

An Advent Retreat

A photograph of four lit red candles arranged on a dark surface, possibly a table, with pine needles and small lights scattered around them. The candles are lit, and their flames are bright yellow and orange. The background is dark with some blurred lights.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES
IN EVERYDAY LIFE

LOYOLA PRESS.

1 Introduction to the Mystery of Christ for Advent and Christmas

ADVENT is a time when we recall the Son of God becoming man for us, and we prepare ourselves for his second coming in glory. It is a time for active expectation, desire, prayer, communication, and joy.



CHRISTMAS is a time for joy and contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. We witness the first manifestations of his efforts to save us. As the Mother of God, Mary is especially celebrated during this season.

In the method of prayer proposed by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, contemplation of the mysteries of Christ's life plays a central role. That is why, in addition to prayerful reading, we highlight what is called Ignatian contemplation on infancy narratives. During this time, we ask for a very special grace to know the Lord more intimately in order to love and serve him better.

- A** Remove yourself somewhat from the daily, habitual activities and devote at least 20–30 minutes to personal prayer.
 - B** Devote a few minutes every day to the Prayer of Loving Attention (Examination of Conscience) to review the main events of your day.
 - C** Try to find a friend or, better yet, a small group with whom you can share the fruits of your prayer once a week or so.
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2 Determine Your Personal Program

Establish your schedule for daily prayer and stick to it as much as possible. Set some dates when you can share the fruits of your prayer with a friend or small faith-sharing group.

3 Guide for Daily Prayer

- A** Select a time and place that is best for your daily prayer.
- B** As you begin your prayer time, realize that God is really present and wants to draw close to you.
- C** Ask for the light of the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire you.
- D** At the beginning of your prayer time, say this or a similar prayer:

*Here I am, Lord, standing before you
just as I am at this moment.
I sit in your presence, Lord, in peace and tranquility.
I am in your presence and allow myself to be
directed by you. I open myself to you who are near.
You are the font of life, the force of life which
permeates my very being.
You are my breath which maintains me in existence.
Let peace dwell within me.
Give me the grace to let myself be cleansed by you,
to be a shell filled only with you, my God.
Let all my thoughts and feelings, my will and liberty,
be totally directed to your honor and service. Amen.*

E Here are two ways to pray using the suggested scriptural texts:

Ignatian Contemplation — (IC)

(can be used for either Old or New Testament readings, but especially for events in the life of Christ)

- Recall the story and use your imagination to enter into the Gospel scene.
- Try to *see*, contemplating each person in the scene. Give a prolonged look, above all, to the person of Jesus himself (if that is the case). Just look without trying to explain or understand.
- Try to *listen*, paying attention to the spoken or implied words. What might they mean? What if they were directed to you?
- *Observe* what the people in the scene do. They have names, a history, sufferings, personal quests, joys. How do they react? Note the gestures, the feelings, and attitudes, above all, of Jesus himself.
- *Place yourself actively in the scene*. Allow yourself to be involved in what is happening. Besides seeing and listening, try to touch and feel the flavor of what has happened during prayer. In reflection try to benefit from everything that happened in this time of prayer.

End this time with an intimate farewell to your God using the words of the Lord's Prayer. On the completion of the time of prayer, do not forget to do a brief review. (See step 5.)

Prayerful Reading — (PR)

- Read the entire text once; reread it slowly, verse by verse. Ask yourself: *What does the text itself say?*
- Stop wherever God speaks to you interiorly. Do not rush; learn to savor things. Ask yourself: *What does the text say to me?*
- God is a Father who loves us much more than we could ever be loved by anyone else. Ask yourself: *What does the text make me want to say to God?* These can be praises, petitions, thanksgiving, adoration, or silence.
- Continue to gather whatever comes to mind, whatever touches your heart: desires, lights, appeals, recollections, inspirations. Ask yourself: *What is it that this text and everything I have experienced through it made me savor and live?*

End the prayer with a loving goodbye. Pray the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary. On the completion of this time of prayer, do not forget to do a brief review. (See step 5.)



4 Texts for Each Day

Abbreviations: (IC): Ignatian Contemplation • (PR): Prayerful Reading

1st Week

DEEPEN YOUR FAITH IN THE LORD WHO GIVES US WHAT WE NEED.

Petition: Ask for the grace to enter into the spirit of the season of Advent, which prepares us to encounter the Lord anew, both now and at the end of time.

- 12/3 Sunday, Jeremiah 33:14–16; Psalm 25; 1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2; Luke 21:25–28,34–36
- 12/4 Matthew 8:5–11 (IC)—Many will come to eat at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven.
- 12/5 Luke 10:21–24 (PR)—Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.
- 12/6 Isaiah 25:6–10 (PR)—Let us rejoice and be glad in the God who has saved us.
- 12/7 Isaiah 26:1–6 (PR)—The Lord is an eternal rock.
- 12/8 Luke 1:26–38 (IC)—Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God.
- 12/9 Repeat the text(s) and prayer that touched you the most this week.

2nd Week

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD.

Petition: Ask for the grace to prepare the way for the Lord in your own heart, in your family, in your work, in your faith community, and in the world community.

- 12/10 Sunday, Baruch 5:1–9; Psalm 126; Philippians 1:4–6,8–11; Luke 3:1–6
- 12/11 Luke 5:17–26 (IC)—The merciful Lord brings new life and forgives sins.

- 12/12 Zechariah 2:14–17 (PR)—I am coming to dwell among you, says the Lord.
- 12/13 Matthew 11:28–30 (PR)—We will find rest.
- 12/14 Matthew 11:11–15 (PR)—Whoever has ears ought to hear: Our redeemer is the Holy One.
- 12/15 Isaiah 48:17–19 (PR)—The Lord God teaches what is good for us.
- 12/16 Repeat the text(s) and prayer that touched you the most this week.

3rd Week

REJOICE, FOR THE LORD IS NEAR!

Petition: Ask for the grace to live in the joyous expectation of the coming of the Lord, who brings us salvation.

- 12/17 Sunday, Zephaniah 3:14–18; Isaiah 12:2–6; Philippians 4:4–7; Luke 3:10–18
- 12/18 Matthew 1:18–25 (IC)—She will bear a son, and he will be called Immanuel, “God with us.”
- 12/19 Luke 1:5–25 (IC)—John the Baptist will turn many to God and prepare a people fit for the Lord.
- 12/20 Luke 1:26–38 (IC)—May God’s will be done in me.
- 12/21 Luke 1:39–45 (IC)—Blessed is the one who believes what was spoken would be fulfilled.
- 12/22 Luke 1:46–56 (PR)—My soul proclaims the Lord’s greatness, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
- 12/23 Repeat the text(s) and prayer that touched you the most this week.

4th Week

THE WORD HAS BECOME FLESH.

Petition: Ask for the grace of the Holy Spirit's fruitfulness in our lives, just as the Spirit was fruitful in Mary.

- 12/24 Sunday, Micah 5:1-4; Psalm 80; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45
- 12/25 **Christmas**—Luke 2:1-14 (IC)—Today is born a savior, Christ the Lord.
- 12/26 Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59 (IC)—Lord, teach us to speak with wisdom in your Spirit.
- 12/27 John 20:1-8 (IC)—They saw and believed.
- 12/28 1 John 1:5-2:2 (PR)—Walk in the light.
- 12/29 1 John 2:3-11 (PR)—To know God is to listen to God's word.
- 12/30 Luke 2:36-40 (IC)—Give thanks to God for our redemption.

Christmas Time 1st Week

JESUS IS OUR LIFE.

Petition: Ask for the grace to believe in Jesus as the meaning of your life.

- 12/31 Sunday, **The Holy Family**—Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14; Psalm 128; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:41-52
- 1/1 **Mary, Mother of God**—Galatians 4:4-7 (PR)—God sent a Son, born of a woman, so that we might be children of God.

- 1/2 John 1:19-28 (IC)—Do we recognize Jesus among us?
- 1/3 John 1:29-34 (IC)—Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- 1/4 1 John 3:7-10 (PR)—Those born of God do what is right.
- 1/5 1 John 3:11-21 (PR)—We should love one another; let us love.
- 1/6 1 John 5:5-13 (PR)—Whoever has the Son has life.

2nd Week

GOD MADE KNOWN IN JESUS CHRIST.

Petition: Ask for the grace to lead by the star, the light from above, and to take this light to others.

- 1/7 Sunday, **The Epiphany of the Lord**—Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72; Ephesians 3:2-6; Matthew 2:1-12
- 1/8 **The Baptism of the Lord**—Isaiah 42:1-7 (PR)—The earth awaits the Lord's teaching.

[Evaluate the entire Advent Retreat, if possible, with a faith-sharing group.]

5 Review of Prayer

When you complete each period of prayer, ask yourself how it went:

- What word of God touched me the most?
- What feeling, sentiment, emotion, or effect predominated?
- Did I feel some calling, a desire, or an inspiration?
- Did I experience some difficulty or resistance?

If possible, write in a journal about the answer that seems most significant. Formulate it in a prayer of petition or thanksgiving. These same questions can be used in the faith-sharing group or in spiritual conversation with another.

6 The Prayer of Loving Attention

(Also known as Examen of Consciousness)

At the end of the day, give a few minutes of loving attention, making yourself present to the Lord as someone who was graced by him during the day.

Thank God for everything that was good for you and for your brothers and sisters.

Invoke the power of the Holy Spirit, asking for light to discern how to use your liberty, how to decide wisely.

Take note of the situations, circumstances, and events of your day in which you allowed God to act, to be present in your life. Review your actions that were signs of God's presence and love for others.

Ask for forgiveness from Jesus, your faithful friend, for the good you did not do and for not allowing yourself to be led by the Holy Spirit.

Entrust yourself and the coming day to the Lord and experience the joy and hope that come from putting all these matters in his hands.