

Fr. Charles Puthota's Blog

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From the Pastor's Desktop



An Incomplete Summary of the Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

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July 31 is the Feast Day of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). For over 500 years his insights have influenced the world. St. Ignatius founded the Jesuit Order called the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits distinguished themselves in the Church and the World not only through service of education, but also through a solid spirituality, missionary enterprise around the world, cutting edge theological/ philosophical investigations, and an unabashed openness to the world and culture.

Uniqueness: When the Jesuit Order was founded and called the Society of Jesus, some other religious orders had concerns about the name. But St. Ignatius prayed copiously for the grace of calling it the Society of Jesus and nothing else. Also, St. Ignatius wanted the Order to be apostolic rather than monastic. He wanted the Jesuits to go all over the world with a great flexibility and dynamism to work for God and people. Another interesting characteristic of the Jesuits is that St. Ignatius did not want a particular religious garb for his men. They would adapt to the local, national customs and wear the priests' garb of the particular area where they minister. Last but not least, as far as I know, the Jesuits are the only Order that does not require their men to do the Divine Office in common. It is left to the individuals to pray it at their convenient time. They had to be engaged in their apostolate with all their commitment and dedication and accommodate the praying of the Divine Office individually at their own time.

Let me list some of the insights of St. Ignatius:

Conversion: This is at the heart of the spirit of St. Ignatius. He himself was converted. A wayward worldly soldier he was before, but after he was injured in war in Pamplona, he began to ask the question: "If the saints could do so much for God, why can't I?" While convalescing in the family castle of Loyola in the Basque countryside (where I had the privilege of celebrating Mass in the very room where St. Ignatius spent his convalescence months), there was a deep conversion that God brought about in his life. His attention now turned to Christ. He transferred his chivalry and passion in service of Christ our Lord. Later in the cave of Manresa, he spent months praying, undergoing the process of conversion, and jotting down his insights which would later become the spiritual classic called the ***Spiritual Exercises***. In the retreats based on the Ignatian spirituality, especially in the beginning, conversion would be the focus of attention. The retreatant is asked to meditate on God's amazing love, one's sinfulness, and conversion, and rededication to God's love and service.

The First Principle and Foundation: In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius says that we must be clear about the purpose of our life, not just in the immediate sense, but in the long range. We are created to love, serve, and reverence God and by means of that to attain our final fulfillment and destiny, which is union with God in eternity. Everything in the world is given to us as a means --- as a help --- for us to reach our ultimate destiny. Therefore, we are to choose only those that will help us toward achieving the purpose of our lives and avoid those that do not help us toward our ultimate goal.

Discernment of Spirits: St. Ignatius observed early on that there were positive and negative movements and forces acting on his soul. Some thoughts lead us to peace and consolation; some others lead us to emptiness, turmoil and desolation. In order for us to make choices in life, if we pay close attention to the movement of the spirits in our souls, we will be able to discern what God wants us to do. God's Spirit will guide us by providing the climate in our soul which would be an indication for us to choose a particular option, way of life, etc. In other words, by becoming aware of the spirits acting on our soul like the wind on the water, we will become experts in listening to God's voice at a deeper level and respond to it with openness and courage.

For the Greater Glory of God: This is AMDG! Which is short for Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam --- For the Greater Glory of God. Please note that it is not the great glory, nor the greatest glory. It is the "greater" glory. The adjective "greater" indicates that it's a constant striving for the greater glory. We keep growing always in this area. We cannot possibly give the greatest glory, which is reserved for the time when we will join the angels and saints. But here on earth, we are running the race, always stretching out spirits and hearts for God and people, never resting on our laurels.

Finding God in all things and All things in God: There is a dynamic dialog, the constant relationship between the divine and the human. The world is charged with the grandeur of God, as the Jesuit poet Gerald Manley Hopkins says. We are called to grow in the divine milieu, the sense of God's presence in everyone and everything. Our daily lives are suffused with the sense of transcendence. God works, directs, guides, graces, and empowers throughout our lives. To the extent that we can see that "the earth is crammed with heaven," we can find ourselves standing on the holy ground. We can then take all our endeavors and quests and struggles to the heart of God.

The Ignatian Indifference: This means that when we have several options to choose from, we need to be indifferent, in the sense that we do not cling to any one option, until the process of discernment is undertaken. It's the healthy sense of being open to that particular option which God is leading us to make. This spirit of non-clinging, this indifference in the Ignatian sense, is necessary for us to be able to make any good choice.

Magis: The word "Magis" in the Ignatian vision expresses the desire to keep doing always "more" for God. We can never be content with what we are and what we do. There is always room for improvement; there is greater glory to be given in and through our endeavors; there is always more that we can do as human beings and Christians. There is the healthy sense of restlessness within us, which St. Augustine speaks of, which will keep stirring within us the never-ending desire to live and work for the greater glory of God.

Contemplation in Action: St. Ignatius felt that we need to bring prayer into life and our life into prayer. We are called to be contemplatives in action. Our actions would be a continuation of our union with God experienced in contemplation and meditation. Then we can take life into prayer, asking God to sanctify our deeds. While we are in contemplation, we shall in an authentic way bring ourselves without any falsehood, and stand before God. There is a perpetual flow and play between our prayer and life, faith and service; they are not disconnected areas, but the two sides of the same coin.

St. Ignatius' Prayer for Generosity: Dearest 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 any reward, save that of knowing that I do your most holy will. Amen.

St. Ignatius' Suscipe (Receive) Prayer: "Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will - all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours, do with it as you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me."

Your Friend and Pastor,
Father Charles Puthota