



Praying Together



*St Ignatius of Loyola
Number Seventeen
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Dear Friends,

Something a little different this week, just to keep you on your toes! I thought we might take a closer look at some of the Saints who have been so influential to the works and spiritual life of the Church. We tend to overlook the Saints a bit in the Church of England, but they are an interesting bunch, as you can imagine, so this week I thought we would take a look at the life of St Ignatius of Loyola. I have always been very interested in St Ignatius, mainly because of his spiritual exercises, which I have come across in various places over the past few years. Just before lockdown I had attended a day at Foxhill, (our Chester Diocesan retreat house), where we looked a little closer at his teachings and exercises. It was a really lovely day, greatly beneficial to all who attended.

St Ignatius was born in 1491 in the little town of Loyola situated in the Basque region of Spain. He was the youngest of 13 children and as a young man he had a reputation for having a liking for fancy clothes, being a womaniser and an expert dancer! At the age of around 20 he was gravely wounded in a battle with the French. A canon ball shattered his right leg, he only just survived and spent ten months confined to his bed recovering. During this time his sister brought him some books to read to relieve the boredom. They were a series of religious texts on the life of Jesus and the lives of the Saints. These books had a great influence on him and inspired him to devote his life to God.

When he could walk again, he went to a place of pilgrimage in the mountains called Montserrat. There he made a confession in writing of the sins of his whole life (it took three days). Then he exchanged clothes with a poor man and made a vigil before the black Madonna of Montserrat. His new life had begun. At first, he was a beggar and a hermit, then a pilgrim. He began to study for the Priesthood, and found during this time some prayer exercises he had devised were very helpful to the other students. These prayers were mostly focusing on finding God in the everyday and to seek God in everything we do. He and some fellow Priests founded the Society of Jesus, better known to us as the Jesuits, which is now the largest male religious order in the world with over 26,000 members.
(Margaret Hebblethwaite, The Way of St Ignatius, Finding God in all things, 1999)

I was quite struck by the fact that it was through a period in his life where he was unable to move or do anything that he found the time and space to find God. This is similar to our lockdown experience where so many of us have had more time on our hands. I have heard many stories of people deepening their faith and commitment to God through this period because they have had more space to reflect on their lives and their own spiritual

journey. We need time and space to develop a deeper relationship with God. Ignatius realised this, which is why he taught prayerful contemplation.

One of the exercises we did at Foxhill was the Examen. This is a prayer said at the end of the day. We think of the times we met God and the times when we missed him and we look forward to tomorrow. Maybe you would like to pray it for yourself.

Reflection on the day, before bed (The Examen):

- Sometimes it is nice to light a candle when we pray, to remind us of God's presence. Not essential however!
- Take a moment to let God look at you. Breathe in God's love.
- With your hand on your heart ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you feel most grateful.
- Recall what was said and done in that moment. Enjoy the gratitude you feel again now. Breathe in its life.
- Ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you feel least grateful. What was said and done in that moment? Let it be. Breathe in God's love just as you are.
- Speak to God about what you have noticed.
- Give thanks to God for your day.
- Ask help for tomorrow.

Prayer of St Ignatius of Loyola:

Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I do your will. Amen.

Please could we also remember in our prayers Daisy and Peter who are getting married at St Michael's on Saturday 1st August. Please pray that their love for each other will grow and that their marriage will be blessed. Pray for all whom they love and all who love them. Amen

Ali, on behalf of St Michael's Church, Marbury.