



### *Ignatius and his brothers – focusing on his First Companion, Peter Fabre, S.J.*

In a recent interview Pope Francis singled out and praised the man often called the "Second Jesuit." The Pope was asked the reason for his devotion to this "First Companion" of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus. "[Pierre Favre's] dialogue with all," said the pope, "even the most remote and even with his opponents; his simple piety, a certain naïveté perhaps, his being available straightaway, his careful interior discernment, the fact that he was a man capable of great and strong decisions but also capable of being so gentle and loving." Favre spent a great deal of his Jesuit life working with Protestants during the explosive time of the Reformation; and, as the pope intimated, he always did so with great openness and charity—during a time when they were called "heretics" and not generally so welcomed or regarded.

One of my favorite quotes from Fabre is: "Take care, take care, never to close your heart to anyone." Which truly characterizes his gentle, grace-filled life: One of the very first (and one of Pope Francis' favorite) of the first Jesuits. So, what does St. Peter Faber have to say to us today that can help us better understand the robust founder of the Jesuits?

Favre was said by St. Ignatius to be the man best suited to direct others in the Spiritual Exercises—quite an accolade from the author of the Exercises. But surprisingly, Favre's story is not nearly as well-known as those of his two famous college roommates, Ignatius Loyola, and Francis Xavier. He still languishes in relative obscurity. Indeed, so many writers can't even agree on a standard way of referring to the man—you will see in his name, variously, the original French "Pierre Favre," the somewhat modified Anglo-French "Peter Favre," and the totally Anglicized "Peter Faber"—is an indication of the lack of attention given him. That of course changes with his canonization. Included here is a short meditation on the life-changing friendship between Pierre and his two college roommates which formed the leadership that guided the first followers of Ignatius.

With his talent for friendships, Ignatius enjoyed close relations with a large circle of friends. (That is one reason for his enthusiasm for writing letters.) Indeed, the earliest way that Ignatius referred to the early Jesuits was not with phrases like "Defenders of the Faith." **Friendship** was an essential part of Ignatius' life. Two of his closest friends were also his college roommates, Peter Favre, from the Savoy region of France, and Francisco de Javier, the Spaniard later known as St. Francis Xavier.

The three met at the Collège Sainte-Barbe at the University of Paris, then Europe's leading university, in 1529. By the time they met Ignatius, Peter and Francis were already friends and sharing lodgings. The two had studied together for their master's degrees; both were excellent students who had heard stories about Ignatius before meeting him. The former soldier was a notorious figure on campus, known for his intense spiritual disciplines and habit of begging alms. At 38, Ignatius was much older than Peter and Francis, who were both 23 at the time. And his path to the university was more circuitous. After his soldiering career, his recuperation, and his conversion, he had spent months in prayer discerning what to do with his life. Ultimately, he decided that an education was required. So, Ignatius went to school, taking elementary grammar lessons with young boys and, later, studying at the universities of Alcalá and Salamanca. His studies provide us with one of the more remarkable portraits of his newfound humility: the once-proud soldier squeezed into a too-small desk beside young boys in the classroom, making up for lost time.

Several years later, enrolled at the University of Paris, where he met Fabre and Xavier. There, in Fabre's words, they shared "the same room, the same table and the same purse." His commitment to a simple life impressed his new

friends. So did his spiritual acumen. For Fabre, a man troubled all his life by a "scrupulous" conscience, that is, an excessive self-criticism, Ignatius was a literal godsend. "He gave me an understanding of my conscience," wrote Fabre. Ultimately, Ignatius led Peter through the Spiritual Exercises, something that dramatically altered Favre's worldview.

This happened despite some very different backgrounds. And here is one area where Ignatius and his friends highlight an insight on relationships: friends need not be cut from the same cloth. The friend with whom you have the least in common may be the most helpful for your personal growth. Ignatius and Peter had, until they met, led radically different lives. Peter came to Paris at age 19 after what his biographer called his "humble birth," having spent his youth in the fields as a shepherd. Imbued with a simple piety toward Mary, the saints, relics, processions, and shrines, and angels, Peter clung to the simple faith of his childhood. Ignatius, on the other hand, spent many years as a courtier and as a soldier, undergone a dramatic conversion, subjected himself to extreme penances, wandered to Rome and the Holy Land in pursuit of his goal of following God's will.

One friend had seen little of the world; the other much. One had always found religion a source of solace; the other had proceeded to God along a tortuous path. Ultimately, Ignatius helped Peter to arrive at some important decisions through the freedom offered in the Spiritual Exercises. Peter's indecision before this moment sounds refreshingly modern, much like the frustrating indecision of any college student today. He wrote about it in his journals:

"Before that—before having settled on the course of my life through the help given to me by God through Inigo—I was always very unsure of myself and blown about by many winds: sometimes wishing to be married, sometimes a doctor, sometimes a lawyer, sometimes a professor of theology, sometimes a cleric without a degree—at times wishing me to be a monk."

In time, Peter decided to join Ignatius on his new path, whose ultimate destination was still unclear. Peter, sometimes called the "Second Jesuit," was enthusiastic about the risky venture from the start. "In the end," he writes, "we became one in desire and will and one in a firm resolve to take up the life we lead today...." His friend changed his life. Later, Ignatius would say that Favre was the most skilled of all the Jesuits in giving the Spiritual Exercises.

It is impossible to read the journals and letters of these men—Ignatius the founder, Xavier the missionary, and Favre the spiritual counselor—without noticing the differences in temperaments and in talents. In later years Ignatius would become primarily an administrator, guiding the Society of Jesus through its early days, spending much of his time laboring over the Jesuit Constitutions. Xavier became the globetrotting missionary sending back letters crammed with hair-raising adventures to thrill his brother Jesuits. (And the rest of Europe, too: Xavier's letters were the equivalent of action-adventure movies for Catholics of the time.) Favre, on the other hand, spent the rest of his life as a spiritual counselor sent to spread the Catholic faith during the Reformation. His work was more diplomatic, requiring artful negotiation through the variety of religions wars raging at the time.

The varied accomplishments of Ignatius, Francis and Peter began with the commitment that they made to God and to one another in 1534. In a chapel at Montmartre in Paris, the three men, along with four other new friends from the university—Diego Laynez, Alfonso Salmerón, Simon Rodrigues, and Nicolás Bobadilla—pronounced vows of poverty and chastity together. Together they offered themselves to God. (The other three men who would round out the list of the "First Jesuits," Claude Jay, Jean Codure and Paschase Broët, would join after 1535.)

The mode of friendship among the early Jesuits flowed from Ignatius's "way of proceeding." For want of a better word, they did not try to possess one another. In a sense, they shared a form of poverty. Their friendship was not self-centered, but other-directed, seeking the good of the other in the mission committed to that person. The clearest indication of this is the willingness of Ignatius to ask Francis to leave his side and become one of the church's great missionaries. And his decision to make Peter one of the "peacemakers" in a turbulent time. The heritage of Ignatius is the willingness to freely share their gifts as God and God's people needed and from which all will benefit from the sharing. It truly became a practice and heritage freely given for the good of the church, for one another and "*To the Greater Glory of God!*"