

Topic 16: Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Soldier and Saint, Part 2

Overview: Ignatius had a vision of a way of contemplation that could be followed by everyone. The gift of St. Ignatius to the Church is his Spiritual Exercises. The Exercises are meant for all who want to grow in their relationship with God. At the heart of the Exercises are his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. The Examen is a practice of reviewing at least once a day where God has been acting in your life, how you are responding, and how you need to ask for forgiveness and healing as you continue into the next day. Other spiritual practices that have come from the Ignatian movement in spirituality are retreats, spiritual direction, and sodalities.

Spiritual Practices

- The Retreat: a periodic retreat became a regular feature in the pattern of piety followed by many people.
- Spiritual Direction: the Ignatian approach to spiritual direction is probably the clearest and most influential, developed to a high degree by early Jesuits.
- Sodalities: Jesuits adopted, modified, and promulgated confraternities of various kinds.
- Ignatius warns against indiscriminate use of methods of meditation by unschooled and unguided people.

The Spiritual Exercises

- The Spiritual Exercises trained the soldiers with an understanding of individual needs. Ignatius takes the classical faculties of the mind (memory, understanding, and will) and treats them in a systematic way, using them to cultivate an attitude of contemplation.
- Ignatius tells us that we will experience both consolation and desolation in our prayer. He develops a skillset of discernment.
- The purpose of the Exercises is to help a person become spiritually and apostolically decisive.
- God intervenes in our lives. As we become reflective, we gain a sense of our own personal salvation history.
- The Exercises are divided into four weeks or movements.

1) The first week corresponds to the purgative way.

(a) The First Principle and Foundation: “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for man and to help him in attaining the end for which he is created. Hence, man is to use them in as far

as they help him in the attainment of his end, and must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him. For we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things in as far as we are allowed free choice and not under any prohibition; consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long to a short life, and the same holds all other things; our one desire and choice should be what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.”

(b) We must begin with the notion of being loved and accepted by God, and then examine the things that draw us away from God. We look at sin from the perspective of God’s mercy.

2) The second week corresponds to the illuminative way.

(a) It begins with contemplation of Christ’s kingship over the world. We move into the mysteries of Christ’s life up to the Last Supper.

3) The third and fourth week correspond to the unitive way.

(a) The third week focuses on the Passion of Christ.

(b) The fourth week focuses on the joy of Christ and his followers in the risen life. We are now sent out into the world as disciples of Christ.

- The Spiritual Exercises reflect Ignatius’s own experience.

Discernment of Spirits

- Not every good or spiritual experience is of God. Discernment involves paying attention to the movements that lead to God and those that lead away from God.
- Ignatius’ Autobiography and Spiritual Diary reveal a mystic who knew the importance of religious emotions.
- The spiritual director helps a person to stay with the movements that lead towards life and God.

Examen: The Examen is a way of carrying the Exercises into one’s daily life. □
The Examen has several steps:

1) Gratitude

2) Petition

- 3) Review
- 4) Forgiveness
- 5) Renewal
- 6) Transitions

- “Everyday mysticism”

Review Questions

1. The Examen is a spiritual practice that has helped countless people. Bring this practice into your spiritual life.
2. Pay attention to your desires, gives you a sense of God’s desire - God’s will for you. The practice of spiritual discernment is based on paying attention to one’s desires.
3. If you have not made the Exercises, consider doing an eight-day retreat. If this is not possible, what is called the “Nineteenth Annotation” is a way of doing the Exercises over a long period of time (several months or longer) as you continue your daily home, work, or school life.