



Ignatian Learning – A gift of this year of remembering

Each year there are multiple travel opportunities to make a pilgrimage to some of the places that were significant in St. Ignatius's journeys of life in faith, including Manresa and Barcelona, both in Spain. Manresa, for Ignatius, was a place of solitude and an intense experience of a vivid and personal relationship with God, as well as an anticipation of the service to the poor at a local hospital which would be so formative in his life. Later, Ignatius went to Barcelona, from where he had planned to go and live in Jerusalem, as the destination of his life and his missionary pilgrimage. In Barcelona, which he saw as just a waiting point, Ignatius begged for money for his daily sustenance. At the end of the day, he would give away whatever remained unused to others, rather than hang onto it. Although he knew that he would require additional funds for his passage to Jerusalem, he gave away whatever he had at the end of the day, trusting in God to provide in the days to come for the tasks to be accomplished.

Eventually, Ignatius did embark on a ship to the Holy Land. But he was forced to return due to unrest there, which enveloped the area nearly as soon as he had arrived! Guides in the present note with groups to imagine what would happen if we were put on a plane to Jerusalem and told to expect time visiting the holy sites. But then as soon as we arrived and unpacked at the hotel, imagine we were told we had to go back and not stay for any planned activities! I can imagine a good deal of discontent. Ignatius argued, insisted, and resisted but eventually ended up back in Barcelona, where he decided to study Latin in preparation for his journey to the priesthood.

Learning to Trust

Although I was already familiar with these parts of Ignatius's story from his autobiography, my own experience with pilgrimage brought home for me the ways that his mystical experiences at Manresa must have been deeply interconnected with his experience as a beggar and pilgrim there and in Barcelona. Ignatius was filled with a "palpable experience of God," so present to him in the cave at Manresa that it never was far from his consciousness. Perhaps it is there that he learned to trust in God's intimate, personal love, which truly was a kind providence for him. Surely the graced moments of prayer provided a kind of "reservoir of love" and a trust in God's abundant generosity so there was a trust that allowed him to give away all that he had—rather than to cling to wealth, honor, or any other good one might place above God. Ignatius gave himself away in service at the hospital in Manresa, and he gave himself away to others in Barcelona too. Even the records of his own spiritual experiences were ones that he shared and gave away, as they were gradually developed into the product we now know as the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Movement from the Graces Received in Prayer to Generosity

This kind of movement from grace received in prayer to a vibrant generosity in ordinary life can apply to our own lives. Like Ignatius, we are all gifted in our own ways by God's love and generosity. While how we pray or experience God, or what kinds of gifts and talents we receive, varies from person to person, God loves and knows each one of us intimately. At the same time, we are also beggars who depend on God in our everyday lives, whether our lives feel enriched or impoverished at any given time. Ignatius provides a model for how we can generously give ourselves away to others.

Sometimes, I may indeed feel enlivened and empowered by God's generosity for me and then allow myself to rest in and soak up the goodness of the Lord. However, in those times when marriage, work, parenthood, service, or even prayer itself seems to leave me feeling a bit like a beggar, I can still choose to respond in generosity in the other areas of my life. Maybe a family relationship is stressed and difficult for a time, but I can still try to be generous with those who share my time in work or in an office or classroom. Perhaps a given day of teaching or meetings does not go as well as I had hoped, but I can still try to be kind to the cashier as I buy lunch in McDonald's or in the cafeteria. The truth is that

God is constantly generous to us; the question is whether we are paying attention to God's presence and are we willing to be responsive and generous as we give back love to others that we meet each day.

Ignatius must have been so disappointed not to be able to stay in Jerusalem, but he eventually accepted that God had other plans for his life. We, too, do not always get to "go to Jerusalem" but do we believe that we are given opportunities to trust in God still laboring on our behalf? Ignatius learned to keep his trust in God and love for God steady in all the phases of his life, whether it was a time of "plenty" or of "little." This trust was developed in his experiences of personal prayer and generous living. Like Ignatius—both a mystic and a beggar—we are now invited to receive God's gifts and to share all that we are and have, season after season.