Thoughts on

St. Ignatius of Loyola

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"Man is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and thereby save his soul."

St. Ignatius Loyola

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St. Ignatius Loyola

Many years ago, a friend suggested working on “Spiritual Exercises”. I don’t think I knew what she was talking about, but since I trusted her and was always looking to grow in my spiritual life I said yes and there began my love of all things Ignatius! His feast day is celebrated on July 31 and the folks over at Ignatian Spirituality have a month-long series to celebrate. I am also going to work on posting each day. Today I’ll start with a round-up of resources for you.

First of all is the actual site where the celebration is hosted: 31 Days with Saint Ignatius.

If you are interested in learning more about this great saint, who is the founder of the Jesuits, I like this biography from Xavier University or this one from New Advent.

For some lighter facts about Ignatius, good to share with young people, check out this list from Loyola Press.

One of the reasons I am drawn to St. Ignatius is his practical approach to the spiritual life and how he reminds us to see God in our everyday existence. The Jesuit motto, Ad maiorem Dei gloriam which means For the Greater Glory of God is a reminder that all we do in our life, no matter how mundane, if done with the belief and attitude that it is done for God and his glory, we will grow in holiness and be the person God calls us.

Who is St. Ignatius of Loyola?

Watch this video about St. Ignatius.

St. Ignatius, Patron Saint of …?

It seems silly really, to have so much admiration for a saint, to have read more than one book about him, and then to realize I did not know what he is the patron saint of? Not a clue. Should I be telling you this? I am losing my credibility here? Hey, I can’t know everything.

I looked it up; here is the list: Dioceses of San Sebastian and Bilbao, Biscay & Gipuzkoa, Basque Country, Military Ordinariate of the Philippines, Society of Jesus, soldiers, Educators and Education (BIO from Catholic Online). I read it and until I got to Educators and Education I was a bit distraught. I don’t live in any of those dioceses; FYI, I looked them up to be sure, they are in Spain. I have nothing to do with the military or the Philippines or soldiers. Of course, I do love the Jesuits, especially Pope Francis. Clearly though the best connection for me is educators and education, that’s me. I’m all about learning, seeking knowledge and sharing it with others.

I feel better with that connection, though there’s no reason not to love a saint just because you are moved toward him or her.

Who is your favorite saint?
The Spiritual Exercises

One of Ignatius’ greatest legacies, besides founding the Jesuit order, is his spiritual exercises. These exercises were developed, “to prepare the soul, and properly dispose it to lay aside all inordinate affection, and then to inspire and discover how God would have it set its life, in order for gaining eternal salvation.” (Life of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Fr. Genelli, S.J.)

They are done by religious and lay people, with different approaches dependent on how long you have to do the exercises. For those who can they can be done over one month away from the world. For those who cannot leave the world they can be done over a longer time period, using the 19th Annotation of the exercises. I find it striking that Ignatius himself saw the need for this option.

There are many books and on-line options for completing the Spiritual Exercises. Ideally, you have a spiritual director to guide you but I have done this with a few trusted friends as well when a director was not available.

The first book I used, and probably my favorite, is For the Greater Glory of God, A Spiritual Retreat with St. Ignatius by Manuel Ruiz Jurado, S.J.

A shorter, simpler version and a great way to discern if the exercises are for you is this book, Praying with Ignatius of Loyola by Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and Marie Schwan. It contains a brief biography of Ignatius and then fifteen meditations, one chapter each which include scripture, prayers and words from Ignatius’ writing as well as questions for journaling and/or pondering.

(Both books are from The Word Among Us Press)

If you prefer an on-line version, there are two sites I’ve used; An Ignatian Prayer Adventure and Creighton University’s Online Retreat. An Ignatian Prayer Adventure is eight weeks while Creighton’s is thirty-four. Both have books available to go along with the what is on the site and Creighton has audio if you prefer to listen rather than read.

I encourage everyone I know to pray the spiritual exercises. The prayer, contemplation and meditation involved strips away so much of what we carry around with us that is not of God. God can then fill us with his purpose. For as Ignatius says, “He who goes about to reform the world must begin with himself, or he loses his labor.”
The Daily Examen

The examen is an examination of conscience done once or twice a day. There are five steps to it:

1. Give thanks to God our Lord for the benefits I have received.
2. Ask for grace to know my sins and rid myself of them.
3. Ask an account of my soul from the hour of rising to the present examen; first as to thoughts, then words, then deeds.
4. Ask pardon of God our Lord for my faults.
5. Resolve, with his grace, to amend them. Close with an Our Father. *(Spiritual Exercises, 43)*

Done faithfully, this will make us aware of our sins, both venial and mortal and uncover patterns of behavior. By being open before God he can help us discover the roots of our failures. Through prayer, we are given the grace to pursue holiness in our daily life, not sin.

The examen is not meant to be navel gazing or self-flagellation. It is meant to be an honest dialogue between you and God, who wants very much to heal you and offer you his love. We cannot hide our sins from God though we often try. God cannot be fooled.

As Paul tell us, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we are clearly apparent to God, and I hope we are also apparent to your consciousness. (2 Cor 5:9-11).”

It is for our own benefit to know who we are and how God sees us. By praying the examen with truth and humility, our soul grows closer to our father and in turn, we can draw others to him.

The two standards

This [video clip from Fr. Kevin O'Brien, S.J.](#) talks about how to choose from the two standards we are offered in the world, Satan or Christ.

Indifferent, but in a good way

Lately it’s been difficult to be indifferent. I seem to be hyper-focused on created things or should I say “creating” things. I have lists, pages and pages of them, projects in all different stages, balls bouncing everywhere and I am often dependent on others to get IT done. That last point, oh my, that is so the one that gives me the most discomfort. I am not indifferent, instead I am too focused on how I want things to be.

I want to check things off my list so I can stop thinking about them. But I can’t. And so, I must exercise patience and self-control. And try not to worry. For what will worry do? In the end, it most likely is the cause of wrinkles or sleeplessness or worse, both!
Pause. I need to pause and breathe and focus and pray. Then I can move forward with some degree of calm instead of agitation. I need to focus on being indifferent to those things which I have no control over and I also need to take tasks one at a time and see interruptions as opportunities to grow in trust.

I need to “pray as if it all depends on God and work as if it all depends on me.” (St. Ignatius).

The Call of Christ the King

What does it mean that Christ calls us to himself? Fr. Kevin O’Brien, S.J. tells us here.

Sweetness and Suffering

Days ago this quote came to my inbox: “All the honey that can be gathered from the flowers of this world has less sweetness than the vinegar and gall of Jesus Christ our Lord” (Ignatius of Loyola). Days ago, I had a root canal done on tooth #5. Days ago, I decided to offer up any suffering associated with said root canal for whoever God needed to use it for. Now, please, do not mistake suffering for lack of medication to alleviate the pain of a root canal. I had medication, plenty of it, because while I was willing to offer up my own personal suffering, as a patient I don’t like to make my dentist suffer any more than necessary and medication helps us all suffer less.

As I lay there, numb up to my eye I prayed and thought about all those I know and love who suffer due to chronic illness and was able to forget about what was happening to tooth #5. I could put aside the annoyance of the noise of the tools and bad taste in my mouth for a greater good. And as I lay there, mouth wide open, poised to grab the armrests in pain, I was able to let go. To trust that if I was numb up to my eye I wasn’t going to feel pain. I was uncomfortable, sure, but I knew it would pass while simultaneously realizing that for many it doesn’t pass. I could lean into the pain and make peace with it, heck I almost relaxed (likely due to meds).

For a microcosm of a second, there was sweetness in my suffering. And this quote began to make some sense. We know Jesus died for us and his death on a cross was brutal, painful, and humiliating. Yet he did it for me and you, for us. He offered all the bitterness of humanity up to his Father so that we could have eternal life. And there is no greater sweetness.

Discernment of Spirits

St. Ignatius gave us tools to use in our daily life to help us discern where we are being led and by whom. He guides us in learning if we are led by good or evil spirits. Knowing which spirit you are led by is of great help in making decisions in your life, large and small. A great series to help you learn about St. Ignatius’ 14 Rules of Discernment is one by Fr. Timothy Gallagher. You can listen to his podcasts here. He also has a DVD series and books on the topic.
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 Loyola
Prayer Against Depression

O Christ Jesus, When all is darkness
And we feel our weakness and helplessness,
Give us the sense of Your Presence,
Your Love and Your Strength.
Help us to have perfect trust
In Your protecting love
And strengthening power,
So that nothing may frighten or worry us,
For, living close to You, We shall see Your Hand,
Your Purpose, Your Will through all things.

St. Ignatius of Loyola

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Suscipe

'Receive, O Lord, all my liberty. Take my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. Whatevery I have or hold, You have given me; I give it all back to You and surrender it wholly to be governed by your will. Give me only your love and your grace, and I am rich enough and ask for nothing more.'

St. Ignatius Loyola

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Prayer for Discernment

Grant me, O Lord,
to see everything now with new eyes;
to discern and test the spirits that help me
read the signs of the times;
to relish the things that are yours
and communicate them to others.
Give me the clarity of understanding
that you gave Ignatius.
Amen.

PEDRO ARRupe, S.J.
This is a beautiful prayer, often said after receiving Holy Communion. The original author of the prayer is unknown but it does appear in Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises.

Anima Christi
Soul of Christ, sanctify me; Body of Christ, save me;
Blood of Christ, inebriate me;
Water from the side of Christ, wash me;
Passion of Christ, strengthen me; O good Jesus, hear me;
within your wounds, hide me;
let me never be separated from you;
from the evil one, protect me;
at the hour of my death, call me; and bid me to come to you;
that with your saints, I may praise you forever and ever. Amen.

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