

Praying through State in Life—Requirements and Expectations.

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Praying through one's state of life is a seven week process. During this time, one sets aside his/her normal lifestyle and unnecessary involvements in order to spend the time seeking the Lord through prayer and reflection, meeting with a spiritual mentor, and making a decision in a spiritual manner. The approach is largely Ignatian, that is, it adapts the approach of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* to a decision-making prayer process. While this decision-making prayer process draws upon a variety of aspects of the Ignatian exercises, the process that we have adopted is specifically an application of the "third time" of making a "correct and good choice of a way of life" in *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (sections 177-188). This "third time" or way specifically involves using one's reason and imagination in the context of prayer and other spiritual exercises in order to discover God's will for one's life. This is in contrast to Ignatius's second way of making a decision, a way which focuses upon the discernment of spirits. For St. Ignatius, the discernment of spirits involves determining whether or not one is being influenced by the Holy Spirit or evil spirits according to his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. The rules for the discernment of spirits involve an assessment of the participant's experiences of "consolation" and "desolation."

In this state in life prayer process we are not focusing on using St. Ignatius's "second time" of making a choice, that is, "When much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits" (*The Spiritual Exercises*, section 176). This second way of making a choice seems to presuppose both the context of a full blown Ignatian retreat and spiritual directors well-versed in the rules for the discernment of spirits. While our spiritual mentors are versed in spiritual discernment based upon their own spiritual life experience, they do not have the extensive training of Ignatian retreat masters. Although we are not focusing upon the discernment of spirits as the major method for making a decision, the discernment of spirits will be attendant to our process.

REQUIREMENTS

For those praying through their state in life:

1. At least 18 years of age. In most cases, being older—a junior or senior in college on up—would be better.
2. Not in a serious or exclusive dating relationship. The whole process of seeking God for his will presupposes an openness to him and a certain amount of detachment. People in a serious or exclusive dating relationship are usually quite attached. The relationship must be broken off if praying through one's state in life is to be fruitful. We are not assuming that all such heterosexual dating relationships are outside the Lord's will. We are simply saying that praying through one's state in life does not make a lot of sense if someone is already previously committed in some way to another person.

Because of tendencies in our current culture, it must also be stated that a person actively engaged in a homosexual relationship ought not to go through this prayer process. This is not a matter of prejudice, but of pastorally applying Church teaching (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2357-2359). All homosexual activity or behavior is “intrinsically disordered,” violates the natural law (*CC* #2357), and certainly meets the requirement of “grave matter” for mortal sin. Being in such a relationship, moreover, can create attachments that are a serious obstacle to discerning God’s will. Finally, a significant homosexual *orientation* ought to be examined and resolved before making such serious commitments as the priesthood or marriage.

3. Be capable of the priesthood, marriage, or the religious life. Here we mean the person appears to be relatively average or normal physically, psychologically, emotionally, etc.¹

Sometimes, as one is going through the process, it becomes clear that the person is incapable of making a free decision at this time: a profound need for professional counseling, or inner healing, or deliverance becomes apparent. In such a case, we would recommend not continuing the prayer process.

4. Be in a period of relative tranquility in his/her life. Our approach to praying through one's state in life is based upon St. Ignatius's "third way for making a choice" (*Exercises* # 177). It is a time when the person is not spiritually or emotionally agitated. He/she should be emotionally stable: he/she should not be emotionally disturbed nor deeply confused. The person's life should not be in upheaval. He/she should not be involved in deeply disturbing relationships.

5. Be in the state of grace and be a practicing Catholic. Sacramental confession should be recommended for all at the start of the process. While God can guide any person, certainly a person in the state of grace and turned toward the Holy Spirit is more able to receive God’s guidance. The person should not be in open rebellion against the Church. It is the same Holy Spirit who guides the Church whom we expect to guide the participant.

For persons underway to City of the Lord, it is usually best if they experience our life and receive some basic formation before praying through their state in life.

6. Have the right attitudes and orientations:

¹ Any impediment or “irregularity” that according to Canon Law would impede either marriage (*Canons* #1073-1082) or the reception of Holy Orders (*Canon* #1040) would be resolved by the competent ecclesial authority, and not spiritual mentors who lack adequate training.

- a. Want to please the Lord. Have a desire to do his will. Be serious about seeking God's will.
- b. Possess or be willing to cultivate openness to God, to be willing to be led or taught by God.
- c. Either be detached, or be willing to cultivate a detachment from a particular state in life: that is, if one already has a strong leaning toward one state in life over another, to be willing to set aside whatever emotional attachment he/she might have to that state in life in order to value the other states of life equivalently before making a decision.
- d. Be willing to take direction from one's spiritual mentor as to the process of praying through one's state in life.
- e. Be willing to go through the process outlined below.
- f. One must do one's best, making the most of his/her time, natural gifts, and efforts to seek God's will for the next 7 weeks.
- g. One must have faith that God will give him/her the guidance he needs through this process, if one has prayed faithfully, followed the process diligently, and trusted that God wants to guide, that He can guide, and that He will guide him/her.

7. Be a pray-er: ideally, one who has an established personal prayer life. If not, at least one who is willing to set aside time to pray, and willing to learn how to pray. The spiritual mentor, who has been a committed Christian and pray-er for at least 10 years, provides some experiential knowledge of God in this process where many of the participants are either young or have little experience of God. Besides personal prayer, frequent participation in the celebration of the Eucharist and the use of popular devotions (e.g. praying the Rosary, the Novena to the Holy Spirit, litanies) can be a way for the person to turn his/her life over to God.

For Spiritual Mentors

Spiritual mentors should have lived a committed Christian life for at least 10 years, and have been largely faithful to daily prayer. They add to the process what is normally missing among the young or the spiritually inexperienced: experiential knowledge of God, of life, of making choices, and of the consequences of choices. Spiritual mentors should be trained in this state in life process. Their role is to walk with a person through the process, pray for and with the person, be a sounding board, "reality test," help a person think clearly and ask the important questions, help a person see the implications of his decisions, and give guidance *about the process*. Spiritual mentors are not to influence a person in choosing one state in life over another. Spiritual mentors themselves need to examine their own attitudes toward each of the

states in life, and come to a point of valuing each state in life equally so as not to prejudice the participant. They need to respect the freedom of conscience of the participant, but may also participate in the correct formation of conscience by speaking the truth as necessary. Spiritual mentors, while familiar with the workings of the Holy Spirit and the various ways in which God guides us, are not necessarily trained spiritual directors. Normally, they would not have the breadth and depth of training common to most seasoned spiritual directors.

THE PRAYER AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The process includes the following elements for the duration of the seven week process:

1. Limit other socializing only to what is necessary, or spiritually fruitful. By "spiritually fruitful," we mean things like small group faith-sharing, service projects, family gatherings, etc. One would not date at all during the seven week period of seeking God's will.
2. A cultivation of silence and listening to God. If possible, eliminate all input from the media: listening to the radio, watching TV, going out to movies, addictive or extensive use of the Internet or social media, etc. Use the time instead to quiet oneself, to turn to God in prayer, and to do spiritual reading and reflection. Different spiritual books will be suggested by your mentor.
3. Meet with your spiritual mentor one/two hour[s] week.

4. Set-up and interview three people: a married person, a priest, and a consecrated religious (i.e. someone who has publicly made the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience under the authority of the Church). A list of some people may be provided.

While the permanent unconsecrated single state can be a fruitful expression of the lay state in general, we are not requiring interviews with persons living in an unconsecrated lay single state. Participants already have some experience of this state. We want to encourage them to examine other states with which they may not be as familiar.

5. Do the spiritual meditations, prayer and reflection exercises as requested each week. (Minimum 3 hours/week).

6. Keep a journal. The journal is an aid in keeping track of one's thought processes, and in opening up to God. It is confidential. Nothing from the journal needs to be shared with anyone, including the spiritual mentor, unless the participant wishes.

7. Make whatever extra spiritual choices and sacrifices one can for this period: e.g. daily examination of conscience, go to extra daily mass, pray the rosary, do a charitable deed each day simply for the Lord, set aside an evening just to be with the Lord and reflect prayerfully. Be careful not to get consumed by either too much serving during this time or by unprofitable spiritual activities. This is primarily a *listening* time. Do what is most conducive to seeking the Lord and getting in a posture to hear Him.

8. In regard to troubled or broken relationships, forgive those who have hurt you. Ask forgiveness or repair relationships where possible. [The spiritual mentor should not assume that the participant knows how to forgive, and may need to help the person understand how forgiveness is first of all a matter of choice, not feelings].

Any questions, text your name, number, and “state in life question” to Tom Lulling: 480-309-4392. If you want to pray through your state in life with a mentor, text your name, number, request, and dates available (from June 1, 2021 through Dec. 1, 2021) to Tom Lulling, so that I can match you up with a mentor who has those dates available. You should have approximately 8 free weeks in a row, although an occasional skipping of a week or two is usually possible, depending upon yours and your mentor's schedules.