

Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality

Ignatian spirituality offers us a way to deepen our desire and commitment to help others, especially those in more urgent need and less hope of help.

Ignatian spirituality is based on the spirituality of Iñigo Lopez de Loyola, later known as Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius was born in the Basque region of northern Spain in 1491. He was a person of many gifts: personal courage, leadership ability, strong and charming personality, and skills of diplomacy.

God led Ignatius through a serious leg wound at the battle of Pamplona, reading the life of Christ and the lives of the Saints, the failure of his own plans for serving God, studies at several universities, and suspicion from the Church, to gather like-minded university students and, in time, found the Jesuits. Ignatius had such devotion to Jesus that the order was called 'Companions of Jesus', though it has come to be known in English as the Society of Jesus.

The Spiritual Exercises

From the time he was wounded at Pamplona, Ignatius carefully noted the movements of God's spirit in his life and his response to them. These thoughts of Ignatius, the layperson seeking God, were to become the Spiritual Exercises. They are the story of his spiritual journey and religious experience. The spirituality of the Spiritual Exercises continues to transform the lives of women and men, Religious and lay, who desire greater freedom to give and receive love more generously.

Under God's guidance and with communal reflection, Ignatius and his companions translated their vision into apostolic strategies, namely: to choose to be with Christ, as servants of his mission, to be with people where they dwell and work and struggle, to bring the Gospel into their lives and labours. As 'friends in the Lord', Jesuits are sent on challenging missions. The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus set down what it means to be a community on mission.

Seeking and finding God in all things

Ignatius learned to reflect upon the events of each day and to become aware of where God had touched him during that day. He discovered that the whole of life was a pilgrimage in which he needed to be attentive and sensitive to the Spirit guiding him. He learned how to share these valuable lessons with women and men who felt a desire to be more generous towards their Lord; a generosity characterized by love which was manifested more in deeds than words. Today, families, workplaces and communities who embrace Ignatian spirituality and way of proceeding continue to be shaped by the dynamic of prayerful reflection on experience leading to more generous and effective service.

For Ignatius, the desire to help people found two principal outlets: helping the needy and engaging in spiritual conversation. Ignatius saw an intimate connection between spiritual conversation and the Spiritual Exercises. Spiritual conversation relies on an attentive heart shaped by prayer, listening characterized by openness to the other, and thoughtful consideration of how the fruit of this conversation might move us, with others, to action for the greater good of self, others, creation, and God.



St Ignatius of Loyola





A faith that does justice

Ignatius' desire to help people where they are remains pivotal in the nurturing of a faith imbued with charity that acts justly. At the international meeting of the Jesuits in 1995 (General Congregation 34) it was recognized that faith constantly invites the promotion of justice, entry into cultures and openness to other religious experiences.

Justice relies on communicating faith, transformation of cultures and collaboration with other traditions. Inculturation requires communicating faith with others, dialogue with other traditions and commitment to justice. There can be no dialogue without sharing faith with others, evaluating cultures and deepening our concern for justice.

Ignatius knew that purposeful, prayerful reflection on experience develops an awareness and desire to respond to God's constant invitation to act. We act with Christ's generosity in whatever we do, no matter the position we hold or our background and experience. With Ignatius, we develop a realistic and grateful understanding of ourselves and the way God is calling us to act with intelligent compassion and forgiveness. God's enduring love allows us to welcome all creation imaginatively and responsibly.