

THE LIFE OF
St. Ignatius

A Prayerful Introduction



To understand and appreciate Ignatian Spirituality, one must understand the life experiences of St. Ignatius, says Fr. Mark Link, SJ. To help give readers of *Partners* a prayerful introduction to his life, Fr. Link adapted the following nine meditations from his book *Challenge, a daily meditation program based on The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. In the book Fr. Link suggests the following format for each meditation:

- 1) Read each reflection prayerfully.
- 2) Think about what struck you most in the reflection.
- 3) Speak to God about your thoughts.
- 4) Listen to God's response in the depths of your heart.



by Fr. Mark Link, SJ

The Youth

Ignatius was born in Spain a year before Columbus stepped ashore on America. By his 16th birthday, both his parents had died. He was taken in by a family friend, the treasurer of Spain. He became a page in the royal court. It was no seminary. He wrote to a friend that he indulged in “gambling, dueling, and affairs.”

Father, I have sinned against God and against you: I'm no longer fit to be your SON. Luke 15:18.

The Soldier

Upon turning 20, Ignatius hired himself out as a soldier. One day he was sent to defend the city of Pamplona against the French. Cannonballs began pounding the city wall, opening a hole in it. As Ignatius rushed to defend the opening he was struck down by a cannonball that shattered his leg.

No one falls to the ground without your Father's consent... You are worth much more than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31.

The Convalescent

For nine months Ignatius endured a painful recovery that left him with a lifelong limp. During this time he used to daydream of the

glory he would win for the lady of his dreams. He asked for romances and books of chivalry, but the only two books in the house were a life of Christ and a volume of the lives of the Saints. Slowly he became attracted to what he found there. He still dreamed of glory, but now it was to be God's glory. He resolved to change his life and devote it to the service of God.

Accept salvation as a helmet, and the word of God as the sword which the spirit gives you. Do all this in prayer, asking for God's help. Ephesians 6:17-18

The Penitent

When he had fully recovered, Ignatius went to the monastery and shrine of Montserrat, a long 300-mile trip over hill country. There he made a general confession of his sins in writing. On the eve of the feast of Our Lady, he spent the whole night in prayer before a statue of Our Lady.

Let us celebrate with a feast! This son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found. Luke 15:23-24

The Pilgrim

Ignatius went to Manresa, a town on the Cardoner River. He begged his food from door to door. The kids used to call out, "Here comes the man in the old sack." Ignatius' greatest joy during this period was his seven hours of daily prayer in a cave on the banks of the Cardoner.

Long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35

The Tortured Soul

The springtime of the joy of the first weeks at Manresa suddenly clouded over into a bitter winter. An awareness of the evil of his former life began to torture him. His taste for spiritual things vanished as suddenly as it came. In an effort to recapture the fervor and joy he once experienced, Ignatius went on an 8-day fast, but to no avail. He fell into a deep depression and was on the brink of suicide. He cried out "hasten, Lord, to my aid!" God heard his prayer. Slowly, a profound grace and peace returned to his tortured soul.

An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. Luke 22:3

The Mystic

One day as church bells pealed, Ignatius felt his soul soaring skyward like an eagle and "in the imagined harmony of three organ keys, he contemplated the mystery of the Trinity. Tears of joy ran down his cheeks." Other experiences followed. During Mass one day, he saw clearly "how Jesus Christ was there in the most holy sacrament." The things he saw gave him such strength in his faith that he often thought to himself: if there were no Bible teaching these truths of faith, he would be resolved to die for them, merely because of what he saw. —*Autobiography of Ignatius*

I know a certain Christian man who was snatched up into the highest heaven; and there he heard things which cannot be put into words. Corinthians 12:2-5

The Transformed Man

One afternoon, Ignatius was walking along the Cardoner River. Suddenly, God gave him an "enlightenment" of faith, theology, and the spiritual life. Later, he wrote that all the enlightenments of his life combined "would not, in his judgment, be as great as what he experienced on this occasion." It was as though he was transformed into another person. He threw himself down on his knees before a nearby crucifix to express his gratitude to God.

Holy, holy, holy! The LORD Almighty is holy! His glory fills the world. Isaiah 6:3

The Author

The "enlightenment" helped Ignatius to see that Jesus and God's Kingdom are present among us, right now. It also helped him to see how the struggle between good and evil is going on in every heart, right now. More importantly, he saw how to communicate the fruit of his enlightenment to others. And so he began writing what is now known to the world as *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. The rest of the story is history.

The Lord said, "write an account of this so that it will be remembered." Exodus 17:14



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To receive a complimentary copy of *Challenge*, contact Eileen Meehan at (800) 922-5327 or eileen@jesuits-chi.org

