

ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

SURRENDER OF THE SOUL TO CHRIST

A Pastoral Reflection for the Ignatian Year
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INTRODUCTION

St. Isaiah the Solitary, the fourth century Egyptian hermit, writes in his work *On Guarding the Intellect* that “without anger a man cannot attain purity: he has to feel angry with all that is sown in him by the enemy.” The saints of a more choleric temperament struggle with their wrath and competitiveness, but discover that these traits were given by God as means of achieving great holiness. Saul’s zeal killed Stephen when misdirected, but carried Paul over sea and desert armed only with prayer and fasting. Jerome’s tongue could flare up at his brethren, but the tongues he learned gave the Church her authoritative translation of the Scriptures. Louis de Montfort fought men with his fists before beating down demons with the Rosary. In every age, the great triumph of such saints has been the rediscovery that imitation of the gentle Christ includes cleansing the Temple and cursing the fig tree.

It was into this drama of divine providence that Ignatius of Loyola was thrust at his birth in 1491 in the Basque country of northeastern Spain. It was an era of Renaissance humanism, *devotio moderna*, and Reconquista. The details of his life with which we are most intimately familiar are taken from a

hurriedly-composed biography jotted down by a younger Jesuit; Ignatius was far too busy with the work of his Society of Jesus to spend any time writing or even thinking much about himself. Both the structure and the content of the work reveals an aggressive and determined personality. Yet to focus only on Ignatius’s natural vices would deprive us of the full picture of a man, and would permit us to venerate not a saint but a stereotype. Ignatius knew the full strength of the individual human will, and so founded his congregation on the principle of obedience. He preached the necessity of solitude, and so gathered together a community of brothers. He spoke of subduing the passions, and so he wept while offering Mass. The cruciform life of holy paradox, present in all the saints, is best found in not their writings but their persons. Just as the Catechism is meaningless apart from the life of Christ, so too is Ignatian spirituality incomprehensible without St. Ignatius. Perhaps the true crystallization of Ignatius’s spirit can be summed up in the words of his own *Suscipe*:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will.

All I have and call my own, You have given all to me; to You, Lord, I return it.

Everything is Yours; do with it what You will.

Give me only Your love and Your grace, and that is enough for me.

Liberty, memory, understanding, and will: the surrender of all these things to the Triune God was the center and circumference of Ignatius’s vision of the spiritual life. Understanding their import is impossible apart from both Ignatius’s life and spirituality, and so it is to these that we now turn.

“And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land.”
Ezekiel 22:30



2 Ignatius Loyola of Spain by anonymous artist.

LIBERTY: CONVERSION AND SCRIPTURAL MEDITATION

Ignazio Loiolakoa had three great loves: wine, women, and himself. Inspired by the violences of El Cid, Roland, and King Arthur, without subjecting himself to their virtues, he repeatedly escaped the legal consequences of his duels and other shenanigans thanks to his noble birth. He spent his teens and twenties impressing women with his charm, men with his sword, and himself in the mirror. At the Battle of Pamplona in 1521, his right leg was shattered by a French cannonball. Unsatisfied with the appearance of the reset leg, he insisted that the leg be re-broken



St Ignatius Loyola wearing leg splints, by De Favray.



Painting in the Palace of Versailles of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, depicted in armor with a Christogram on his breastplate. Anonymous artist of the French School.

and re-set until it would again look good in his fashionable tights. Having done irreparable damage to both his leg and ego, he began recovering in a family castle in Loyola. Unfortunately for the soldier, but fortunately for his soul, the only books available to him while laid up in bed were lives of Christ and the saints.

Among them was a *Life of Christ*, written by the 14th century Carthusian monk Ludolph of Saxony, which encouraged its readers to visualize the Scriptural scenes in their imaginations. Ignatius, more out of boredom than devotion, took to imagining himself as an onlooker in the life of Christ and the lives of the saints, or even as participating in them as a character. Having exhausted his capacity for meditation, he would slip back into memories and daydreams of wine and women. Alternating between his daydreams of the Savior and sins, he began to notice a pattern. While calling his immoral exploits to mind, Ignatius would feel excited and rushes of pleasure, but afterwards would feel despondent and lonely. On the other hand, while imagining the life of Christ or the saints, Ignatius would feel some degree of emotion as the scene demanded (sorrow at the Cross, joy at the Resurrection, etc.). However, after the period of mental reflection on sanctity, Ignatius felt something in his sickbed that he had never experienced at royal palace or rural pub: peace. He began to consider, 'what would it be like if I were

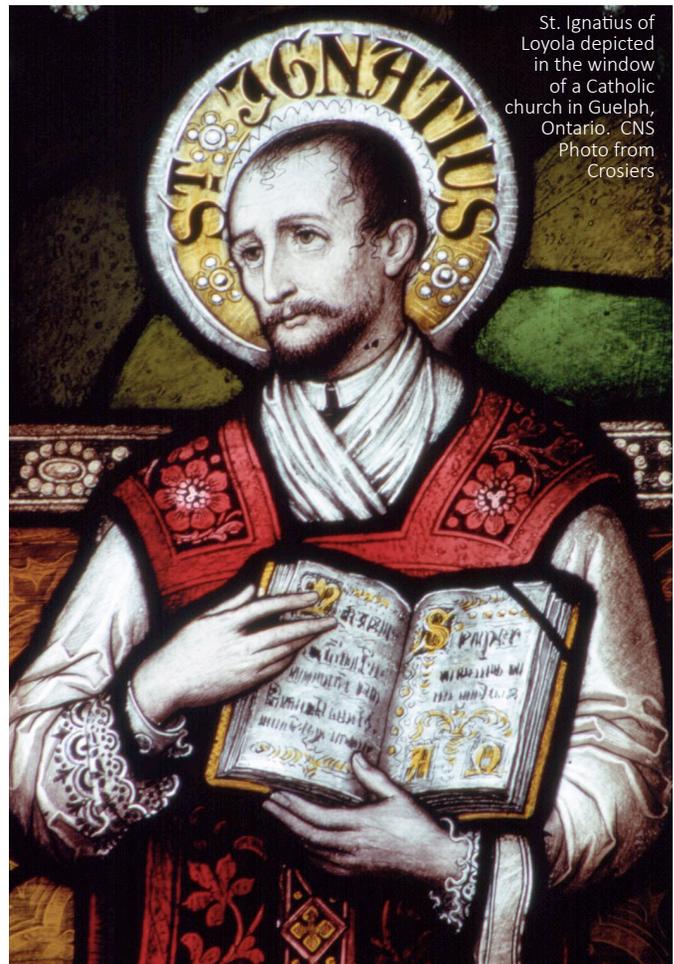
to live like Christ and His saints?’ As Ignatius had run into the breach of the wall at Pamplona, Christ ran into the breach of Ignatius’s broken heart and taught him that freedom is not libertinism, but the clear conscience of a disciple at prayer: “My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it” (John 14:27).

Consequently, Ignatius abandoned his career and courtly pursuits. For the first time in his life, he was taking his faith seriously. He had recognized the profundity of the claim made to Truth by the Gospel, and it came about by meditation on the Scriptures. He outlines the process in a fivefold movement. We may use the acronym PRICE to describe the five ‘steps’ of Ignatian contemplation, for Prepare, Recollect, Imagine, Converse, and End. Let’s take a look at each of these five steps.

1. Prepare: I want to begin by taking a place and time which is set apart for my prayer, and by selecting a passage. For a beginner, it is helpful to begin with a Gospel passage with a lot of ‘action.’ St. Ignatius counsels that we begin, not by reading the text immediately, but by ‘considering how God our Lord looks upon me.’ In this instance, I recall the love and glory of the Trinity, and become aware of myself as being seen and loved by the Three Persons. It is helpful to use gesture in this preparation. Ignatius’s own practice was to say an Our Father slowly, dwelling on each phrase, with his eyes directed towards the heavens. He would then briefly kneel or bow, before beginning. However this is done, it is an important means of setting the stage for what is to come in the contemplation.

2. Recollect: Having entered into a spirit of prayer, the next step is to deliberately offer some action or intention to God. Having already considered how God sees me, I now offer myself back to God. It will include asking for the graces of this time of prayer, and will likely include any particular graces I wish to receive, or sins I wish to defeat.

3. Imagine: Compose the situation of the Biblical scene: Describe your surroundings: temperature, weather, scent, night/day, indoor/outdoor, etc. Who is there? Are you involved, or observing?



St. Ignatius of Loyola depicted in the window of a Catholic church in Guelph, Ontario. CNS Photo from Crosiers

What conversation happens among the characters? What does their emotional state seem to be (happy, playful, angry, etc.)? Do any of the characters (including you!) touch, or speak, or feel? The gospels are sparse texts, and there is plenty of room for your prayer to do the heavy lifting with the details that are not provided. Also, you may wish to only read the text once and then pray. You may wish to read one line at a time. You may wish to keep re-reading the text intermittently. The more you do this, the more natural it will become. Last, and not least, don’t be afraid of tangents! For example, if you are contemplating on the Nativity, and decide to follow the shepherds home, that’s all right: God is in charge here.

4. Converse: Ask for a grace which is the result of the prayer. It may be for the grace mentioned at the beginning, or it may be something else entirely. Also, offer gratitude for the prayer and for anything else. Use the language you would use in speaking to a close friend.

5. End: Conclude with an act of praise; Ignatius recommends another deliberate Our Father. There is no better way to end our prayer than with that given by Jesus Himself.

MEMORY: RETREAT AND EXAMEN

Having decided to leave the world and live for the Lord, in 1522 Ignatius left Loyola for the Benedictine monastery in Montserrat. It was at Montserrat that he made a general confession of all the sins of his life, before heading to the nearby town of Manresa to undergo a painful purification of his soul. While full battlefields had invigorated Ignatius, he was now terrified by the prospect of interior aridity. Beset with memories of past sins, scruples about his current life, doubts of God's love, and other such demonic temptations, he underwent a dark night of the soul. Having no formal education in asceticism, he doubtlessly thought something was wrong; in fact, this is a normal stage in spiritual growth, in which the soul is purified from spiritual attachments and grows in the love of God for God's sake alone. Nevertheless, his memories of the lives of Christ and the saints, as well as of his own experiences, kept him on the way of perfection.

After eleven months of spiritual darkness, he awoke as though from a nightmare to discover the uncreated light within and around him always. His biography relates one such mystical experience: *Near the road is a stream, on the bank of which he sat, and gazed at the deep waters flowing by. While seated there, the eyes of his soul were opened. He did not have any special vision, but his mind was enlightened on many subjects, spiritual and intellectual. So clear was this knowledge that from that day everything appeared to him in a new light.*¹

Having committed to the path of mystical union with the Trinity, Ignatius naturally began speaking to others about his experiences, and teaching them how to enter into prayer. The local inquisition conducted an investigation into his teachings, and while they found nothing wrong, they suggested that he study philosophy and theology as a means of refining his language and gaining some credibility.

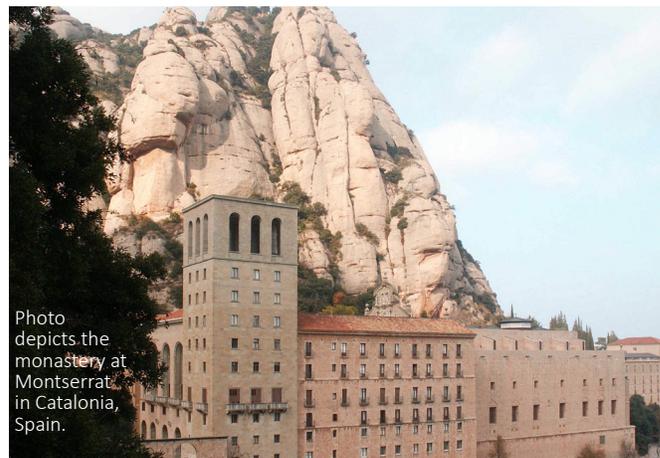
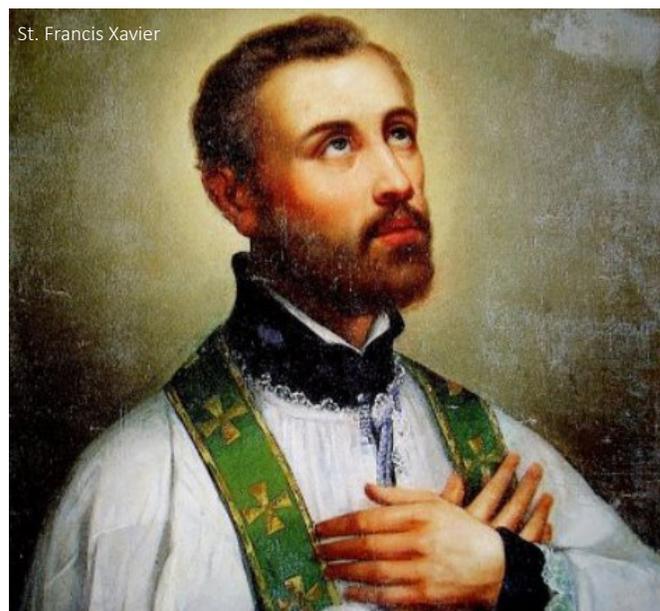


Photo depicts the monastery at Montserrat in Catalonia, Spain.

Ever undaunted, Ignatius traveled to Paris, where he began his studies humbly in the Latin classes offered to adolescents.

To afford living in Paris, Ignatius needed the financial assistance of a roommate to split the rent on his flat. Fortunately for Ignatius, he found a spritely fellow Spaniard by the name of Francis Xavier. Ignatius taught Francis all that he knew about prayer, drawing on his experience of conversion, confession, desolation, and joy. In other words, Ignatius could find God at work in the events of his own life. It was this profound self-knowledge which led to his formulation of the daily Examen prayer, a daily examination of conscience which teaches its students to see Christ in all things. Since we use the Examen to 'get a grip' on our memory, we will be using the acronym AGRIP: Abba, Gratitude, Recollection, Imperfections, Petition.



St. Francis Xavier

¹ The Autobiography of St. Ignatius, ed. J.F.X. O'Connor, S.J. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1900. Accessed at < <https://holybooks-lichtenbergpress.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Autobiography-of-StIgnatius.pdf> >, 3/4/22. Page 17

1. Abba: I turn to the Father of lights, the fount of mercy, the source of all consolation, and the majestic beauty Himself. I recall that I am in His Holy Presence, that His Kingdom is within me. I take a few minutes to calm myself and focus myself upon His presence in my soul.

2. Gratitude: I thank God for all He has given to me: my body, my understanding, my free will, my life, my family and friends, and every good thing from my life that He has been delighted to give me. Once again, there is no need to rush through this; I have entered in some sense into eternity by my communion with the Trinity.

3. Recollection: I pick a time to look back upon (usually this is the whole day if done in the evening), and examine how I lived. This is where my memory is most at work: I am not only examining the events of the day, but my lived experience including my thought processes and my emotions. I am looking for God's graces in my day, and how I responded to them and used them.



Pope Paul III by Titian.



Stained glass window in St. Ignatius Loyola church, Hicksville, NY depicting St. Ignatius of Loyola.

4. Imperfections: Doubtlessly I will find those moments in which I have failed to love God, myself, and others as I ought to. At this point, I will beg pardon for those failures, but I will also pay attention to what happened: what was the occasion of sin? How could I have handled it differently? How can I avoid this going forwards?

5. Petition: I conclude with a prayer of hope. It is the Blessed Trinity who makes all things new, including my own imperfect soul. I commit all that I am and have to His wisdom, knowing that ultimately it is God who effects all the good actions of which I am capable.

UNDERSTANDING: STARTING THE SOCIETY OF JESUS AND DISCERNMENT

Ignatius's personality was too powerful to limit his influence to just Francis Xavier. In a short amount of time, he had gathered a small community of disciples around himself of young men whose lives were profoundly touched by Ignatius's teachings and wished to teach others the same. Recognizing what was at work, Ignatius set about founding a religious order. While past orders had been named for their founders (the Benedictines), their patron saints (the Augustinians), or their charisms (the Order of Preachers), Ignatius decided that his order would simply be called the Companions of Jesus. This was generally received poorly at inception; besides the pure audacity of such unprecedented nomenclature, describing your order as 'the Friends of Jesus' could be interpreted as insinuating that other orders

did not cultivate such friendship. Nevertheless, in 1540 the constitutions of the Society of Jesus were approved by Pope Paul III and the order began to flourish immediately.

Distinctive of Ignatius's vision was his militaristic understanding of obedience. The spirituality of obedience in dioceses and religious orders was historically rather dialogical and incorporated the talents and dispositions of the subject, as well as the desires of the local authority. From Ignatius no such quarter was given: the Society's mission was the glory of God and salvation of souls, and this took immediate precedent over one individual's ideas. Every Jesuit was expected to be able to enter any mission, be it a parish, a school, or anywhere else, at a simple word from his superior. If a Jesuit were assigned to a particular place, then it was not a matter of debate whether or not it was a good assignment: God had placed him there, and God would provide, end of story. If soldiers could be

commanded to hold a station even to death, then so too could priests.

Given the spiritual and psychological demands of such radical availability, it makes sense that Jesuit formation from the beginning was such a long process, averaging over a decade before ordination. Central to this was his notion of discernment, a process important not only for those contemplating religious life, but for every Christian to find God's will for them in the future. Before elucidating his process for discernment, Ignatius makes two observations. First, our aim in all things is the glory of God. We are created in His image and likeness, and so when we speak about the purpose of life as 'getting to heaven,' even that salvation is a sort-of side effect of glorifying God and adoring Him and worshipping Him. I am not the main character of my story. I am a supporting character in Christ's cosmic drama. Second, God has created a natural order out of love; He has given us passions and an intellect and a will, and we can use these in many situations. I don't need to discern if 2 and 2 is 4; I can use my intellect for that. I don't need to discern if I would rather have the burger or the pot pie for dinner; if I'm in the mood for a burger, then I can follow my passions on that one. Normal decisions demand the proportionate response of using my God-given abilities and dispositions.

Next, St. Ignatius is keen to point out three underlying principles for discernment. First, God will never lead us to discern between a good option and a bad option. We don't discern temptations, we fight them. Second, my discernment must be in accord with my state of life. If I am married or ordained, I must remain true to those vows. Beyond vocational realities, I would say that this means being genuinely honest about my strengths and weaknesses. God loves who I am, not who I wish to be. Third, I should be in a perpetual state of grace, or striving for it, to do this. For some of us, this may mean going to confession very regularly. As Christ in the world, as members of His Body and Bride, Confession is a beautiful way of keeping up our relationship with Him. If you want to know what God is asking of you, get to Confession regularly - it will help keep your intellect and passions unclouded.

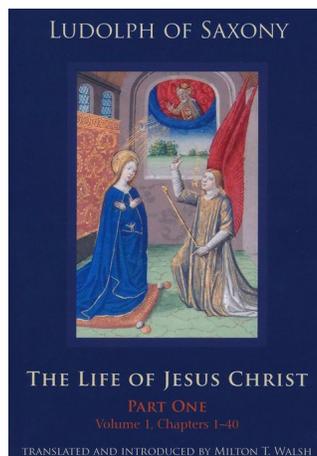


Photo of painting of St. Ignatius Loyola by Francisco de Zurbarán (1598 – 1664)

Having laid out his presuppositions and principles, Ignatius gives some rather thorough rules for what he calls ‘the discernment of spirits.’ What spirits are we talking about? There are the good spirits: the Holy Spirit being primary, but also the Blessed Virgin, my patron saints, my guardian angel, and the saints and angels of heaven. There are also the bad spirits: Satan and his angels. Lastly, there is my own spirit, caught in the spiritual warfare of Christ and the devil. What we want to do is to take some time and move forward with reasonable certainty. He lays out the process as follows:

1. Identify the Decision: First, we want to actually identify our options. This is why the two prerequisites are God’s Will and self-knowledge. Ignore the conclusions of others: this is your discernment, not theirs.

2. Prayer for Indifference: The second step is to pray and work for indifference to the ultimate decision. Whichever option God reveals to you is going to be the best one for you; even if you have a preference at the moment, the desire is to discover where God is calling you.



3. Weighing Options:

Consider all possible positive and negative consequences of making each choice. You may wish to write them down and keep a list as they arise. Do not omit negative things about your preference, or positive things about the others (if you have a preference).

4. Imagination: Do the following for each option. Do it multiple times for each option.

i. Yourself: In your prayer, imagine yourself as having selected that option. Imagine your life after the decision, and whether you regret the decision or applaud it.

ii. Advising Another: Imagine yourself giving advice to someone in the same shoes in which you find yourself. Get some distance from yourself by putting another in your shoes.

iii. End of Life: Imagine yourself looking back on your life from your deathbed. Are you happy with this decision? Are you glad you made it, or do you regret it?

iv. Others: Speak with others who will be affected by this choice. What thoughts do they have for your sake (not their own desires).

5. Choose: The sole criterion for making the decision is going to be peace. The devil, and my own mind, can confuse any number of things. I can confuse pleasure or amusement for happiness; I can confuse unwillingness for sorrow; I can confuse lust for desire. Ultimately, though, the one thing which I can’t confuse and the devil can’t imitate is the peace of meditating with a particular decision. That is where God’s Will lies. Make that choice.

6. Pray for Confirmation: At this point you have made your decision, and you are going to act as if you are absolutely certain that this is God’s Will. At this point, ask God for confirmation in your prayers. He will either give a sign to indicate one way or the other, or He will abstain so as to not discourage from that decision.

At some point, you will have to actually choose. God is not going to violate your free will. He will indicate and advise, but He will never remove your ability to choose. You will tend in a particular direction and towards a particular decision, but the decision is yours. Furthermore, this needs to be done over a period of time. The bigger the decision, the more time needs to be invested so as avoid the influence of quotidian pleasures and pains. You can be confident, regardless, that whatever decision you do make, God will not abandon or forsake you.

It was this confidence in the presence of God which motivated Ignatius’s confidence in his sixteen years as the first Superior General of the Jesuit order. The Society immediately began to spread throughout Europe and around the world. With the formal promulgation of the Society’s constitutions in 1553, Ignatius’s tireless work was drawing to an end. On the 31st of July, 1556, Ignatius entered into eternal life, finally resting from his labors in the arms of the loving Father.

Will: the Jesuit Vision and Influence

Purifying our memory of the past in the Examen, our liberty in the present with Contemplation, and our understanding of our future in Discernment, what are we to make of the will? In other words, how is this spirituality lived out concretely? We look to examples from history to see how this can be manifested in various ways. Saint Francis Xavier (1506-1552) and Servant of God Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), for example, carried the Gospel to the Indian subcontinent, Japan, and China, learning new languages and winning victory over long-established cultures. The academic St. Robert Bellarmine (1542 – 1621) composed his momentous Disputations to defend the Church's teachings and history against the rising tide of Protestantism. St. John Francis Regis (1597 – 1640) ministered in schools and hospitals, and of particular note established safe houses for women in dire situations. Blessed Miguel Pro (1891-1927) ministered to the persecuted Catholics of Mexico during the Cristero War, eventually embracing martyrdom at the hands of the unjust state. Missionaries, academics, pastors, and martyrs: what is it that connects all of these seemingly disjointed modes of life?

St. Ignatius Loyola on the colonnade of St. Peter's Square



The clear answer is found in the subjection of each Jesuit's respective will to Ignatius's desire for the Society. The Jesuit commitment to 'find God in all things' is not an abstraction for the Ignatian disciple. Rather, it is the recognition that God is always with me wherever I have been placed by providence. If Xavier and Ricci were sent to the Orient, then they knew that God would be there waiting for them. If Bellarmine was to write long treatises in his office, then he knew that Christ the Truth was already in his office. If Regis was assigned to a school to teach grammar, then the Divine Teacher was among the students and faculty. And if Miguel Pro were sent to Mexico to suffer and die, then the Crucified Christ would be with him the entire time. Ignatius had found God waiting for him in a sick-bed, and since then his spiritual children have been finding the Lord in the most apparently mundane of places. Christ is not an abstract future, but a present person.

CONCLUSION

His liberty, the memory, the understanding, and the will: all these were given to Ignatius by Christ, and to Christ he returned them willingly. What, then, is the takeaway for the Catholic in the pew? I would propose two.

1. Prayer: Ignatian contemplation of the Scriptures and his Daily Examen are simple means of advancing in prayer. All of us have Bibles lying around the house, and many of us can give ten minutes in the evening to a reflection on the day. This elevation of our liberty and memory to the Divine Presence is an achievable way of spending time with the Lord. Perhaps an easy way to start would be, just once a week, to contemplate the Gospel reading for the upcoming Sunday as a means of enhancing my participation at Mass.

2. Learning: Very often, Catholics are overwhelmed at the amount of options for learning about the Faith: there are YouTube videos, series on Formed, parish classes, and thousands of books. Perhaps for the Ignatian year, we may wish to focus on St. Ignatius and his Society. The *Classics of Western Spirituality series* has a volume dedicated to Ignatius's biography, letters, and Spiritual Exercises.

Fr. James Broderick's *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: the Pilgrim Years* offers a deeper introduction to the saint's life. Fr. William O'Malley's *The Fifth Week* is an excellent introduction to Jesuit identity and spirituality. Fr. Mark Thibodeaux's *Armchair Mystic* is quickly becoming a classic of Ignatian spirituality. Fr. Timothy Gallagher's *The Examen Prayer* is a wonderful elucidation of self-knowledge in the Ignatian spirit. In addition to these, there are the very accessible writings of St. Robert Bellarmine such as *The Mind's Ascent to God* and *The Art of Dying Well*. Besides these spiritual works, there are the biographies of Jesuit saints, including Fr. Gerard Muller's *Father Miguel Pro: A Modern Mexican Martyr* and Louis de Wohl's *Set All Afire: A Novel of Saint Francis Xavier*. Jonathan Wright's *God's Soldiers* offers a broad historical overview of the Jesuits. In short, since Pope Francis has called us to spend the year reflecting on Ignatius and his legacy, the best we can do is to follow that heed and engage with the Society's incredible heritage.

As we continue our journey through the Year of St. Ignatius, we have been given a great opportunity to make Ignatius's spirituality our own, and his example our shining light along the way of perfection. By God's grace and Ignatius's intercession, may we be able to say with him and all the Church:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will.

All I have and call my own, You have given all to me; to You, Lord, I return it.

Everything is Yours; do with it what You will.

Give me only Your love and Your grace, and that is enough for me.



Father John Wachowicz

Father John Wachowicz first encountered the Society of Jesus as a student at Regis High School, where he was formed in Ignatian spirituality. He continued his Jesuit education at Fordham University, where he majored in philosophy. After discerning for a time with the Society, Father Wachowicz entered St. Joseph's Seminary for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, completing his studies with a thesis in Biblical symbolism. He was ordained a priest by Bishop Barres in 2017, and is currently associate pastor of St. Patrick's in Huntington. He hosts "The Main Street Catholic" podcast, and can be found on Instagram @st.patrickhuntington.

IMAGE CREDITS

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Top: St. Ignatius Loyola, wearing splints following a leg wound at the battle of Pamplona, has a vision of St. Peter. In the Archbishop's Curia, Floriana, Malta – by De Favray. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

Bottom: Painting in the Palace of Versailles of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, depicted in armor with a Christogram on his breastplate. Anonymous artist of the French School. This work is in the public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

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St. Ignatius of Loyola depicted in the window of a Catholic church in Guelph, Ontario. CNS Photo from Crosiers

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Top: Monastery at Montserrat in Catalonia, Spain. Source: Wikimedia Commons. File is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic license.

Bottom: St. Francis Xavier. Source: Wikimedia Commons. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

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Top: Portrait of Pope Paul III by Titian (1490-1576). This work is in the public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Bottom: Stained glass window in St. Ignatius Loyola church, Hicksville, NY depicting St. Ignatius of Loyola. Photo by Fr. Shibi Pappan, pastor.

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Book Cover: The Life of Jesus Christ by Ludolph of Saxony. Source: The Life of Jesus Christ, Volume 1: Translated By: Milton T. Walsh By: Ludolph of Saxony: 9780879072674- Christianbook.com

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St. Ignatius Loyola on the colonnade of St. Peter's Square. This file is made available under the Creative Commons CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication: <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en>. This photo is in the public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



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