

## **Lecture 3. The Autobiography and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola**

**Overview:** We are going to be looking not only at the autobiography of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (ca. 1491 - 1556), but also his letters, and more importantly, his Spiritual Exercises, which lie at the heart of both his writing and Jesuit identity. In order to understand the Spiritual Exercises, we need to examine the narrative of his life as laid out in his autobiography. Ignatius's order would be a product of a new age, and thus understanding his life is essential for understanding the Society of Jesus.

**I. St. Ignatius:** Inigo Lopez de Loyola was one of the first of the modern figures. Psychologist, founder of a religious community, warrior turned saint, architect of a radical approach to spirituality, educator par excellence, and administrator, Ignatius (as he became known) crafted a new way of being a servant of Christ in the world. He also composed a work of foundational spirituality that is a perduring Christian treasure: the Spiritual Exercises.

**II. Conversion:** At one point in his Autobiography Ignatius observed that "although he was attached to the faith, I did not live in conformity with it, and I did not avoid sin. Rather, I was addicted to gambling, dissolute in my affairs with women, argumentative, and ever keen to demonstrate my prowess with a sword." But a cannonball at the siege of Pamplona changed everything.

Now transformed - if not fully at least with prospects - Inigo (as he still was known) begins his quest to know God, to serve the Divine Majesty. And in Manresa he would have a mystical experience out of which would come his classic contribution to the spiritual life, the Spiritual Exercises.

**III. The Spiritual Exercises and the Society of Jesus:** A structured religious experience, the Exercises is designed to elicit a profound experience of God and of human freedom. They engage the whole person - the imagination, reason, will and the affections. They define Jesuit identity, and they bear the stamp of Inigo's personality - his introspectiveness, his preference for an orderly way of experiencing God in the world.

- The Exercises is the cornerstone. But the Society of Jesus is the larger edifice. One who is part of the Companions of Jesus in Ignatius's words is "a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith, and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine,

by means of public preaching, lectures and any other ministration of the Word of God, and further, by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments."

### **Review Questions**

1. Why is Ignatius's experience at the River Cardoner so foundational to the Society of Jesus?
2. Trace Ignatius's steps from the cave at Manresa to the Gesu in Rome.
3. The Autobiography is bare narrative; the Spiritual Exercises a concise manual for psychological and spiritual integration. What does each say to us of the inspiring personality of their author?