



Ignatian Spirituality

Charles J. Jackson, S.J.

PRAYER FOR GENEROSITY

St. Ignatius Loyola

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.

SUSCIPE

St. Ignatius Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, understanding, my entire will,
all that I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Do with it as you will.
Give me only your love and your grace:
that is enough for me.

NOTHING IS MORE PRACTICAL...

Pedro Arrupe, S.J.

Nothing is more practical than finding God; that is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love; stay in love, and it will decide everything.

SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is a word that lacks a concise definition. Although it includes prayer, piety and the so-called interior life, it is ultimately a way of living and acting. For the Christian, spirituality can be defined as life in accord with the Spirit of God, a life that ‘makes us sons and daughters of God’ (Rom. 8:9,14).



This is not to say, however, that there is but one Christian spirituality. There are, in fact, many. By way of example, each of the four Gospels in the New Testament can be said to reflect a distinct spirituality, each faithful to the gospel Jesus preached yet viewed through the prism of its writer. As Christianity developed, however, so too did other spiritualities, each rooted in a particular historical and cultural setting and in some manner expressing its ideals and aspirations. Each was grounded in a specific understanding about God, about God’s relationship with the world and about the human person in that world. And it was from this understanding that the spirituality – a way of living and acting – developed and grew.

...a spirituality is grounded in a specific understanding about God, about God’s relationship with the world and about the human person in that world.

A word of caution, however, is in order: a spirituality is not simply a collection of spiritual ideals and practices, a smorgasbord – as it were – from which one can pick and choose. It possesses an internal cohesion. Its elements, in

fact, display a remarkable interrelatedness in which each flows from and gives expression to the worldview from which the spirituality sprang.

Each spirituality is identified by the specific historical, cultural or religious tradition from which it sprang – 17th-century French, Pauline, Carmelite, Celtic and Methodist spiritualities, to name but a few. This brochure will focus on Ignatian spirituality, the spirituality of the 16th-century Basque, St. Ignatius Loyola. It will single out some of the more important traits of this spirituality, describe each, underscore their interrelatedness and attempt to show how each flows from and gives expression to Ignatius' integral worldview. In order to do this, however, it seems best to begin not with the spirituality of St. Ignatius but with the man himself.

ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

Almost five hundred years ago, Ignatius Loyola, a Basque courtier-soldier lay on his sickbed recovering from wounds that had almost ended his life. Looking for something to help pass the time, he began to read: not the romantic novels he desired, but the only books available – a life of Christ and the lives of the saints. From time to time, he set aside his book and allowed his thoughts to wander – imagining himself a valiant knight in the service of a great lady. His thoughts also turned to what he had read, and he imagined himself imitating the heroic deeds of the saints in serving God.



He began to notice, however, that his thoughts evoked different reactions in him. Thoughts of himself as a valiant knight, though delightful while they lasted, ultimately left him feeling empty and sad. On the other hand, thoughts of imitating the heroic deeds of the saints brought him a joy that lasted even after these thoughts had ended. Then, as he later described it, 'one day his eyes opened a little, and he began to wonder at this difference and reflect upon it.' It dawned on him that one set of thoughts was directed toward God and presumably had its origin in God, whereas the other was not. Two contrary spirits, he sensed, were actively *at work* in him: the Spirit of God and the spirit of evil. He realized that God was communicating not in mountaintop experiences, but in his affective responses to the ordinary events of his life.

During the long months of his recuperation, Ignatius read and re-read the two books, reflected on Jesus' life and the examples of the saints, and made more than a few resolutions. What was ultimately pivotal, however, was not anything that he *did* during this time but rather something that was *happening* to him. God, he realized, was actively *at work* in him – inviting, directing, guiding and actively disposing him for the way in which he might best serve him.

In late February 1522 Ignatius left Loyola. Although his wounds were not completely healed, he had grown increasingly eager to be on the road. An unfocused desire beckoned him to Jerusalem where he envisioned spending his life doing penance. He made his way across Spain to the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, where he made a general confession and then an all-night vigil before the image of the Black Madonna. Sensing a desire to spend a few days in a hospice recording some reflections, he then made his way to a nearby town called Manresa. He would remain there almost eleven months.

In his exuberance he quickly surrendered himself to hours of prayer and intense bodily penance. Although his spirituality was well-meaning and generous, it was largely self-centered and superficial. Yet for about four months he basked in a tranquility of unceasing joy. In time, however, he began to experience great changes in his soul. His tranquility and joy gave way to aridity and sadness, and he began to question his new way of life. Ongoing anxiety about sins he may have failed to confess troubled him greatly. His penchant for reflection, however, served only to push him into even deeper introspection, making him a prisoner of his own self-absorption. He sought for

help everywhere but could find no relief. Weeks flowed into months, but his anguish continued unabated.



Suddenly, and in a manner completely unexpected, he awoke as from a dream. In but the briefest of moments, he saw his scruples for what they were – simply lies and falsehood: he was freed from their power. He had been brought face-to-face with his own poverty and inability to achieve his own healing and wholeness. Many years later he observed that during this time ‘God dealt with him just as a schoolmaster deals with a child.’ God had revealed to him his human frailty so that ‘the all-surpassing power’ (2 Cor. 4:7) could be seen as residing in God alone.

His spiritual tranquility returned, and he enjoyed many spiritual consolations. He received great illuminations as well – of the Trinity, the creation of the world, Eucharistic sacramental presence and Christ’s humanity – but these illuminations seem almost negligible to one that occurred on the banks of the river Cardoner.

He sat for a while facing the river which there ran deep. As he sat, the eyes of his understanding began to be opened. He saw no vision, but was brought to understand and know many things, spiritual matters as well as those of faith and learning, and this with so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him.

In a few tersely-written sentences Ignatius described a spiritual illumination so overwhelming that he seemed ‘a new man with a new intellect.’ Although his writing may rarely have projected style or polish, his precision and clarity of thought were always in evidence. On the topic of his illumination, however, he seemed at a genuine loss

to communicate his experience in any detail. He could find no words to describe what was clearly indescribable. The illumination was not simply an experience of 'spiritual matters as well as those of faith and learning.' It was an experience of God, one that he could never speak of without overwhelming emotion.

Like Paul on the road to Damascus, Ignatius at the Cardoner experienced himself 'grasped by Christ Jesus.' (Phil. 3:12) He had been graced to discover in God

the mystery of his purpose, the hidden plan he so kindly made in Christ from the beginning, to act upon when the times had run their course to the end: that he would bring everything together under Christ as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth (Eph. 1:9-10).

The illumination spoke not only of God's plan; in one manner or another, it spoke also of God himself. God's continued action in his life revealed the very nature of the Trinitarian God, and of how God wished to act with all his creation. God, he had been brought to understand, is a movement beyond itself, goodness overflowing itself. In experiencing the unity, beauty and all-pervasive love of the Trinitarian God – Father, Son and Spirit – Ignatius discovered the source and principle to guide all his future action.



It is difficult in this to separate the man from the mystic, nature from grace, Ignatius himself from God's power working in him. Yet Ignatius was not simply a passive recipient of God's grace. Without overstating the matter, he fell totally and irrevocably in love with God, and he would direct everything toward responding to that love. But we might well ask ourselves: Was there some

particular quality of his that stood out, one that melded perfectly with God's grace, which shaped his response to God? Some might point to his great strength of soul, his personal courage, his iron-willed determination. Without denying the importance of his innate qualities, it seemed that Ignatius responded generously to God because he developed the interior freedom that allowed God to teach him and lead him in his service. This interior freedom, forged in humility, lay at the root of what he would call *indifference*. This was an openness to God, a courage that was to be found in God alone, a conscious choice for God in all things that became a seeking for God in all things. Ignatius would begin his *Spiritual Exercises* on the theme of *indifference*, and conclude it with an offering of oneself based on this same interior freedom. It was this humble openness to God that determined his manner of prayer, gave rise to his frequent examinations of conscience, and was ultimately the source of his utter confidence in God, his universal availability, and his generous responsiveness to God's direction and guidance.



IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

We have already observed that a spirituality possesses an internal cohesion, and this is certainly true for Ignatian spirituality. But we might well ask ourselves: Just what is the nature of this internal cohesion? What is the *glue* or, more precisely, the understanding or interior vision that gives Ignatian spirituality its cohesion? Although Ignatius never spoke in such terms, his realization at Loyola that God was actively *at work* in his life and, as his experience at Manresa revealed, that God was similarly *at work* in the lives of all people provided the grounding for what became his spirituality. This insight became the premise underlying his *Spiritual Exercises* and found expression in the fifteenth of its preliminary notes: 'it is the nature of

the Creator to deal directly with the creature, embracing it with love and praise, and disposing it for how it might serve him.’ It is this understanding of God – that God is an ‘active God,’ ever *at work* in people’s lives, inviting, directing, guiding, disposing them for how they might serve him – that animates Ignatian spirituality and gives it its internal cohesion.

...it is the understanding that God is an ‘active God,’ ever at work in people’s lives, that animates Ignatian spirituality and gives it its internal cohesion.

Ignatian spirituality can thus be described as an *active attentiveness* to God joined with a *prompt responsiveness* to God, who is ever active in our lives. Although it includes many forms of prayer, discernment and apostolic service, it is the interior dispositions of attentiveness and responsiveness that are ultimately crucial. The result is that Ignatian spirituality has a remarkable ‘nowness,’ both in its attentiveness to God and in its desire to respond to what God is asking of the person *now*.

Ignatian spirituality can be described as an active attentiveness to God joined with a prompt responsiveness to God, who is ever active in our lives.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Ignatian spirituality began in the religious experience of Ignatius Loyola, but it only took shape and form as he gave it written expression in his *Spiritual Exercises*. It is beyond the scope of this brochure to do justice to the rich complexity of the *Spiritual Exercises*. A few comments, however, are in order.

The *Spiritual Exercises* owes its origin to Ignatius’ reflections on his how God had been *at work* in his own life and his experiences of guiding others in the spiritual life. It is not a treatise on the spiritual life nor, for that matter, is it even meant to be read. It is a set of guidelines, somewhat like a teacher’s notes, intended for a person guiding another in ‘making’ the Exercises. The *Spiritual Exercises* describes a *process* directed toward developing attentiveness to God, openness to God and ultimately responsiveness to God. All this is based on the premises (1) that

God deals directly with the individual person and (2) that the person can discern to what God is inviting him.

The *Spiritual Exercises* is meant to draw a person into a dynamic that progresses from his awareness that he is a sinner yet forgiven to his free and total offering of himself to God. Central to this dynamic and acting almost as a thread running through it is the person of Jesus. Yet Jesus is not simply a model to be imitated; rather as the glorified Christ, he is always God *with us*, laboring *with us* and *for us*, drawing us into the Father's love. At its deepest level, the *Spiritual Exercises* is meant to draw the person into a deep and personal relationship with Jesus.

In one manner or another, all of Ignatian spirituality is expressed in the *Spiritual Exercises*. However, since it has been described as *active attentiveness* and *prompt responsiveness to God*, it seems appropriate to highlight two facets that give clear expression of this: discernment and the examination of consciousness.

DISCERNMENT

Discernment is rooted in the understanding that God is ever *at work* in our lives – inviting, directing, guiding and drawing us into the fullness of life. Its central action is reflection on the ordinary events of our lives. It seeks to discover God's presence in these moments and to follow the direction and guidance he gives us through his grace. It is not the events themselves that are of interest, but rather the affective responses they evoke in us - feelings of joy, sorrow, peace, anxiety and all the indefinable 'somethings' that arise and stir within us. It is precisely here that through faith we can discover God's direction and guidance in our lives.

Discernment presupposes an ability to reflect on the ordinary events of one's life, a habit of personal prayer, self-knowledge, knowledge of one's deepest desires and openness to God's direction and guidance. Discernment is a prayerful 'pondering' or 'mulling over' the choices a person wishes to consider. In his discernment, the person's focus should be on a quiet attentiveness to God and sensing rather than thinking. His goal is to understand the choices *in his heart*: to see them, as it were, as God might see them. In one sense, there is no limit to how long he might wish to continue in this. Discernment is a repetitive process, yet as the person continues, some choices should of their own accord fall by the wayside while others

should gain clarity and focus. It is a process that should move inexorably toward a decision.

St. Ignatius observed that the Spirit of God works to encourage and give joy and inner peace to the person who is trying to respond generously to God's love; the spirit of evil, on the other hand, interjects discouragement, anxiety and fear. In other words, the person honestly seeking God can discover God's direction and guidance by being sensitive to the affective responses his considerations evoke in him. Does one option evoke a sense of peace? Perhaps God is affirming it. Does another leave him unsettled? Then perhaps God is directing him elsewhere. In all this, he must be sensitive to where he experiences peace and joy, inspiration and hope. It needs to be pointed out, however, that his finding himself affirmed or unsettled in his considerations does not necessarily mean that God is affirming or negating anything. Discernment is a convergence of many factors, all of which need to be weighed and evaluated in prayer. A person's mind may offer sage advice, but discernment ultimately happens in the heart.



EXAMINATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The Examination of Consciousness is a simple form of prayer directed toward developing a spiritual sensitivity to the special ways God approaches, invites and calls.

It should be done at the end of each day, though it can be done more frequently, as the person feels drawn to it. The more frequently he does it, however, the more natural

it becomes for him. Thus it becomes a way of consciousness, a way of growing into an ever-closer relationship with God. It can take anywhere between five and fifteen minutes. It really doesn't matter how long one spends; the important thing is that he opens himself to recognizing and responding to God's movements within him.

St. Ignatius suggests five steps to the Examination of Consciousness. It is important, however, that the person feels free to structure the Examination in a way that is most helpful to him. There is no right way to do it; nor is there a need to go through all of the five points each time. A person might, for instance, find himself spending the entire time on only one or two points. The basic rule is: Go wherever God draws you. And this touches upon an important point: the Examination of Consciousness is primarily a time of prayer; it is a 'being with God.'

The five points Ignatius proposes are:

- Recall that you are in the presence of God: You are before God who loves you and welcomes you, who enlightens and guides you. Embrace the God who dwells in you, the God ever *at work* in you.
- Give thanks to God for his many gifts: Give thanks to God for what he has allowed you to do this day and for what you have received this day, the pleasant and the difficult, for the word of encouragement and the generous gesture, for your family and friends, for all those who challenge you to grow.
- Examine how you have lived this day: What has happened to you in your life and relationships? How has God been *at work* in you? What has he asked of you? And how have you responded: with generosity or self-centeredness, honesty or deceit?
- Ask for forgiveness: Ask pardon for your failures to understand or respond to others in their difficulties and pain. Ask pardon for not loving God in every part of your life.
- Offer a prayer of hope-filled re-commitment: *I am aware of my weakness, yet am confident in God's strength. I renew my commitment to follow the path that God offers me to be a source of light for all creation. 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old has passed away. See, everything has become new.'* (2 Cor. 2:17)

SOCIETY OF JESUS: THE SPIRIT EMBODIED

Almost twenty years passed between Ignatius' experiences at Loyola and Manresa and the foundation of the Society of Jesus in 1540. What set the fledgling Society of Jesus apart from pre-existing religious orders was its overarching and unrelenting desire 'to labor *with Christ*' in ministry. Ignatius' mysticism was one of *action*, an *active attentiveness* and *prompt responsiveness* to God's direction and guidance. The Society of Jesus was understood as following this pattern. In fact, Ignatius and his early companions envisioned the Jesuit as being ready to depart 'on mission' at a moment's notice. This demanded of him the ability to adapt to changed circumstances, determine the best course of action and make decisions. The fact that within a few short years schools were opened and soon enjoyed great success seemed to call this earlier ideal into question. The issue, however, was not that a dynamic movement had become a static one. Rather it was a question if the institution could manifest the same responsiveness to changing times and needs. Although the individual Jesuit today may spend many years in the same ministry, the ideal of *active attentiveness* and *prompt responsiveness* to God's direction and guidance remains as true for him today as it was for Ignatius.

Ignatian spirituality has a remarkable 'nowness,' both in its attentiveness to God and in its desire to respond to what God is asking of the person now.



ADDITIONAL READING

Ignatian Spirituality: Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999); Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st Century* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004)

St. Ignatius Loyola: A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of St. Ignatius of Loyola (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995); José Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Pilgrim Saint* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1994)

Spiritual Exercises: William A. Barry, S.J., *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001)

Discernment: Debra Farrington, *Hearing with the Heart: A Gentle Guide to Discerning God's Will in Your Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Thomas Green, S.J., *Weeds Among the Wheat: Discernment: Where Prayer & Action Meet* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1984); Charles J. Jackson, S.J., 'Vocations and Vocation Discernment,' (<http://www.calprov.org/vocations/vocationdiscernment.html>)

Examination of Consciousness: Phyllis Zagano, 'Examen of Consciousness: Finding God in All Things' (<http://www.americancatholic.org/newsletters/cu/ac0303.asp>)

Society of Jesus: William O'Malley, S.J., *The Fifth Week* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1996); John O'Malley, S.J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1993)

Jesuit Spirituality: William A. Barry, S.J., and Robert G. Doherty, S.J., *Contemplatives in Action: The Jesuit Way* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002); Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company that Changed the World* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003)

WHY BECOME OR REMAIN A JESUIT?

Karl Rahner, S.J.

Many will ask how a modern man can still remain or become a Jesuit. The reply to such a question can only be the very personal one of each Jesuit. I would like to give my own reply to that question in all simplicity even though it may sound somewhat pious.

I still see around me, living in many of my companions, a readiness for disinterested service carried out in silence, a readiness for prayer, for abandonment to the incomprehensibility of God, for the calm acceptance of death in whatever form it may come, for total dedication to the following of Christ crucified.

And so for me, in the final analysis, it is no great matter what credit in the history of culture or of the Church goes to a line of men with a spirit like that, nor does it matter to me if a similar spirit is found in other groups, named or nameless.

The fact is that the spirit exists here. I think of brothers I myself have known - of my friend Alfred Delp, who with hands chained signed his declaration of final membership in the Society; of one who in a village in India that is unknown to Indian intellectuals helps poor people to dig their wells; of another who for long hours in the confessional listens to the pain and torment of ordinary people who are far more complex than they appear on the surface. I think of one who in Barcelona is beaten by police along with his students without the satisfaction of actually being a revolutionary and savoring its glory; of one who assists daily in the hospital at the bedside of death until that unique event becomes for him a dull routine; of the one who in prison must proclaim over and over again the message of the Gospel with never a token of gratitude, who is more appreciated for the handout of cigarettes than for the words of the Good News he brings; of the one who with difficulty and without any clear evidence of success plods away at the task of awakening in just a few men and women a small spark of faith, of hope and of charity.

For Further Information:

In the U.S.A.

Jesuit Conference
1616 P Street NW
Suite 300
Washington, D.C.
20036-1420

202-462-0400
usjc@jesuit.org

In Canada

Jesuit Vocation Office
1325 Bay Street
Suite 300
Toronto, ON
M5R 2C4

416-962-4500
vocation@jesuits.ca