

FEAST OF ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Reflection

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IHM Chapel, Monroe, MI

31 July 2023

Texts: Exodus 32:15-24, 30-34;

Matthew 13:31-35

Today is the Feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, better known as the Jesuits. Several Jesuits from the University of Detroit Mercy serve us here for our Sunday Liturgy and I imagine that they will be celebrating *fully* this great feast of St. Ignatius. As an eighth grader at Gesu Parish in Detroit, I remember hearing about St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier in school and at Mass in sermons, as they were called then, from the pastor of my parish. The Detroit Province of Jesuits were responsible for the missions in Patna, India. I recall listening to many stories of how the Jesuits respected the languages of the Indian people and shared in their culture.

Inigo Lopez de Onaz y Loyola, the youngest of thirteen children, was born in 1491 in the Basque region of Spain to a noble family from the clan of Loyola. Soon after his birth, his mother died and maternal care was given over to the wife of a local blacksmith, a servant in the Loyola household. I imagine too that his older sisters and brothers also cared for him. At seventeen Inigo joined the army. He participated in many battles, but fighting in Pamplona in 1521, he was hit on his right leg by a cannonball. He returned to his father's castle to recuperate for a year with nothing to read but some books on the Lives of the Saints and a book by Ludolph of Saxony entitled *De Vita Christi*, a Life of Christ.

These books influenced Inigo profoundly. He turned away from his worldly life and turned toward Jesus. He was known for his arrogance, showing off his armor and sword and his fancy dress and impressing his lady friends. When he could again walk, he visited the Benedictine monastery in Monserrat. He confessed his sins to a monk, gave away all his fine clothes to the poor and placed his sword and dagger at the altar of Mary the Mother of God. After Monserrat, he walked to the nearby town of Manresa, staying there for about a year and serving in a nearby hospital in exchange for food and lodging. He solidified his conversion by praying many hours a day and it was here that he created a draft of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Around 1530, Ignatius moved to Paris to study philosophy and theology at the famous Université de Paris. There he met some younger students, including Francis Xavier and Peter Faber, and four others. On August 15, 1534, these six

companions made their way up the hill to Montmartre and into the small chapel of St. Peter. Before a statue of Our Lady, they pledged to remain together to form a new order that would combine contemplation and action, just as Jesus did. In 1539, Ignatius founded the Society of Jesus and it was approved in 1540 by Pope Paul II. And the rest, as they say, is history!

The *Spiritual Exercises* have three features:

- First, a *Colloquy* or prayer at the beginning of the day and then the *Examen of Conscience* at the end of the day;
- secondly, placing oneself in the midst of a Gospel scene in which Jesus speaks so that one can speak with Him.
- thirdly, an emphasis on the *Contemplation to Attain the Love of God*. In this third way, Ignatius asks us to remember:

“Love consists in a mutual sharing of gifts. As a lover, one gives and shares something of oneself from what one has. So too, the Beloved shares in a similar way with the lover. In love, one always wants to give to the other.”

Then, in a most remarkable way, Ignatius proclaims:

*“Take Lord and receive all my liberty
- my memory, my understanding, my entire will –
all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me,
and to you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours. Do with me what you will.
Give me only your love and grace.
That is enough for me.”*

In the scene from Matthew’s Gospel today, I can imagine Ignatius sitting there with Jesus. He says to Jesus: “Give me only your grace-filled love. That is enough for me.” Then, Jesus says to him: “Yes, from the love I have infused in you, you have indeed planted a good seed, Ignatius, and look how it has bloomed right up to today. How many Jesuits there are today preaching, teaching, and healing in my name all around the world! Yes, in 1539 you have planted well a good seed.”

How great is God’s love and care for us! We too are infused with God’s love! We too engage in the “mutual sharing of gifts” among us, for God is with us in love! We too can say: “Give me your grace-filled love. That’s enough for me!”

Let us share our gifts with each other and proclaim the Gospel,
as Jesus did and as Ignatius did -
preaching, teaching, and healing wherever we are!

Praise be to You, our loving God!