

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jul 31st 2013

Today marks an important feast day for those of us associated with Jesuit education: the Memorial of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus and writer of the Spiritual Exercises, a man whose life work and legacy has done much to shape our own senses of faith and mission.

Before he was St. Ignatius, Iñigo was a young man of nobility with a particular voraciousness for adventure and glory that accompanied being a knight. In other words, he had particular preoccupations with fame, vanity, and self-procurement of only the best in life; he wanted to be noticed.

Iñigo's life would be changed, however, when, during a battle against the French near Pamplona in the northern Basque region of Spain, he would be hit in the legs with a cannonball. Literally knocked off his feet and in a great deal of pain, he refused to relinquish his pride; he would be taken to the castle in Loyola to recover on account of his valor. It is said that he had his leg re-broken so as to insure that it would heal straight and without any noticeable defect to his physique.

To pass the time during his convalescence, he requested some books to read, hoping to be distracted from his discomfort with heroic tales of warriors and fanciful romances. Unfortunately, the castle had a shortage of these literary genres. He was instead provided with the only two books available, one that narrated the life of Christ and the other retold the lives of the Saints. Approaching these texts with his same all-or-nothing-attitude, he read and contemplated the life of Christ and the Saints in connection to his own ways of living, noticing a call of sorts to change his priorities and devote his life to increasing the faith of others.

Following his conversation of heart, Iñigo would give up everything. Desiring not to be noticed, he went to the monastery at Montserrat and offering his sword at the altar; spending nearly a year in the wilderness near Manresa living as an ascetic while praying and penning the Spiritual Exercises. Ultimately, he discerned that God did not wish Ignatius to be a hermit in a cave. His quest for growing in faith then took him to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, his inability to not be noticed would become a problem and he would be firmly asked to leave.

He was easy to notice in the small primary school desks as he learned Latin in order to attend university. Once at the university he would be noticed again by men who he would later found the Society of Jesus with.

Turning now to today's First Reading, we hear of Moses and the Israelites immediately after receiving the Ten Commandments. Coming down from (both literally and emotionally) his conversation with God, Moses is radiating (literally) with a deep joy and light-ness that he seems to be oblivious to, but that the Israelites recognized. Troubled by the sight of him, they must be persuaded to listen to Moses, who is veiled to prevent distracting them with his radiance.

In the Gospel, we hear Jesus describe the Kingdom of Heaven in simile. Jesus characterizes the joy of finding God's love to finding great treasure and giving everything in service of maintaining that prized gift. I would imagine a particular radiance surrounding the individuals Jesus describes.

Like Ignatius suggests, we are called to live a life "finding God in all things" and with "hearts on fire" with God's love. Like today's reading suggest, when we find God we are/will be filled with great joy superior to anything else in this life, a joy that others might notice in us and we notice in other people and places.

Like all those who have been inspired by the faith, mission, and Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius throughout the centuries, may we continue to experience the joy of serving others and notice the treasure of God's love and guidance in our lives every day.

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