



### **Holy Imitation – The Call of Ignatius and each of us**

The decisive moment in the life of each person and also in Ignatius’s life came when he realized that he was imitating the wrong person. He realized that imitating the example of a noble knight would not satisfy him ultimately, and that God had truly stirred him to a deeper and more genuine desire to imitate those saints who had chosen to walk in God’s path in their selfless desire to praise God.

He had once been satisfied to imitate *knights*, with all the social acceptance and popularity he assumed such imitation could bring to him. But his devastating physical injury in battle and frustrating recovery brought him to honestly question his life and to learn about what he really desired, and thus he came to understand that the desire to imitate the knight satisfied only his *surface* desire and ego. Discovering his deeper yearning meant letting go of his former patterns of imitation — letting go of his finely honed self, at least as he had come to understand it in his earlier days. As he rethought his process of learning and self-knowledge he came to understand the need to be “born again,” to start over, to follow Jesus’ radical direction: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23) as the invitation in the Gospel had indicated.

His moment of ultimate conversion was also his moment of genius, in the sense that Emerson alluded to when he wrote that “imitation is suicide.” It is the moment of realization when every person’s education and learning brings him to the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must ultimately accept in and for himself, for better or for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, “no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.” (from Self Reliance)

Emerson was partly right: imitation begins the journey but only sustains us so far, and at some point we must be responsible for the person whom we seek in truth and then choose to become. Ignatius exchanged one form of imitation for another, but even that second form of imitation—as demonstrated by Saints Dominic and Francis—got him sent home from a failed pilgrimage to Jerusalem and hauled him into a challenging and thorough review by the Spanish Inquisition a few times. In time he came to realize the truth: Christ called him to not be a knight, nor a “Francis,” and not a “Dominic,” but a genuine Ignatius, just as he is and could grow to be. And from that moment the rest of his life was spent in the search for God’s truth as Ignatius was invited to discern it fully and then to demonstrate its importance and meaning – in the holy imitation of Christ alone, and thereby to come to discover God’s genius in being himself, Ignatius, the person God created and called him to be.