BAPTIZED FOR LIFE
AN EPISCOPAL DISCIPLESHIP INITIATIVE

Baptismal Feast Day Resources
Practices to Consider – Preparing

Preparing for the Baptism Feast Day on All Saints' 2021

Preparing for the Baptism Feast Day of All Saints in many ways is similar to preparing for any other special event. Think wedding, anniversary, family reunion, special dinner party. When there is an event out there on the calendar waiting for us, often we think about it and prepare in advance, *to be ready for the special day.*

If it is a wedding, we make travel plans, reserve a place to stay, send a gift, choose a (perhaps new?) outfit to wear, think about the couple, their parents, their wedding party. If it's a dinner party, we anticipate the company, the food, choose an outfit, perhaps get a gift for the hostess/host. If it's a family reunion, we spend time rehearsing relationships so that we don't muddle who's who—cousins, aunts, uncles—anticipate stories to tell and hear again, plan what to bring.

All these preparations are focused around the people being celebrated, the people hosting us, the ones who will be present. Preparing for a Baptismal Feast Day holds similar invitations. And, it has a twist—because the One upon whom this special day is focused is God… and you…. and the worshiping community.

So, to prepare, you might indeed think about and plan for food and your outfit, about who you might see and stories you might hear and tell. But to *really* prepare for this Feast Day, spending time in advance with the One who is at the center of it all will make the day rich in ways you could not anticipate.

So how do we do that? How do we "spend time with God" in a way that deepens the relationship that the two of you share? Here are a few practices that might help:

First, if you want to spend time with God, you will need to set aside some ***time*** to do that. Time to just be with God. Choose the time that is best for you and put it on your calendar. No really, put it on your calendar. And don't worry—any time is a good time by God. God's schedule is very flexible. Ours are the ones that get rigid.

Second, choose a practice that you will look forward to. Below you will see a list of a few options. There are so many more, but here are a few. Choose one from the list, or name another one that works well for you, and set the intention to engage in that practice every day for 6 weeks, or 4 weeks, or 2 weeks, or 10 days before the Feast Day. Set the intention to spend time every day focused on God and on your relationship with God.

Third, begin. Just start your daily practice. Start journaling; practice a daily Examen; sit in Centering Prayer; write a love poem to God; take a walk and keep your focus on nature and God; sing songs of love and gratitude to God in the shower… whatever is the practice that you have chosen, begin. Then do that every day for the 6 weeks before the Feast Day.

On the special day, when the Baptismal Feast Day finally arrives, enter into the celebration with all the love that you have given and received during your intentional time of preparation. It's a celebration! Delight in and enjoy—with a wide-open heart—every moment of it.

And, finally, on the day after the Feast Day, use your practice time to reflect on what you experienced the day before. When did you feel most alive? Where did you see/hear/feel/touch/taste the mystery of God? How is your Christian calling stirred because you participated in a Baptismal Feast Day?

One final word: it's the ***practice*** that holds the gift. Engaging with a practice for a number of days in a row—creating a habit—will keep you focused on God and on your relationship to God. Taking time to ***intentionally spend time with God*** while leaving everything else aside can have transformative qualities.

Thomas Keating, one of the authors of Centering Prayer, used to say: "The only way to fail at this prayer is to get up from your chair and not engage." "God honors your intentions," Keating said. And as you set an intention, and do your best to keep the intention, you can't fail. As Thomas Merton said, "With God, a little sincerity goes a long way."

PRACTICES TO CONSIDER:

PRAYER WITH THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

From the Book of Common Prayer, find the Baptismal Covenant.

- Using file cards or smallish pieces of paper, write down each of the promises on a separate piece of paper.
- Working with one promise at a time, dedicate some time – 5 minutes? 10 minutes? More? – in silent prayer, meditating on the promise. If it is helpful, slowly write and rewrite the promise on a paper or on the card. Be with that promise. What does it look like to live into that promise? How might you change your choices of being in your day? Then, carry the card with that promise with you through the day – in your heart, in your mind, in your pocket. Return to it regularly throughout your day.
- Do not move on from this promise until you are ready. Stay with it for as many days as seems invited. Before you pick up the next promise, take some time to journal about your experience with the promise you have been with. When you are ready, move on to the next promise.

The Examen of Consciousness (sometimes called "Rummaging for God")

EXAMEN SAMPLE #1 and General Background:

Finding God in all things. Context of the Examen: "The Word of God is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance. See, today I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster...Choose life." (Dt 30:14, 15, 19)

This small prayer, the Examen of Consciousness, is the heart of the spirituality developed by St. Ignatius Loyola and his followers. If practiced once or twice daily, it will help move you closer to the heart of Christ in all your thoughts and deeds. It enables us to open our heart more fully to the Love of God in our lives and recognize God's presence in everything, as we go about our daily tasks.

(Adapted from "Examen of Consciousness: Finding God in all things" by Phyllis Zagano)

St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) founder of the Society of Jesus (The Jesuits) suggested that his brothers undertake a daily way of praying by examining their lives to better serve God. St. Ignatius stated that the key to a healthy spirituality was to find God in all things and work constantly to gain freedom in your life in order to cooperate with God's will. He called this daily exercise *The Examen* and suggested it should be prayed twice daily – allowing people to hear God in their hearts and discern God's will for them in their lives.

Making time for prayer allows you to fully feel God's presence in your life and enter into a deeper more intimate conversation with Jesus. **The Examen is a simple prayer, a prayer for busy people who are continually seeking to do God's will. It takes about 15 mins to complete. There are 5 simple steps, and the prayer can be made anywhere:**

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.

EXAMEN SAMPLE #2: RUMMAGING FOR GOD

1. ***Pray for light.*** Since we are not simply daydreaming or reminiscing but rather looking for some sense of how the Spirit of God is leading us, it only makes sense to pray for some illumination. *The goal is not simply memory but graced understanding.*

2. ***Review the day in thanksgiving.*** Gratitude is the foundation of our whole relationship with God. So, use whatever cues help you to walk through the day from the moment of awakening—even the dreams you recall upon awakening. Walk through the past twenty-four hours, from hour to hour, from place to place, task to task, person to person, thanking the Lord for every gift you encounter.

3. ***Review the feelings that surface in the replay of the day.*** Our feelings, positive and negative, the painful and the pleasing, are clear signals of where the action was during the day. Simply pay attention to any and all feelings as they surface.

4. ***Choose one of those feelings (positive or negative) and pray from it.*** That is, choose the remembered feeling that most caught your attention. The feeling is a sign that something important was going on. Now simply express spontaneously the prayer that surfaces as you attend to the source of the feeling—praise, petition, contrition, cry for help or healing … whatever comes up. Be with God with the remembrance and your prayer, that is, your response to the remembrance.

5. ***Look towards tomorrow.*** Using your appointment calendar if that helps, face your immediate future. What feelings surface as you look at the tasks, meetings, and appointments that face you? Whatever it is, turn it into prayer—for help, for healing, for patience, for ability to stay present to the moment, whatever comes spontaneously. To round off this prayer of examen, say the Lord's Prayer, Ignatius' Prayer, or any other prayer that surfaces as true for you in the moment.

Taken from an essay, *Rummaging for God: Praying Backward through Your Day*, by Dennis Hamm, SJ.

EXAMEN SAMPLE #3: THE PROCESS

(from *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Sheila, Dennis and Matthew Linn)

Preparation: You may wish to light a candle. Do whatever helps you to experience unconditional love. For example, imagine yourself in a favorite place with someone whose love you trust, such as a friend, Jesus or God as you understand God. Put your feet flat on the floor, take a few deep breaths from the bottom of your toes, up through your legs, your abdominal muscles, and your chest. Breathe in that unconditional love, and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.

1. Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus or God as you understand God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are *most grateful*. If you could relive one moment, which one would it be? When were you most able to give and receive love today? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and receive life again from that moment.

2. Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are *least grateful*. When were you least able to give and receive love? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.

3. *Give thanks* for whatever you have experienced. If possible, share as much as you wish of these two moments with a friend, or journal about your experience of the prayer. Questions to consider:

   What moment today was most life-giving?
   What moment today was least life-giving?

   For what moment today am I most grateful?
   For what moment today am I least grateful?

When did I give and receive the most love today?
When did I give and receive the least love today?

When did I feel most alive today?
When did I feel least alive today?

When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God and the universe?
When today did I have the least sense of belonging to myself, others, God and the universe?

When was I happiest today?
When was I saddest today?

What was today's high point?
What was today's low point?

CENTERING PRAYER

Centering prayer is a prayer of consent which draws one into the presence of God. When we pray this way, we are consenting to God's presence and action within our very being. The primary scripture on which centering prayer is based is Matthew 6:6: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees in secret, will reward you."

As interpreted by centering prayer, the room referred to is our interior space, that deeper spiritual level of our being. Shutting the door refers to letting go of external circumstances and all that goes with them as well as letting go of the interior noise of thoughts and feelings. There are no words in centering prayer. Centering Prayer is about being with God, not about doing with God. It really is the simplest form of prayer there is.

Our intention in centering prayer is to open, consent and surrender to God. When we enter into the silence of centering prayer, we are opening our inmost being to God and consenting to God's presence and action within. Cynthia Bourgeault is an Episcopal priest, a teacher of prayer and a writer on the spiritual life who describes what happens during centering prayer this way:

> *"What goes on in those silent depths during the time of centering prayer is no one's business, not even your own; it is between your innermost being and God; that place where, as St. Augustine once said, 'God is closer to your soul than you are yourself.' Your own subjective experience of the prayer may be that nothing happened—except for the more-or-less continuous motion of letting go of thoughts. But in the depths of your being, in fact, plenty has been going on, and things are quietly but firmly being rearranged. That interior rearrangement—or to give it its rightful name, that interior awakening, is the real business of centering prayer."*

The first step is to ask God for a sacred word. Take a moment to do this before beginning the time of prayer. The word is a short word or phrase that will help you return to God when you drift away from that centered place with God. Some examples are *Love, Jesus, Be Still, Peace, Faith, Listen*. When you realize you have gone off with a thought, silently use your sacred word to return, ever so gently, to your space with God. It is not a mantra to be repeated constantly. Hopefully when we are in that centered space with God, we can be quiet there. When we leave that place following a thought, then we reintroduce the sacred word to bring us back to God.

It is important not to be hard on yourself as you try this prayer. It takes practice! Fr. Keating says that the only way to fail at centering prayer is to get up and walk away in the middle of the prayer time. As long as our intention is to open to God, God honors that intention and works in us in ways that we may never know. Even if we feel like we spent the entire 20 minutes thinking and returning to our sacred word, God is with us and pleased that we are with God. The fruit of centering prayer is rarely realized during the prayer but rather in your life beyond the prayer.

The Guidelines

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

"The chief thing that separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from God. If we get rid of that thought, our troubles will be greatly reduced. We fail to believe that we are always with God and that God is part of every reality. The present moment, every object we see, our inmost nature, are all rooted in God. But we hesitate to believe this until personal experience gives us the confidence to believe in it. This involves the gradual development of intimacy with God. God constantly speaks to us through each other as well as from within. The interior experience of God's presence activates our capacity to perceive God in everything else-- in people, in events, in nature." – Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart, p. 44

POETRY WRITING

The Practice

- Take three deep breaths. With each one, open your heart to the Holy Spirit who is with you, in you, in your hand, as you engage with this practice.

- Write what comes from your heart, knowing that this is for no one's eyes but yours. God is with you.

- Write to tell God what is on your heart.

A Structure

For this time of preparation for the Baptismal Feast Day, you may want to add some structure, some intention, to this practice. Some examples are:

- Write a haiku every night before turning off the light.
- Write a poem each morning at breakfast.

- If you need a prompt for your poem, consider looking at the Prayer Book and the Baptismal Vows. Be with each of the promises of the Baptismal Covenant for a few days during your poem writing time. What is coming up for you? Write that in a poem.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION/ DRAWING / PHOTOGRAPHY

Set aside a certain amount of time – 15 minutes? 30 minutes? more? less? – each day for engaging with a creative activity. Take 3 deep breaths and open your heart to the Holy Spirit who is with you before you begin. Dedicate this time to God and ask for whatever God knows you need. If it helps you stay focused on God while you create, choose a verse to repeat, breathe a word of God's Love over and over, listen to sacred music, whatever calls to you.

Your activity could be anything. Some favorite creative activities are:

- Coloring pages from a book of mandalas.
- Coloring pages that have scripture verses written on them.
- Drawing an image of your gratitude for God for this day.
- Drawing an image of your longing for God in this moment.
- Drawing an image of your joy.
- Using your phone, take a photograph of something that touches your heart… take a walk outside, or wander around your home. Or choose a photograph from a book, magazine, or your own photo album. Then sit with the photograph and write a short meditation, a short wondering, a short prayer that comes to you as you meditate on the photo.
- Knitting, crocheting, any hand work that is a creative outlet for you.

MEDITATIVE WALKING

If you have access to a labyrinth, commit to walking the labyrinth each day. Take an intention-- a request, a gratitude, a scripture verse, a song lyric, etc. into the labyrinth with you, breathing and/or speaking that intention as you walk in. Rest at the center, holding your heart open to God and God's gift for you in that moment. Walk back out with an open heart, breathing the same intention or thanking God for all that God has given.

If you do not have access to a labyrinth, you can make a space anywhere – in the backyard, at the park, in the parking lot, in your living room.

- Rather than walking a serpentine path marked out for you, just set two markers at either end of your space. They could be two trees in a park, lines painted in the parking lot, a chair, and a table in your living room, two ends of a hallway. Your journey will be to walk back and forth between these two markers.
- To mark the journey "in," choose 7 stones or marbles or scrunched up pieces of paper – anything small that you can hold in your hand. Place a bowl or mug or glass or paper cup at one of the markers for your walking.

- Begin by walking your "loop" of marker to marker and back again. Each time you pass by the bowl or cup, place one of the items in your hand in the bowl.
- Keep walking, depositing an item each time you pass. When you have no more items in your hand, you are "at the center." Pause now and rest, holding your heart open to God and God's gift for you in that moment.
- Start your "return" journey by taking up one of the items from the bowl each time you pass. When all the items are again in your hand, take a deep breath, thank God for the time, and move on with your day.

SINGING

Commit to singing to God when you shower.

- Be intentional about the song you will sing in the shower. Prayerfully choose it ahead of time. It can be anything—praise song or traditional hymn, chant or scripture.
- If you forget to choose your song before you get in the shower, just sing whatever comes to your heart. "Jesus Loves Me This I Know" is always a great option.
- As you dry off after your shower, thank God for the time of song and prayer. Ask God for what you need for the day. Take a moment to stand still, arms and hands in a receptive posture, and simply receive God's Love.
- Move on with your preparations for the time ahead.

GENTLE YOGA or OTHER STRETCHING with INTENTIONAL BREATHING

Make a commitment to engage in a yoga or stretching practice each day leading up to the Baptismal Feast Day. Before you begin, take a few breaths to open your heart to God's Presence, asking God for what you need and receiving what God already knows you need. Practice intentional breathing while you engage with your body this way.

Check out these websites for support with a gentle yoga practice. Or create your own routine for gentle stretching. https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene

and en Español:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLui6Eyny-UzzMGyfPJGxl1zJCXEmmjm_w

Go to The Second Breath Center for intentional breathing practice.
https://secondbreathcenter.com/

SPIRITUAL READING

Choose a book, collection of meditations or poetry and commit to spending time in reading and reflection, perhaps also journaling, each day.

Some suggested books:

- *An Altar in the World* – Barbara Brown Taylor
- *A Year with Thomas Merton* – Thomas Merton
- *Book of Awakening* – Mark Nepo
- *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community* – Pádraig ó Tuama
- *Devotions* – Mary Oliver
- *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence – Ruth Haley Barton
- *Psalms for Praying* – Nan C. Merrill
- *Susceptible to Light* – Chelan Harkin
- *The Sacred Art of Listening* – Kay Lindahl
- *To Bless the Space Between Us* – John O'Donohue