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Ignatian Spirituality

BY MICHELLE VERNER, INTERN-IN-SERVICE

Prayer for Generosity

*Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I do your will.
-St. Ignatius of Loyola*

ad majorem dei gloriam
“men and women for others”
God in all things
cura personalis

You may be familiar with some of the phrases listed above if you have had any exposure to the Jesuits or Ignatian Spirituality in the past. As a graduate of both a Jesuit high school and a Jesuit university, I have heard those catch phrases repeated again and again. There is good reason that these ideas rooted in the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, have been passed down generation after generation—they are full of wisdom! My exposure to Ignatian Spirituality over the past ten years has radically altered my relationship with God and the world around me, as well as my prayer life, so I'd like to share with you some of the wisdom contained in this spiritual tradition.

Who Was Ignatius of Loyola?

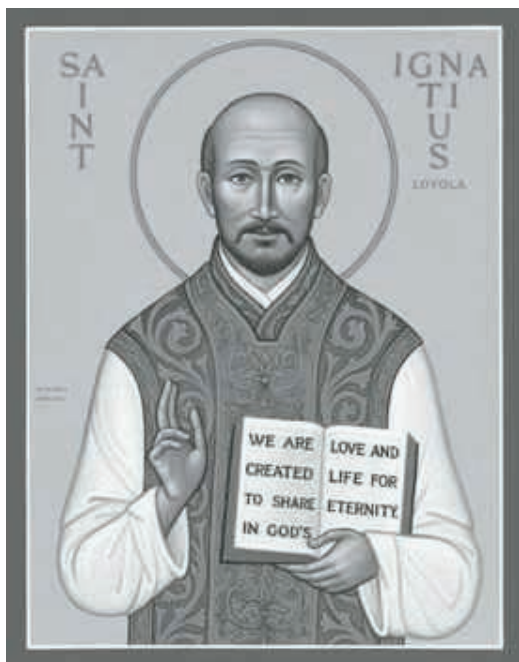
Before getting into the particulars of Ignatian Spirituality, it is helpful to understand a bit about the person for whom it is named, St. Ignatius of Loyola. St. Ignatius was alive in the early 16th century, from 1491-1556, and was an aristocrat turned soldier from the Basque region of Spain. While recovering from a cannon ball injury as a young man, Ignatius experienced a conversion of heart and completely renounced his past life of sin and violence.

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In the years following his conversion and eventual ordination, Ignatius attracted a group of followers, who eventually became recognized by the Pope in 1540 as a new religious order, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), dedicated to being sent around the world at the Pope's request to fulfill any duties required.

The First Principle & Foundation

The first principle and foundation that is the basis for St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises is that:

- *We are created to praise, glorify, and serve God, and by this means to achieve our eternal destiny.*
- *Everything else on earth is a gift from God in order to help us pursue the end for which we were created.*
- *Therefore, we must use things if they help us praise, glorify, and serve God, but we must free ourselves from things that are obstacles to that end.*
- *We should make ourselves "indifferent" (not preferring one over the other) to things such as health/illness, wealth/poverty, fame/disgrace, etc. because everything has the potential of calling forth a more loving response in us that would lead closer to God.*

God in All Things

A central theme of Ignatian Spirituality is that God can be found in all things and is constantly at work in the world. In the words of Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God." Through our everyday lives, relationships, work, studies, or experiences in nature, God is calling us to respond in love, to grow closer to our Creator.

When was the last time you stepped away from the busyness of daily life to walk with God in nature?



Our God is an active one, alive in the world, inviting us daily through our human experiences into deeper love and relationship. When we begin to recognize God's action and God's will even in the seemingly mundane details of our daily lives, we can also become aware of the endless opportunities God presents us with for conversion of heart.

Seeing God in all things also opens us up to the immensity of God. We cannot possibly convey the entirety of the mystery of God through human articulations of theology, doctrine, or prayer. As a result we can only humbly stand in awe of the grandeur of God.

Walking with Christ Through the Spiritual Exercises

As a part of his efforts to grow closer to God and seek God's will for his life, St. Ignatius kept journals full of notes, prayers, reflections, and spiritual insights. He eventually compiled these writings and set them within the framework of a retreat, which

came to be known as the Spiritual Exercises. In the words of Ignatius, the purpose of the Exercises is “the conquest of self and the regulation of one’s life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment.” The four “weeks” (not necessarily 7-day periods) of the Exercises were to be undertaken with a spiritual guide as a means to achieving spiritual freedom and commitment to serving God.

- **First week:** The focus of the first week of the Exercises is a reflection on the love of God for us. This meditation on God’s loving goodness leads to awareness of our response to that love and confrontation with the sinfulness in our lives. Ignatius then encourages us to acknowledge God’s mercy and God’s desire for freedom in our lives.
- **Second week:** In this week, we contemplate the life of Jesus through praying with the scriptural accounts of Christ’s birth and baptism, his sermon on the mount, his ministry of healing and teaching, his raising Lazarus from the dead. In Ignatian contemplation, we use our imagination to enter the scripture passage as participants rather than simply observers.



- **Third week:** During the third week, Ignatius asks us to walk with Jesus as he suffers through his passion and death. Instead of shying away from the horrors of his suffering, we are invited to stand with Jesus and ponder the mystery of Christ’s love for us and the tremendous gift of the Eucharist as an expression of that love.
- **Fourth week:** In the final week, we are invited to contemplate and participate in the joy of Jesus’ resurrection and his appearances to his disciples. We walk with the risen Christ and set out to love and serve him in concrete ways in our lives in the world.

Discernment of Spirits

Underlying the Spiritual Exercises and all of Ignatian Spirituality is the practice of *discernment of spirits*, which is the interpretation of the interior movements of our hearts. Through becoming sensitive to, reflecting on and praying with our emotions, inclinations, desires, thoughts, or imaginings, we can understand where they come from and where they are leading us. Ignatius believed that discerning these interior movements is a way to understand God’s will for us in our lives.

**The Daily Examen:
Review Your Day
in the presence of God**

- 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.**

How can I incorporate Ignatian Spirituality into my own spiritual life?

- Pray an Examen before going to bed each night
- Make an online retreat, such as “An Ignatian Prayer Adventure,” an 8-week adaptation of the Spiritual Exercises offered through ignatianspirituality.com
- Take time throughout your day to become aware of God’s presence in your daily activities
- Try getting to know Jesus through imaginative reading of the Gospels. Walk with Jesus in the Gospel stories and let that transform the way you walk in your own life

**Resources for
Ignatian Spirituality**

- www.ignatianspirituality.com —has many links to prayers, articles, retreat information, Ignatian organizations, and history of Ignatian Spirituality
- www.jesuit.org/Ignatian-spirituality/



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