

Coming to Our Senses: Week Five

The Sense of Smell

Burn incense in a small burner or flameproof dish. Incense is associated closely with the discipline of prayer. (A scented candle or oil infuser will also work. Freshly baked bread can invoke the sense of smell in a positive, prayerful way - you can share the loaf with others, too.)

What are some things that smell good to you? Why do you like them? What smells do you *not* like? What makes a particular smell pleasing to one person, and disgusting to another?



The Psalm: Psalms 141:1-4, 8-9

Response:

*May my prayer rise before you like incense;
the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*

I call upon you. O Lord; come quickly to me;
Give ear to my voice when I call to you.
Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,
And the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord;
Keep watch over the door of my lips.
Do not turn my heart to any evil,
To busy myself with wicked deeds
In company with those who work iniquity;
Do not let me eat of their delicacies.

Response:

*May my prayer rise before you like incense;
the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*

But my eyes are turned toward you, O God, my Lord;
In you I seek refuge; do not leave me defenseless.
Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me,
And from the snares of evildoers.

Response:

*May my prayer rise before you like incense;
the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*

The Miracle

John 11:1-6, 17-27, 38-44 - The Raising of Lazarus

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

1. Why do you think John introduces this story by referring to the one that follows, when Lazarus' sister Mary will anoint Jesus with perfume?
2. How do you reconcile Jesus saying, "this illness does not lead to death" with what actually happened?
3. Martha tells Jesus, "I know that whatever you ask, God will give you," but when Jesus replies, "Your brother will rise again," she thinks he refers to "the last day" instead of the present moment. What are some ways we place our faith in the *future* of God's Kingdom, but not claim its *immediate* benefits?
4. Which sentence in this passage do you think is the most important one? Why?

The Discipline of Prayer

Christians of every time and place have found that following a particular *form* of prayer often helps to stay focused and attentive. The Prayer of Daily Examen from St. Ignatius is just such a form of prayer. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us.

Here is a version of the five-step Daily Examen that St. Ignatius practiced¹:

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

Become aware of God's presence. Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

Review the day with gratitude. Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts, activities, and interactions. Pay attention to small things — God is in the details.

Pay attention to your emotions. We can detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Joy? What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out in some way.

Choose one feature of the day and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

Look toward tomorrow. Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's ahead. Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope. St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God.

End the Daily Examen with the Lord's Prayer.

¹ <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray/#sthash.U3Vj0SFi.dpuf>