



## Solemnity of St Ignatius of Loyola



**Date:** Sunday, July 30, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** A

**First Reading:** Deuteronomy 30:15-20

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 1:1-6 | **Response:** Psalm 1:1-2

**Second Reading:** 2 Timothy 1:12-17

**Gospel Acclamation:** Sp Exx 104

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 12:49-53

**Preached at:** the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

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**T**oday we celebrate in the parish, the feast of Saint Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, and the inspiration of a spirituality that I know many of you, young and old, lay and religious, value and esteem. There's so much I could tell you about St Ignatius, but let me try and be brief and stick to just one thing that strikes me about Ignatius from each of the readings we have just read. And forgive me, but I find it hard to talk about Ignatius without also talking about Jesuits who have follow in his footsteps.

Firstly, Ignatius always pointed people towards Jesus, just as Jesus pointed people towards the Father. He did not want to create the Society of Ignatius, and have something named after him like the Franciscans or the Dominicans did for Francis and Dominic... no – Ignatius wanted the Society to bear the name of Jesus.

There's a joke that's told, perhaps you've heard it, of someone asking a Jesuit what he might feel when he gets to heaven. (Some people telling this joke, would say if, but let's go with when...) This person asked the Jesuit, would he be afraid of meeting Jesus... Oh no he says. Jesus and I are friends, I'm not afraid of meeting Jesus in heaven... but St Ignatius...

If you told that joke to a Jesuit, you'd most likely hear some nervous laughter, because there is a truth in the joke that all Jesuits are friends with Jesus – but I'm sure every Jesuit might be a little apprehensive about Ignatius, or at least what Ignatius thought of them. The reason being was that he was so demanding

on the one hand, but on the other, so very practically wise. And his stress on pointing towards Jesus means that for many Jesuits, their primary spiritual relationship is through Jesus, but the method they use is from Ignatius. Like St Paul in the 2nd Reading, he had been the beneficiary of God's mercy and believed that God had worked in his life so as to call him to a great mission, to stand with his Son at the Cross. We often talk today about being on mission, being sent to the frontiers, but it is always with Jesus who is with us and the poor and the persecuted.

One of the recent Jesuit Congregations asked the question: What is it to be a Jesuit? It is to know, they said, that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was: Ignatius, who begged the Blessed Virgin to "place him with her Son," and who then saw the Father himself ask Jesus, carrying his Cross, to take this pilgrim into his company.

So being with Jesus was important for Ignatius. And what is it, they asked again, to be a companion of Jesus today? It is, they said, to engage, under the standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and that struggle for justice which it includes.

Over time, the Jesuits have expanded that struggle for faith and justice, to include reconciliation... specifically, reconciliation with God, with one another, and with creation.

We see this very clearly in Pope Francis, in how he embodies this through his focus on mercy – a reconciliation with God and one another; and through his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, which had a focus on reconciliation with creation.

Ignatius wrote the book, *The Spiritual Exercises*. It's been published many thousands of times since he wrote it, in very many languages. It is a series of meditations and instructions on how to pray, with four definite themes, what he calls 'weeks'. The first week was to reflect on God's mercy to you, to feel remorse for your past life and to feel gratitude to God, the second week is about following Jesus in his ministry, the third, accompanying Jesus on the cross, and finally, going forth with Jesus in his resurrection, contemplating and sharing God's love for the world. Many of you are familiar with the dynamic, and we can't help but

include aspects of this in all of our preaching – so it shouldn't be new to you. But one of the things the Spiritual Exercises help in is discernment and making decisions.

In our first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses says to the people: “I have set before you life and prosperity, death and doom... if you obey... you will live... If you turn away... you will perish...”

When I reflected on this reading, my heart was drawn to the 23rd paragraph of the Spiritual Exercises, what we call the Principle and Foundation and for Ignatius it was the guiding principle and the foundation for any person to continue praying. Ignatius wrote:

Human persons are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save their soul.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for human persons to help them in attaining the end for which they are created.

Hence, human persons are to make use of them in as far as they help them in the attainment of this end, and they must rid themselves of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to them.

Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.

Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.

I think Ignatius, hearing Moses in Deuteronomy, would want us to be indifferent, and to make choices from a place of freedom. We all know, from our own experience, how making decisions from a place of fear always ends badly. Some decisions are easy, like the one Moses presented: Who wouldn't want to choose life, especially life over death, but some choices are not that easy. We all know that some decisions need discernment. Part of the heritage that Ignatius left the Church was a way of making decisions, to follow God's will, not out of fear, but

in freedom. Ignatius was always concerned with God's greater glory... You may recognize the letters AMDG, Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, for the Greater Glory of God.... This is how Paul concludes in the second reading. When we are faced with difficult decisions, St Ignatius would ask us to always choose the thing that brings God the greatest glory. If you see things in those terms, then you can find some freedom because ultimately the decision is always the same. Putting it another way – whose kingdom does one build? God's Kingdom, or my own? St Ignatius would advise us that our truest happiness in life is found in God.

Finally, let me say a little bit about the Gospel, where we hear Jesus say “I have come to set the earth on fire,” But let me address the piece about ‘causing division’ a little bit. Certainly following your principles and pursuing the truth, does not always win you friends. And Jesus wouldn't have been crucified if he decided to agree with everyone. But the Jews got the Romans to crucify him because he was branded a ‘trouble-maker’. The same might be true for some of us here tonight. Standing up for the truth causes you to commit publicly and sometimes that will put you against people who disagree with you. The point I think is to always love. As Jesus said on the cross: ‘forgive them father for they know not what they do’. Jesuits throughout history are no strangers to controversy and some may see the followers of Ignatius to have been as revolutionary as He was – but they were always holding two things together, a sincere love for the Church, and a mission to go to the peripheries and frontiers – where the black and white decisions were rarely found, and where the full spectrum of colour, ambiguity, and new ideas were found. Ignatius was a revolutionary precisely because he believed that God could be found in all things – the frontiers were the horizons to which he saw God's love had no limit. God was to be found in all things, not just sacred things, but in everything. Because everything was created by God, and as we recall from the principle and foundation, all created things, and all created persons, could be used to further God's kingdom. And if they weren't helpful, you didn't have to use them. This leads to the saying: ‘pray as you can, not as you can't’, but this revolutionary thinking, that God can be found in all things, in all persons, is extremely important, and really challenged some in the Church who wanted to keep Jesus in a box, or wanted others to go into the Church, but if God is found in all things, it's possible and in fact necessary that the Church must go out. As Pope Francis said before he was elected Pope when referring to the scripture which says that Jesus is standing at the door of our hearts and knocks. Obviously, the text refers to his knocking from the outside in

order to enter, but Pope Francis, wondered about the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out. This is the sort of revolutionary thinking Ignatius was guilty of. But what about setting the world on fire?

Pretty much the effect of Ignatius' life was to set fire to the earth, in the form of establishing the Society of Jesus. This setting fire to the earth, was again beautifully expressed by another of our recent General Congregations when they talked about a fire that kindles other fires.

In this sense, the faith and hope and love that each Jesuit possesses should be an occasion for igniting the faith, hope and love in other people. In this way, the world is set alight by us who are meant to be lights for the world...

This is not just for Jesuits, but for all whom we work with and for – this parish. Let us pray today that all of us here might be that light, that fire, that kindles other fires, so that many hearts may be set alight and burn with a faith, a love and a hope in the God who created, cares and is concerned with each one of us.

Let us pray today in thanksgiving for St Ignatius. Let us pray for this parish of the Holy Trinity, whom Ignatius knew intimately. Let us pray that we might live up to the Ignatian ideals, and be a beacon for everyone who wants to encounter, in a deeply personal way, Jesus Christ. Let us pray for the Society of Jesus, that they might receive vocations, so that the wonderful vision of St Ignatius might be able to continue.

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Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2017-07jul-30-ya-ot-17/>

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