

ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

St. Ignatius was born in the Basque area of Spain in 1491. In his early life he pursued a worldly career as a courtier and soldier. At the age of 30 he was struck down by a cannon ball in the battle of Pamplona.

During a year of recuperation he had no books to read except a life of Christ and lives of the saints. He daydreamed about being a heroic soldier and about serving God, and noticed that while both dreams were sweet, the sweetness of the first quickly faded while that of the second endured.

He began to see from this that the second was an indication of God's will and that God speaks to us through our consolations and desolations and other inner movements. As he continued to read and pray over both books, he began to recognize that God was calling him to follow Jesus.

After recovering, he traveled to the monastery of Montserrat near Barcelona, and there dedicated himself to the service of God. His conversion was deepened through ten months of prayer at Manresa, a town about ten miles away.

There he experienced visions and anxieties, joys and scruples, and learned to discern the difference between the workings of God and those of the evil spirit.

In mystical visions beyond words, Ignatius experienced the love of the Trinity communicating itself to us and acting within creation out of love for us. He began to free himself from anything holding him back from God. And he greatly desired to share his experience of God with others.

But, in those days, it was difficult for an unschooled layman to teach about religious matters. He had to go back to school at the age of 30, get a degree, and become a priest. He went to the University of Paris, where he found companions, among them Francis Xavier.

THE JESUITS

When they had finished their studies Ignatius and his companions decided to offer themselves to the Pope for whatever ministry he wished. They discerned that God was calling them to form a new religious order, the Society of Jesus.

Rather than committing themselves to an single work and specific religious practices, they chose to keep themselves available to be sent, on a moment's notice, to any part of the world where the need was the greatest, and to adopt the religious way of life needed for that end.

Ignatius was elected the head of this new order, called the Society of Jesus because of their devotion to the person of the incarnate Lord. They were later called Jesuits, a name meant to mock their frequent use of the name Jesus.

The Jesuits embraced and adopted the name. Ignatius is the foundation on which the Jesuits and this retreat house and our ministry are based.

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Ignatius wanted to share with other people the fruits of his experience of God, and made notes for himself to help him do this.

Those notes grew into a small book of directions called *The Spiritual Exercises*. It was intended to help the person who directed another in a structured thirty-day program of contemplation and prayer rather than for use by the person being directed. Some of the major themes normally addressed in the four weeks or periods of the Exercises are:

Week 1

- God's unconditional, ever faithful love.
- Sin: our failure and the failure of the human family to respond with love to God's love.
- God's ever greater love, mercy and forgiveness.

Week 2

- The person and life of Christ.
- Our call to discipleship, ministry and friendship with Jesus.
- Knowing Christ more intimately, loving him more ardently, following him more faithfully.

Week 3:

- The ultimate expression of God's love.
- The suffering and death of Jesus for us.

Week 4:

- The victory of Jesus over death.
- Jesus' sharing his joy with us.
- Being missioned by Jesus.
- Being empowered by his Spirit.
- The continuing presence of Christ in the world and the life of the retreatant.
- The call to return God's constant love by an offering of one's whole self to God.

SHORTER ADAPTIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

All Jesuits make the full thirty-day Spiritual Exercises twice during the course of their training, but then repeat them in shorter form each year

Over the centuries they have adapted the Exercises into shorter individually directed retreats of six to eight days, and into conference or group retreats of a few days' duration in which the director presents various themes of the Exercises to individuals or to a group of people, who pray on their own about the material presented.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are usually experienced in one of these shorter adaptations, but occasionally people are moved by grace to give themselves to the full Spiritual Exercises.

This could be done either in at a retreat house the form of a silent Thirty-Day Retreat, or at home in the form of The Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life.

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is a unified world view and way of life. Christian Spirituality is believing and acting in accord with God's self revelation in Christ. But there are many ways of doing this, all faithful to the Gospels, but historically, psychologically, and culturally distinct.

Ignatian Spirituality is rooted in the life and experience of St. Ignatius Loyola. Ignatius' book of the Spiritual Exercises, arising from his personal experience, was written to help people. It contains a series of meditations and prayers, considerations, rules and good advice that can be drawn upon as needed. This book is the principal written source of Ignatian spirituality. People who have made the Exercises and have adopted their principles are living Ignatian Spirituality.

CHARACTERISTICS

Some of the characteristics of Ignatian Spirituality are:

- Belief that we are created, forgiven, accepted and unconditionally loved by God, and are called to a life of union with God now and for all eternity.
- Conviction that God does not hold aloof from creation, but is actively working in our world and our lives.
- Affirmation of the world, all the elements of which are created good and which God may be found.
- Reverence for God and gratitude for God's gifts leading to a response of love and service.
- Contemplation, looking for and finding God, in all things, in action as well as in prayer.
- Reverence for and reflection on human experience, since God's presence and call can be discovered there.
- Continual prayer and discernment, attending in particular to interior movements of the heart through which God is manifest.
- Awareness that God deals directly with each person, and that each person must be treated with individual care.

- Reverence for the freedom of each individual to respond to the call of God.
- Clear distinction between God and all other things which are means to the love and service of God and others
- Freedom from disordered attachments to any of these means in themselves so that we may clearly discern, rightly judge, correctly choose, and faithfully and lovingly respond to God.
- Critical consciousness of the distinction between the action of God and movements originating elsewhere that undermine freedom and love.
- Personal love for Jesus, which expresses itself in a commitment to work as his companion and to continue his mission in the world for the good of our fellow men and women.
- Dedication to the Church, the Body of Christ, and to the Holy Father his Vicar.
- Commitment to the welfare of our fellow humans — especially the marginalized, poor and oppressed — by a service of faith of which the promotion of justice is an integral part.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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**The Spiritual Exercises
& Ignatian Spirituality at
MANRESA
Jesuit Retreat House**