

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

Ignatius of Loyola

Until the age of twenty-six he was a man given over to the vanities of the world.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

For me, chief among the joys of leaving the corporate world and entering the Jesuit novitiate in Boston was the slowing down of my life. I had spent six years working days, nights, and weekends, so my introduction to the daily schedule, or *ordo*, of the novitiate was a welcome change.

That's not to say that the life of a Jesuit novice was not full and active in its own way. First-year novices were expected to spend fifteen hours a week at our "ministries" outside the novitiate—I worked in a local Catholic hospital that cared for the seriously ill. Novices were also expected to cook once a week for the community (which consisted of fifteen Jesuits), to attend Mass every day (including Sundays, of course), to pray at least an hour a day (not including community prayer, at 7:00 a.m.), to complete our "house jobs" (mine was cleaning

the kitchen), to participate in weekly spiritual direction (that is, discussing your prayer with one of the novitiate staff), and to attend Sunday evening “faith sharing” meetings (where you were to describe your spiritual life to the other novices). Finally, we were expected to join in the weekly *manualia*, a sort of Saturday morning community housecleaning. I always seemed to get stuck with toilet duty.

But while there was a lot to do, it was a more reasonable life than the one I had led at General Electric. More humane. For this I was instantly grateful to God.

Another requirement for novices was the daily “conference,” an hour-long class presided over by the novice director and his assistant. At 8:00 a.m. every day we gathered around a huge oak trestle table in the library for an introduction to the history and spirituality of the Society of Jesus. An important part of our first year of training was learning about the founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius of Loyola; about the early Jesuits; and about both Jesuit and Ignatian spirituality. (“Ignatian spirituality” refers to the saint’s overall spiritual outlook, whereas “Jesuit spirituality” also includes the spirituality of the Jesuit Order itself, based on its constitutions, its governance, and what is called its “way of proceeding.”)

Given these educational goals, I was not surprised when the novice director asked us to read *The First Jesuit*, a biography of St. Ignatius written by the historian Mary Purcell, as well as *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola*.

What did surprise me was that after finishing those two books (which seemed, at least to my novice mind, rather comprehensive), we were asked to read another biography: *St. Ignatius Loyola: The Pilgrim Years*, by James Brodrick, SJ.

Then another: *Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Jesuits*, by Cándido de Dalmases, SJ.

Finally—apparently in case we weren't paying attention to the first four books—we were assigned *Friends in the Lord*, by Javier Osuna, SJ, focusing on St. Ignatius and the original Jesuits.

We were also strongly encouraged (should we have any free time) to plow through *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus*, by André Ravier, SJ and *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, by Joseph de Guibert, SJ. Nor were novices to neglect *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, selected and translated by William J. Young, SJ.

Fortunately, that last volume, while weighing in at a hefty 450 pages, nonetheless represented only a small fraction of the saint's 6,813 letters. The book's dust jacket proudly calls Ignatius "one of the most assiduous letter writers of his own or any other age." In number, his letters are double the extant letters of Erasmus, Luther, and "almost" (said the dust jacket with a faint air of disappointment) John Calvin.

In any event, you will not be surprised to learn that by the end of the first year of the novitiate, I could recite the story of St. Ignatius by heart.



Íñigo of Loyola was born in 1491 in the Basque Country of northern Spain. As a boy, he served as a page in the court of a local nobleman, and later distinguished himself as a valiant soldier. He describes himself in his short autobiography as "a man given over to the vanities of the world," particularly concerning his physical appearance. He seems also to have been a ladies' man. At least that's how he fancied himself. He was definitely a rake. It was rumored that he fathered an illegitimate child. (There is some evidence to support this,

but it is inconclusive.) And he may be the only canonized saint with a notarized police record, for nighttime brawling with intent to inflict serious harm.

During Iñigo's soldiering career, his leg was struck by a cannonball in a battle at Pamplona in 1521. This pivotal incident, which might have been merely tragic to another person, marked the beginning of a new life for Iñigo. It is also one of the scenes most often depicted in murals and mosaics of the saint's life. At St. Ignatius Loyola Church in New York City, high over the main altar is a brightly colored mosaic of the battle at Pamplona. Atop the parapets of a medieval castle, the injured Iñigo, still clad in a suit of gray armor over a sky blue doublet, reclines in the arms of his fellow soldiers. As the battle rages about him and soldiers scale the castle walls on rickety wooden ladders, Iñigo gazes placidly heavenward, as if already anticipating something new from God.

After the battle, he was brought to his elder brother's home, the family's ancestral castle of Loyola, to recuperate. The bone in his leg was set poorly, and Iñigo, "given over to the vanities of the world," wanted the leg to look smart in his courtier's tights. He therefore submitted to a series of gruesome and painful operations. The leg never healed properly, and he was left with a lifelong limp.

Confined to his sickbed, Iñigo asked a relative for some books. All she could offer was pious reading, which he took grumpily and grudgingly. To his great surprise, the soldier found himself attracted to the lives of the saints and began thinking, *If St. Francis or St. Dominic could do such-and-such, maybe I could do great things.* He also noticed that after thinking about doing great deeds for God, he was left with a feeling of peace—what he termed "consolation." On the other hand, after imagining success as a soldier or impressing a particular woman, though he was initially filled with great enthusiasm, he would later be left feeling "dry."

Slowly, he recognized that these feelings of dryness and consolation were God's ways of leading him to follow a path of service. He perceived the peaceful feeling as God's way of drawing him closer. This realization also marked the beginning of his understanding of "discernment" in the spiritual life, a way of striving to seek God's will in one's life, a key concept in Ignatian spirituality.

Iñigo decided after his recovery that he would become a pilgrim and tramp to the Holy Land to see what he might do there in God's service. First he made a pilgrimage to a well-known monastery in Spain, in Montserrat, where he confessed his sins, laid aside his knightly armor, and put on the homespun garb of a pilgrim. From Montserrat, Iñigo journeyed to a nearby small town called Manresa, where he lived the life of a poor pilgrim: praying, fasting continually, and begging for alms.

During his time in Manresa, his prayer intensified and he experienced great emotional variances in his spiritual life, as he moved from a desolation that was nearly suicidal to a mystical sense of union with God. In the end, his prayer made him more certain that he was being called to follow God more closely. Iñigo spent several months in seclusion in Manresa, experiencing prayer that grew ever deeper, and then commenced his journey to Jerusalem.

After a series of mishaps in Jerusalem and elsewhere, he decided that to accomplish anything noteworthy in the church of his time, he would need more education and perhaps even to become a priest. So the former soldier vowed to recommence his education, an arduous process that took him to the university cities of Alcalá, Salamanca, and, finally, Paris. And since he had little knowledge of Latin, he had to sit in class—at age thirty—with small boys learning their Latin lessons.

Even in my third or fourth reading of the saint's story, I found this chapter of Ignatius's life impressive and touching. It always called to mind the image of the middle-aged man seated at a too-small desk, hunched over his books. The proud courtier who had hoped to win the attraction of influential men and highborn women nonetheless found the humility necessary to admit that in many ways he was no more advanced than a schoolboy.

While studying in Paris, Iñigo attracted attention as a result of his ascetic penchant for dressing in the poorest clothes, begging for alms, helping the poor, and assisting other students in prayer. In Paris he also completed what later become known as *The Spiritual Exercises*, a handbook of practices on prayer, on the human condition, on God's love, and on the life of Jesus, all designed to help people draw closer to God. Iñigo also led his new roommate, Francisco Javier, through these exercises. His friend would later become better known, of course, as St. Francis Xavier, one of the church's great missionaries. Around this time in Paris, Iñigo, for reasons still unknown, changed his own name to the more familiar-sounding Ignatius.

Gradually, Ignatius gathered around him a tight-knit group of six men, who decided they would work together in the service of God.

But doing what? Initially, they decided to go to Jerusalem, as so many Christians before them had done. If that was not possible, they would present themselves directly to the pope, who, by virtue of his knowledge of the needs of the universal church, would be better able to discern a direction for the group. Eventually, the men decided to form the Company of Jesus, or *Societas Jesu* in Latin, for the purpose of "helping souls."

At first, Ignatius had a tough time winning formal acceptance for his society. For one thing, some in the church hierarchy were disturbed that he was not founding a more traditional religious order, with an emphasis on common prayer and a stricter, even cloistered, community life. But Ignatius's men (derisively called "Jesuits" by their critics) wanted to work *in the world*. Ignatius, ever resourceful, shrewdly enlisted the help of powerful churchmen to speak on the society's behalf.

From these humble efforts began the Society of Jesus. After settling in Rome and receiving papal approval for his new order, Ignatius began the difficult task of writing the Jesuits' constitutions and mapping out plans for the work of its members. In all of these efforts Ignatius proved both ambitious and persistent. At the same time, he was flexible and ready to do whatever might be God's will. He fought for the Society whenever a church official raised another objection about his new order. Yet he used to say that if the pope ever ordered the Jesuits to disband, he would need only fifteen minutes in prayer to compose himself and be on his way.

In my novitiate, St. Ignatius was presented as the model Jesuit: intelligent, prayerful, and *disponible*—available, disposed to do God's will. He was ambitious to do great things *ad majorem Dei gloriam*—for the greater glory of God. Another way of expressing this is the Jesuit tradition of *magis*—the best, the highest, the most for God. It has often been noted how fortunate it was for the Catholic Church that Ignatius transformed his worldly ambitions into ambitions for the church. His courtier's charm, his soldier's tenacity, and his stalwart temperament combined to make him a formidable first superior of the Jesuits. (I remember thinking in the novitiate that Ignatius would not have done so poorly in the corporate world.)



Despite his remarkably compelling and undeniably inspiring life, St. Ignatius doesn't elicit the kind of widespread affection afforded to saints such as Thérèse of Lisieux or Francis of Assisi. Descriptions of Ignatius often use such terms as *intellectual*, *serious*, *austere*, *mystical*—making the saint, while respected, a rather distant figure.

And while Jesuits revere their founder, more than a few hold “Fr. Ignatius” at arm's length. An elderly Jesuit at Boston College once said to me, regarding the prospect of his judgment in heaven: “I have no problem with Jesus judging me. It's St. Ignatius I'm worried about!”

It is true that, unlike Francis of Assisi, Ignatius is rarely characterized as endearingly silly (though he liked to perform impromptu Basque dances for melancholy Jesuits) or foolish (though early in his postconversion life he asked his mule to decide, by choosing which fork in the road to take, if he should pursue a man who had just insulted the Virgin Mary). And true, he was not a gifted writer with an instinct for the well-turned phrase, as was his compatriot St. Teresa of Ávila or St. Benedict.

His *Autobiography*—which he dictated only after being asked, and then grudgingly—is occasionally moving in its frank descriptions of his mystical experiences but is sometimes awfully dry. Even Ignatius's greatest contribution to Christian spirituality, *The Spiritual Exercises*, is not a compendium of warm reflections on the love of God. It is instead a series of clear, practical instructions—a how-to manual for retreat directors—that is appreciated more in the doing than the reading. The young Thomas Merton once “made” the *Spiritual Exercises* on his own, sitting cross-legged on the floor

of his apartment in Greenwich Village in the late 1930s. It was a mixed experience for Merton, somewhat akin to attempting to psychoanalyze oneself.

But the two writings into which Ignatius poured his heart and soul—the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus—do work, and have worked well for more than 450 years. For Ignatius of Loyola was nothing if not practical. After discerning God’s will for himself, he resolutely set out to do it. He amended his life. Left his military career. Returned to school. Gathered his friends together. Put himself at the disposal of God and the pope. He organized, led, and inspired what he called his “least” Society of Jesus. He wrote their constitutions, opened schools, and sent out missionaries.

Yet at the heart of what can seem like frenetic activity was an intimate relationship with God, which Ignatius often found difficult to put into words. His private journals show minuscule notations crowded beside his entries for daily Mass. As scholars have concluded, these indicate, among other things, those times when he wept during Mass, overwhelmed by love for God. Ignatius found God *everywhere*: in the poor, in prayer, in the Mass, in his fellow Jesuits, in his work, and, most touchingly, on a balcony of the Jesuit house in Rome, where he loved to gaze up silently at the stars at night. During these times he would shed tears in wonder and adoration. His emotional responses to the presence of God in his life gives the lie to the stereotype of the cold saint.

Ignatius was a mystic who loved God with an intensity rare even for saints. He wasn’t a renowned scholar like Augustine or Aquinas, not a martyr like Peter or Paul, not a great writer like Teresa or Benedict, and perhaps not a beloved personality like Francis or Thérèse. But he loved God and loved the world, and those two things he did quite well.



The best spiritual directors are those who can help you discern where God is at work in your life, and where you might be tempted to act against God's will. In his *Autobiography*, Ignatius describes the first time he came to understand the way God was working within him, gently drawing him closer through his emotions and desires. This key insight would later form the basis of *The Spiritual Exercises*.

In this passage, Ignatius is lying on a sickbed, convalescing after receiving a serious wound in battle, not long before he decides to devote himself to the service of God. In his autobiography, dictated to his friend Luis Gonçalves da Câmara, Ignatius always refers to himself as "him" or "the pilgrim."

While reading the life of Our Lord and of the saints, he stopped to think, reasoning within himself, "What if I should do what Saint Francis did, what Saint Dominic did?" So he pondered over many things that he found to be good, always proposing to himself what was difficult and serious, and as he proposed them, they seemed to him easy enough to accomplish. But his every thought was to say to himself, "Saint Dominic did this, therefore, I have to do it. Saint Francis did this, therefore, I have to do it." These thoughts also lasted a good while, but when other matters intervened, the worldly thoughts . . . returned, and he also spent much time on them. This succession of such diverse thoughts, either of the worldly deeds he wished to achieve or of the deeds of God that came to his imagination, lasted a long time, and he always dwelt at length on the thought before him, until he tired of it and put it aside and turned to other matters.

Yet there was a difference. When he was thinking about the things of the world, he took much delight in them, but afterwards, when he was tired and put them aside, he found that he was dry and discontented. But when he thought of going to Jerusalem, barefoot and eating nothing but herbs and undergoing all the other rigors that he saw the saints had endured, not only was he consoled when he had these

thoughts, but even after putting them aside, he remained content and happy. He did not wonder, however, at this: nor did he stop to ponder the difference until one time his eyes were opened a little, and he began to marvel at the difference and to reflect upon it, realizing from experience that some thoughts left him sad and others happy. Little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that agitated him, one from the enemy, the other from God.



My own affinity to St. Ignatius is not one of great personal affection. Even after many years as a Jesuit, I see Ignatius as a sympathetic but somewhat distant figure, removed from the plane of average men and women. Demanding. Even severe. Still, my gratitude toward him has deepened over the course of my Jesuit life, to the point where he is one of my favorite saints. It's the kind of gratitude you might have for a thrifty and taciturn uncle who has secretly provided the funds for your education without you knowing it. In essence, my gratitude is for his spirituality and for his way of looking at the world and at God. It is his brand of spirituality that changed my life and frames the way I see the world today.

At heart, Ignatian spirituality flows from the saint's most famous work, *The Spiritual Exercises*, which Ignatius wrote over many years; it was the fruit of his prayer and his experience in helping others pray. Any understanding of the spirituality of St. Ignatius and of his Jesuit Order begins with this short work. What has been called his greatest gift to the church has enabled thousands of men and women—Jesuits, priests, sisters, brothers, laypersons—from almost every Christian denomination to experience a deep intimacy with God. It is no stretch to say that *The Spiritual Exercises* has transformed lives.

Essentially, *The Spiritual Exercises* is a manual for retreat directors that maps out a retreat designed to fit into four weeks. During that time retreatants ponder the love of God, pray over the decision to follow Christ, contemplate events from the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and experience God's creative activity in all things. The Exercises are intended to help one know Jesus more intimately, experience a growing freedom, and understand how to make decisions in accord with God's grace.

Though the Exercises are traditionally divided into four "Weeks," in actual practice it usually takes more than seven days to complete each "Week." To add to the confusion, Jesuits also refer to the Exercises as the "thirty-day retreat" or, for obvious reasons, the "long retreat." A Jesuit will make the long retreat twice in his life, once as a novice, and once after the final stage of Jesuit formation, called "tertianship."



The Spiritual Exercises begins, after some preliminary observations, with Ignatius's famous "Principle and Foundation," which lays out in broad strokes his religious worldview: "Human beings are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save their souls." As such, we should make use of things on earth that enable us to do this, and free ourselves of anything that prevents us from doing so. We should be, to use a favorite Ignatian expression, "indifferent to all created things."

Thanks in part to the word that he chose, indifference, as Ignatius uses it, is a commonly misunderstood concept. It does not mean that we should set aside things (or people) as worthless. Rather, we should not be so attached to any thing or person or state of life that it prevents us from loving God. The Exercises invite us to embrace a radical

freedom: “On our part,” Ignatius writes, “we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only that which is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.”

One young woman, after hearing those lines, said to me, “I’m not supposed to prefer health over sickness? That’s *insane!*”

Of course no one wants to be sick. But in Ignatius’s worldview, health should not be something clung to so tightly that the fear of illness prevents you from following God. As in “Well, I’m not going to visit my friend in the hospital, because I might get sick.” Ignatius would say that in that case you may not be “indifferent” enough; health has become a sort of god, preventing you from doing good. The goal is not choosing sickness for its own sake, but moving toward the freedom of knowing that the highest good is not your own physical well-being. For most of us, this kind of complete freedom will remain a lifetime goal.

In my own life, indifference has proven to be a durable spiritual concept. Whenever I find myself overly attached to something—my physical well-being, my plans for worldly success, my popularity among friends, and so on—I remember the need for indifference.

When I was working with refugees in Kenya, for example, immediately before I was set to begin theology studies, my provincial asked me to wait another year before moving on to this next stage of training. He didn’t think I was ready yet for theology studies.

I was crushed. Most of my peers were on the same timetable, and now I was being asked to wait.

The more I thought about it, the more I became consumed with concerns for my reputation, for how things would appear. What would everyone else think? That I was a failure. A bad Jesuit. Damaged goods. I was angry with my provincial and told him so.

When I confessed these feelings to my spiritual director in Nairobi, he counseled not only patience but a prayer for, as he called it, the grace of indifference. “Can you be indifferent to your need to have things happen on your own timetable?” he asked. “Are you more concerned with how things appear rather than what is really best for you? Might God’s timetable be a better one than yours?”

His reminder about indifference helped me weather a short but intense spiritual storm. As it turned out, that extra year, spent working at *America* magazine, was a wonderful period in my life—one that helped me dream about a new career as a writer—and also helped to better prepare me for theology studies.

A few years later I said to my provincial, “You know, I finally realize that I did have to wait that extra year. You were right.”

“I know I was!” he laughed.

But indifference can be a costly grace. Ignatius and the early Jesuits understood this well. In 1539, when a Jesuit whom Ignatius had hoped to send to the Portuguese colony in India fell ill, Ignatius’s best friend, Francis Xavier, volunteered. Faced with the decision of keeping his friend at his side or sending him away “for the greater glory of God,” Ignatius chose the latter.

It must have been a painful step, one he was able to take only with true indifference. It was this radical kind of freedom that enabled Ignatius to let his friend go, and it was the same freedom that enabled Xavier to become one of the world’s greatest Christian missionaries. But the two men, best friends since their university days, would never again see each another. After spreading the message of the gospel in India and Japan, Francis Xavier died off the coast of China in 1552.

Before his departure for India, Francis wrote his best friend a letter from Lisbon, in 1541. To my mind, it is the most moving thing

he ever wrote, as it captures both his love for Ignatius as well as his dedication to his new mission:

There is nothing more to tell you except that we are about to embark. We close by asking Christ our Lord for the grace of seeing each other joined together in the next life; for I do not know if we shall ever see each other again in this, because of the great distance between Rome and India, and the great harvest to be found.



Retreatants usually spend a few days praying over the “Principle and Foundation” not just as a way of thinking about indifference but also as a means of meditating on their relationship with God. This stage of the Exercises allows people to experience gratitude by contemplating God’s creative activity in their lives. For many, it may mean pondering the beauty of nature, or the blessings they have received from God, or any of the ways in which they’ve experienced God throughout their lives.

At this point Ignatius introduces a simple but powerful form of prayer called the “examination of conscience,” a way of noticing where God is active in your life. It’s also called the “examen,” the Spanish word Ignatius used in the Exercises, or “examination of consciousness,” another way of translating the Latin, *conscientia*.

There are five steps in the examen. First, you ask God to be with you. Next, you recall the events of the day for which you feel grateful. Your gratitude need not be for anything extraordinary: it can be for a

phone call from a friend, an enjoyable meal, a tough job finally completed. Small things are important, too: a sunny day, a refreshing nap, a baby's smile. Offering gratitude helps you recognize God's presence in these moments.

The third step is a review of the day. Here you try to notice God's presence in the day, seeking an awareness of where you accepted (or did not accept) God's grace. I like to think of this as a movie of the day being replayed. When you recall someone offering you a kind word, you might say to yourself, "Yes, there was God." Conversely, when you recall treating someone with disrespect, you might say, "Yes, there I turned away from God." This leads naturally to the fourth step: asking forgiveness for any sins. The fifth step is asking for the grace to follow God more closely during the following day. Ignatius recommends closing the examen with an Our Father.

The examen is a simple prayer of awareness. It's about noticing God's presence in the everyday events of life. Prayer, as the Jesuit Walter Burghardt once wrote, is a "long, loving look at the real." And the examen is just that: a way of seeing God in the reality of everyday life. "Finding God in all things" is a succinct summary of Ignatian spirituality, and the examen is a good way of starting to live this ideal.



Besides these everyday graces, at this point in the Exercises retreatants may also recall moments of particular grace, those times when God's presence felt especially near, when we encountered what Sebastian Moore, OSB, has called the desire for "I know not what."

These “peak” experiences are not simply the province of mystics. Many, if not most, people encounter them—though often they are not recognized. Let’s say that you are alone on the beach during a beautiful sunset and are overwhelmed by the beauty of creation. Or you are in the midst of an intimate encounter with your spouse or partner and are made aware of a deep connectedness to the Source of all love. In each of these experiences you are encountering God in a profound and personal way—whether you know it or not.

There are a number of descriptions of such experiences in contemporary novels and autobiographies. In my late twenties, when I was first thinking about religious life, I stumbled across a lovely passage in *Surprised by Joy*, by C. S. Lewis. Early in his autobiography, the author recounts a moment when he was standing before a currant bush in a garden and recalled a fond memory from childhood. Lewis was overcome by a desire “from a depth not of years but of centuries.” He writes:

It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation that came over me. . . . It was a sensation, of course, of desire, but a desire for what? . . . And before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, and the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing which had just ceased.

In my own life, such moments have occurred only a few times. Each time I failed to recognize their importance at the time. Only in retrospect did I understand their meaning.

When I was a young boy, for example, I used to ride my bike to the elementary school located a few miles from our house. The

twenty-minute ride was wonderfully downhill to school and miserably uphill home. The ride to school took me over the new sidewalks of our neighborhood and past familiar houses to a hidden sidewalk, sandwiched between two houses. At the end of this sidewalk was a steep set of concrete stairs, whose climb warranted dismounting the bike and dragging it up the six steps.

From the top of the steps, I could see my school in the distance. And between the steps and the school lay one of my favorite spots: a broad meadow, bordered on the left by tall oak trees and on the right by our school's vast baseball fields. On cold fall mornings, clad in a corduroy jacket, I would pedal my bike down the bumpy dirt path through a meadow full of crunchy brown leaves, desiccated grasses, and dried milkweed plants powdered in frost. In the winter (when I would not ride but walk to school), the field was an open landscape of white snow that rose wetly over the tops of my black galoshes as my breath made clouds before me.

In the spring, though, the meadow exploded with life. It felt as if I were biking through a science experiment. Fat grasshoppers jumped among the daisies and black-eyed Susans, bees hummed above the Queen Anne's lace, little brown crickets sang underneath pale blue thistles, and cardinals and robins darted from branch to branch. The air was fresh, and the field sang the words of creation.

One warm spring morning, I stopped to catch my breath in the middle of the field. I must have been ten or eleven years old. My schoolbooks, heavy in the bike's metal basket, swung violently to the side, and I almost lost my math homework to the grasshoppers and crickets. Standing astride my bike, I could see much going on around me—so much color, so much activity, so much *life*. Looking toward my school on the horizon, I felt so happy to be alive. And

I wanted both to possess and to be a part of all I saw around me. I can still see myself in this meadow, in the warm air, surrounded by creation, more clearly than any other memory from childhood.

Looking back, I believe that I was feeling a sense of God's *promise*: an invitation to limitless joy. It was this memory that came to me at the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises.



After reflecting on such moments, retreatants begin to see their unwillingness to respond to God's goodness—in other words, their sinfulness. One director explained that the more we recognize God's love, the more we see how, like the sun, it begins to throw a shadow, revealing our own sinful nature.

During the First Week, then, retreatants consider their own sinfulness. Ignatius reminds believers always to ask for what they want in prayer, especially during the Exercises. In the First Week, writes Ignatius, we are to “beg for the grace for a great and intense sorrow for my sins.” Over time, retreatants find themselves grateful that though they have sinned often, they are nevertheless loved by God: they are “loved sinners.” Gratitude for God's unconditional love usually, and naturally, prompts a desire to respond to it.

To begin the Second Week, Ignatius offers a powerful meditation entitled “The Call of Christ the King.” He asks retreatants to imagine serving a charismatic human leader. We are to imagine our hero bidding us to follow him in his lifework, and “to be content to eat as I; also to drink, dress, etc.” This is often a deeply moving experience—wouldn't it be fantastic if your own hero called you by name to follow him?

But after meditating on what it would mean for us, we are asked to consider something more important—“how much more worthy”

it would be to follow Jesus Christ. This meditation offers a double invitation: to be with Christ and to work for a world of justice, love, and peace.

Now aware of the desire to follow Christ, the retreatant is invited to contemplate the life of Jesus. And Ignatius starts at the beginning of Christ's life—the very beginning—with a meditation that imagines the Holy Trinity gazing down on the earth and deciding to “send” Christ. In one of the loveliest meditations in the Exercises, we are encouraged to see things as God sees them. We are asked to consider all of humanity and “to see the various persons . . . in such variety, in dress as in actions: some white and others black, some at peace and others in war; some weeping and others laughing; some well, others ill; some being born and some dying.”

How beautiful it was for me, during my own long retreat, to imagine the Trinity looking on the world in compassion. The meditation not only helped me see the world in a new way, but it also helped me appreciate God's desire to send his Son to this world.

Thus begins the part of the Exercises that appealed most to me: the meditations on the life of Jesus. I was introduced to a type of prayer that goes by many names: “Ignatian contemplation,” “contemplative prayer,” “composition of place,” or simply “imaginative prayer.” It is a form of prayer that uses the imagination as a way of encountering God. The method also enables the retreatant to experience the characteristic grace of the Second Week: the desire to know Jesus more fully.

In an Ignatian contemplation we attempt to place ourselves in a particular scene, often from the Gospels. In the story of the Nativity, for example, Ignatius asks us to imagine ourselves with Mary and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem: “to see with the sight of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, considering the length and breadth, and whether the road is level or through valleys and

hills; likewise looking at the place or the cave of the Nativity, how large, how small, how low, how high, and how it was prepared.”

As we journey with Mary and Joseph, we might ask other questions, beyond those suggested by Ignatius. What do Mary and Joseph look like? What clothes are they wearing? We use the other senses imaginatively as well. What do I hear? (Crunching gravel under the donkey’s feet . . . a bird crying in the distance.) What do I smell? (The food we have brought . . . the fresh wind off the grassy fields.)

It may also help to envision being a particular person. Perhaps you are a friend of Joseph, come along to help the couple. In that case, you might think about what you feel. Is your clothing rough or soft? Do you feel the warmth of the sun? Are you fatigued? Through these small details you recreate a Gospel passage in order to more completely enter into it.

As a novice, I had problems with Ignatian contemplation. At the beginning of the long retreat, my spiritual director, named David, gave me a brief introduction to contemplative prayer—using your imagination, placing yourself in the scene, and so on.

It sounded like just about the dumbest thing I had ever heard.

“Let me get this straight,” I said. “You want me to make up a picture of the Gospel story in my head?”

David nodded.

“That’s ridiculous,” I said.

“What’s ridiculous?”

“Isn’t it all just in my head?” I asked. “Won’t I just make the people in my fantasy do what I want them to do?”

“Not necessarily,” he said.

I sat there, confused.

“Let me ask you something,” David said. “Do you believe that God gave you your imagination?”

“Sure,” I said.

“Don’t you think that God could use your imaginations to draw you closer to him in prayer?”

I had to admit that made sense. God communicates with us through every other part of our lives, so why not through our imaginations? David’s gentle questioning freed me from my doubts and allowed me to enjoy a new kind of prayer.

When I set aside my suspicions the results amazed me. Sometimes the prayer was difficult or dry, but many times I felt as if I actually *was* in the story. I was right there with the apostles or in the crowds, seeing a miracle, hearing Jesus preach, witnessing the Crucifixion. And I was astonished at the emotions evoked and the insights received. Until entering the Jesuits and experiencing this form of prayer, I doubted that God would ever, or could ever, communicate with me in such an intimate way. Today this type of meditation is the primary way I encounter God in prayer.

One example: during a recent eight-day retreat I was asked to pray over that same passage, the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. The previous few months had been difficult ones, focusing on the challenge of chastity in my Jesuit life. I was beginning to think that chastity was sort of a “second-best” kind of life, with its own rewards, to be sure, but not as satisfying as married life.

The first few times I prayed over the passage were largely fruitless. Gradually, though, I was able to imagine myself as a friend of the family. As Mary and Joseph readied themselves for the arduous trip, I decided to help as much as I could. So I went into Nazareth to buy some food for the journey—a few loaves of flat bread, which I bound up in a clean cloth. At the well in the town square, I used an animal skin to collect fresh water. From a vendor I bought a few dates, which

I stuffed in my pocket. It felt good to be doing something for the couple—something simple and useful.

When I returned to their house, I found that they were nearly ready to go. Mary was hugely pregnant; I saw how difficult it was for her to move. I realized that she couldn't do everything herself and needed help from Joseph and me.

Once outside, Joseph packed the supplies on his little donkey and helped Mary up. In the meantime I realized I had forgotten a flint for the fire, and I rushed inside to retrieve it. Outside again I watered the donkey, and we were off. Then I heard Joseph say to me, "You're a big help."

It dawned on me that though I was not a member of their family, I enjoyed helping them, walking alongside them. I was part of their life. And I thought of all the people who had invited me into their lives. As a celibate priest, I am welcomed into people's lives not just in baptisms, marriages, and funerals, but also in the most intimate of ways—in hearing their struggles, celebrating their successes, breaking bread with them, seeing their children grow up. As I prayed, I was filled with an overpowering feeling of gratitude for my chastity and my way of life. For the first time as a Jesuit, I no longer saw it as second-best at all. The celibate life is different, but it's a wonderful way for me to live.

All this from a meditation on a simple passage from Scripture.



During the Third Week, after retreatants have meditated on the ministry of Jesus, Ignatius invites us into each painful stage of the

passion and death of Jesus—from the Last Supper to his burial. The grace that one requests during the Third Week is to have compassion for and to suffer with Jesus. And as we place ourselves in these scenes, we begin to see Christ's suffering as a sign of his love, as well as the inevitability of hardships for those who follow Christ.

At this stage, retreatants are often drawn to meditate on Christ's self-sacrificing love for humanity and to recall times of suffering in their own lives. Often they also find themselves invited to “die to” different parts of themselves that prevent them from following Christ more fully.

Seeking this grace means moving toward an important kind of indifference—the freedom to set aside aspects of your life that prevent you from following Christ: the freedom of “dying to self.” For me, this has often centered on pride: my desire to be popular, admired, and even desired. Those feelings, while not bad in themselves, can often prevent us from following Jesus wholeheartedly. It's easy to see how an overriding concern for “popularity,” for example, would be an obstacle to preaching the gospel in situations where doing so would challenge the status quo. Jesus was frequently “unpopular,” and so was his message. Following Jesus may mean accepting the ridicule, the contempt, and sometimes the persecution that comes with preaching his message.

The Spiritual Exercises, then, invite us to cross the threshold of self-interest and become united with Christ in his mission—even to the point of accepting hardships and personal suffering. Experience with the Exercises was one thing that enabled dozens of Jesuit martyrs—from St. Edmund Campion (England, 1581) to St. Paul Miki (Japan, 1597) to St. Isaac Jogues (Canada, 1646) to Blessed Miguel

Pro (Mexico, 1927) to the six Jesuits martyred in El Salvador in 1989—to understand the call to follow Christ in this radical way.

When I finally reached the last stage of the Spiritual Exercises, I was surprised to discover that the Fourth Week was relatively short. Ignatius recommends only one meditation on the Resurrection. And the grace that one asks for is easy to request: “to rejoice and be glad intensely.”

Once again in the Exercises, this grace usually leads to a desire to respond. After spending thirty days meditating on God’s love, being with Jesus in his ministry, witnessing the Passion, and experiencing the Resurrection, one wants to respond. By now the retreatant recognizes God’s loving action everywhere. So the Exercises draw to a close with a meditation on how God’s love works in our life and, finally, a prayer offering ourselves to God, positioning us to live out the fruits of the retreat.



St. Ignatius of Loyola intended the Exercises not simply for Jesuits, but for all Christians—no matter what their state of life. For Ignatius believed that God desires to be in relationship with every person. Out of this belief flowed his broad-minded and life-affirming spirituality.

Theologians often describe Ignatian spirituality as “incarnational.” In other words, while it recognizes the transcendence of God, it is also grounded in the real-life experiences of people living out their daily lives.

It is a spirituality that reminds us that God speaks to us through prayer—but also through our emotions, our minds, and our bodies.

God can communicate through sexual intimacy, romantic love, and friendship. God can be found in Scripture and in the sacraments. God can show his love through your sister, your coworker, your spouse, your next-door neighbor, a teacher, a priest, a stranger, or a homeless person. Finding God in all things. And all people.

The path of St. Ignatius means searching for signs of God's presence in the stuff of the everyday. And it means committing yourself to regular prayer in order to contemplate these signs. For without the discipline of prayer we tend to overlook and forget those moments of God's presence. We are to balance, therefore, a life of activity and of prayer. The goal of Ignatian spirituality can be summed up in another succinct expression: desiring to become a "contemplative in action," a person who maintains a contemplative stance in an active life.

It was this spirituality—both practical and mystical, earthy and otherworldly—that, during the first year of my novitiate, drew me close to God for the first time in my life. And it all made sense! Ignatian spirituality helped me meet God in new ways, opened my mind to new ways of prayer, fostered trust in God's presence, and liberated me from the alienation I had experienced for so many years. For the first time ever I felt and believed that God was close to me.

But when I pray to St. Ignatius of Loyola, I don't feel the same affection that I do for, say, Thérèse of Lisieux or Thomas Merton. I don't linger over passages from the letters and journals of Ignatius the way I might reread *The Seven Storey Mountain* or *The Story of a Soul*. And I admit that, like that elderly Jesuit from Boston College who feared his encounter with Ignatius in heaven, I haven't felt as close as I would like to the founder of the Society of Jesus.



Not long ago, however, I made a very short pilgrimage to Loyola, the birthplace of Ignatius, with a Jesuit friend, which helped me to see Ignatius anew. And along the way, I received a sort of spiritual gift.

I had been invited on a week-long trip to Lourdes with a Jesuit friend named George, who I had known since the novitiate. We were to serve as chaplains on a pilgrimage organized by the Order of Malta, an international Catholic group that sponsors an annual trip for the sick and their companions (and their chaplains) to the famous shrine in southern France where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to a young girl in 1858. This would be our second trip with the group.

Since we had one free day and had already seen much of Lourdes during our first trip, George and I decided to see if we could visit Loyola, located just across the Spanish border. So after a few days of celebrating Masses, walking in Eucharistic processions, visiting the baths with sick and ailing pilgrims, and hearing dozens of confessions, we rented a car for our pilgrimage within a pilgrimage. Secretly I wondered whether we would get lost. Plus I wondered if we would be able to procure any “Loyola water,” which supposedly helps women get pregnant, and which had been requested by some of our fellow pilgrims.

Our pilgrimage took us along the coast of Southern France, past Biarritz, the fabled resort where I imagined the moneyed gentry still living in Cole Porter-like style. Surprisingly, George and I arrived in Loyola in just three hours, and here is where it began to seem almost comically easy to see God’s hand in our little journey.

When we walked into the ornate basilica in the center of town, we discovered that a Mass in Basque (St. Ignatius’s mother tongue) was to begin in just a few minutes. After the Mass (which George said might as well have been in Navajo, for all we understood) we toured Loyola Castle, located within the basilica complex.

On the lowest floor there was a small diorama that showed small plaster statues, no more than a foot high, enacting scenes from the life of Ignatius. One little scene, frozen behind the dust-covered glass, was surprisingly moving: a depiction of a youthful Ignatius taking leave of his family at Loyola Castle, in order to begin his new life. Rarely did I think of Ignatius as a young man, but suddenly, thanks to these tiny, cheesy, dusty sculptures, I began to get a glimmer of what it must have meant for him to give up everything for God.

On the uppermost floor, we stumbled on a room enclosed by a glass partition. I asked a tour guide about the room. “Eso es la capilla de la conversión,” he said blandly. This is the chapel of the conversion.

I was stunned: this was the room in which Ignatius experienced his first conversion while recuperating from his injuries. I had no idea that anyone would know exactly which room it had been, but there it was. On the far side of the room was a polychromed statue of the saint lying on his sick bed, clutching a book and looking heavenward, caught in the moment of his decision to change his life. Above his room, painted in gold on a wooden beam, were the words: *Aquí Se Entrego à Dios Iñigo de Loyola*. Here Iñigo of Loyola surrendered himself to God.

In that glassed-in room a priest was about to celebrate Mass before an ornate wooden altar. Sadly, I said to George, “Well, I guess we won’t be able to go inside.” But, as if overhearing us, the priest smiled and waved us in. A Frenchman, he invited us to join a group of French pilgrims just beginning their pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. He was overjoyed when he discovered that we were Jesuits, and told his group how providential this was. We celebrated Mass with the group and even proclaimed the readings in our high-school French. Afterward the priest asked us what we did back home. I’m a writer, I said, and George is a prison chaplain.

He put his arms around us and smiled broadly. Then he said to the other pilgrims in French, “These two vocations began in this room.”

Okay God, I thought, I guess I’m seeing you pretty clearly now.

Immediately afterward, in the gift shop, George and I met a cheerful Jesuit brother, who, as it happened, knew someone in my community back home in the States. He invited us to lunch in the Jesuit residence, just about to begin, ushering us through the vast corridors and into a colossal granite-walled refectory. Using what Spanish we remembered from summer classes as novices, we asked about the history of the complex of buildings at Loyola and the work of the Jesuits in the community. The meal was all the more delightful as I was down to my very last euro.

Afterward, one of our lunchtime partners, a kind elderly Jesuit, gave us an extensive tour of their main ministry, which was, appropriately enough, a colossal retreat house located on immaculately kept grounds, called the *Centro de Espiritualidad*. Each of the five floors boasted its own chapel, each appealing to a different style of prayer: one ornate, one spare, and so on. One even looked very Zen, though I knew neither the Spanish nor the French for that word. We left the retreat house with just enough time to return to Lourdes.

The absolute ease with which all these things happened, and just at the right time, made it easy to experience God throughout the entire trip. On the other hand, we failed miserably in our attempt to get Loyola water. (The sacristan shrugged when we asked whether they had it in the house.) But no matter. George filled a bottle of water from a fountain outside the basilica and said triumphantly, “Loyola water!” We returned to Lourdes just in time for dinner with our friends. When I described how perfectly our trip to Loyola had gone, one of the young women on our trip said, “Like a confirmation of your Jesuit vocation!”

Sometimes God is not merely quietly present but almost shouts his presence at you.

But none of these insights, and none of this attentiveness to God's presence in my life, would ever have been possible had I not been exposed to Ignatian spirituality, a spirituality that encourages actively looking for God in one's life. And all of this of course was thanks to Ignatius of Loyola.

So even though I may not feel especially close to Ignatius, what I do feel is gratitude—a deep and lasting gratitude for one of the greatest gifts I've ever received: the gift of a spirituality that enables me to see God in all things.

More Than Ever

Pedro Arrupe

I am quite happy to be called an optimist, but my optimism is not of the utopian variety. It is based on hope. What is an optimist? I can answer for myself in a very simple fashion: He or she is a person who has the conviction that God knows, can do, and will do what is best for mankind.

PEDRO ARRUPE, SJ,
ONE JESUIT'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

The first time I called the Jesuit novitiate in Boston, one of the novices picked up the phone. “Arrupe House!” he said brightly.

“Oh . . . sorry,” I said, somewhat confused. “I guess I have the wrong number. I wanted the, um, Jesuit novitiate?”

“Yeah,” he said, and I could almost hear him rolling his eyes. “That’s us. Arrupe House.”

Before entering the Society of Jesus, I hadn’t a clue as to who (or what) Arrupe was. Paradoxically, now that I’ve been a Jesuit for some time, it continually surprises me that the name of Pedro

Arrupe, superior general of the Jesuits between 1965 and 1983, isn't more widely known.

It's not that I believe that someone should be well known simply by virtue of having been superior of the Jesuit Order. Rather, Pedro Arrupe's life, character, and example are so compelling, and so relevant to contemporary believers, that I am always surprised that more people aren't familiar with his story.

Pedro Arrupe's life can, I think, be seen as a microcosm of the life of the twentieth-century church. He was born in Bilbao, in the Basque Country of Spain, in 1907, to a devout Catholic family. After completing his secondary studies, Arrupe began his medical training first in Valladolid, Spain, and later at the University of Madrid Medical School. But after a visit to Lourdes, where he witnessed a spontaneous healing (a polio-stricken boy was able to walk after seeing a procession of the Blessed Sacrament), his life took a dramatic turn. Thanks to his few years of medical training, Arrupe was permitted to be present at the medical verification of the healing, and he concluded that he had seen a miracle.

"It is impossible to tell you what my feelings and the state of my soul were at that moment," he later said of his experiences at Lourdes. "I had the impression of being near Jesus, and as I felt his all-powerful strength, the world around me began to seem extremely small." After he returned to Madrid he said, "The books kept falling from my hands; those lessons; those experiments about which I was so excited before seemed then so empty. . . . I was dazed with the memory which upset me more every day: only the image of the Sacred Host raised in blessing and the paralyzed boy jumping up from his chair remained fixed in my memory and heart."

Shortly afterward, Pedro Arrupe, age nineteen, gave up his medical career to enter the Jesuit novitiate in Loyola, Spain—the hometown

of St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus. His medical school professors were horrified.

In 1932, along with all the other Jesuits in Spain, Arrupe was expelled from the country by the Spanish Republic and was forced to complete his studies abroad. After studying in Belgium, Holland, and the United States, he was ordained in 1936. Two years later he was sent by his Jesuit superiors to work in Japan as a parish priest in Yamaguchi.

The young priest immediately immersed himself in Japanese culture in order to better understand the country in which he was living. Arrupe studied the Japanese language as well as its customs—the tea ceremony, flower arranging, calligraphy. He also adopted the Japanese style of praying—sitting cross-legged on a simple mat—which he employed for the rest of his life. (During his time as superior general in Rome, his unusual position at prayer would surprise a few traditionally minded Jesuits.)

While in Yamaguchi, he was suspected (falsely) of espionage for “Western powers” and was arrested and thrown into solitary confinement for thirty-five days. Arrupe endured the December cold with nothing but a sleeping mat in his cell. He later said of this period: “Many were the things I learned during this time: the science of silence, of solitude, of severe and austere poverty, of inner dialogue with the ‘guest of my soul.’ I believe this was the most instructive month of my entire life.”

In 1942, Fr. Arrupe was appointed novice director for the Japanese Jesuits and took up residence at the novitiate outside the town of Hiroshima. When the atomic bomb was dropped on the city on August 6, 1945, Arrupe and his novices cared for the sick and wounded, converting the novitiate into a makeshift hospital. Using his medical training, he performed simple surgery on scores of victims. Arrupe spent the

next thirteen years in Japan and in 1959 was appointed superior of the Jesuits' Japanese Province.

Six years later he was elected superior general of the Society of Jesus, during the latter part of the Second Vatican Council and at the beginning of a period of volcanic change in the church. The Spanish director of novices in Japan seemed to be the perfect man for the times: a person with international vision and experience, a priest who had lived and worked in both the East and the West, and a Jesuit who understood that the church's center of gravity was moving inexorably away from Europe and to Asia and Africa. Overall, Arrupe understood the meaning of the word *inculturation* long before it became popular.

Heeding the call of the council for religious orders to rediscover their roots, the new "Father General," as he is traditionally called, encouraged his brother Jesuits to adjust the Spiritual Exercises for the current world, to redouble their work with the poor and marginalized, and to promote the "faith that does justice," in accord with the wishes of the Jesuit General Congregation, the order's ultimate governing body. This emphasis on justice as an essential component of the gospel was what Arrupe would become most known for. Long before the martyrdom of many Jesuits who worked with the poor (among them the six priests killed in El Salvador in 1989), Arrupe instinctively grasped the importance of such a project, as well as the risks involved in facing down the forces that oppress the poor. To one of the congregations of Jesuits discussing the matter, he said, in essence, If we choose this path, some will pay with their lives.

"Is our General Congregation," he asked, "ready to take up this responsibility and to carry it out to its ultimate consequence? Is it ready to enter upon the more severe way of the cross? If we are not ready for this, what other use would these discussions have, except perhaps merely an academic one?"

Fr. Arrupe's term as superior general was remarkably fruitful. "Don Pedro," as he was affectionately known, visited Jesuit scholastics, brothers, and priests in high schools and parishes, in the slums and the countryside, in universities and retreat houses, and in their novitiates and infirmaries. Arrupe traveled to every corner of the globe and was invited to address major gatherings of church leaders, social leaders, and lay leaders. His writings and speeches focused not only on the promotion of justice and work with the poor but also on such varied topics as the renewal of religious life, ecumenism, inculturation, secularism and unbelief, evangelization and catechesis, the intellectual life, and the church's need to reach out to youth.



This is my favorite passage from a book of interviews with Pedro Arrupe called *One Jesuit's Spiritual Journey: Autobiographical Conversations with Jean-Claude Dietsch, SJ*. Here Arrupe tells of visiting his brother Jesuits who were working in a desperately poor slum in Latin America. During his visit he celebrated Mass for the local people in a small, decrepit building; cats and dogs wandered in and out during the Mass. Afterward, Fr. Arrupe was invited to the house of one of the members of the congregation and received an unexpected gift:

When it was over, a big devil whose hang-dog look made me almost afraid said, "Come to my place. I have something to give you." I was undecided; I didn't know whether to accept or not, but the priest who was with me said, "Accept, Father, they are good people." I went to his place; his house was a hovel nearly on the point of collapsing. He had me sit down on a rickety old chair. From there I could see the sunset. The big man said to me, "Look, sir, how beautiful it is!" We sat in silence for several minutes. The sun disappeared. The man then said, "I didn't know how to thank you for all you have

done for us. I have nothing to give you, but I thought you would like to see this sunset. You liked it, didn't you? Good evening." And then he shook my hand.

As I walked away I thought, "I have seldom met such a kindhearted person." I was strolling along that lane when a poorly dressed woman came up to me; she kissed my hand, looked at me, and with a voice filled with emotion said, "Father, pray for me and my children. I was at that beautiful Mass you celebrated. I must hurry home. But I have nothing to give my children. Pray to the Lord for me; he's the one who must help us." And she disappeared running in the direction of her home.

Many indeed are the things I learned thanks to that Mass among the poor. What a contrast with the great gatherings of the powerful of this world.



One of his most important initiatives on behalf of the poor was the founding, in 1980, of the Jesuit Refugee Service, which he began in response to the worldwide refugee crisis. Four years after I entered the Jesuits, I began working with the Jesuit Refugee Service in East Africa, and I heard the simple logic that prompted Arrupe to found the group: There are Jesuits everywhere in the world, and there are refugees everywhere in the world. Why not bring the two groups together?

During his time as superior general, Arrupe came to exemplify the Jesuit ideal of the "contemplative in action." Vincent O'Keefe, an American Jesuit who was one of Arrupe's chief assistants in Rome, later remarked: "At home or on the road visiting his brothers, Fr. Arrupe radiated a deep inner serenity that enabled him to move from situation to situation, from crisis to crisis, and from language to language." The contemplative. At the same time, noted Fr. O'Keefe, "it was easy to tell when Don Pedro was in residence in Rome, for

then the Jesuit headquarters was bustling with visitors from all over the world, while the staff did its best to contend with the drafting of letters and speeches.” The contemplative in action.

Even among other religious orders, Arrupe was seen as an inspired and inspiring leader. As a result, he was elected to five consecutive three-year terms as the president of the Union of Superiors General. Arrupe was increasingly seen as a leader within the universal church as well. He attended all the international synods of bishops from 1967 to 1980 and spoke at each one on behalf of both men and women religious orders. Among many he was seen as the “second founder” of the Society of Jesus. Indeed, Arrupe’s appearance—slight build, hawklike nose, intelligent eyes, bald pate—prompted many comments about his uncanny resemblance to his fellow Basque, St. Ignatius of Loyola.

It is difficult to communicate how admired Fr. Arrupe was by so many Jesuits, particularly in the United States and especially among younger Jesuits, for whom his commitment to social justice was so important and inspiring. One obvious sign of that affection is the number of Arrupe Houses in the United States. Both my novitiate and my philosophy community were so named, causing no end of confusion to my non-Jesuit friends. “Is every Jesuit community called Arrupe House?” asked a friend after he received a note on house stationery.

Don Pedro was by all accounts highly intelligent, consistently warm, and typically witty. A friend who worked closely with him told me the story of two American novices passing through Rome on their way to India, in order to work with the poor there.

“They’re going all the way to India?” asked Arrupe. “It certainly costs a lot of money to teach our men about the poor!”

As comfortable as he was with his brother Jesuits, he was equally at home with laypersons, no matter what their background. The

Vatican historian Peter Hebblethwaite, himself a former Jesuit, told of running into Arrupe in Rome when Arrupe's car had been involved in a minor accident. At the time, Hebblethwaite's wife, Margaret, was meeting a certain Jesuit for spiritual direction. Hebblethwaite described the scene in an article for *America* magazine:

His driver was expostulating with the other driver. We stopped. "This is my wife, Margaret," I said. His eyes lit up: "Margaret," he said, "you are doing a retreat with Father Herbie Alfonso?" She was. So the wife of an ex-Jesuit discussed the Spiritual Exercises with the Father General, while I twiddled my thumbs. I suspect it was a unique moment in Jesuit history.

But Pedro Arrupe was not popular everywhere. Because his efforts on behalf of social justice seemed to carry the whiff of socialism or, worse, communism, Arrupe earned the displeasure of some in the Vatican. Within some Roman circles (and even some Jesuit circles), he was thought naive, not so much charismatic as impractical, and even dangerous. This misunderstanding greatly pained Arrupe. As Vatican officials complained, as denunciations from the segments of Catholic press rolled in, and as bishops cornered him at various meetings to bitterly bemoan "socialist" Jesuits in their dioceses, Don Pedro would typically defend his men loyally. (At the same time, he used to say to those Jesuits in question, "Please make it easier to defend you!")

But in case any Jesuits misunderstood Arrupe's stance toward the church, he pointedly mailed a photo of himself to Jesuit communities around the world showing him in his black cassock kneeling at the feet of Pope John Paul II. The caption, taken from one of the

founding documents of the Society of Jesus, reads: *Soli Domino ac Ecclesiae Ipsius sponsae, sub Romano Pontifice, Christi in terris Vicario servire* (“To serve the Lord alone and the Church, his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the vicar of Christ on earth”).

In 1981, at age seventy-four, Arrupe suffered an incapacitating stroke. Unable to continue as superior general, he turned over the governance of the society to Vincent O’Keefe, charging him with guiding the order until a General Congregation could be called to elect a successor. But in a move widely seen as a critique of Arrupe’s leadership and a stinging personal rebuke, Pope John Paul II replaced Fr. O’Keefe with his own “delegate,” another Jesuit, who would lead the Society until the election of the next superior. It was a crushing blow for the ailing Arrupe. In his book *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings*, Kevin Burke, SJ, writes, “Overcome with grief when he learned of this extraordinary intervention into the governance of the Society, Arrupe burst into tears. He was embarking on the most difficult decade in his life, a decade of forced inactivity and silence, a season of profound spiritual poverty and surrender.”

In response to this move by the Vatican, Arrupe, ever faithful, instructed Jesuits around the world to accept John Paul’s decision with loyalty, as he himself had. It was a move that astonished many of his detractors, who thought him essentially disobedient, and won him the favor of the Vatican. In the end, the Jesuits successfully weathered the ecclesial storm—but also continued their work with the poor.

For the next ten years, Don Pedro lay in a hospital bed, crippled by his stroke—partially paralyzed and increasingly unable to communicate—in the Jesuit headquarters in Rome. Pope John Paul II would visit him a few days before his death in 1991.



In Elizabeth Johnson's book *Friends of God and Prophets*, the theologian outlines two models of relating to the saints. The first, perhaps more well known in Catholic circles, she calls the "patronage model," where the faithful request favors from the saints. Since the saints are closer to God in heaven (and now have no needs themselves), it's natural to ask them for help. Though it is always God to whom we pray, we ask the saint to "intercede" for us, much as we might ask an older brother or sister to approach a parent on our behalf.

But, as Johnson points out, this model did not predominate in the early church. There we find something else: the "companionship model," where the saints are our friends, those who have gone ahead of us and are now cheering us along, brothers and sisters in the community of faith, the great "cloud of witnesses." This is a more egalitarian notion of sanctity and sainthood. St. Paul, for example, speaks of all the Christian faithful as saints.

In my own life, I find both models operative. In general, I relate most often to the saints as companions, as models, and certainly as cheerleaders. But there are many times when I feel the need for help in approaching God, and the saints are fine people to turn to.

Thérèse of Lisieux, for example, is the person I think of when feeling dejected or discouraged. She had a deep understanding of the way grace works through the struggles of everyday life, and her example helps me to more peacefully accept what the day places before me. And when I feel overwhelmed by the day's burdens, I turn to her for her prayers. In my office, I have posted a favorite prayer card of Thérèse, given to me by a friend who visited Lisieux. In her Carmelite habit, Thérèse stares at the camera with her typically frank expression. Underneath the photo

is her spidery handwriting: *Je suis venue au Carmel pour sauver les âmes, et surtout afin de prier pour les prêtres* (“I have come to Carmel to save souls, and especially in order to pray for priests”). Thérèse of Lisieux acts as both a model for me and an intercessor.

When I am having difficulties with my vocation—say, when I am trying to accept a difficult decision from a superior—I turn to either Ignatius of Loyola or Thomas Merton. I figure Merton knows a little about difficulties with religious superiors (even the briefest glance at his journals shows that he struggled with his vow of obedience almost daily). And I figure Ignatius knows a little about Jesuit obedience. (Though as one Jesuit remarked, “What does *he* know about it? He was always the boss!”) I turn to Aloysius Gonzaga when I’m struggling with chastity. To John XXIII when I am struggling with the church. And to Dorothy Day when I am finding it hard to live as simply as I should.

And for the record, whenever I lose something, I inevitably fall back on one of the first prayers I was taught in childhood, to St. Anthony of Padua, finder of lost things:

St. Anthony, St. Anthony,
please come around.
Something is lost
and cannot be found.

Frequently, the speed with which I find the lost object after saying that prayer is close to alarming.

Pedro Arrupe has always been a patron for work with the poor and the underprivileged. Since the novitiate, I have found inspiration in his writings to Jesuits, his speeches about social justice, and his constant encouragement to be a “man for others.” In one of my favorite passages

from a book entitled *Justice with Faith Today*, Arrupe, speaking on Good Friday in 1977, compares the cry of Jesus from the cross to the cry of the poor today:

“Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, the poor and powerless, you do to me.” These words are strikingly clear and unmistakable. Jesus identifies himself with the poor. The thirst in the throat of Jesus is a real thirst that cries to heaven as it did then on Calvary. And that cry of Jesus at the point of dying is repeated in thousands of throats that today are clamoring for justice and fair play, when they beg for bread, for respect for the color of their skin, for a minimal medical assistance, for shelter, for education, for freedom.

So it is to Arrupe that I pray when seeking guidance for ministry among the poor, the marginalized, or the hopeless. I prayed for his help, shortly after his death, when I was working in East Africa with refugees. I prayed for his intercession while working as a prison chaplain in Boston during my theology studies. And I prayed to him during one of the most challenging ministries I’ve ever undertaken.



At the time of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, I was living in New York City and working at *America*, a Jesuit magazine. Two days later, I began ministering to the firefighters, police officers, and rescue workers at the site of the former World Trade Center. Almost immediately I was joined in this work by a number of my brother Jesuits.

In the first few days, gaining entrance to the site was easy: all you needed was a Roman collar. But within a week, as security around the area grew tighter and more organized, it became more difficult to pass through the chain-link barricades erected by the police, the National Guard, and the U.S. Army.

One morning a Jesuit friend and I approached two surly-looking police officers manning one of the checkpoints. Sensing that getting in might prove difficult, we decided to pray for some intercession. Turning to Pedro Arrupe immediately came to mind, not only because we felt he would look out for us as Jesuits, but also because we remembered his experience ministering to the victims of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. We figured he knew something about the type of ministry we were doing: working with confused and sad men and women following a man-made disaster. So Bob and I stood on a crowded street corner in lower Manhattan as fire engines and police cruisers raced past us, sirens blaring, and asked Fr. Arrupe for his intercession: “Help us get into the site and do God’s work.”

As we drew nearer to the police officers, their faces softened. Smiling and nodding, they greeted us cheerfully: one, it turned out, had gone to a Jesuit university, Boston College. He asked for a blessing. We had no trouble passing through the barricade.

Each time I approached a barricade with my Jesuit friends, we would pray to Pedro Arrupe. And as I began to work with other young Jesuits at the site, the prayer to Arrupe seemed more and more natural—younger Jesuits in particular consider Fr. Arrupe a hero because of his openness, his sense of humor, his dedication to the poor, and his total commitment to Jesus Christ. And each time we asked his intercession, we were able to pass through another barricade.

One morning, a group of five of us walked to the site, hoping to celebrate Mass with the rescue workers. There were plenty of supplies

to lug along: chalices, patens, hosts, wine, a stole. Upon arrival, we stumbled upon an unusually long line of volunteers—steelworkers, doctors, counselors, construction workers, psychologists, engineers, sanitation workers—all standing under a hot September sun, patiently waiting to enter the site. When I inquired about the delay, a sanitation worker said, “The FBI has just declared the place a crime scene. It’s gonna be impossible to get in, Father.”

After waiting for an hour in the broiling sun, I approached a soldier from the National Guard and explained our desire to celebrate Mass.

He was implacable. Get back in line, he said, and wait your turn.

Glumly I returned to my Jesuit friends. “We can’t get in,” I said. Bob turned to me and smiled.

“Of course we can’t,” he laughed. “We forgot to pray to Pedro Arrupe!”

This time I said a short prayer to Fr. Arrupe. A few minutes later I ambled over to another police officer and asked for entrance. I told him we’d been waiting for more than an hour.

“Of course you can come in!” he said. “You just have to know who to ask for help.”



In September of 1983, as the Jesuit General Congregation convened in Rome to elect his successor, Fr. Arrupe, by now unable to speak, provided a personal message to be read to the delegates by another Jesuit. “How I wish I were in a better condition for this meeting with you,” it began. “As you can see, I cannot even address you directly.”

In the message that marked the end of his eighteen years as superior general, Don Pedro first gave thanks to God and then expressed

gratitude to his fellow Jesuits. “Had they not been obedient to this poor Superior General, nothing would have been accomplished.” He thanked the Jesuits for their obedience “particularly in these last years.” He asked that young Jesuits surrender to the will of God. Of those who were at the peak of their apostolic activity, Arrupe said he hoped they would not “burn themselves out.” Rather, he said, they should find a proper balance by centering their lives on God, not on their work. To the old and infirm Jesuits, “of my age,” he urged openness.

Finally, with many Jesuits weeping in the hall, Arrupe’s message ended with some thoughts and a favorite prayer, taken from the conclusion of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius and made more poignant by what he had experienced as superior general and what he now experienced as a human being:

I am full of hope seeing the Society at the service of Our Lord, and of the Church, under the Roman Pontiff, the vicar of Christ on earth. May she keep going along this path, and may God bless us with many good vocations of priests and brothers: for this I offer to the Lord what is left of my life, my prayers and my sufferings imposed by my ailments.

For myself all I want is to repeat from the depths of my heart: “Take, O Lord, and receive: all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. All I have and all I possess are yours, Lord. You have given it all to me. Now I return it to you. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace, and I want nothing more.”

For me, the story of Pedro Arrupe is the story of a dedicated man whose ultimate cross was not only his physical sufferings but also

misunderstanding from the church he loved so much. Even throughout those difficult times, his hope and his faith in the church and in God remained. He was, as he said often, “an incorrigible optimist.”



Initially, what drew me to Pedro Arrupe was a little prayer card I was given during my philosophy studies, shortly after his death. On its front was a black-and-white photograph of Fr. Arrupe at prayer, in his favorite Japanese style. Wearing a cassock, he sits in the Eastern fashion, feet tucked under him, on a bare floor. His scuffed black shoes lie to his side.

But it was not the image that captivated me but what was printed on the back: a prayer written by Arrupe shortly after he had suffered his stroke, and read out during that same address at the 1983 congregation. It was one of the most moving expressions of surrender I had ever read.

“More than ever,” he wrote, “I find myself in the hands of God. This is what I have wanted all my life, from my youth. But now there is a difference; the initiative is entirely with God. It is indeed a profound spiritual experience to know and feel myself so totally in God’s hands.”

For a long while I wondered: What could enable a person to approach life in this way? He wrote these words during a time of public censure after many years of service, and in the middle of a debilitating illness. What could account for his open and trusting attitude? An answer came when I stumbled across the story of an Italian journalist who interviewed Arrupe in the late 1970s. The journalist asked, “Who is Jesus Christ for you?”

One imagines that the seen-it-all journalist probably expected any one of a host of dull responses. The superior general could be counted on to say something like Jesus Christ is my friend, or Jesus Christ is my brother, or Jesus Christ is my leader.

Don Pedro, however, said this: “For me, Jesus Christ is everything!”



This popular meditation from Pedro Arrupe, which has been printed on note cards, posters, and coffee mugs, has a complicated provenance. Though it has been “attributed” to Arrupe, no one has been able to find it in any of Arrupe’s official speeches or letters. Fr. Vincent O’Keefe, SJ, one of Arrupe’s closest friends and advisers, once told me that it had most likely been copied down by someone at a talk given by Arrupe and circulated from there. And, said Fr. O’Keefe, it’s just the kind of thing Arrupe would say:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than 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.



It was this radical stance, this utter dependence on and trust in Jesus Christ, that enabled Pedro Arrupe to fulfill his vow of obedience even during what for him must have been the most difficult situation imaginable: a public rebuke by the Vatican. And it is here

that Arrupe inspires me the most and has become an increasingly important figure to me.

Over the centuries, many loyal and devout Catholics have been misunderstood and treated unjustly by the church. This is not a controversial statement. Think of Galileo, or, more to the point, Joan of Arc. In the past century, too, a number of committed Catholics have suffered mistreatment at the hands of the church they love. Before the Second Vatican Council, for example, many talented theologians, including such towering figures as the Jesuit John Courtney Murray and the Dominican Yves Congar, were “silenced” by Vatican officials and their own religious orders.

Murray, a theology professor at the Jesuits’ Woodstock College, had written extensively on the question of church and state, proposing that constitutionally protected religious freedom, that is, the freedom of individuals to worship as they please, was in accord with Catholic teaching. The Vatican, however, disagreed, and in 1954 Murray’s superiors ordered him to cease writing on the topic. But almost ten years later, Fr. Murray was asked by the archbishop of New York, Francis Cardinal Spellman, to accompany him as an official *peritus*, or expert, at the Second Vatican Council. It was there that the previously silenced Murray served as one of the architects for the council’s *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, which drew on Murray’s earlier, banned work and affirmed religious freedom as a right for all people. Toward the end of the council, John Courtney Murray was invited to celebrate Mass with Pope Paul VI, as a public sign of his official “rehabilitation.” Murray died a few years later, in 1967.

Yves Congar’s story is similar. The French Dominican priest, whom the *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* calls “perhaps the most influential Catholic theologian of this century prior to Vatican II,” wrote extensively on the church, specifically regarding questions of church

authority, tradition, the laity, and relations with other Christian churches. Thanks to his groundbreaking work, Congar was a popular teacher, lecturer, and writer. In 1953, however, his book *True and False Reform in the Church* was abruptly withdrawn from circulation. The next year he, too, was ordered to cease teaching, lecturing, and publishing. Like Murray, however, Congar's work proved foundational to the Second Vatican Council. As a participant in the council, Congar made major contributions to two central documents: the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and the *Decree on Ecumenism*, both of which drew from his earlier, banned writings.

Yves Congar's eventual rehabilitation was even more dramatic than John Courtney Murray's: in 1994, he was named a cardinal by Pope John Paul II.

Before the council, many may have looked at the situations of Murray and Congar and said, "How foolish of them to keep silent!" Others might have said, "How absurd to keep their vow of obedience when they know that their writings would help the church!" Or, more simply, "Why don't they just leave their orders and write what they please?" And over the years many who have been silenced or prevented from doing certain kinds of ministries have left the priesthood or their religious orders or even the church in order to say what they wanted.

What enabled Murray and Congar and other good servants of the church, as well as Fr. Arrupe, to accept these decisions was their trust that the Holy Spirit was at work through their vow of obedience, and that through their dedication to their religious vows, God would somehow work, even if these decisions seemed illogical or unfair or even dangerous. (Significantly, one of Congar's final works was entitled *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*.) The stance is similar, I think, to the seriousness with which couples take their marriage vows during rocky periods in their relationship. They trust that even

though things are rough at the time or their marriage makes little earthly sense, their vows are a sign of God's fidelity to them, a symbol of the rightness of their commitment, and a reason to trust that God will see them through this period.

Murray and Congar were not the only ones silenced or prevented from carrying out their ministries in the twentieth century. During the latter part of his life, Thomas Merton faced growing fears that he would be prevented by the censors of his Trappist Order from publishing any writings on the cold war. In 1962, the publication of his book *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* was forbidden by his Trappist superiors, who also ordered him to cease writing on issues of war and peace. Merton was furious at the decision, saying that it reflected "an astounding incomprehension of the seriousness of the present crisis in its religious aspect." His book, which contains what are by now widely accepted critiques of war and militarism, was finally published in 2004.

In a moving letter to Jim Forest, a fellow peace activist, Merton explained his decision and his understanding of obedience. His letter is quoted in *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*:

I am where I am. I have freely chosen this state, and have freely chosen to stay in it when the question of possible change arose. If I am a disturbing element, that is all right. I am not making a point of being that, but simply of saying what my conscience dictates and doing so without seeking my own interest. This means accepting such limitations as may be placed on me by authority, and not because I may or may not agree with the ostensible reasons why the limitations are imposed, but out of love of God who is using these things to attain ends which I myself cannot at the moment

see or comprehend. I know he can and will in his own time take good care of those who impose limitations unjustly or unwisely. This is his affair and not mine. In this dimension I find no contradiction between love and obedience, and as a matter of fact it is the only sure way of transcending the limits and arbitrariness of ill-advised commands.

Pedro Arrupe, of course, having just suffered a stroke, was not able to write as eloquently about his obedience during his own trial. Nor is it likely that the more mild-mannered Arrupe would have used the same words that Merton did. But though he accepted things with greater equanimity than did Merton, the Vatican's decision still pained Arrupe. One need only recall his tears at the news. Yet Arrupe's short prayer about being in God's hands, like Murray's and Congar's assent to their silencing, and like Merton's remarks about knowing that God was at work in ways that he "cannot at the moment see or comprehend," was a way of expressing his commitment to his vows, his belief that God would ultimately bring about good, and the fact that, for him, Jesus Christ was "everything."

When I entered the Jesuits, I expected that obedience would prove to be the easiest of the vows. Poverty—giving up so much and living with so little—seemed obviously difficult. And I knew chastity would be a great challenge, too; it's difficult to live without sexual intimacy and to experience loneliness so frequently. But obedience didn't trouble me as much. After all, you just have to do what you're told, right? Do the job you're asked to do.

But recently, during the course of writing this book, I was asked by my superiors not to write about certain topics that are still too controversial in the church. So, wanting to remain faithful to my vow of obedience, and bearing in mind the words of Thomas Merton and the

example of Pedro Arrupe, I accepted this decision, though I hope and trust that one day I will be able write about these things more freely.

Or perhaps, in the course of events, I will discover that my conscience moves me to speak more openly or explore other avenues of discourse. The longstanding tradition of the church, after all, is of the primacy, dignity, and inviolability of the informed conscience. St. Thomas Aquinas famously said that he would rather disobey church teaching than sin against his conscience. More recently, the Second Vatican Council, summing up Catholic teaching on the topic, declared, “In all his activity man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to know God. . . . It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience.”

“Conscience,” wrote the Council, “is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths.”

There is a long list of saints and holy persons who have felt duty-bound to speak out about matters concerning the good of their church, even at risk to themselves. Their consciences impelled this. During a time of crisis in the church in the fourteenth century, St. Catherine of Siena, the renowned mystic, wrote to a group of cardinals in Rome saying, “You are flowers that shed no perfume, but a stench that makes the whole world reek.” When asked how she could possibly know so much about Rome from her faraway post, she replied that the stench reached all the way to Siena. In 1374, in a letter to Pope Gregory IX, exiled in France, she instructed him to return to Rome. “Be a man! Father, arise!” she wrote. “I am telling you!”

Catherine could not remain silent.

But for Murray, Congar, and Merton, silence was not only what their vow of obedience demanded, but also what their consciences obliged. For their contemporary Pedro Arrupe, the issue was not so

much remaining silent as it was patiently accepting mistreatment in the church and guiding the rest of the Jesuits, through his example, to respond with charity.

Needless to say, I am no Murray or Congar or Merton or Arrupe. But I know that God will somehow work through all of this. And I trust that both my vow of obedience and the desire to rely on my conscience will, together, prove in some mysterious way to be a source of life for me and for others.

I trust in all this because, as Don Pedro said, “For me Jesus Christ is everything.”

