



Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

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IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, AN UNLIKELY SAINT

By Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ

Today's Entrance Antiphon and Optional Readings for Religious Founder

Entrance Antiphon

At the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PHILIPPIANS 2:10-11

First Reading

Brothers and sisters: Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Avoid giving offense, whether to Jews or Greeks or the Church of God, just as I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own benefit but that of the many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Gospel

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

MATTHEW 13:44-46

Reflection

The Entrance Antiphon from Paul's letter to the Philippians is from the early Christ hymn, a poem inspired by Isaiah 45:23, which is a call to all nations to bow before God, praising the glory of the Creator: *To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear*. This verse, together with Paul's admonition to the Corinthians, *Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God*, highlights for us the heart of Saint Ignatius' profound love for Jesus Christ and his burning desire to do all for the greater glory of God.

Ignatius of Loyola was born in 1491 in the Basque region of northern Spain. In his youth he was a courtier, an attendant at the royal court. Eventually, desiring to gain the glory of a hero in battle, he joined a small cohort of Spanish soldiers and fought in a battle in 1521 in Pamplona against the French army. In the brief battle, a cannon ball shattered one of Ignatius' legs and severely damaged the other, after which his cohort surrendered. Nursed by the French medics who carried him back to his home in Loyola, Ignatius began a long period of surgeries and recuperation. This humiliation was a great disappointment to this young man, who was vain, ambitious, and now injured; in his youth, he had been living a reckless life regarding women, gambling and dueling. Now he faced obscurity and suffering during a long convalescence.

After months of agonizing pain, Ignatius asked for some reading material to help him pass the time. His family didn't have any romance novels (which he requested), but they did have a copy of the Life of Christ and a collection of the lives of the saints. *What happened next shows how profoundly he was influenced by what he read*. At times, he would put the book aside and imagine himself as a valiant knight in the service of a beautiful princess. At other times he would imagine the life of blessed Francis or blessed Dominic and he even ask himself the question, "What if I should do what St. Francis did or St. Dominic did?" God was assisting him through the material he was reading. Eventually, *Ignatius began to notice the difference* in his daydreams and

fantasies: after imagining a certain lady he would serve, he was left feeling dry and discontented. Yet, when he thought of the deeds of God that came into his imagination, he took much delight, which lasted for a long time. Ignatius realized that his thoughts evoked different reactions in him: one set of thoughts was directed toward God and seemed to come from God; the other set was not. Over time, Ignatius began to realize that he could discover God's direction and guidance in his life; he came to understand the foundation of the gift of discernment.

After almost nine months of convalescence, Ignatius was able to walk, and he decided to give himself to prayer, penance and reflecting on his life. Now a Pilgrim, he walked to Montserrat and later to Manresa, where he remained in prayer as a hermit in a cave for almost eleven months. During that time, he said that God worked with him directly, as a "teacher would guide a student." He had profound experiences of God and described them in his journals. Eventually, these writings became the foundation of the **Spiritual Exercises** that have been handed down to us.

After these years of conversion and spiritual formation, the life of Ignatius included a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and later, a return to Spain, where he discerned a desire to begin studies, which eventually brought him to Paris. Here his vocation became clear as other companions gathered around him and experienced the Spiritual Exercises. He was eventually ordained a priest and became the founder of the Jesuits, who were sent all over the world, obedient to the Pope in every age. (As we know, Pope Francis is a Jesuit, a gifted leader for our time.) By the time Ignatius died on July 31, 1556, his religious order had grown to more than a thousand members.

As in the Gospel passage above, Ignatius had discovered the treasure hidden in a field, and he gave up everything to follow the treasure of his heart, Jesus Christ. He had found the pearl of great value and gave his life so he could share the riches of divine grace offered to every person who seeks to know God.



St. Ignatius of Loyola
Photo by Rochdale Arts & Heritage Service from Art UK

For Pondering

This extraordinary saint gave the Society of Jesus and all of us the legacy of a

set of meditations called the Spiritual Exercises, based on the following of Jesus Christ. Just as Ignatius and his Companions learned that Jesus was teaching them how to live a life of meaning, filled with joy and enthusiasm, would you like to experience this fire and energy in your own life?

This might be a good time to explore the fruitfulness of the Spiritual Exercises, even for a day or a weekend or an extended time. With God's grace, this treasure can open for you a path following Jesus so intimately that it will change your life.

For Prayer

AMDG

"All for the greater glory of God!"

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