

IF YOU asked a group of Jesuits to sum up the spirituality of St. Ignatius in a phrase, they'd probably say "Finding God in all things." That there is unanimity among Jesuits about something as complex as the vision of their founder is surely a positive thing. (And surprising, too: trying to get a group of Jesuits to agree on anything is a bit like herding cats!)

But "Finding God in all things" can be repeated so many times that it can lose its punch. It can become another stale bromide that fails to make any real difference in our lives.

Certainly finding God in all things means paying attention to the kaleidoscope of ways that God works. God can speak to us through the deep love we feel for our spouses, our friends, and our children. God speaks through the sacraments—during a celebration of the Mass, at the baptism of a longed-for child or grandchild, during a wedding ceremony, and even in the gratitude we feel for a friend's life during a funeral liturgy.

But God's love can also be felt through less obvious ways. Getting a phone call from a friend during a lonely day. Feeling a warm breeze on your face that heralds the coming of spring. Reading a book that recalls an incident from your past, and which spontaneously fills you with happy memories.

But to appreciate these moments we have to pay attention to them. One way to do this is through a prayer popularized by St. Ignatius and known as the "examination of conscience." Essentially a reflective review of the day, the "examination" asks one to be attentive to those times when God seemed especially near. For without the practice of regular prayer we can overlook these privileged moments.

Yet St. Ignatius's vision was that people would not simply *reflect* on their lives, but that they would *act*. It is surely wonderful to feel God's presence, to "savor" it, as Ignatius liked to say. But there is always



"Saint Ignatius at Manresa," a stained-glass window at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in New York City.

So Now What?

CALL AND RESPONSE IN THE IGNATIAN TRADITION

by James Martin, SJ

a response involved. In the Gospels, when Jesus called together his disciples, it wasn't simply to enjoy his company, it was also to respond to the needs of the community—especially the poor. And his freeing of people from their sins and physical ailments was typically accompanied by an invitation to spread the good news to others.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the manual of prayer written by St. Ignatius, this idea is encapsulated by a powerful meditation known as the "Call of the King," in which the retreatant imagines Jesus calling him or her—personally—to join him in the mission given by his Father.

This response can take many forms. It can be as simple as being a more loving person with your family or friends. But that's just a beginning! For some, the call might be to aid a Catholic institution with financial support. For others, direct ministry with the poor. In this issue of *Partners* you can read about the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (see p. 8), a group of people who, after retirement, have found satisfaction helping the poor and marginalized. For others, the call is to foster a more serious prayer life, which might mean deciding, after years of postponement, to pick up the phone and schedule that retreat.

"Finding God in all things" is not just about the feelings of gratitude and closeness to God. Though Jesus spent time eating and talking and just hanging out with his disciples, he was clear that their mission was not simply to relax with him. It was also to respond to the need of the larger community, "to the ends of the earth."

Of course it's always an invitation. God doesn't force us to do anything. And the invitation is usually subtle. A friend once told me she couldn't bear to watch the stories of poor people on the evening news because they made her "too sad." Gradually, though, she realized that these emotions were ways that God was working within her. What she felt was a call to service, a call as real as the one heard by the first apostles.

"Finding God in all things" is not a passive proposition. As St. Ignatius intended, it is meant to prompt an answer to the gentle invitation that Christ holds out for all of us.

What will your response be? ■



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