

KEEPING A SPIRITUAL JOURNAL

Keeping a journal is a very valuable tool for discernment. As St. John of the Cross says:

“When there is consolation, we feel it will last forever; and when there is desolation, we believe God is gone forever.”

The journal can help keep us in balance so that we can see our ups and downs as part of our journey and not “lose sight of the forest because of the trees”.

We have come to understand Ignatian spirituality as, essentially, a spirituality of gratitude. The journal records our joys as well as our sorrows, so reminding us of God’s love for us and our love in return. Journal keeping is, primarily, a record of the Lord’s activity in our life, reflecting our relationship with Him. In the light of our inner journey, it is also a record of significant events as well as our relationship with other people. It is a creative process, helping us to keep in touch with the energies within and those needing release for the sake of our personal and spiritual growth.

As human beings, we tend to make the same mistakes over and over again. Keeping a journal helps us become more aware of who we really are and the mistakes we make so that we can pray for healing and freedom from compulsive behaviour.

The journal becomes a tool for self-knowledge and psychological honesty. It helps us evaluate spiritual growth and is useful in our communication with a spiritual director.

While there are no rules about one's personal journal, some structure is helpful:

- Write in your journal regularly, preferably daily, giving a simple summary of the day and your inner experience – particularly your feelings and emotions. Thomas Green SJ, in "A vacation with the Lord" suggests writing our journals as if "talking to the Lord" so that we focus on discerning feelings in prayer rather than heady ideas or insights.
- Record your state of intimacy with God, your response to His Spirit and your dialogue with Him.
- Record, too, any unconscious material such as spontaneous daydreams, images, voices, fantasies. Also record your night dreams as soon as you wake and do so in the present tense. Become aware of hidden meanings and links with other experiences.
- Periodically review what has gone before, noticing themes, repetitions, growth patterns and areas of weakness.

In time, the journal becomes a familiar and pleasurable routine – an indispensable part of our prayer.

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