

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer you my corrections, asking that my errors be resolved and mistakes smoothed over.
Peter O'Sullivan SJ

Entering into Prayer

Feel free to choose an exercise from the beginning of the retreat or another way to enter your time of prayer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 4: 4-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone.” ’

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” ’

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you”, and
“On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’

Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.





Get Behind me Satan
by
Ilya Repin

Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?
Are there times in your life when you have been tempted?
What do you think Jesus would say to you about that?

Food for Thought

Jesus enters the desert just before he begins his public ministry and shows his readiness for this service through his ability to know when he is being tempted. It is strange how the evil one tempts Jesus in this passage with a verse from the psalms, a verse which reassures us that God will protect us from harm and will not even let us stub our toes on rocks. The words quoted must have been all too familiar to Jesus but he knows not to trust them, not because they are untrue, but because of who is saying them at that moment. The psalm quoted in today's Gospel reassures us that God will take care of us, even when we feel as though we are in a spiritual desert. However, trust in God does not lead to the quick results the bad spirit offers, it leads us through the desert, out the other side, and onward to service and ministry.

Suggestions for Prayer

In the Spiritual Exercises, St Ignatius warns us to be careful of false consolation, when the bad spirit comes to us under the guise of the good spirit. That seems to be what is happening to Jesus in today's Gospel. The word of God he hears is good, but the one who is speaking to him is not, and the consequences of following this voice would be fatal. It is all too tempting to follow our own interpretation of the scriptures, but we need to discern whether it is really the good spirit which is working through our understanding. The slow leisurely reading of scripture using the method of Lectio Divina can help us come to a deeper understanding of the transforming power of God's word. By letting little nuggets of scripture sink ever deeper into our lives, we can begin to notice where the good spirit is working in our understanding, bringing peace, joy and growth.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, as you read or listen to the Word of God try and listen too to the thoughts and feelings which come to mind as you read. Are they being raised by the Good Spirit or the Bad Spirit?

Examen (review of prayer)

Let God look at you with love. What are you doing for Lent this year? How is that working out? What's going well? And less well? What do you need from God to help you?

Talk with God about your Lent. Be still in God's gaze again.

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.

Stephen Hoyland

MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Jesus Christ, let my behaviour today not be modelled on that of the world but of on the new mind which you have given me.

Philip Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

Feel free to choose an exercise from the beginning of the retreat or another way to enter your time of prayer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 25:31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’



Image for the Day

Do you find this painting awe-inspiring, frightening, beautiful, or boring? Why?

Are there times in your life when you reflect on what will happen when we leave this earth?

What do you think Jesus would say to you about how you live your life now?

Food for Thought

We all aspire to be holy but the pathway to holiness can sometimes be covered over by brambles. We are offered so many ways to achieve holiness that it becomes easy to neglect the one way which the Lord offers us right at the heart of our lives. Being holy can never just mean following a set of laws, valuable though those laws may be to guide our lives. It must also mean being attentive to those around us, in our families, our workplaces and our communities. For it is there that we encounter those who in need of our care and attention, it is there alone that we will be known by God as his holy people. God would never put holiness out of our reach.

Suggestions for Prayer

This passage would have appealed to Ignatius because it brings together two dimensions of spirituality which he cared about deeply, the divine majesty of the Lord and attention to those in need. In fact, he writes that in becoming friends of the poor, we become friends of the Eternal King. That a king could be a pauper or a pauper a king seems like a contradiction, yet we are invited to believe that we meet Christ the King in the poor. While we often think about the poor as particular marginalized groups in society, we probably do not need to go that far to find someone in need of our attention. Perhaps there is someone close to us who needs to be treated with all the respect and love they deserve.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, can you find a small way to treat a friend or family member so they felt as though they were royalty?

Examen (review of prayer)

Yes, here I am Lord, to have a few minutes quiet time with you. It is good to be here and to think a bit about my day...

Thanks for all the day has been and for all your gifts. These are the moments that come to mind when I think about saying "Thank you".

I'm sorry for the moments of selfishness and unkindness and any other times when I did not manage to be your hands, Jesus, your feet, your eyes, your love, your compassion for the people around me.

Please give me a nudge if there was something you were trying to tell me today when I wasn't paying attention! And promise you'll be with me all through tomorrow too, Amen.

TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Dear Lord, please fill me with your radiant presence, so that people see you, not me, today.

Nick King SJ

Entering into Prayer

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds without and within the room.

Identify each sound as you are able.

Gently, slowly, without judgement, focus your attention on each one.

Return your attention back to where you were before.

If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing.

Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:7-15

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

'Pray then in this way:
 Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name.
 Your kingdom come.
 Your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
 And do not bring us to the time of trial,
 but rescue us from the evil one.
 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you;
 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.



Jesus teaches the people
by
James Tissot

Image for the Day

Does this painting speak to you and if so, what does it say?

Do you remember being taught your prayers?

What do you think Jesus would say to you about your prayer life?

Food for Thought

If God knows what we need before we pray, why do we pray at all? Perhaps the answer to this question is given right at the start of the Gospel today. We are surrounded by so many babbling voices that sometimes we ourselves do not know what it is that we truly want. We pray not just to ask for what we want but to understand in a deeper way what God wants for us. When we begin to understand what God desires, some of those babbling voices within us will quieten down. We will become still. We will focus. Prayer will become our daily bread, or our daily rice or our daily pasta, a simple meal, but like any staple food, just what we need.

Suggestions for Prayer

In order to quieten down those babbling voices within you, try a stilling exercise to settle down before you pray. Whether you listen to sounds around you, focus on your breathing, or relax the muscles of your body you will begin to centre on your prayer too. Quite early on in my prayer life I was lucky to discover that sometimes it is enough to ask to go deeper in prayer for prayer to begin to deepen. When you have completed the stilling exercise and feel ready to start the prayer, ask for the grace to go that little bit deeper still, perhaps to a place within yourself where you do not normally go, perhaps be closer to the place where God resides in you. Find your own way of asking for this depth and see what happens. You might like to gently pray the Our Father from that deeper place today, asking for whatever it is that you need.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, try to find a way to create a moment of silence and contemplation for yourself or another person.

Examen (review of prayer)

Light a candle. Take a moment to let God look at you. Breathe in God's love.

With your hand on your heart ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you feel most grateful.

Recall what was said and done in that moment. Enjoy the gratitude you feel again now.

Breathe in its life.

Ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you feel least grateful.

What was said and done in that moment? Let it be. Breathe in God's love just as you are.

Speak to God about what you have noticed. Give thanks to God for your day.

Ask help for tomorrow.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer you my country, asking that you make it a force for good in the world.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Entering into Prayer

The Jesus Prayer

This is one of the most famous mantras. Listen to each phrase and then add your voice to it ...
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... continue on your own with this ... the phrase may shorten naturally ...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Jonah 3:1-10

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.'

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.



The Repentance of Nineveh
by
John Martin

Image for the Day

Does this help you imagine Nineveh, or do different images come to mind?

When have you asked for God's forgiveness?

What do you think it felt like to be Jonah?

Food for Thought

God threatens the city of Nineveh with a disaster, one which is avoided because the people of the city begin to believe in God, thanks to the arrival of Jonah. They show repentance for their bad conduct by fasting and wearing sackcloth. The writer adds an important detail, that everyone from the greatest to the least of them, even the king himself, demonstrates this change of heart. In the same way, Jesus is a sign for his generation. His arrival must prompt our change of heart, a change which takes place not just among ordinary people but among the highest levels of society.

For us that means that we must involve ourselves in the political process, in our society and our local community. That way we too, by the lives we lead, may become a sign for our own generation.

Suggestions for Prayer

During Ignatius' recuperation after his injury in the battle at Pamplona, he spent a long time just daydreaming. On the one hand he dreamed about the great saints and on the other hand about tales of chivalry. He discovered that his daydreams about the saints brought deeper consolation. Have a go at daydreaming yourself. Make two lists of people in our own world. The first is a list of ten people who are famous or powerful but do not leave you feeling inspired, and the second is of ten people who may or may not be famous, but leave you feeling as though you would want to be like them. What is the difference between these two lists? Note down the character traits of the two groups of people. What might those character traits tell you about yourself and who you are called to be? Take it to the Lord in your prayer.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, find one way to be involved politically, either by reading about a social issue, participating in a political event, or bringing your politics into a conversation at home or at work.

Examen (review of prayer)

An ecological examen

All creation reflects the beauty and blessing of God's image. Where was I most aware of this today?

Can I identify how I made a conscious effort to care for God's creation during this day?

What challenges or joys do I experience as I recall my care for creation?

How can I repair breaks in my relationship with creation, in my unspoken sense of superiority?

As I imagine tomorrow, I ask for the grace to see the Incarnate Christ in the dynamic interconnectedness of all creation.

THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

There will be lots to complain about today, I know, Lord; but give me the grace to listen to others instead of moaning at them. Amen.

Nick King SJ

Entering into Prayer

Catching up with God

Often it is difficult to focus because we're distracted by what has happened or what is coming up. Let this be the start of your prayer today. What have you been up to? As you remember, share this with God.

What have you to do today (or tomorrow)? Share this with God.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Esther 4: 17

Queen Esther, seized with mortal anguish, had recourse to the LORD.

She lay prostrate upon the ground, together with her handmaids, from morning until evening, and said:

“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, blessed are you.

Help me, who am alone and have no help but you, for I am taking my life in my hand.

As a child I used to hear from the books of my forefathers that you, O LORD, always free those who are pleasing to you.

Now help me, who am alone and have no one but you,

O LORD, my God.

“And now, come to help me, an orphan.

Put in my mouth persuasive words in the presence of the lion and turn his heart to hatred for our enemy,

so that he and those who are in league with him may perish.

Save us from the hand of our enemies;

turn our mourning into gladness

and our sorrows into wholeness.”



Queen Esther
by
Edwin Long

Image for the Day

How might it have felt to be Queen Esther?
When have you asked God for help?
How does this image make you feel?

Food for Thought

Time and time again in the Old Testament, God looks upon the faith of one person as a sign of faith of the whole people, just as he does in today's first reading. Perhaps it is your faith which God is looking upon as he gazes upon the world right now. Faith is strong when there are signs of God's presence in our lives, but must be stronger still when the signs of God's presence do not appear to be there. It is then that we can stand before the Lord on behalf of all those who struggle with faith. This kind of faith keeps knocking upon the Lord's door, confident of receiving what it desires, regardless of whether it is received or not. We do not just believe in God because of what we can receive from him, but because of who he is, the source of all life and gift, the giver of all that we truly need.

Suggestions for Prayer

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius reminds us to ask for grace at the beginning of prayer and normally tells you what to ask for. In daily life, it can sometimes be difficult to know what grace to pray for, but it is usually enough to ask for one thing we need to strengthen ourselves in the day ahead, whether it is clarity about a decision, forgiveness for some wrong or a deeper closeness to the Lord. At one point in my life, I got stuck and did not know what to ask for, so I imagined Jesus was walking down the street and asked myself: "What do you want to ask Jesus for, for yourself?" Then in prayer, I asked him for what I wanted. It helped me to get in touch with my real and deep desires and avoid the trap of praying for what I thought the Lord wanted for me.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, try to reach out to someone who is struggling with a burden.

Examen (review of prayer)

Take time to become still. Use any method you find helpful, for example, listening to the sounds around you, or breathing in God's love. Enter the prayer with gratitude for all God's gifts.
Ask for God's light as you review the day, that God will show you what will be most helpful to see.
Let your mind's eye look back over the day, gently noticing whatever catches your attention.
There is no need to remember everything. Be relaxed about it and see what comes.
Notice especially moments of most life, light and energy and moments when these seemed to drain out of you. For what do you feel most thankful? For what do you feel least thankful? Breathe in the life experienced in your time of consolation. Breathe God's love into your moment of desolation.
Speak to God "as one friend speaks to another" about what you have noticed in this prayer.
Looking ahead, ask God for what you need to help you respond to God's call.

FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer you my contentment, may those moments of calm and peace flow into everything I do.

Peter O'Sullivan SJ

Entering into Prayer

Using beads or your fingers

If you have a rosary or other prayer beads, use these to get started. If you don't have beads, count on your fingers. Call to mind three people or causes you wish to pray for. Limit it to three. Share your desires with God. Intercede for these people using the beads. Hold the first bead and say a short prayer that you know well. Repeat on another bead and so on up to 10.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:20-26

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgement." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.



*Jesus teaching*

by
Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich

Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?
Do you imagine Jesus differently? How?
Who were your teachers?

Food for Thought

We normally think of Jesus as being against the Pharisees, but curiously, in today's Gospel Jesus seems to be asking his followers to outdo them, at least in their uprightness. He says this because he wants his followers to go beyond what their religion tells them to do. It is not enough to comply with religious obligations, they must out do even those who are most pious by making the meaning of religious actions visible in their everyday lives. For us, that means that we cannot go to the sacrament of reconciliation without reconciling ourselves with other people, we cannot listen to the Word of God without putting it into practice, we cannot receive the Eucharist without wanting to build up the body of Christ in our lives too. For Jesus, religious practice is never a shortcut to holiness, it must go hand in hand with the challenging task of following him wherever he leads.

Suggestions for Prayer

Drawing to the end of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius reminds us that love shows itself more in deeds than in words. However, love does show itself in words too. The bible is full of poetry and song that seeks to express the loving relationship between God and his people. One helpful way of reflecting on your life is to take one word which expresses who God is asking you to be over the period of time, to take three determined points during the day, and at each point to ask yourself if you are disposed to living up to all that word contains. To discover your word, use the poetry of the bible to help you. This helps us to prepare ourselves for the moments which we cannot control and to know that even when we do not succeed everything we wish to in life, at least we have the disposition to allow God to work through us as he wishes.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, choose a psalm, a song or a poem from the bible and let it inspire you. Reflect on how one word describes who you need to be at this time.

Examen (review of prayer)

Feel free to try an examen from our website PathwaysstoGod.org or use any of the examens already used.

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you? How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Jesus, give your strength and encouragement to those, today, who are not well in body or mind or spirit. May they know how close you are to them.

Simon Bishop SJ

Entering into Prayer

Use this method or any other that suits you.

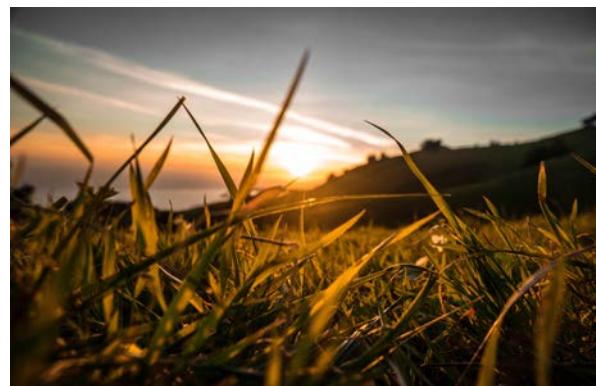
Choose a longer prayer that you know well. For example, the 'Our Father'. In time with your breathing, pray each line slowly. Only move on when something of the meaning of that phrase has landed in you.

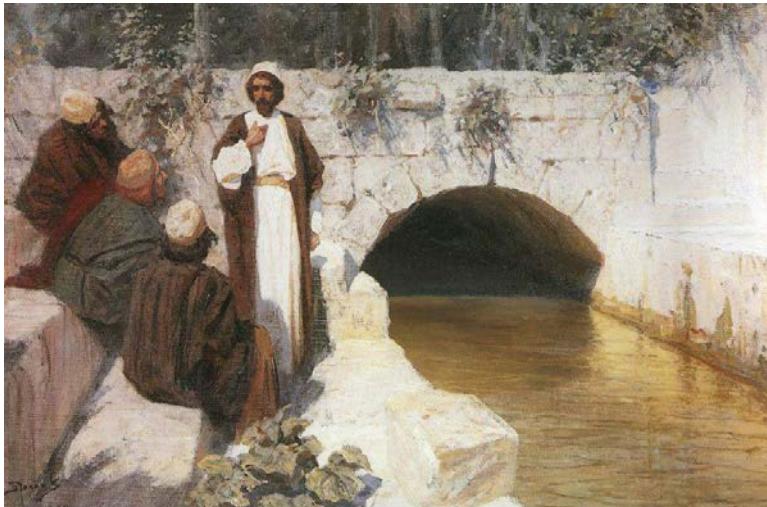
TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.





Jesus teaching
by Vasili Polenov from the Life of Christ

Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?

What do you think Jesus might be saying to you if you were there with him?

How do you think the disciples reacted?

Food for Thought

We are taught from a very early age to hate other people. We might not like to acknowledge it, but we all learn that there are people like us, and that there are other people who are definitely not like us. Perhaps it is because they come from a different background, perhaps because they wear different clothes, perhaps because they eat differently from us. We build an invisible wall between them and us and, very politely, begin to hate them. Jesus wants nothing to do with those invisible walls because God makes no distinction between the people he has created. He has allowed his face to shine on each and every one of us without exception. To be more like Him, we must allow ourselves to be brothers and sisters of all and remove the obstacles which keep us from one another.

Suggestions for Prayer

Each one of us has been hurt at some time in the past, and for a long time afterwards, we can hold onto feelings of bitterness towards others. For some, praying with a difficult memory can help to bring healing, but only when it is the right time to do so. Do not choose a memory which is still raw or painful but one which is ready to be examined gently for what it contains. Go back to that moment in your imagination and without probing around too deeply, go through what happened. You may feel drawn to talk to the person who hurt you in order to understand why they acted the way in which they did. What were the factors in his or her upbringing or background that contributed to the incident? What else that day might have happened to provoke that outburst? Try to understand what happened from the other person's point of view. If you can, and only when you feel ready, express forgiveness and ask the Lord what you might receive as gift through this action of forgiveness.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, help someone else understand the importance of forgiveness though your words, actions or gestures.

Examen (review of prayer)

Feel free to try an examen from our website PathwaysToGod.org or use any of the examens already used.

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you?

How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.