

Topic 15: Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Soldier and Saint, Part 1

Overview : St. Ignatius of Loyola was a shining star of the spiritual renewal and reform that emerged in 16th century Spain. He continued the movement of spirituality from the desert and monastery into the world that began with St. Francis and St. Dominic. You might say that he carried this impulse even further as he founded the Company of Jesus who crafted what has come to be known as “Apostolic Spirituality.” From the very beginning of this movement, Ignatius and his followers founded universities and colleges and had an effective outreach to the poor, especially in the foreign missions.

St. Ignatius (1491–1556)

- Ignatius was the soldier, wounded in battle, who became a saint. In 1521, he suffered a severe leg wound. During his recuperation, he began to read the about the lives of the saints. Ignatius had a profound religious experience that led him to reform his life and to become a soldier for Christ.
- Ignatius became a wandering ascetic for the sake of Christ.
- Through a number of extraordinary religious experiences (of the Trinity, Christ, and Our Lady) he was transformed from being a temporal knight to be a knight for Christ.
- He gathered companions around him. His group became known as the Society of Jesus.
- He founded colleges, universities, and charitable institutions. He had a deep love for the poor and the sick and a strong missionary spirit.
- After a vision at La Storta near Rome in 1537, he had a strong desire to serve others. This vision connected Ignatius and his companions with the Pope.
- Ignatius brought St. Francis’s vision of bringing the friars from the monastery into the world to a new level.

1) Ignatius adamantly refused to allow the Jesuits to chant the Divine Office. He envisioned a clear correlation between prayer and ministry.

In *The Imitation of Christ*, one of Ignatius’ favorite works, Thomas à Kempis cautioned against traveling too much. Ignatius insisted that it was only by engaging in the pilgrimage implied in ministry that the Jesuit could hope to attain sanctification.

1) He gives going into the world a spiritual significance.

Ignatian Spirituality

- Ignatius's thinking and spirituality influenced many religious communities.
- When Ignatius stepped back and listened as a wounded soldier, he had a religious experience.
- Ignatius saw the world as the place where God calls us to experience our salvation. For him, the world becomes the monastery.
- Ignatius gives us tools for responding to the Lord's call and to living out our discipleship.
- When Ignatius discusses prayer, he emphasizes its affective dimension and the use of imagination. Ignatian spirituality is full of creativity.
- Ignatian spirituality shows us a way to move towards a deeper spiritual freedom. In some respects, this journey towards freedom parallels the monastic concept of purity of heart.
- Ignatius gives us a way of paying attention and becoming more aware. He teaches us to be more reflective as we live in the context of a very busy world.
- Ignatian spirituality is practical. There have been many interpretations of Ignatius's thinking throughout history. Some looked at his exercises as a rigid program. Today, most see Ignatius's vision as an attitude or outlook that can lead us closer to God.
- We are companions of Jesus and of one another. We do not live a spiritual life alone. Ignatius shows us a way of building relationships in the context of the world. The experience of the Risen Christ binds us together.
- Ignatius's spirituality is a spirituality of contemplation in action.
- "We are called to be men and women for others."

Review Questions

1. St. Ignatius challenges us to "find God in all things." Keep a journal in which you reflect and write about the ways to experience God in the details of your daily life.
2. St. Ignatius teaches us "to think with the Church." The Church is all of us. How do we remain loyal to the Church and at the same time call it to reform and renewal?
3. St. Ignatius models in his spirituality total generosity to God and service to others as men and women for others. Reflect on your own life and how you might move beyond a self-centered life and to live a more other and God centered life.