

Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



Week Twenty Seven Encouragements & Wisdom

E & W reflections are additional helps for your Sacred Story prayer journey. Reflect on them ahead of your prayer exercises for the week or outside of your fifteen-minute prayer windows during the week.

SIX PRACTICAL TIPS BEFORE WE MOVE TO PART THREE

1. The goal of *Sacred Story* prayer is Christ—find your own “voice” living it

St. Ignatius was a soldier and created prayer disciplines that are structured and practical. We have recreated his structured, practical lessons with new language for a new millennium. Yet, it is still evident to see the methodical mind and heart that first gave birth to these dynamic prayer lessons. But mastering the structured method is not the goal of *Sacred Story* prayer, Christ is. Ignatius’ prayer structures are aids to cultivate a sensitive, attentive heart and mind docile to Christ’s love. It is the structure that gives us the means to the end which is Christ. The structure provides the ritual by which we create room in our day, in our consciousness, and in our heart, for God. The structure and the method is the means to the end, not the end itself.

An artist friend of mine who teaches both painting and sculpture told me that he has to insist his students not to copy his style. If they are ever to become a good artist, they must find their own style. Becoming a good artist will require of the student both the discipline and structure of the teacher and the *risk* needed in finding one’s own “style.”

If you find yourself obsessing about the structure and whether you are *doing it right*, then consider what I just said above. We have given you the permission to use your own name for God and to find your own style or voice in the statements for creation, presence, memory, mercy and eternity. You need to take this permission to heart and make the prayer your own so it can lead you to the presence of Christ in your life story.

2. On losing your train of thought or falling asleep in prayer

If we are tired, the calming effect of focused prayer can open us to the fatigue present in our body, mind and heart—and we can fall asleep. Such is life. But if you find yourself *constantly*

falling asleep during your prayer, perhaps you need to find a different time of day to pray it when you are not so tired. Give God a better time period so you can benefit from the prayer. Simple! We can also fall asleep not because we are tired but if we are getting close to experiences, feelings, memories etc., that “render us unconsciousness.” Think of the disciples in Gethsemane when Christ asked them to “watch and pray.” It was too much for them and they fell asleep. Sometimes our *Sacred Story* prayer brings us close to realities that shut down our consciousness—a kind of spiritual/mental short-circuiting. If this is happening, just ask Christ to give you the grace to “watch and pray” with him. In time, by grace, you will be given what you need to stay awake.

Holy women and men have long suffered distractions during prayer. Don’t fret them. Use them to draw close to Christ. If you can’t focus on the themes of your *Sacred Story* prayer, then notice what is distracting you and *speak to Christ* about the distractions: “Lord, is this distraction something you want me to pay attention to? If so, help me understand why; If not, then help me focus.” However you can be constantly distracted during prayer also because you are tired too. In that case you may consider a giving God a better time period for the prayer.

3. Come back to *Sacred Story* prayer practice even if you miss days/weeks

We have been constant in asking you to be patient with yourself as you develop the habit of *Sacred Story* prayer. The weeks’ lessons are set in a certain order and build progressively. Some people will move through the weeks “on time” while others will take a “month” for “one week.” At this point in the lessons therefore, some may be *caught up* while others have not yet completed a whole-life confession. This is to be expected. Just keep at *the practice* and don’t get discouraged or *drop out* because you feel behind. Remember, you can’t really get behind in a relationship, but you can give up on one. The *Sacred Story* prayer is a discipline to help you build your relationship with Christ. Don’t give up on Christ or the disciplines, even if you miss days, weeks for months. Keep coming back! Christ desires that you be faithful in returning home for he has plans for you.

4. On finding time in the day for *Sacred Story* prayer

Developing a new habit requires experimentation. This is true for prayer habits too. If your daily/weekly schedule is regular as clock-work or wholly unpredictable you still must find time daily to do the things that are essential to your health, well-being, peace of mind *and* growth in faith.

Experiment until you find at least *one* time a day for *Sacred Story* prayer that works in your schedule then keep that appointment with Christ daily. You can develop a habit by doing something often enough so that you want/need to do the activity. The daily practice also increases your desire to stay the course.

Remember too, the time for *Sacred Story* prayer is fifteen minutes. That is no time at all! The difficulty is not the time but the effort to stay alert to the inner workings of your spiritual life. The more you work to stay conscious, the more difficult it becomes to live an unconscious life. Be responsible and build this habit that can do so much for you. And if you fail in the practice (see above) keep going back till it *sticks!*

5. On monthly confession and being a sinner loved by God

The First Letter of John helps us understand that we are all sinners, but loved by God. We only have a problem if we deny that we sin.

‘If we say, ‘we are without sin,’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. If we say, ‘We have not sinned,’ we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.’ (1 Jn. 1: 8-10).



A mature Christian is aware of his or her sins but does not lose heart because of them. They have grown to understand God’s compassion. Our goal in *Sacred Story* is not just to know the sins we commit, but to open ourselves to God’s graces so we can comprehend the source of our sins. Looking for the roots of our visible sins, like Ignatius taught us to, helps us awaken to the patterns that can cause the sin and lack of freedom in our lives. Frequent confession, helps us stay awake to both the sins, the patterns of sins and to the overwhelming nature of God’s mercy. Our tradition states that we *have* to go to confession if we are in a state of grave sin. Some know grave sin as “mortal” sin. In St. Ignatius’ day, people went to confession once a year before the yearly communion—what was and is called the *Easter Duty*. Confession because of grave sin is a “maximum” obligation and Holy Communion once a year is a “minimum” obligation. “Father, what am I obliged to do if I get in maximum trouble?” Or, “Father, what is the minimum I need

to stay in the game?” Our relationship with Christ does not grow by living our Faith only on the *maximums* and *minimums*.

Practicing monthly Reconciliation for non-grave sins is a spiritual work that produces profound growth and fosters consciousness of habits, both good and bad, that can aid my walk with Christ. Not many of us wait until our house or yard is garbage-strewn before we make an effort to clean. Most clean and tidy up regularly so things don't get out of hand. Think of monthly Reconciliation in the same way.

St. Ignatius not only promoted frequent, monthly confession, but also frequent communion. Both were radical innovations in their day. Ignatius' goal was to bring people close to Christ, and frequent communion and regular confession are synergistic in their ability to deepen our spiritual life toward this goal. Here is what Pope Benedict XVI said about the intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation in his 2007 Apostolic Exhortation,

Sacramentum Caritatis:

20. The Synod Fathers rightly stated that a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation. (54) Given the connection between these sacraments, an authentic catechesis on the meaning of the Eucharist must include the call to pursue the path of penance (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-29). We know that the faithful are surrounded by a culture that tends to eliminate the sense of sin (55) and to promote a superficial approach that overlooks the need to be in a state of grace in order to approach sacramental communion worthily. (56) The loss of a consciousness of sin always entails a certain superficiality in the understanding of God's love. Bringing out the elements within the rite of Mass that express consciousness of personal sin and, at the same time, of God's mercy, can prove most helpful to the faithful. (57) Furthermore, the relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation reminds us that sin is never a purely individual affair; it always damages the ecclesial communion that we have entered through Baptism. For this reason, Reconciliation, as the Fathers of the Church would say, is “the work of the baptized person” (laboriosus quidam baptismus) (58) they thus emphasized that the outcome of the process of conversion is also the restoration of full ecclesial communion, expressed in a return to the Eucharist. (59).

6. On Mercy and Eternity

Mercy

I believe that forgiveness is the only path to healing and illumination, and I beg for the grace of forgiveness, and the grace to forgive, especially for the general and particular failures of this day, and from my past.

Eternity

I believe the grace of forgiveness opens my heart, making my every thought, word and deed bear fruit that endures to eternity, and I ask that everything in my life serve Christ's Great Work of Reconciliation.

Mercy focuses my heart on the supreme act of love required of me in forgiving other people in the here and now. Forgiveness requires God's grace because I don't have the strength to forgive others or myself. Mercy focuses my attention on the people and circumstances of my life story so

I learn the only path to my peace is forgiveness and seeking forgiveness. Forgiving and being forgiven is as, the Holy Father stated above, the *work of the baptized person*. So what gives me hope in sticking to this work when I can't see the results of my labor in the here and now? It is my focus on what Christ promises for Eternity.

Eternity focuses my heart on the future Kingdom—the new heavens and the new earth—and gives me hope that my forgiving and seeking forgiveness is a *work for the ages*. The sufferings I endure in my forgiving and seeking forgiveness is my share of the afflictions which Christ bore on my behalf and on behalf of the Church and the whole human race. (Col. 1: 24-27). Christ knew that his sufferings would inaugurate the New Jerusalem. Christ wants me to know that my sufferings, borne on his behalf, will lead me and hopefully many others to that New Jerusalem. Read also 2 Cor. 4:7-5:8.

