evening comes,
and the busy world is hushed,
and the fever of life is over,
and our work is done.
Then in his mercy may he
give us safe lodging,
and a holy rest and peace at the last.
(St. John Henry Newman)



THE WAY OF PRAYER AND REFLECTION AT INTEGRITAS

... without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty. Jesus wants evangelisers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence.

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 259)

Integritas is a domestic centre of Christian faith which first commenced in September 2000 with prayer on Wednesday evenings. These evenings of prayer and reflection have continued since then and commence each year at the beginning of September and conclude at the end of June.

These evenings take place between 8.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. on Wednesday evenings. The purpose is to engage the whole of one's person in prayer – body, mind, soul and spirit. The practice, therefore, commences with a relaxation exercise, which ensures that the body is comfortable and becomes still. This exercise then focuses upon the breath, leading to an awareness that one is not breathing but being breathed. This awareness underpins an understanding throughout the prayer that one is called to be an instrument in service of God's love in the world.

A period is then allowed for centring prayer. This is a relatively short period which would be considerably longer for those who regularly practice this way of prayer in daily life. Nonetheless, it is allowed for at this early point in the prayer so as to further concentrate the mind and to bring it into harmony with the soul (the realm of the psyche) and to create greater sensitivity to the Holy Spirit within oneself.

These two initial practices of relaxation of the body and breath and centering prayer, come from the tradition of *apophatic* prayer, which counsels the person in contemplation to let go of images and feelings that do not lead directly to resting in God's presence. Apophatic prayer is an ancient and venerable way of prayer found in the writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers and in the writings of Christian mystics such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. It renounces images and feelings in order to finally come to rest in the presence of God.

The next stage is a series of prayers from Scripture which seek the mercy of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They begin with the reading part of Psalm 50 (51) in alternate verse, which commences with the words "*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love*". This marks a change to prayer in the *cataphatic* prayer which honours and reverences images and feelings and goes through them to God. Any sort of prayer that highlights the mediation of creation can be called cataphatic. Praying with one's senses, feelings, intuitions and imagination are cataphatic forms of prayer.

The next stage is the introduction of the theme for the evening's prayer. The sequence of these themes is broadly taken from the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, which are availed of for two related reasons. Firstly, the spiritual themes of these exercises develop a heightened awareness of the person of Jesus Christ and of how His central presence gives a new order to one's life. This is the basic vision of *Integritas*, namely that through a growing attraction to Him, a new integrity emerges in one's life. This integrity becomes a reality through the strengthening of four progressive relationships in one's life being :

- The relationship with God, the persons of the Holy Trinity;
- The relationship with one's nature and mission;
- The relationship with others in the bonds of family, friendship and the local Christian community;
- The relationship with the universal Church, humanity and creation.

The second reason for relying upon the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* is that they are particularly applicable to the lives of lay people and to discerning the will of God for one's life in the midst of difficult choices and constant demands. By continually reflecting on one's life in this way of prayer, one is increasingly called to become totally dependant upon Jesus Christ, to notice the gentle, recurring calling of the Holy Spirit from Him to choose a life that is integrated and to be encouraged through faith in Him to follow the path that leads to the Father.

At this stage, we then arrive at the central and pivotal point – listening to the reading from the Gospel which is related to the theme of the evening and then being in silence so that the Word of God can be contemplated. After this period of silence, one is then invited to reflect upon what has emerged during this period of silence and to note it down so that it will be remembered and available to be reflected upon thereafter.

Following this period of reflection, a period of prayer is allowed for our families when family members, living and deceased, are remembered and the wellbeing of all families is prayed for. The central importance of families, of marriage and the care and nurturing of children by their parents is critical for our shared future, for the good of society and the Church and justifies specific prayer and attention.

The final stage of the evening turns to an abbreviated form of Compline, drawing from this great monastic practice of prayer and uniting with the universal Church in thanksgiving to God and in asking for His protection and care in our lives and in our homes. Music is played at the conclusion of the evening and one can stay in silence in the prayer room thereafter for as long as one wishes.

THEMES FOR EVENINGS OF PRAYER

The evenings of prayer at *Integritas* follow a particular rhythm wherein certain themes (drawn from the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*) are explored in a way which is in harmony with the liturgical calendar. The sequence of these themes is as follows:

Foundation

September and the first two weeks of October

These initial six evenings are based upon the first part of the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. They are concerned with bringing us in touch with the reality of the love of God in our lives. We all have different concepts of God which prevent us from believing that God is all loving or that the love of God is a reality in our lives. For some, it is impossible to accept that the love of God is immanent or uniquely present in the life of each one of us. For others, it is not possible to believe in the love of God as transcendent, as all pervasive, beneath, behind and through all things, working for the salvation of all of creation.

The first two of these six evenings seek to work with the sense of God's love being immanent in our lives and the next two reflect upon the transcendent nature of divine love. It is essential not just to experience both of these aspects of the love of God but also to ensure that they are in balance. The deepest desire of the human person is to know oneself as loved by God and to live in service of this love in one's life. The final two evenings concentrate upon how one is being called by the love of God in one's life and the way one is responding to the truth of this love. The purpose of these six evenings of prayer is to allow one's soul to be attracted by the love of God by moving towards an image of a loving God and discovering the love of God in one's life.

Throughout these evenings, it is helpful to stay with what St. Ignatius described as the "Principle and Foundation" of one's life. By this, he meant that as we become attracted to the love of God, we voluntarily want to give our lives in service of this love. In seeing that nothing matches the love of God, we seek to ensure that nothing is put before it and that our lives are based upon and ordered around this love. This obedience, or listening to God, is a response to the yearning for the love of God that each one of us is. During each of these six evenings, a piece on the *Principle and Foundation* described by St. Ignatius of Loyola is set out so that it can be reflected upon and kept in the background during one's prayer.

Mercy

Third week of October to the beginning of Advent

In the first stage of these evenings of prayer, as described above, we reflect not only upon how God is loving and provident but also upon how He asks us to listen to this love, believe in it and surrender our "whole heart, soul, mind and strength" to it. In this second stage, we concentrate on what happens when we do not surrender to this love.

This is what we mean by sin and we seek an understanding of three aspects of it:

- 1) The *nature* and the *seriousness* of sin, its destructiveness or tragedy. We seek a cosmic sense of sin, such as the injustice we see in the world today, as well as a personal one.
- 2) *Our involvement* in sin or our basic sinfulness that we own.
- 3) *The extraordinary response of God to our sinfulness*. To get the clearest picture of the extent of God's fidelity to us, by exploring the full extent of our infidelity to God, is the ultimate objective of this stage.

This stage draws upon the second part in the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* which concentrates upon the permanent, steadfast nature of the love of God in our lives. It does so by first making us conscious of the presence of sin in human affairs, both as individuals and as a society. This is a necessary corrective to the strong contemporary tendency to deny the presence of sinfulness as a reality in our lives. Having acknowledged the existence of sinfulness, this stage seeks to then make us aware of our own personal, unique involvement in human sinfulness. We are challenged to see this destructive reality in our own lives, to acknowledge its presence and to become aware of how unattractive and serious it is. Finally, this stage invites us to realise the constant presence of the mercy of God for each one of us. By becoming aware of one's own sinfulness, one can then enter into a sense of the depth and extent of the mercy of God for oneself, personally.

Birth

Advent and Christmas

The Incarnation, the Word taking flesh, is the most important event in human history. It is God taking human form. Hence, our understanding of the person of Jesus is so important because He reveals to us what God is like. During these evenings of prayer, we are concerned with developing an intimate knowledge of Jesus, with having a deeper sense of Jesus Christ within oneself, a new sense of the birth of His presence within oneself.

Accordingly, in these evenings, we look at how personal the love of God is for each one of us in the way that Jesus uniquely calls each of us to be with him. In this part, Jesus asks the central question that He poses in the Gospels – “who do you say that I am?” (Lk 9 : 18-21) He asks who am I for you? What do you think of me? How do you feel about me? The grace we are looking for in this part is “...an interior knowledge of Jesus the Lord who became a human being for me.” (St. Ignatius) Accordingly, there are three aspects to the interior knowledge which is being sought in this part, namely that :

- 1) Jesus is the Lord or God and
- 2) He became a human being
- 3) for me.

In other words, we are looking for an interior knowledge (a) of Jesus who is God or love (b) made visible or expressed in human form and (c) that He does all this for me.

The entire part of the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, which is drawn upon during these evenings, is concerned with a conversion of the heart to Christ. This is essential before we embark upon the next part which is a call to mission in service of Christ. The Christian claim that Jesus is decisive is not a claim that God is to be found only in Jesus and nowhere else. It is a claim, however, that the only God that might possibly be discovered elsewhere is the God disclosed into the world through the Incarnation and then revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The scripture readings are taken from the narratives concerning the birth of Jesus in which belief in the reality of Jesus being the Lord or God is very clearly stated. The readings also relate to the life of Jesus as an infant, as a child and His hidden life before He became a public figure. They are chosen so as to establish within us a sense that Jesus was a human being and lived an ordinary life in many ways before His true identity was made known abroad.

Call

First Week after Christmas to Ash Wednesday

The next part of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which these evenings of prayer draw upon, centres upon the call given to each one of us to be a unique part of the mission of Jesus Christ. In order to realise this calling, we need to become aware of how we are being simultaneously drawn towards and away from Him. We are constantly presented with two ways, one that will lead to one's deepest desires being realised in Him and the other which seeks to distract us from the joy and purpose of a full life that Jesus wants for each one of us.

The main focus of our attention in this fourth part of the *Spiritual Exercises* is to continue to grow in an interior knowledge of our Lord who has become a human being for each one of us so that we might know, love and follow Him. We seek to become more sensitive and responsive to the attitudes we need to adopt if we want to follow Jesus. In this part, one is challenged to identify the concrete decisions and choices that have to be elected for if Jesus is to gradually become the centre of one's life and if one's life is to become a reflection of Him.

If we act on the belief that our significance and worth are not a gift, but have to be earned, we live in a very different world in which we will notice a loss of joy and enthusiasm. This is because the significance we earn by what we have or do is often fragile, fleeting, intermittent and superficial. The feelings that a sense of insignificance generates are anxiety, anger, guilt, sadness and fear. When this image of ourselves as insignificant, and the feelings it generates become habitual, we develop a poor self-image which erodes or blocks our belief in those who love us. This erosion of faith and hope leads us down what Jesus calls the road to "destruction" (Mt 7:13-14).

During these evenings, we seek to become more aware and conscious of the various ways we are seduced to follow another way than that of Jesus. We become aware of the tendency in each one of us to make something other than God the centre of our lives so that we then become distracted from God and become pre-occupied by something else. When this occurs, we seek to create ourselves rather than allowing ourselves to be created by God.

Death

Lent

The six evenings of prayer throughout Lent concentrate upon how we realise the calling that each of us has from God. For this to happen, there has to be a constant dying to oneself, to one's own ambitions and preoccupations and to personal attachments that inhibit us from following our calling.

This part centres upon the important role suffering plays in the growth of all of our relationships but especially in our relationship with Jesus. The aim of this part is to enter into an experience of the sufferings and death of Jesus in the way you would want to enter into the sufferings of a friend. For our contemplation of the sufferings of Jesus to foster our relationship with Him, we need to focus on:

- (a) the intense, passionate love that led Him to undertake them
and
- (b) on the love this inspires in us
and
- (c) how our whole being is being drawn to Him and how our lives are called to a new integrity (*integritas*) around Him.

In our efforts to share in Jesus' suffering and sorrow, it is best to enter our own first. Without becoming familiar with our own experience, that of Jesus remains unreal. We may then find it difficult to identify with or be involved in what He went through. In doing this, we avoid focusing on the physical sufferings of Jesus as these are largely outside our experience and may distract us from entering where most of His suffering lay. The ultimate objective of sharing Jesus' sufferings is to grasp something of the passionate love which inspired Him to undertake them, not just for a group but for each person and ultimately for oneself. Facing the personal nature of this overwhelming reality enables us to get a more intimate knowledge of His love and to be confirmed in our calling to follow Him by taking the hard road joyfully.

Resurrection

Easter period

In this part, we seek to enter into a sense of the glory of Jesus Christ and to experience the joy of His presence in every relationship and in all things. For when a relationship or a thing is seen as a gift and thus as a sign of His presence and providence, it becomes a revelation of His beauty and draws us to Him. The aim of this part is, therefore, to be glad and to rejoice in the glory of Christ our Lord. The radiance of Jesus' love, seen in His growing attractiveness in the Gospel stories, reaches its climax in the glory and joy of His resurrection.

Jesus is no longer visibly present to His Church. He is now exalted, at God's right hand and it is from there that He exercises His authority over heaven and earth. In the mystery of the resurrection, our joy emanates from Jesus being with each member of the Church. Each one of us is drawn by the attractiveness of the risen Lord into His body and into full relationship with the persons of the Trinity. When He becomes the centre of our lives, a new integrity develops in our lives around Him. By drawing us to Himself, He brings us inwardly into the relationship with the persons of Trinity from where a new and eternal sense of order, cohesion and relatedness develops in our lives. The word *integritas* is used to describe this phenomenon, that is how the growing attractiveness of Jesus at the centre of one's life leads to a new integrity in one's life and relationships around Him.

Redemption can be seen as reconciliation, a befriending of all estranged by sin. This reconciliation is achieved when Jesus draws everyone to Himself and to each other by His growing attractiveness in the Gospels and especially when He is "lifted up" on the Cross and in glory (Jn 12 : 32). Everything, when seen as a gift and thus as a sign of His presence and providence, is a revelation of His beauty and draws us to Him. Everything is a revelation of the risen Lord and can put us in touch with the glory and joy of His love.

Closely connected with Jesus' desire to share His risen life with us is the way the love He expressed in His death and resurrection draws all things to Himself and to each other. St. Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises* aims to help us further this reintegration of all things in Jesus by asking us to do an exercise he calls "The Contemplation to Attain the Love of God" (*the Contemplatio*). The love of God is to be found in all things.

Cultivating this vision involves developing our ability to see everything in the following four ways :

1. Everything is a gift from God, whether that gift is natural, personal or supernatural;
2. As everything as a gift is a sign of the giver's love, everything is a wayside sacrament or a powerful sign of God's love and presence;

3. Everything that happens is a sign of God's providence in that "by turning everything to the good, God co-operates with all those who love Him".
(Rom 8 : 28)
4. An appreciation of God's gifts leads to an appreciation of the giver. (Eph 1 : 1-14)

This experience of God giving us all things and sharing even Himself with us evokes a desire to love and serve God in all things. In this part, we are seeking an interior knowledge of God's gifts, so that filled with gratitude for them we may in all things serve Jesus who through the attractiveness of His love for us seeks to become our Lord. We seek to develop a vision of all things that we come across each day as gifts and thus as signs. As such, everything puts us in touch with the love of God.

Trinity

Pentecost

Atonement, the at-one-ment, the gathering of all into one, is the final, climactic theme of these evenings of prayer. It expresses the whole purpose of contemplative prayer. By being drawn to Jesus Christ, by finding our centre in Him, every aspect of our lives develops a new integrity around Him. The Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, draws all to the Father, gathering all that is scattered into One. This is what the term *integritas* (l. integrity) is chosen to signify.

In essence, this is the whole purpose of these evenings of prayer. It is to allow the person of Jesus Christ to gradually win us over, through His incomparable attractiveness, so that He becomes the centre of our lives. This, in turn, leads to everything that is fractured or discordant in our lives becoming integrated around him, through the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, and brought into the oneness of the Father. For as St John Paul II stated "The kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but is before all else a person with the name of Jesus of Nazareth". Or as Pope Benedict XVI has also stated "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty ideal, but the encounter with an event, a person, who gives live a new horizon and a decisive direction."

Lady Julian of Norwich wrote of us being enveloped in the love between the persons of the Holy Trinity, in the fourteenth century, in this way:

We are enfolded in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. And the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are enfolded in us: all-mighty, all-wisdom, all-goodness, one God, one Lord.

What is it that draws us to Jesus Christ and to the Father? We become increasingly aware of being enveloped in the eternal self-surrendering reciprocal love between them. The total self-giving of Jesus Christ, to which we are drawn by its incomparable attraction, is a mirroring of the eternal, mutual, self-giving love of the triune God, whose love He came to reveal and to gather us into.

Hans Urs von Balthasar posits a compelling picture of this eternal mutual self-giving of the persons of the Trinity. He writes that:

the Father strips himself without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son; he imparts to the Son all that is his. [...] The Son's answer to the gift of the Godhead can only be eternal thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father's original self-surrender. Proceeding from both, as their subsistent 'We', there breathes the 'Spirit' [...] as the essence of love he maintains the infinite difference between them, seals it and, since he is the one Spirit of them both, bridges it (*Theo-Drama, IV, The Action* (1994 edition) 323-324).

This same triune God is the creator and sustainer of all that is, so that von Balthasar can comment, in asserting what is the absolute ground on which we can rely, that the "absolute truth [...] is itself a truth of eternal relations in an eternal life" (*Explorations in Theology, Volume I*: (1989) 80). What underpins reality, in other words, is an eternal mutual giving and receiving in relationship. This illuminates the biblical depiction of God as love. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (1 John 4:16).

Moreover, this eternal movement of love constitutes, within the triune nature of God a "pole of bestowing, a pole of receptivity, and a pole of reciprocity" (Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's Theologia Crucis*, (1995) 167). God the Father bestows all that he is (apart from being Father) to the Son, who receives this eternal gift with infinite gratitude and returns, in total surrender, all that he is to the Father, from which mutual self-giving love proceeds the Spirit. This action of giving and receiving discloses the mutuality at the heart of divine triune life, which we are all called into.

A final statement about the mystery the Holy Trinity and our relationship to them was expressed by Karl Rahner in these terms:

God freely steps out of himself in self-communication ... through the Son who appears historically in the flesh as man ... and the Spirit who brings about the acceptance by the world of this self-communication.

Man understands himself only when he has realised that he is the one to whom God communicates himself.

(Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, (1997) 46, 86)

Saint Patrick's Breastplate

I bind unto myself today
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, his might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need,
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward,
The Word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger.
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the Name,
The strong Name of the Trinity;
By invocation of the same.
The Three in One, and One in Three,
Of whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

At some thoughts one stands perplexed, especially at the sight of men's sin, and wonders whether one should use force or humble love. Always decide to use humble love. If you resolve on that once and for all, you may subdue the whole world. Loving humility is marvellously strong, the strongest of all things, and there is nothing else like it.

(Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*,
Book Six: The Russian Monk.)

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

(John 15 : 9-17)

Finally, brothers and sisters,
 whatever is true,
 whatever is noble,
 whatever is right,
 whatever is pure,
 whatever is lovely,
 whatever is admirable –
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy –
 think about such things.

(Phil 4 : 8)

The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are
persecuted for righteousness's sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5 : 3-10)

The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.
Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia, The Joy of Love* (2016) 11.

Overleaf: *The Holy Family*, by the hand of Fr. John M. Reynolds, *Integritas*.

MP ΘΥ

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