



Ignatian Reflections: Living Fully Season after Season

One of the pleasures associated with the commemoration of St. Ignatius of Loyola's life is journeys to various sites that were significant in the saint's faith journey. One very significant site, Manresa, was a place of solitude and an intense experience of a vivid and personal relationship that was beginning with God, as well as a location involving service to the poor at a local hospital. Ignatius later went on to Barcelona, from which point he planned to go and live in Jerusalem, as the ultimate destination of his pilgrimage in faith. In Barcelona, which he saw as just a waiting and "jumping off" point, Ignatius begged for money for his daily food and at the end of the day, he would give away whatever remained to others, rather than hang onto the collected funds. Although Ignatius knew that he would require additional money for his passage to Jerusalem, he gave away whatever he had at the end of the day, trusting in God's providence for the next day.

Eventually, Ignatius embarked on a ship to the Holy Land. But he was forced to return due to unrest in the Holy Land, nearly as soon as he had arrived! Imagine the frustration 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 we were told to go back and not stay for any planned activities! I can imagine the level of discontent. Ignatius argued, insisted, and resisted but eventually ended up back in Barcelona, where he began to study Latin as an adult student in preparation for the priesthood.

Learning to Trust

Being familiar with these parts of Ignatius's story from reading his autobiography, the experience of "pilgrimage" brings home the ways that his mystical experiences at Manresa must have been deeply interconnected with his experience as a beggar and pilgrim there. Ignatius was filled with the palpable experience of God, so present to him in the cave at Manresa. Perhaps it was there that he learned to trust God's intimate, personal providence. Surely those graced moments of prayer provided a kind of "reservoir of love" and a trust in God's abundant generosity to him, a trust that allowed Ignatius 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 to others 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 gave away, as they gradually developed them into the tradition which we know as the Spiritual Exercises.

Movement from the Graces Received in Prayer to Generosity

This kind of movement from the graces received in prayer to generosity in ordinary life can apply as well 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 all 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 to me and allow myself to rest in and soak up the goodness of the Lord. However, in those times when marriage, work, parenting, service, or even prayer itself seems to leave me feeling like a bit of a beggar, I can still choose to respond in generosity in the rest of my life. Maybe a family relationship feels stressed and difficult for a time, but I can still try to be generous to those with whom I journey

in life. Even when a day does not go as well as I had hoped, I can still try to be kind to the cashier as I buy lunch. The truth is that God is constantly generous to us; the question is whether I am paying attention to God's presence and am willing to be responsive to it through what I return in love to others whom I meet this day.

Ignatius must have been so disappointed not to stay in Jerusalem, but he eventually accepted that God had other plans for his life. We, too, don't always get to "go to Jerusalem" but we can trust that God is still laboring on our behalf. Ignatius's trust in God and love for God remained steady, whether it was a time of plenty or of "not much"! Our trust develops in both experiences of personal prayer and generous living. Like Ignatius—both a mystic and a beggar—we are invited to receive God's gifts and to give away all that we are and have, season after season, responding to God's invitation in our lives.