

## **Ignatius of Loyola**

**Introduction:** Every once in a while a person comes along who has an influence beyond their own time and place; someone who makes a profound and lasting contribution to the stock of human experience. Such a person was Ignatius of Loyola.

Given the name Inigo at his baptism, Ignatius was born at the margins: in the year 1491 just as the medieval was giving way to the renaissance; in the mountainous and inaccessible borderlands between the Spain of Emperor Charles V and its powerful rival, the kingdom of France; speaking the Basque

From an early age, Ignatius was determined to overcome this obscurity and to make a name for himself on the world stage. This he was to do but in ways he could not have imagined.

**The Knight:** Ignatius tells us in his autobiography that he spent his youth in the pursuit of arms, dreaming about the life of a medieval knight in love and in war. He later recalled this time as being 'given to the follies of the world.'

It was not until he was thirty that Ignatius got his chance to be the knight of his dreams, when, in May 1520, King Francis I sent an army to defend French interests at Pamplona. The walls of the city were strong but the Spanish garrison small and hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned by the superior French force. Ignatius' 'great and foolish desire to win fame' led to a reckless attempt to fight off the French against the odds.

A cannon ball from the French guns soon put paid to Ignatius' bravado. One leg was shattered and the other badly damaged. But, impressed by his bravery, the French army surgeons tended to him and, rather than being kept prisoner, he was sent home, a bumpy ride of fifty miles on a horse-drawn litter causing him much pain and discomfort.

Seeing the mess his legs were in, and knowing that this would put an end to his ambitions of courtly life and love, Ignatius had his own doctors break and reset the bones without anaesthetic. Close to death several times, it was not clear that the brave young man would survive his ordeal but, four weeks after the battle, things took a turn for the better and his wounds began slowly to mend.

For nine months, Ignatius was confined to bed in rooms on the third floor of the castle at Loyola. To while away the time, he called for romances - tales of medieval knights, daring deeds, and beautiful princesses. But the only books that could be found were a life of Christ and a collection of saints' lives. Reluctantly, Ignatius

opened these books and astonished himself by being drawn into their stories, imagining himself as one of these saintly and heroic followers of Christ.

During this time, and subsequently at Manresa, Ignatius wrote down his reactions, thoughts and reflections in a specially prepared book 'of polished and lined paper. . . which he carried around very carefully'. What he wrote in this notebook was to be the source of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the classic of western spirituality for which Ignatius became famous. It was published in its final form in Latin in 1548.

Weighing up his former dreams of knightly conquest and courtly love and his new dreams of being a latter-day disciple of Jesus by imitating the lives of the saints, Ignatius determined to reinvent himself. He would begin his new life by going to Jerusalem as a pilgrim.

**The Pilgrim:** And so it was that, accompanied by his brother, Pero, and a couple of servants, Ignatius set out on his great adventure. He came to think and speak of himself as 'the pilgrim'. The holy land was the goal of his pilgrimage: he would walk the streets of the towns where Jesus had worked his miracles, and sit in the fields where Jesus had taught his disciples. It was to be here that he would live out his new dream of being a disciple of Jesus.

On his way to take ship at Barcelona, Ignatius made a detour to the mountain-top monastery at Montserrat and there, in a dramatic gesture remembered from childhood tales of questing knights, he hung up his sword and dagger before the ancient statue of the black Madonna, spending the whole night in vigil. He swapped his fine courtly dress for a rough tunic made of sackcloth and took up the iconic staff and water-gourd of the pilgrim. He continued to Manresa, a small town not far away, probably to seek advice from a hermit familiar with the dangerous and arduous journey to the holy land.

*The Spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola* - **The Practice of Attentiveness:** During the long months of convalescence after the battle of Pamplona, Ignatius began to be attentive to his experience. He noticed the things that happened, big and small, and the way they left him feeling. Ignatius offers us a spiritual exercise called the examen - a simple five step exercise which we can use to be attentive to the experience of each day, noticing how God has been present, how we have been left feeling, and how this reflection might help us determine our next steps.

The eleven months Ignatius ended up spending at Manresa (March 1522 - February 1523) would lay the foundation of his new life and see the shaping of a new spirituality. Determined fully to emulate the simple and self-sacrificing lives of the

saints, Ignatius lived at the little hospice of Santa Lluçia, a place where the sick, the orphaned, the mentally ill, and the elderly were abandoned to charity. He tended to their needs assiduously and begged alms on their behalf. But, after four months, his desire to find solitude and time for prayer led him to a cave in the cliffs beyond the city walls and high above the river Cardener. It was here that his most intense experimentation and experience of prayer and penance, meditation and contemplation, took place and were distilled into his notebook.

Ignatius began to notice how some impulses led him towards God and others distracted and led him away. He noted that God dealt with him at this time 'just as a schoolteacher treats a child whom he is teaching . . . because he had no one else to teach him.' He began to master the art of discernment.

By February 1523, the pilgrim felt spiritually and psychologically prepared and set off once more for the holy land. After many delays and false starts, he sailed from Venice in May 1523 and entered the gates of Jerusalem 'with great consolation and joy' four months later.

Like pilgrims through the ages, Ignatius set about visiting all the places mentioned in the gospels. But as he did so, he seized upon every opportunity to speak about God with whoever would listen, be they Christian or Jew or Muslim. Tensions between religions in the holy land were as fraught then as they are today and Ignatius quickly landed himself in trouble with the authorities. Six weeks after arriving so full of hopes, Ignatius was deported back to Italy.

With his dreams of following Jesus by living in the holy land dashed, Ignatius was left uncertain what to do next. He was sure that God was calling him to do something quite particular with his life but was quite unsure as to what that could now be.

Ignatius continued to speak about God to anyone and everyone and, in those febrile times of new and unorthodox religious movements, this quickly attracted the attention of the Inquisition. Ignatius was repeatedly jailed for preaching without the authority or theological training deemed necessary to do so. Undaunted, he resolved to get the education he needed and, at the age of 33, returned to grammar school in Barcelona to learn the Latin he would need for higher studies, sitting alongside schoolboys less than half his age.

Ignatius proved himself an able student and he soon entered the university at Alcala de Henares, near Madrid, and then at Salamanca. But the disorderly nature of the Spanish universities left him frustrated and so he conceived a plan to go to Paris to enroll at the most prestigious university of the day.

At the College de Montaigu, Ignatius began his studies in humanities but struggled to support himself by begging alms. It was during this time he came to England on a begging trip and found Londoners most generous. He graduated with a Master's degree in March 1535. Now qualified to teach theology, he could do so without fear of the Inquisition, although throughout his life he was dogged by those who were suspicious of the familiar and intimate way he spoke about God.

During his time in Paris, Ignatius would lead friends through his *Spiritual Exercises* and soon attracted a following among his fellow students. These included St Pierre Favre and St Francis Xavier with whom he shared rooms and who became his first companions and co-founders of the Society of Jesus.

Ignatius returned to his old dream of living in the holy land and following in the steps of Jesus. At Montmartre on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1534, Ignatius and six companions (Pierre Favre, Francis Xavier, Diego Lainez, Alfonso Salmeron, Nicolas Bobadilla and Simao Rodrigues) took vows of poverty in imitation of the life of Christ's disciples, and resolved to travel to the holy land together 'to spend their lives in the service of souls'.

First, they set off for Rome to obtain the Pope's blessing on their venture. But Pope Paul III threw them a new challenge, 'Why do you have such a great desire to go to Jerusalem? The good and true Jerusalem is Italy, if you want to produce fruit in the Church of God.' This challenge changed the companions' direction - from desiring to live as modern day disciples in Jerusalem to being apostles wherever the need was greatest.

The companions were ordained priests in Venice in 1537 and, not quite yet giving up the hope of reaching Jerusalem, they split up in pairs and journeyed to towns around Italy 'to help souls'.

*The Spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola* **The Art of Discernment** - Ignatius daydreamed about his future and 'little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that were stirring... realizing from experience that some thoughts left him sad and others joyful.' This ability to tell the difference between the things that led to his deepest good (which Ignatius called **consolation**) and those things which, enjoyable though they might be at the time, pulled in the opposite direction (which he called desolation) is the art of discernment, a key technique of Ignatian spirituality.

Their work as apostles was with the poorest and most marginalized in society: prostitutes, the sick and those dying of plague, addicts, widows and orphans, the mentally ill, and Jewish converts who faced prejudice and ostracization. During the terrible winter of 1538, the companions begged enough money from the wealthy to feed the poorest 10% of the population of Rome for the worst of the winter.

Uncertain whether being 'friends in the Lord' was a temporary thing or whether they would stay together as a group, the companions spent some weeks in careful deliberation and discernment in the spring of 1539. They concluded that they wished to establish a new religious order and so Ignatius was set the task of writing out a short 'formula' to describe the new institute. This was presented to Pope Paul III who, on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1540, confirmed the friends as the Company (or Society) of Jesus, 'for the service of God and the help of souls'. The Jesuits had been born.

**The Jesuit:** Once Ignatius came to Rome in November 1537, he never left. The contrast could not be greater: from being the pilgrim crisscrossing Europe 'alone and on foot' he was now constrained to settle at the hub of the growing network of Jesuits (there were over 1,000 by the time he died), tied to his desk receiving and writing letters, and meticulously crafting the *Constitutions* which would be the rule book and blueprint for this new Society of Jesus.

Ignatius wanted his Jesuits to be fleet of foot -always ready to go where the need was greatest and then to move on when the work was done or could be handed over to others, just as the Jesus' disciples had done. The methods of the new religious order were grounded in the one-to-one engagement of the *Spiritual Exercises* - entering into conversation with individuals about their lives and their relationship with God. People reacted with great enthusiasm, appreciative of these Jesuits who spoke openly in the town squares as well as the churches 'from the heart, in the spirit, practically' (Jeronimo Nadai SJ), touching and often transforming lives.

It was from his rooms in Rome at the Red Tower, and later next to the little church of Santa Maria della Strada which the Pope had entrusted to the Jesuits, that Ignatius sent his great friend Francis Xavier to India, Sri Lanka, Borneo, Japan and China with the words, 'Go! Set the world ablaze' with the love of God. He sent Diego Lainez and Alfonso Salmerbn to the Council of Trent as expert theologians. Peter Canisius was sent to defend the Catholic faith against the reformers in Germany.

It was also from Rome that Ignatius agreed to a request from the town council of Messina in Sicily to establish a school. Other schools, in Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, and Germany quickly followed and universities too. Within the next ten years, Ignatius had opened some 38 schools and universities. Within the next two

centuries, there were over 800. The Jesuits were to become the 'schoolmasters of Europe' and, beyond Europe, in places at the very edges of the known world.

*The Spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola* **Encountering Jesus** - In the life and teachings of Jesus (contained in the gospels), Ignatius sees a way of living that brings out the best in us. Ignatius would imagine himself into gospel scenes and hear the words of Christ addressed directly to himself. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, there are over forty exercises in which Ignatius offers imaginative ways of encountering the person of Jesus. Above all, Ignatius understood Jesus to be calling him to 'Come, follow me'; living out this calling in the service of others, whatever the cost. Through these personal contemplative encounters, Ignatius gradually got to know Jesus as friend and companion.

Towards the end of his life, Ignatius was persuaded by his companions to recount his life story. This became the *Autobiography* recorded by fellow Jesuit, Luis Goncalves da Camara, an important resource for understanding the conversion and calling of Ignatius to a greatness that he could not have imagined as the young hidalgo at Loyola.

Throughout his life, Ignatius was plagued by ill health and, in the summer of 1556, he was suffering from another bout of stomach pains. He died on 31<sup>st</sup> July, the day on which we keep his feast each year. Ignatius was declared a saint in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV and is buried in the Jesuit Church of the Gesu in Rome.

So what was Ignatius of Loyola's legacy? Certainly the Society he founded with nine companions which continues to live and proclaim the gospel across six continents today. Certainly, in his own time, the example his 'reformed priests' gave to the wider reform of the training, lives and ministry of priests throughout the Catholic church. And, certainly, the way in which the gospel message was fearlessly taken around the globe by Jesuit missionaries. But perhaps Ignatius' most important and enduring legacy is his spirituality - Ignatian spirituality.

**What is Ignatian Spirituality?** What do we mean by 'spirituality'? Spirituality is a response to the realization that human beings are more than their component parts of flesh, blood and bones, reflexes, minds and consciousness. Spirituality is a particular understanding and cultivation of the inner self, the things of the spirit, most especially where the human spirit touches God's spirit. As the Jesuit geologist and paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), put it, 'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.'

A particular spirituality will grow out of a particular religious tradition (as Ignatius' spirituality grows out of the Catholic Christian tradition) but each spirituality will have a vision of the life of the human spirit and offer a coherent set of techniques, methods and practices for noticing how our spiritual, psychological and physical selves are faring, and for nourishing us, encouraging us to grow, and healing us when we are damaged.

*The Spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola Grateful and Generous* - When he was walking from Paris to Rouen in September 1529, Ignatius records a moment when he was overwhelmed by joy and gratitude after a long period of listless drifting and dissatisfaction with life. From then on he took notice of the things for which he was grateful each day. This practice of gratitude changed his outlook on life and brought about a sustained sense of wellbeing and happiness. Once established, his daily gratitude found expression in being more generous. Ignatius characterizes generosity in terms of what he called the '*magis*' (meaning 'more') - always wanting to be more so that he could do more 'for the greater glory of God and the common good'. Gratitude and generosity are the bookends of the *Spiritual Exercises* and Ignatian spirituality.

Spirituality helps us to engage with the fundamental questions of meaning and purpose which all human beings have: Who am I? Why am I the person that I am? What am I put here on earth to do? How can I grow the best side of me and rein in the worst? What does it mean to be a good person and lead a good life? What brings fulfilment and happiness?

This inner or spiritual life is usually talked about in religious terms (there are, for example, spiritualities in Buddhism and Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) but some of it, at least, can also be expressed in ways that are not associated with religious belief.

Within the Christian religious tradition, there are many spiritualities but each is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the gospels. Each has a different take on how to respond to the invitation of Jesus to 'Come, follow me' (Luke 18 22). Some Christian spiritualities are more contemplative, some more active. Ignatian spirituality seeks to bring both together as a spirituality for 'contemplatives in action', a phrase coined by one of Ignatius' companions, Jeronimo Nadal SJ (1507-80).

In those intense months of reflection and turmoil during his convalescence at Loyola and at Manresa, and in the following 33 years, Ignatius crafted a distinctive spirituality - Ignatian spirituality.

Ignatian spirituality is a toolbox of methods, reflections, meditations and contemplations, rules and guidance, for living fully and intensely as God calls us to live. If, as St Irenaeus says, 'the glory of God is a human being fully alive', then Ignatius gives us a way of being fully alive by being attentive to God's calling and loving which draw us out to be the persons he calls us to be. Ignatius' spirituality, like all Christian spiritualities, is deeply rooted in the gospel and encounter with Jesus. Through that encounter, it explores our own nature, our strengths and weaknesses, and how we make decisions that are, in the deepest sense, good or bad for us.

In the little book of his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius sets out a series of exercises, meditations and contemplations, to be followed, full-time, over a period of thirty days. This is the prototype of the Ignatian retreat. Most people (who do not have the leisure to take a month off to do a retreat), though, will encounter Ignatian spirituality in particular exercises (such as the examen or an imaginative contemplation) or on short retreats over a day or weekend, or through a retreat in daily life (when a person does a little of the *Spiritual Exercises* each day over a longer period of time).

If you visit the cave at Manresa today, you approach its entrance across a mosaic pavement created for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ignatius' time there in 1522-23. At the centre of the mosaic is a glorious sunflower with a quotation from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid (43BC-17AD): '*vertitur ad solem*' ('it turns towards the sun'). It recalls Ignatius' realization that just as the sunflower is at its most glorious when it turns towards the sun, so human beings are at their best when they turn their hearts and minds towards the God 'who made us; we belong to him'. (Psalm 99) Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* show us a way of doing this in our daily lives - by being attentive to our experience and discerning in our choices, by practicing gratitude and generosity, and, above all, by encountering the person of Jesus 'in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.' (Colossians 1:19)

Spirituality is, of course, primarily a way in which individuals respond to the calling and love of God. But a group of individuals, such as Ignatius and his companions, can also use that spirituality to inform their community life and 'way of proceeding' (Ignatius' phrase for a particular way of seeing and doing things).

Jesuit schools and universities draw upon Ignatian spirituality to articulate their vision of education and to shape the way in which they conduct their daily 'way of proceeding'. Other Jesuit works will do something similar. Ignatian spirituality gives them a distinctive identity as a Catholic community with a Christian mission.

Some key aspects of Ignatian spirituality are explored in the boxes throughout this booklet. But an intellectual knowledge of Ignatian spirituality can never replace the 'live' experience of doing an Ignatian retreat or using his spiritual exercises, such as the examen, in prayer and reflection.