



**SPIRITUAL TRAINING**  
*in family life*



**STRENGTH & FRAGILITY**

# PRESENTATION OF THE BODY & SOUL ITINERARY

On the occasion of this Olympic year, the Jesuits invite you to explore the spiritual dimension of playing sports and the relationship with the body, through the strains that are experienced in sports activities as well as in the spiritual life (strength & fragility, competition & team spirit...).

The “Body & Soul” itinerary offers spiritual training as a family experience. In each booklet, you will find a guided prayer, a time of sharing, a presentation by a Jesuit to explore the theme in greater depth, and testimonies from athletes. Each family is invited to come together for a time of listening, sharing, and praying.



1. GAMES & DISCIPLINE
2. BODY & SOUL
3. STRENGTH & FRAGILITY
4. HARDSHIP & STRUGGLE
5. DEFEAT & VICTORY
6. COMPETITION & TEAM SPIRIT

Here we are at the third stage, “**Strength and Fragility**”, ready to share this family time!

## SUMMARY

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# FAMILY MEDITATION



## MEDITATION BY SAINTE-MARIE LA GRAND'GRANGE SCHOOL

In Saint-Chamond, Loire, the institution of Sainte-Marie La Grand'Grange includes around 2,000 students across 2 sites and 4 educational units (elementary school, middle school, general and technical high school).

At the end of the XIX<sup>e</sup> century, the Marist Fathers built the Collège Sainte-Marie in Saint-Chamond. 50 years later, a chapel dedicated to Mary was added. In 2004, the professional high school in la Grand'Grange (the former large barn of a château) joined Sainte-Marie and is nicknamed la "Gégé".

The Jesuits managed the school through some difficult times, so it was only natural that in 2009 Sainte-Marie La Grand'Grange officially came under Jesuit supervision.

## LET'S BUILD MOMENTUM

*We're already halfway through our training! An opportunity to realize that not everything is as simple and effortless as we'd like it to be. Our physical and spiritual capacities are limited.*

*Yet God continues to support us, to encourage us to keep moving forward. He is our best coach and our greatest supporter. He does not expect us to perform extraordinary feats, but challenges us: "Go with the strength that moves you" (Jg 6:14). Will we rise to it?*

*Let's ask ourselves what are our strengths and talents. No false modesty: if God has given them to us, it's so that we can use them! Knowing and recognizing them can help us better recognize what God expects of us.*

*But let's also look at our limitations. Will we be able to take them into account and be patient with ourselves? Sustaining our efforts while finding time to rest, going further without hurting ourselves: these are this week's challenges!*

## OPENING PRAYER

### Putting ourselves in the presence of God

We sit quietly together, in silence. We join hands and take a moment to breathe gently.

We mark ourselves with the sign of the cross: **In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### Asking for grace

We ask God for the grace to trust him, even in times of trial, to look at the good he has put in us, and to thank him for it.



## MEDITATE WITH THE BIBLE

### Introduction to the reading

The people of Israel have settled in the land of Canaan, God's promised land. However, this is a very difficult time, as Israel is attacked by the local population. In the text we're about to read, it's the Midianites who oppress Israel. But God decides to call Gideon, a young Israelite, to fight the Midianites. Gideon hesitates a great deal, and asks God for several signs before agreeing to take part.

Gideon is the smallest of his family and his clan is the weakest of his tribe. What's more, he's afraid to listen to God's call. And yet, it's Gideon that God is calling for this fight. How can this be? Why this choice? Because God promises to be by his side and give him the strength he needs to triumph over his enemies. That's right! God's logic, which may seem crazy to us, is to choose the most fragile to put his unequalled strength into them.

### From the book of Judges (Jg 6,12-16)

*And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor." And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."*

*And the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."*

## A few ideas for reflection

> With respect and humility, Gideon asks God: “*Why all these misfortunes?*” This is the same question we ask ourselves when faced with life’s difficulties.

*I remember the events that test and weaken me. I seek God’s presence through gestures of solidarity and comforting words.*

> Gideon is the smallest of the little ones in his tribe, the one who is forgotten. With a look of confidence, God gives Gideon his place: he is strong and a valiant warrior.

*What strengths does God see in me? What mission does He have for me?*

## Personal meditation

We read the biblical text again and let the Word resonate within us. God speaks to each of us, personally, through this text. I try to listen to what’s going on in my heart, without fear of showing the Lord my weaknesses.

## INTERCESSION

Gideon is called “brave warrior” and Malo, our classmate in 4ème, was a “brave warrior” always smiling. Lord, we entrust to you the children who are fighting illness and are examples of courage and strength for us.

## OUR FATHER

To conclude this time of prayer, in the words of Jesus, we say together ***Our Father, who art in heaven...***

## CONCLUSION

Lord, may your grace inspire our action and sustain it to the end, so that all our activities take their source in you and receive their completion from you.

We draw upon ourselves the sign of the cross. **In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen**

# MOVING FORWARD WITH A JESUIT

”Are you weak enough  
to follow Jesus? “



## PRESENTATION

My name is Mikhaël Ahmad. I am a British Jesuit of Pakistani origins. Until the age of eight, I grew up in Pakistan, then moved with my family to the UK. I had many different jobs: shepherd, sports coach... But I finally chose to join the Society of Jesus as a brother. I took my first vows in August 2022 and have been in community in Paris ever since, studying at the Facultés Loyola Paris.

## IN SHORT!

Let's welcome our weaknesses and acknowledge them with joy!

This is the path of love that God wants for us. It's a difficult path, one that requires the greatest of courage: accepting vulnerability... But it's also a path to holiness and surrender to God's immense love for us!

From the Jesuit novitiate to my time at l'Arche, this is the experience of my little conversion concerning the acceptance of my weakness.

*“Are you weak enough to follow Jesus?”* someone asked me at the Jesuit novitiate. It puzzled me! I entered the Society of Jesus at the age of 30 with the idea that life was hard work and that “success” only came from my own efforts: my values were autonomy and strength of character, fragility was a weakness, you had to be strong, infallible. Contemplating the lives of many saints, I could only see their extraordinary powers, their immense exploits during the worst persecutions. God had a lot of work to do to change my perception of weakness.

So these words had a profound effect on me. I embarked on a path where God showed me how our weaknesses are a fertile ground for him to work on: it’s there that we learn how much we are loved. I then understood better what Saint Paul said:

*“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”* (Ep 3,20).

For me, these words are an invitation for trust and courage, the courage to embrace our whole being with all its weaknesses, as God does: not to reject my weaknesses, nor to avert our eyes from them. It was when I was volunteering in a L’Arche community that I needed this courage.

Working in a L’Arche community is a wonderful experience, but also a great challenge. No matter how strong you are, the love and compassion, the frustration and feeling of not knowing what to do will touch your soul, it’s inescapable. Yet I went into this job with the only mindset I knew: completing tasks to prove to others my worth and effectiveness. But when a new member, a sweet woman called Joset, was welcomed into the community, I understood the value of fragility. Joset was born blind and also had hearing problems. Shortly after her arrival, I was asked to spend some time with her. I wasn’t able to provide her with the things she valued. Rather, it was up to her fragility to speak to mine and help us come together, to move beyond the transactional relationship. Her way of communicating was through touch. She liked to have music playing in the background, and would smile when a song, whose rhythm she could feel, came on the radio. If she wanted to spend



time with someone, she would hold their hand, so we conversed like this, and when a song she liked played on the radio, our hands would move to the beat! She always took the lead. It wasn't my strength that helped her. The service was accepting the gift of her vulnerability and sharing mine in return.

Acknowledging one's vulnerability isn't easy. It requires **trust** and **faith** in others. Of course, we can't and shouldn't bare our souls to everyone all the time. Yet we all have someone who calls us to place our **trust** and **faith** in him: Jesus, who took upon himself our weaknesses, who knows how powerless we feel, who accepted to depend on God to act with power and authority. He is the one who does not reject us, condemn us or push us away, but welcomes our weaknesses. His power transforms those elements we consider to be weaknesses into wonderful tools for good.

We are all called to this intimate relationship with God. It is a journey: only God knows at what pace we are capable of giving ourselves to him. This is the path of holiness. At first, I thought the saints were great people doing great things in their own strength, but then I discovered that their holiness came from their progressive surrender of themselves each day, little by little, offering more and more of themselves and acknowledging their weaknesses before God. Thus they were able to receive in return the gift of God's strength, to accomplish more than they could ever have dreamt of:

**"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."** (2 Cor 12,10).

# A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE



## INTRODUCING THE WITNESS

Etienne is 32 years old, from Senegal, and has been living in France since 2018 for his studies in educational sciences. He works at the University of Créteil as an educational manager and educational advisor. He is also an amateur basketball player and has been playing at a high level since childhood. He started weight training when he arrived in France.

### TESTIMONY

“*Étienne, do you think a sportsman or woman should know his or her weaknesses and respect them, or develop his or her strengths and push his or her limits?*”

*First of all, you need to know yourself, your body, your strengths and weaknesses, and how far you can push yourself. For me, it's a question of training and persistence. It's also a question of competition: personally, when I train alone, I don't tend to push myself. But when you're with others, that's when you really start to compete. Pushing my limits once cost me dearly, because I injured my shoulder. I was doing a lot of pull-ups and made a bad movement. I was unable to train properly for over six months.*

*Until then, I didn't spend much time warming up and stretching, and that's a real shame. I need to develop this discipline, because that's what can help avoid injuries. At the same time, to make progress, it's important to step out of your comfort zone, not suddenly, but gradually: “Day by day, week by week, I've got this program for today, this is what I'm going to do, I've got to achieve it tomorrow, next week...”. Little by little, the bird makes its nest, as they say. All the time, you have to say to yourself: “When I started out, I was like this and I want to reach such and such a point. How can I reach this point?” If, for example, you took up basketball a year ago, you've learned quite a few things in that time, now how can you put them into practice?*

# ANOTHER SMALL STEP



## FAMILY TIME TOGETHER

We set up a simple, short outdoor or indoor course. We pair up. One of us closes his eyes and follows the route, guided by the voice of his companion.

When he's back, the roles are exchanged: the one who was blind becomes the guide, and vice-versa. The new guide must guide the blind person by touch (hand in hand, hand on the shoulder, etc.). He's not allowed to say a single word.

To add a little challenge, and if there are enough of us, we can make it a race between the different pairs.

Finally, we take a little time to discuss the experience:

- > *Was it easier for me to guide or to be guided?*
- > *Speech, touch: what difference does it make to guide/to be guided?*

## AND NOW ...

We've just passed the third stage of our journey. We're halfway through the race! We've finished the first half!

Let us place ourselves under God's loving gaze: He is the only judge, and He does not condemn. He gives us strength and teaches us to live our weaknesses as opportunities to love better.

Second half: the match will get a little tougher, but let's keep our courage and trust, as God gives us a second wind. Now it's time for the fourth stage: **Hardship and Struggle!**

This itinerary is put together by the **Family Ministry of the French speaking Jesuit Province of Western Europe (EOF)** in partnership with Prie en Chemin, 4 Jesuit schools (Saint-Louis de Gonzague, Sainte-Marie La Grand'Grange, Provence, Saint-Marc), a Christian Brothers school (La Salle-Saint Denis), the church of Saint-Paul de la Plaine and the diocese of Saint-Denis.

*The Family Ministry, EOF Province brings together many initiatives offered by Jesuits for families: summer vacation sessions, weekends and online retreats, simple and creative proposals "to be experienced at home" ... All in a joyful spirit united in Christ!*



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