

Seeking Integration and Wisdom through the Spiritual Exercises

POSTURE AND ATMOSPHERE AT PRAYER %

Like teachers of prayer in other great traditions, Ignatius of Loyola made much of the body and its posture at prayer and of creating an appropriate atmosphere in one's place of prayer.

What will be your usual best posture when you have a period of prayer? Being relaxed and yet attentive is the goal. In theory, the "lotus" position—seated low to the floor/ground with legs crossed underneath—may be the best way to foster this, but many of us simply cannot do it.* Some people find kneeling good; others standing or even lying down on one's back on the floor or on top of bed. For me, being seated in a slightly padded straight-back chair works well. Meditative walking if you have enough unencumbered space inside or out, helps some. What will work for you? You may have to experiment with several postures in order to find "yours."

For "atmosphere," some people light a candle (or use a battery-powered simulated one); it can be a visual focus for your praying. Others use an "icon" or holy picture or other holy object@. A window that looks out on "nature" can also be good. Some "new age" music# or recorded nature sounds as background might foster the right spirit. Be creative in creating your atmosphere.

% A supplement to the three Brackley chapters on prayer

*For years I used a wooden prayer bench (called a *seiza* bench after the Japanese word for "sitting prayer") that I had built, which was almost as good as assuming the "lotus" posture. But now my lumbar stenosis keeps me from using it. Ask me for more details if you're interested.

@ I have a plain little olive-wood cross that I like to hold sometimes.

This kind of music, rather than having a "driving" beat, has a flow that helps you stay quiet where you are—a good antidote to our culture's making us always "on the go."