



## Ignatian Spirituality Today

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# Foreword

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*Pau Vidal Sas*

Dear Reader,

You have in your hands a little gem, the work of two contemporary authors who are important voices of our 21st-century Christian tradition. Finding themselves now at a mature—not senescent!—stage of their life journey, they share with us the reasons why they believe that the experiences Ignatius Loyola had more than 500 years ago and the Ignatian spirituality that derives from them continue to be extremely significant today.

Mariola López Villanueva, a Religious of the Sacred Heart, is a journalist and biblical scholar. She has a doctorate in spiritual theology from the Granada Faculty of Theology and is now a professor there. She is passionate about finding everyday language—language that is tender, alive, and understandable—for talking about the experience of a God who dwells in everything, especially in the discarded persons who are found living on the margins. Javier Melloni, a Jesuit, is a specialist in Ignatian spirituality and comparative mysticism. He has spent more than twenty-five years living at the Cova de Manresa and devoting himself to describing in contemporary language the fundamental experience of Ignatius on the banks of the Cardoner River. The Cardoner, which Javier contemplates from his window, is a river that resonates in many other religious traditions.

These two essays arose independently and on different occasions, but published here together, they are doubly forceful, not only for what each text says and how it says it, but also for the subtle dialogue established between them in their content as well as in their style. This diptych has the additional virtue of being able to benefit both those persons getting to know Ignatian spirituality for the first time and those who are already familiar with its language.

In this booklet you will find two contemporary views on Ignatius and his spirituality, both views founded on the conviction that every authentic and profound spirituality impels us to be always encountering God in the world. Some have the idea that spiritual persons are those who turn away from the material world and withdraw

from the clamor of the cities; disillusioned from contemplating so much pain and injustice, they view humanity with suspicion and prefer to remain isolated in their ruminations. Arguing quite to the contrary, Mariola and Javier interpret the experience of the saint of Loyola to show how it offers us a rich and nuanced dialogue with our contemporary world. Offering a lucid criticism of the limits and the traps that encumber us today, they propose a perspective that is serene, attentive, consoling, and grace-filled. They show that Ignatian spirituality, far from being a *fuga mundi* (flight from the world), is a thoroughly incarnated spirituality, an everyday spirituality made tangible in flesh.

In their respective texts, you will be able to find pearls of great value, such as the importance of recognizing that all spiritual growth involves a process; it is an journey in which we must calmly assume our own fragility and visit the darkest hells in order to redeem them. They also stress the centrality of discernment as a way of being attentive and receptive to the will of God today. They warn us that the Ignatian *magis* should not become a voluntaristic Promethean dynamic; it should rather express our desire to develop ourselves fully so as to become what we are called to be. The two authors remind us that, for Ignatius, love and service are so intimately entwined that service can, in a way, be said to be the everyday, concrete form of love. They also emphasize the importance of the place where we situate ourselves; it should be a place that keeps us aware that we must travel through poor and humble spaces if we want truly to follow the poor and humble Jesus of the gospels.

In opting for a spirituality that keeps our eyes wide open and our feet solidly on the ground, Mariola and Javier offer us the gift of considering the figure of Ignatius Loyola and contemplating the good news of Jesus of Nazareth from his perspective. In so doing, they throw a little more light on the path ahead of us. After pausing for a while in our present pilgrimage to remember the pilgrim Ignatius, we will be able to renew our journey refreshed. Having learned to observe the world more attentively, we will be more grateful for what we have received, more reconciled with our own vulnerability, and more willing to help others. Each generation must carry out this basic exercise of *aggiornamento* even as it rediscovers the roots that enable it to live with creative fidelity. We come from different places, and we are heirs to a tradition, but this tradition make sense only if it truly enlivens us and provides life in abundance for everyone today.

It is our task, then, to read carefully and to find our own unique, unrepeatable way of accompanying the luminous fragility of the pilgrim Ignatius as he travels from the Cardoner River to the vision of La Storta. In doing so, we will experience the joy and confidence of not being alone; we will now feel accompanied, united in community with others who desire to live their spirituality authentically, conscientiously, and compassionately.



Sculpture of Saint Ignatius by Bill McElcheran at the Ignatius Jesuit Center in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. © Jesuits of Canada Photography: Franck Janin, SJ.

# Ways of Walking

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*Mariola López Villanueva*

I arrived in Córdoba as a walker on the Ignatian Way, carried along by a certain unawareness. I was daring to participate in an International Congress on the figure of Saint Ignatius Loyola, on the 500th anniversary of his conversion.<sup>1</sup>

Jesuit friends encouraged me to take the opportunity to visit again that beautiful city in Spain, an enclave of cultures. The title the congress organizers had proposed to me for my talk was “Keys for How to Live Ignatian Spirituality Today.” After giving it some thought, I asked myself: do we really want to know how to *live* Ignatian spirituality, as if it were a goal to be achieved? I then took the liberty of rephrasing the title this way: “How Ignatian Spirituality Helps Us Live Today.” That is, how does it help us to live with joy and meaning in a world where so many people do not experience either? The joy and the meaning of life are born of the experience of loving and being able to serve. This was what Ignatius asked for the grace to do— always and in everything.

We have just gone through a period in which we experienced much physical and emotional fragility, and we are living in troubled times, aggravated by the war in Ukraine, as well as by all the other wars that are happening right now but of which we are less aware. Even so, these are extraordinary times because God is coming in them, and he comes in a healing way, especially for the most fragile side of life.

It was in a similar moment of great fragility that God took hold of the life of Íñigo. It happened after the ambitious projects he had been pursuing until then were totally frustrated by that cannonball that shattered leg and kept him prostrate and broken for many months. But it was through that crack in his armor that God was able to sneak into his heart and transform him, little by little, until he could see all things in a new, divine radiance. Today we celebrate the bountiful light that shone forth then and continues to flow from that wound.

The reality remained the same, the reality that the knight Íñigo knew well and that drove him to desire success and grandeur. But now his gaze was transformed: he

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1. Text of the paper presented at the Congreso Internacional: San Ignatius de Loyola, Córdoba, June 22 to 24, 2022.

saw with a new vision that made him radically revise his stance in life, replacing his lethal weapons with blessings.

Ignatius would discover that what we really need, what is most essential, does not come to us from outside (events, circumstances, ideas); it comes rather from an in-depth encounter with ourselves and with the God who shows himself to us in the ordinary activities of our daily lives. He would often remind himself and his companions that “whatever you do, whatever makes you feel most alive... that’s where God is.”

And little by little, by testing his inward experiences and interpreting the interior movements of consolation and desolation, Ignatius allowed himself to be modeled and configured by his Master and Lord. Later on he recorded these experiences as a journey, thus creating a roadmap that would help others. This record took the form of the Spiritual Exercises (SpEx), a program of interior and exterior practices for ordering one’s life through recognizing that God loves us first.

Toward the end of this little book of the Exercises, in the *Contemplation to Achieve Love*, we find these words that inspire us today: “In everything, to love and to serve.” This is the deepest desire of Ignatius, and he asks us to make this request: “Ask for interior knowledge of all the great good you have received so that, stirred to profound gratitude, you may become able to love and serve in everything” [SpEx 233].

How did the pilgrim come to this experience? How can we re-experience it today in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, in the midst of this globalized technological reality we all share?

## The Luminous Fragility of the Pilgrim

“Pilgrim” is the term Ignatius uses to identify himself. The word designates a person who is always in movement, walking without ceasing, constantly learning, searching for the God who will surprise us and call us to his service in the midst of all things.

Indeed, we are all pilgrims on this journey, even though we live in this unprecedented time in history. Our age is very different from the one in which Ignatius lived, but it is still capable of being illuminated by the spirituality he gave to the Church. It is a spirituality we need to recreate in each new era. When I had the opportunity to make the Exercises through art with the Jesuit Bert Daelemans, he showed us a sculpture called *Saint Ignatius the Pilgrim* (1964), created by the Canadian William McElcheran. Using this image, Daelemans explained to us “the laborious transformation by which the voluntarist Íñigo who did not recognize his own fragility became the vulnerable Ignatius who chose his fragility as a path and a portal for encounter.” The sculpture represents an Ignatius in movement, leaning forward; he is unarmed and wears only a cloak to protect himself; the expression on his face shows he is eager to

listen; he is united with others, as is clear from the letter he holds in his right hand. The inclination of his body reveals that he is following the Spirit without getting ahead of it; he is allowing himself to be led gently to where he does not know, while there opens before him a path he will travel along with many others. Daelemans writes beautifully about this sculpture of Ignatius the Pilgrim:

There walks a saint out in the open. Only at first glance is he alone. Leaning forward, always forward, he walks bravely against the current, resisting all winds. He is secure, determined, solid, anchored in a faith that manifests firmness and solidity. With his left hand at heart level, he grabs the cape that barely shields him, accentuating his vulnerability. But he moves forward resolutely, step by step, and the path opens before him. He tenderly bows his face as he encounters others and lifts their spirits. A true pilgrim.

He bows his head to listen because he knows that he cannot advance without listening. His desire is to be a contemplative in action. He will act, yes, but from a depth of awareness. In his right hand he holds a letter so close his body that at first glance it is not perceived, but it is that letter that keeps him united with the body of the least Society of Jesus. It is a letter that, like so many others, keeps him united with his companions on the frontiers of the world, all anointed by the same Spirit [...]. He does not know where he is going, but he wisely trusts that he is going in the right direction because he is not going alone. He is being driven by the Spirit of Christ, and his heart is supported by Christ, that God who is equally a pilgrim.<sup>2</sup>

## Ways of Walking

This vulnerable, trusting manner in which Ignatius became a pilgrim shaped in him an incarnated spirituality that placed great stress on discernment, a practice that Ignatius taught his followers. He had learned discernment from the fathers and mothers of the desert, those great therapists of the Spirit, who realized that each person needed a specific medicine. They knew that what was good and appropriate for one individual was not necessarily so for another, and they insisted on pastoral attention that was personalized, humane, and sapiential. Ignatius put at our disposal a method that helps us to orient both the minor choices of each day and the major decisions of our lives in accord with the ways of Jesus and his Gospel: “With you, as you, like you.”

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2. DAELEMANS, Bert (2021). *La vulnerabilidad en el arte. Un recorrido espiritual*, Boadilla del Monte: PPC, p. 112. The sculpture of *Saint Ignatius the Pilgrim* is located at the Spirituality Center of Guelph, Ontario (Canada).

The spirituality of Ignatius is firmly rooted in historical events; it seeks to immerse itself in the vicissitudes and conflicts of the men and women of our time. It is a spirituality with its eyes wide open and its feet firmly on the ground, and in the face of reality it asks: “How are you here now, God? And what do you want of me? What do you want of us?”

To help us grow in this attitude of discernment, Ignatius proposed a simple daily practice, the *examen*, which involves taking each day in our hands and placing it under the light of God. We gather up what we’ve experienced and give thanks it—gratitude is always the first movement. We then review what needs to be repaired and ask for grace to return to the path of Jesus, walking as he walked.

This practice of discernment is a way of relating to our reality, and I want to use it as a key to explaining the relevance of the Ignatian path for our own time, for us who are pilgrims of the 21st century. I propose that there are three concrete ways of walking this path fruitfully:

- It is a way of walking that gradually cleanses and refines our perception, thus transforming our sensitivity.
- It is a way of walking that helps us grow in our capacity to be grateful and to recognize God’s steady passage through history.
- It is a way of walking that connects and intertwines us with others so that we can cooperate mutually to help care for the unfolding of life, especially where it is most threatened.

## A Way of Walking that Gradually Cleanses and Refines our Perception

I was recently recalling a beautiful and sensitive film by the Japanese director Naomi Kawase, *A Pastry Shop in Tokyo*.<sup>3</sup> Sentaro is a young man who runs a small pastry shop and is looking for an assistant. When Tokue, an elderly woman, offers to help him, he only reluctantly agrees, but she soon shows him that she has a special gift for making sweets. Thanks to her secret recipe, the small business begins to prosper, and the two of them open their hearts to each other. At one point the old woman tells Sentaro: “I saw you working with sadness in your eyes.”

We need to ask ourselves: What are we carrying within us that robs us of our spirit, that makes us work and live with sadness in our eyes? We increasingly contemplate our world as mere spectators, viewing it through screens, but the Lord wants us to be his accomplices and companions, close collaborators in his transformation of the world.

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3. Screenplay and direction: Naomi Kawase. Co-production: Japan-France-Germany (2015).

We are born of the creative, life-giving gaze of the God who sees everything he has made as good and as precious (cf. Gen 1:31), but this original blessing becomes smudged as we journey through life. We need to recover that original experience of how God sees us so that we can offer it to others. That primordial divine gaze is the reason for our existence, and it says to each creature: “You are welcome to this earth.” God’s gaze engenders in us the confidence we need both to feel secure and to confront the world boldly and take risks.

Sometimes we are blinded by busy-ness, self-absorption, and over-saturation. We indulge in the perverse types of gaze that are mentioned in the gospels: the gaze of those who murmur (cf. Lk 15:2), of those who look with distrust (cf. Mk 8:11-13), of those who expect nothing new, of those who see only what is missing, of those who obfuscate and do harm (cf. Jn 8:4-6).

Zulu, a South African language, has a simple greeting, *Sawubona*, which means “I see you.” Today our gaze has been colonized by screens so that we look at one another without actually seeing one another. As a result, our relationships are robbed of presence and warmth. To feel seen is to feel loved, so when we do not know how to see each other, some part of our humanity is failing. Is it not true that our mutual gazes can sometimes discourage us, but at other times can encourage us? Sadly, we have the experience of living together and looking at one another every day, but without really seeing one another.

Ignatius invites us to engage in a twofold movement in order to heal our gaze: first, we place ourselves under the gaze of Jesus and give him the opportunity to take a good look at our lives. Consider how he gazed at the woman he met by the well in Samaria; he first asked her for water to make her feel valued and to reveal her capacity for love (cf. Jn 4). Ignatius wants us to expose ourselves every day to this healing, empowering gaze of Jesus, so that we become completely re-created by it. We receive ourselves fully from the gaze of God, who sees everything he has made, including my life, as good and full of beauty.

The second movement is to gaze attentively at Jesus: to see how he relates to others, such as the surprised Zacchaeus who, feeling trapped by his life, thought he had nothing in himself that was worth giving to others (cf. Lk 19:1-10). Or we can contemplate how Jesus sadly let that rich young man go away, because affection can in no way be imposed or commanded (cf. Mt 19:16-30).

“Do you see this woman?” Jesus asked Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7:44) after Simon was scandalized that Jesus had allowed this woman of ill repute to squander her perfume and affection on him. Simon saw the woman, of course, but he could not see how much hurt she had suffered or how great was her thirst for tenderness. Jesus went on to show Simon, step by step, how much beauty, generosity, and self-giving there were the gestures of the woman he was judging and censuring. Her whole

body—with tears, caresses, and kisses—expressed her love for Jesus in a totally vulnerable way. The woman became beautiful as Jesus beheld her. As she bathed in the light of love, her life was transfigured, and even its secrets were illuminated. Like this woman, we too need to expose ourselves to this gaze of Jesus that refocuses our own gaze. We cannot cleanse our gaze without drawing near to others, having real contact with them, and opening our eyes and our hearts to their reality.

We cannot be contemplatives in everyday life or attend to the secret pains of others unless our gaze enjoys soft and peaceful moments. We need times when we are not doing things, not calculating, not rushing; we need times when we are simply standing still, just being, just marveling at the miracle of existing-alongside-others.

To be illuminated, our faces need to receive a gaze of friendship and love. We rejoice when we see, and we can see with our feet, because we see from the place where our feet have taken us. That is why Ignatius urges us to travel through poor and humble spaces like the ones Jesus traversed. Take a good look at Jesus so that his way of proceeding is impressed on our senses. “I want to know you as you are,” prayed Pedro Arrupe; “your image stamped on me will be enough to change me.”

The elderly Tokue had told the young Sentaro, “I saw you working with sadness in your eyes,” and that was why she went to work with him: to restore light to his life. With delicate patience she little by little revealed to him her secret: working slowly in a world that was always in a hurry, cooking with loving attention, and taking delight in her creations.

It was something like this that Ignatius Loyola learned in the course of his eventful life: to work and to serve with ever more light in his gaze and with an ever keener perception of the needs of others. He discovered that what was important was not the things we do, such as giving talks or cooking, working in the fields or writing, teaching classes or visiting the sick. What is most important is how we do these things, the attentiveness and affection with which we are present to others.

“To ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received” [SpEx 233] is to ask for a new way of looking at ourselves; it is an interior contemplation of faces that makes us realize how much love passes through them; it is a clear gaze that helps us to see the points of light that spring from the wounds and to discover the pearls of humanity hidden in the margins of life.

## **A Way of Walking that Helps Us Grow in Our Capacity to Be Grateful**

We go through seasons, even years, during which it is difficult for us to weave together the threads that make up our life: we lose our center, we lose meaning. When Hagar, the slave of Sarah and Abraham, was wandering, lost, through the desert, with a son

by her side, the angel asked her: “Where do you come from and where are you going?” When she responded, “I am fleeing,” the angel told her, “Return,” but she could return only after discovering herself and knowing that she was blessed (cf. Gen 16:8ff.).

We live in fast-paced times that are filled with a multitude of stimuli. We are experiencing how the internet colonizes our intimacy and our way of relating to one another. Mobile phones keep us anesthetized. We do many different things, but sometimes we don’t know very well where we are going. We do things very very quickly, feeling so alienated and busy that we lose our orientation and find it impossible to enjoy and savor life.

I remember something that happened to me a few years ago, when I was living in a community with Adriana, a young lay woman from Guatemala; she was finishing her master’s degree and had just recently arrived in Granada. One night the two of us went out for a drink. We went to a tapas restaurant, and Adriana ordered a cheese board. Before I realized it, I had already eaten my share. She looked at me in surprise and said:

“How quickly you ate it!”

“Yes,” I said, a little embarrassed, “I was hungry.”

“Which cheese did you like the most?” she asked me.

“Ah, were they different?”

I had eaten the cheese so quickly that I had barely been able to taste the different types. It was a wake-up call, and I felt that this was also how I was going through life: I was not allowing myself the time and the silence necessary to enjoy relationships and things. I still remember how much Adriana enjoyed the cheese and how she took time to savor it.

When we lose our ability to pay attention, to *taste things interiorly*, our ability to be grateful also becomes dulled. There is a way we can go through life making many demands, as if everything was owed to us. We like to believe that what we have we have earned for ourselves. This was the attitude of the people who thought they were good in Jesus’ time; he invites us not to act like them (cf. Mt 23:3).

The Pharisee in the parable is proud of himself, upright, and self-sufficient. He thanks God for what he himself does, and he considers himself praiseworthy. He is grateful for being better than other people, whom he judges harshly. He is not aware that the triple-C virus—competing, comparing, and criticizing—has infected his hard drive and is damaging it. He is confident in himself and his spiritual achievements, and he feels superior to that other man there in the temple (cf. Luke 18:9-14). Meanwhile, the publican, crouching in the shadows and keeping his distance, asks in his poverty only that God have mercy on him. And when he experiences that mercy, though the story doesn’t tell us so, he is grateful not for what he has been able to do for himself, but for what God has done in him without his deserving it.

True gratitude is that which leads us to recognize that all the good we possess has been received from the Other and from others. Gratitude puts us in our true place as creatures, knowing that we belong to God and that we need each other to move forward. Life is giving and receiving. If only we could recognize those everyday mutual dependencies and those silent acts of caring that nourish us in our daily lives and without which we could not survive!

Ten lepers were healed by Jesus, but only one of them returns to thank him. Jesus asks, “Were not the ten made clean? Where are the nine others? Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?” (Luke 17:11-19). Ten lepers are cleansed, but only one, the Samaritan, the *outsider*, is able to realize it. “When he saw himself cured, he returned praising God with a loud voice and fell prostrate at the feet of Jesus, thanking him.” It is this bowing down, this act of gratitude, that brings him an even deeper healing: “Get up,” Jesus tells him, “your faith has saved you.”

When Ignatius learned to be grateful for the light that burst forth from his wound, all things seemed new to him: the faces, the landscapes, the failures, the attempts, the companions who will come.

That is the first bowing down, and for Ignatius, the most important one: bowing down to recognize the distinctive steps of the Lord in history. We recognize God’s way of moving about—raising up, healing, empowering, laboring—and we realize that he does this especially on the weaker side of life. We need to acknowledge this so that we are able to give thanks to God, collaborate with him, and place ourselves at his service. How different it is to serve out of gratitude and not obligation, without earning anything, without achieving anything! A good way of knowing how we are doing interiorly is to consider how much we exercise, on a day-to-day basis, our capacity for appreciating and being grateful to others in concrete terms. We provide relief to others when we live gratefully.

Ignatian service springs forth from the ground of gratitude, and it grows with the deepening of our understanding of how much love and how much good we have received without deserving it. All this expands our heart. As Gabriela Mistral says in her poem, *The Pleasure of Serving*: “There is joy in being healthy and in being just, but the most beautiful and the greatest joy is in serving.”<sup>4</sup>

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4. MISTRAL, Gabriela (2020). *Poesía reunida*, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

## A Way of Walking That Joins Us With Others to Help Care for the Unfolding of Life

I am always moved when I return to the story of the Canaanite woman and contemplate how Jesus allows himself to be converted by that pagan stranger who asks him to alleviate the suffering of her daughter (cf. Mk 7:24-30). This needy woman cured Jesus of his conditioned Jewish gaze; she expanded in him unimaginable spaces and helped him dissolve his own interior boundaries.

During that encounter, she accompanied Jesus as she revealed to him the sacred dignity of each creature, beyond their race or religion, and she helped him to discern more clearly his image of God and his own mission. In the original Greek, Jesus tells her: “You have evangelized me” (Mk 7:29), or put another way, “You have made me more human.”

To be helped is to be human. We all look for people who can speak to us words to live by, and we are urged to give others a word of life. Another important tool in Ignatian spirituality, along with the examen, is being accompanied and accompanying others. We cannot see well just on our own. We need to move from self-management to shared life. We need other voices and other views to keep us from getting lost and to make our journey fruitful.

*Helping others* became one of the basic actions in the spirituality of Ignatius. Helping others was at the center of his lifelong project and that of his colleagues. That is why, when he was already more than thirty years old, he went to Paris to study: he wanted to be able to accompany others better. It was his way of loving them.

Sometimes we just need someone who can help us to see and to name what is problematic in ourselves and has us blocked; we need someone to help us open ourselves to the abundant life that Jesus offers us. Discernment as a lifestyle requires us to let ourselves be accompanied in order to experience our journey as a transformative process.

Toni Catalá, a beloved Jesuit and teacher of discernment in everyday life, was especially gifted in helping us to reveal ourselves to the Lord without leaving anything out, without hiding anything. Toni showed us his own vulnerability, and that helped us to put aside our fears and expose our vulnerability to God and to others. Jesus tells us that the Spirit is unable to arouse those who are strong, hard, or rigid. God resonates always in those who are tender, fragile, weak, and vulnerable (cf. Mt 11:25).

At another point in the Japanese film, the elderly Tokue tells young Sentaro: “We have come to this world to see it and hear it; it matters not what we become. There is no need to be someone in life; the important thing is that each of us gives meaning to the lives of others.”

This was also the experience of Ignatius: giving meaning to the lives of others. He united the two verbs, *love* and *serve*, because for him service was the day-to-day, concrete form of love. As another Jesuit, Darío Mollá, says “It is a love that cannot remain only in words, although it needs them as well.”

We form part of other people’s lives. We give one another emotional nourishment through our kindness, our appreciation, our warmth of relationship, our trusting in one another. Ignatius learned, as the Santiago Benavides song says, that “without love, our hands cannot help anyone.” During all his life journey Ignatius met people who were mediators for him, and he wove bonds of support and growth with everyone he encountered. Ignatius knew that, the more we become like Jesus, the healthier and more blessed our lives become for others. Serving is knowing that we are medicine for one another. We help each other to heal and to grow.

Adolfo Nicolás, former general of the Society, asked himself in a beautiful prayer: “Lord, what weaknesses have you seen in us that you decided to call us, despite everything, to collaborate in your mission?”

Ignatian spirituality leads us to discover that we are fragile but still called. We are loved in our weaknesses. Vulnerable and resilient, we are sent forth with others to collaborate in the mission of Jesus. We ask for the grace to be able to love and to serve in everything, keeping our senses wide open, listening to reality, and always maintaining an attitude of discernment. We reach out to others who are searching, and we accompany them as they walk a little further ahead. We decenter ourselves and put at the center those who are despised and discarded. We help each other as we walk together toward lives that are more fulfilled and connected.

This open-eyed, down-to-earth spirituality generates an attentive lifestyle and a great openness to the fractures and potentialities of our world. I believe that the Ignatian *magis* is not concerned with greater efficiency, or more quantity, or more excellence. It is most concerned with helping others more and helping them better; with becoming more caring, more tender, less hardened; with being less self-sufficient and more interdependent, more compassionate and generous. It makes us fragilely confident in the love that transforms all things for the better. To an older and weaker Ignatius, even the tiny flowers spoke of God’s delicate tenderness toward him.

I conclude with this quaint story of a young disciple who asked her teacher; “What is more important in life, the journey or the destination?” The teacher answered, “The company.”

We are grateful to the Society of Jesus for the fruitful spiritual legacy it has left us over the last 500 years; it is a legacy that is necessary and transformative in our time. We are also thankful for the “luminous company” that we can be for one another in our daily journey; as Tokue was for Sentaro. In one of their conversations she told him that the moon had told her one day: “Look at me carefully. I’m shining for you.”

# What is Ignatian Spirituality's Ongoing Contribution Today?<sup>5</sup>

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*Javier Melloni Ribas*

## Sons and Daughters of an Epoch of Change

Saint Ignatius of Loyola lived during a change of epochs that was comparable to what we are experiencing today. It is for this reason that his spirituality remains significant for us. Ignatius was born a year before the Europeans discovered America. He was wounded in Pamplona the same year that the navigator and explorer Juan Sebastián Elcano was making the first circumnavigation of the globe. The voyage, begun three years earlier under the command of Ferdinand Magellan, confirmed that the Earth is spherical; it was completed on September 8, 1522. Questioning the vision of the world that we've always had can be fascinating, but it can also be disturbing. In those years people's entire conception changed: until then the earth had been conceived as an immense flat surface that was mostly unknown but marked by a limit. What lay beyond that limit raised fears. What was close by and familiar generated confidence because it was demarcated, but a spherical world created confusion: where something ended was only the beginning of something else, and the horizon that seemed like the end kept receding.

A few decades after the death of Saint Ignatius, a second, even more radical transformation of the vision of the world took place with Galileo: people came to realize that the Earth, which had previously been conceived as the center of the universe, was actually a tiny planet revolving around the sun, which was in turn a small star located in the outskirts of a galaxy, which was just one among many other galaxies forming part of the universe.

In such an epoch of change, when all that seemed known and certain was coming undone, unrest spread, and with it, growing disenchantment. Our own society is

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5. Text of the conference given on January 11, 2023, as part of the cycle of conferences accompanying the *Ignatius Experience* exhibition at the Diocesan Museum of Barcelona from October 2022 through February 2023.

also living at a time when worldviews are being transformed and basic values are being questioned, leaving many people with serious concerns and uncertainties. Such a situation produces an attitude of “every man for himself,” often with visceral, instinctive reactions. People consume the immediate moment as if it were the only thing to hold onto. Mind you, *immediate* is not the same as *present*: our experience of the present implies full consciousness, which includes the past and the future, but what is immediate implies fragmentation, a succession of fleeting instants detached from the continuum of time.

This is the great challenge and test for our generation: just as Saint Ignatius descended into his own hells to free himself of the false ideas he had of himself and only later began to see “all things new,” so too we must descend into the hells we ourselves have created. We must be able to pass through them so that we gain a new perspective on the world, on ourselves, and on God, for these three things are all interrelated.

The only way to transform the shadows is to embrace them, just as the only way to heal a wound is to reach to where the harm is. We cannot see all things new if the old things have not been first abandoned. We do well to listen to the exemplary stories of those who have preceded us because they are finished; they can help us give order and meaning to the road that lies ahead, because we are still in process; we have not yet gone all the way.

## Two Great Spiritual Moments: in Manresa and at the Gates of Rome

Saint Ignatius had two great interior experiences that were foundational moments of his life; they occurred at the Cardoner River and at La Storta.

### *The vision of the Cardoner River*

Very early in Ignatius’s spiritual journey, during the summer or autumn of 1522, when he was in Manresa, he experienced several months of deep anguish. This period lasted until the personality he had previously constructed was dissolved, and his inner eyes were opened (*cf. Autobiography* 30). He could not explain what he had seen by the river because it exceeded his capacity for understanding, but he realized that he was able to see “in a new way the things of faith, the spiritual life, and ‘letters’.” In contemporary language, we could say that he was having a *cosmotheandric* experience,<sup>6</sup> in the sense that his spirit was being opened up to the divine (“things of faith”), to interior

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6. A neologism of the philosopher and theologian Raimon Panikkar; it combines the Greek terms *cosmos* (‘world’), *theos* (‘God’) and *andros* (‘man’).

processes (“spiritual things”), and to the natural world (at that time the term “letters” meant secular learning or general knowledge).

Ignatius later said that, if he were to put together all the other graces he had received in his life, they could not be compared with what he had received in that single experience by the Cardoner River. What happened to him? What opened up in him? In my opinion, Ignatius was shown the inseparability of God and reality. He understood that God is the incandescent Ground of all that exists. He realized that God is not found in some afterlife separated from material reality; rather, God is to be found in the very heart of what we experience now. He grasped that God is the invisible Source of all that is visible.

From this vision is born all Ignatian-inspired mysticism: drawing closer to God means drawing closer to the heart of reality, because God is revealing himself in each person, each situation, each thing. This is what Ignatius proposes as a prayer in his Contemplation to Achieve Love. He was convinced that this mystical experience was not only for him, but for the whole world. He believed that, by making the spiritual exercises for a month, people would come to perceive how God dwells in all things, and that they would free themselves from each thing in order to be united with God. When we say “month,” we need not understand a chronological measure of time, such as the thirty days of the Spiritual Exercises. Rather, we can understand time in a *kairological* sense. (Note that the Greek word *kairós* means the “appropriate time,” which is different for each person.) There can also be a collective *kairós* like the one in which we now find ourselves. Time becomes *kairós* when more and more people come to understand God not as a supreme Being separate from the world, but as a transcendent Presence dwelling in us.

This is the horizon of Ignatian mysticism that is proposed at the end of the Exercises. In my conception, what had previously been the arrival point, has now become the starting point.

### *The experience of La Storta*

Along with this initial experience that carried Ignatius toward an infinite Openness, we find another pole, which is very down-to-earth. It is the art of living, which is the art of being concrete, of being attuned to everything we do and every choice we make, because at every moment our life is at stake.

When a second trip to the Holy Land, this time with his first companions, proved impossible for Ignatius, he had to practice a very difficult obedience to reality. The Latin word for “obey,” which is *ob-audire*, has the precise meaning of “listening carefully”—listening to the Life that is being revealed through events. On his way to Rome, Ignatius had doubts as to whether God wanted him to go there. During the journey, he

asked Mary to place him with her Son. In the small chapel of La Storta, at the entrance to the city, he received confirmation through what is known as the “vision of La Storta.” But it was not Mary who placed Ignatius with the Son; it was the Father.

The word *storta*, in Italian means “crooked,” “not straight.” In this context, it could mean “not evident.” What was Ignatius shown there? He saw<sup>7</sup> the Father saying to Jesus, who appeared carrying a cross: “I want Ignatius to serve us.” The Father—the Absolute, the Origin—showed him Jesus, the zenith of divine humanity, carrying a cross that was seen to be “the way.” Ignatius thus understood that the divinity already consummated in Jesus was still not consummated in humanity, which still was crucified with all the crucified of history. Ignatius experienced Jesus revealing himself not as the Pantocrator or the resurrected Christ, but as the *kenotic* Christ who carries the cross of humanity. This is the *not yet* of a history yet to come. Even though Ignatius ended his long pilgrimage at the gates of Rome, having spent fifteen years traversing the cities and highways of Europe, he was now grafted onto the pilgrimage of Christ who walks with all humanity.

Ignatius had left Manresa certain of two things: he wanted to continue his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to “help souls.” In his *Autobiography* he does not say simply “help others” in general, or “help one’s neighbor,” or “help those in need.” Ignatius, who was very precise in his language, spoke of “helping souls.” But why souls? The reason was that he felt that the best thing he could do was to help individuals to go deep into themselves; he believed that in their encounter with God they would simultaneously find their own place in the world, and the three key dimensions—self, world, God—would all come together. We are like plants: if we’re in the right place, we will blossom, grow, and unfold; If we’re not in the right place, we will wither, and in the end we will die. This whole process requires wholehearted listening, which involves attention, trust, courage and lucidity, the very elements we find in the Exercises.

Ignatius’s trip to Jerusalem turned out to be a failure: after three weeks the Franciscans ordered him to leave. What had happened? Had he been mistaken in thinking that God wanted him there in Jerusalem? It had been God’s will that he go to Jerusalem, but not stay there. He would progressively discover that Jerusalem was now the whole world. While in Venice with his first companions, he tried for a second time to travel to Jerusalem because he still had not fully understood what God wanted of him. If God was everywhere, as he knew from his experience at the Cardoner River, then

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7. We cannot analyze here the ontological status of a vision, the degree to which it was intrapsychic or originating from a transcendent source. In any case, the vision resulted from the personal and collective imagination of Ignatius, while being at the same time a manifestation of the presence of God. The meaning was inseparable from the image by which it was manifested.

why insist on staying in only one place? Ignatius, like all of us, had to discern slowly what he was experiencing.

In summary, the Cardoner and La Storta epitomize two aspects of Ignatius's experience that left their mark on the spirit of the Society of Jesus and on Ignatian spirituality more generally. They represent, on the one hand, the mystical "already" that sees God in all things and all things in God, and, on the other, the prophetic "not yet" that knows how to identify pain and condemn injustice.

## A Spirituality that Continues to Speak to Us

We can identify six key traits of Ignatian spirituality that continue to be fully valid today. For 500 years, they have inspired and nourished the lives of countless people.

### *Faced with anonymity, personalization*

People are living increasingly in an urban environment, and city life is synonymous with anonymity, which is increasing exponentially with globalization. Ignatian spirituality, which was born with modernity, shares with it the new "subjective" consciousness that help each and every individual to see that they are unique and unrepeatable. It is a spirituality that makes us aware that we become what we are meant to be when we are in contact with our own uniqueness, and that that awareness makes us better able to serve others. To the extent that we are centered in who we really are, we can give ourselves to others totally..

In this regard, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin has an extraordinary passage in his work *The Divine Milieu*:

Perhaps for the first time in my life, I (who supposedly meditate every day!) took up a lamp and abandoned the seemingly bright zone of my occupations and my daily relationships. I descended to the most intimate part of myself, to the deep abyss where I could perceive, obscurely, the source of my power of action. As I moved away from the conventional markers that superficially illuminate social life, I realized that I was escaping from myself. With each further step down, I discovered another character in me, someone whom I could not name exactly and who no longer obeyed me. Finally, when I had to stop my exploration because there was no longer any ground beneath my feet, I found myself perched above a bottomless abyss from which emerged, coming from I know not where, the torrent I dare to call my *life*.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre (1967). *El medio divino*, Madrid: Taurus, pp. 70-71.

These words are an excellent illustration of the First Week of the Exercises. Until we break through the dark areas of ourselves and release our hidden depths, we have not completed the First Week. Our aim in the First Week is to embrace our shadows and to plunge to the origins from which the core of our uniqueness emanates. The task of the director is to accompany people, to help them realize their exceptional uniqueness, and to connect them with the Source and the Ground from which they proceed.

*Faced with endless repetition, the incessant dynamism of discernment*

Discernment is the complete opposite of repetition, programming, or dogmatic thinking. When we live our lives from God, nothing is taken for granted; instead, every instant provides an opening that asks for an appropriate response. To the extent that we are open and available, we become aware of the confluence of the *cosmotheandric* triad: 1) God who lives within me and within all things; 2) my humanity (or that of the group discerning together) that is attentive to what is happening; and 3) the world around us, because it is the place that we are called to serve and that seeks a response from us.

Discernment is not a technique, although it requires certain procedures. Discernment is a mystique, a way of being in the world that resists our compulsion to control everything and our desire to anticipate the life we have not yet lived. We have built a society based on fear or on conquest; our institutions are contaminated; they are held prisoners by excessive pre-programming and endless quantitative assessments. How much time we waste developing programs and then evaluating them, while Life escapes us!

Discernment implies a completely different way of situating ourselves before life, trusting implicitly in the Ground that sustains the Divine Milieu in which we live and move and have our being, for it is only that Ground that allows the emergence of That Which We Are and That Which Is in every situation presented to us. .

*Faced with opposition, the principle of integration*

We ordinarily live in a world of opposites in tension: identity/alterity, poverty/wealth, announcing/denouncing, justice/mercy, uniformity/diversity, freedom/obedience, action/contemplation, grace/effort, etc. These polarities exist at every level, and we find ourselves swinging back and forth between them, confronting one thing with its opposite. At a first level, we may find these to be incompatible dualities that make us live in permanent tension and division, but we will discover, when we look at them at a higher level, that the polarities become integrated and the tensions become fruitful.

One important polarity in the mission of the Society of Jesus is the commitment to being at the grassroots of society, sharing the lives of the poor, while at the same time working to transform the structures that cause injustice. We find an example of this in the life of Saint Ignatius, when he returned to his hometown Azpeitia after fourteen years of absence. He did not want to live in his brother's house, which is what his family expected of him; instead, he resided in the hospital for the poor and the pilgrims. It was precisely because he spent three months sleeping in the Magdalena hospital, which can still be visited today, that he was able to learn of the problems of the poor citizens and propose a series of reforms in the town of Azpeitia. He strongly recommended a series of social measures, such as assistance for the destitute, prohibition of gambling in the taverns, banning of irregular relations of priests with the local women, and ringing of bells five times a day in all the churches and hermitages of the valley to help lift people's hearts toward God. Some of these reforms are still in force 500 years later in Azpeitia. Ignatius was able to do this not only because he lived alongside those in need but also because, being the brother of the lord of the valley, he could intervene in the local government and demand changes that the poor themselves could never have done. Years later, when Ignatius sent some Jesuits to the Council of Trent, he told them that they should attend the council sessions, but that every four days they should spend some time assisting the poor and the sick in the city's hospitals.<sup>9</sup> For Ignatius it was always one thing *and* the other, not one thing *or* the other—it was two things at once.

The same principle applies to the other classic polarities of Ignatian spirituality: faith and reason, faith and justice, contemplation and action, etc. These are much more than simple juxtapositions. They are integrations wherein one element enriches the other in ever more comprehensive ways. The 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation was held in 1975, when much of Latin America was under the rule of dictatorships. In order to respond to the harsh political reality in those countries as well as in many others, the Congregation proposed the ideal of “the faith that does justice.” During General Congregation 34, held in 1995, the concept of *justice* was expanded even further. Political and social justice are clearly necessary, but other elements are also essential for transforming people and society. These are the intangible values that are expressed by other cultures and other religions in ways that are unfamiliar to us and that we must study, venerate, and assimilate. Decree 2 of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation, held while Father Kolvenbach was the general superior, contains a key passage that illustrates very well this integration of polarities:

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9. Cf. Letter to the Jesuits sent to Trent, written at the beginning of 1546 by Ignatius Loyola, *Obras Completas* (1983), Madrid: BAC, pp. 705-708.

No service of faith without  
promotion of justice  
entry into cultures  
openness to other religious experiences.

No promotion of justice without  
communicating faith  
transforming cultures  
collaboration with other traditions.

No inculturation without  
communicating faith with others  
dialogue with other traditions  
commitment to justice.

No religious dialogue without  
sharing faith with others  
evaluating cultures  
concern for justice.

(CG 34, D.2, 19)

It is not a question, then, of setting these activities in opposition to one another. Rather, the challenge for us is to integrate all of them—profession of faith, commitment to structural change in society, respect for cultures, and veneration of other religions—because all of them are paths that give access to the Absolute. Fully grasping the fact that there are other ways of understanding the Mystery forms part of Ignatian spirituality; very likely it was this that was revealed to Ignatius in the vision at the Cardoner, though the theology of the time could not accommodate it.

*Faced with the imposition of uniformity, the principle of inculturation*

For nearly two millennia, the cultural trappings of the Christian faith have been fundamentally Western and European. Even though the faith spread to America, Asia, and Africa centuries ago, we have only recently become aware of this. The evangelization of other peoples has often brought with it the horrendous humiliation of indigenous peoples who lost their cultures and were forced to become Westernized in the evangelizing process.

The so-called “Presupposition” of the Exercises [SpEx 21] requires us to make a serious effort to understand the point of view of other persons. This aspect of Ignatian spirituality encourages the principle of inculturation that was already present in the first Jesuit missions in China, Japan, the Paraguay Reductions, etc. *Inculturation* implies reverence for the regions and the cultures that welcome you as their guest. You remove your shoes before the sacred land of your hosts. Ignatius stated this clearly in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus:<sup>10</sup> when you go to other places, he wrote, dress as do the people of the place, speak their language, know their customs, etc. When you learn to speak the language of another people, you begin to think also as they do. Language is not just a matter of linguistics; it contains a whole way of viewing the world. Likewise, when you dress like the people of another place, you begin to experience life differently from the way you did when you were wearing pants and shoes.

This effort to get closer to the perspective of others is present in the dialogues that the first Jesuits held with the Protestants. At the request of his companions, Peter Faber (1506-46) wrote up some advice on this matter, based on his experience. His words are very relevant today. He recommended, for example, talking with those considered adversaries about the things shared in common, not about matters that are divisive. He advised his companions to talk about what really moves them, not about reasonings related to ideology. The lesson for us is that we should share what we experience, not what we think; we should talk about what benefits us all and helps us to be better, not about abstract and debatable questions.<sup>11</sup> This approach requires us to draw close to those who are dissimilar and difficult, without overwhelming them. We must honestly respect those who are different from us because they are bearers of truths that surpass us, truths that we need to absorb in order to be truly fulfilled..

### *Faced with the temptation of totality, the magis*

The temptation of totality consists in trying to build a completely finished system—whether sociological, political, economic, theological, or pedagogical. Into such a system, nothing fits except what we have determined. At a time when all models and systems are collapsing, we must make proposals that are infused with the dynamism of the *magis*, the Ignatian spirit of “always more” that keeps us from identifying with any project or any institution that is closed in on itself. But this ideal does not mean undertaking the agonizing task of Sisyphus, who was perpetually trying to reach the mountain top, only to slide back down again and again, turning his efforts into a

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10. Cf. *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* [577].

11. Letter to Diego Lainez, March 7, 1546, in Grupo Espiritualidad Ignaciana, *Escritos esenciales de los primeros jesuitas* (2017), Bilbao-Santander: Mensajero-Sal Terrae, pp. 240-242.

nightmare. That is not what is asked of us, because there is no summit to conquer; rather, we need simply enjoy the journey.

The *magis* is not the *maxime*. The *maxime* or “maximum” makes an attempt at conquest; it is a drive for perfection and excellence that turns out to be very dangerous for impure hearts like ours. That is because striving to be excellent, perfect, or the very best produces in us a relentless, toxic competitiveness; we become enslaved to always looking at ourselves in the mirror and comparing ourselves with others. The *magis* does not seek excellence but plenitude. It draws on the inner dynamism of life: it makes us like trees, which are always growing but are not striving vainly to being taller or stronger than others. The *magis* means sharing in the impulse of life in order to achieve more life, but without desiring to conquer anything. The *magis* does not try to reach a particular place because there is always some new place beyond. The *magis* consists of letting ourselves be carried along by the soft breeze of the Spirit, letting go of what we now have in order to embrace what we do not yet possess. It means letting the Spirit move through us so as to make us available, generous, trusting, and free.

*In the face of anguish, the principle of consolation*

*Consolation* is one of the key Ignatian words. It does not mean some simple comforting or ephemeral pleasure. Rather, consolation is a profound sense of joy that comes from the certainty that everything exists in and by God. That is how Ignatius defines consolation in the third rule of discernment of the First Week:

“Consolation is when some interior motion is caused within the soul through which it comes to be inflamed with love for its Creator and Lord. As a result, it can love no created things on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of all of them”  
[SpEx 316].

In other words, it is not a matter of taking satisfaction in something I possess or obtain; rather, it is the perception that everything is saturated with God and that everything leads me to God, whether I possess it or not, whether I like it or not, whether I am satisfied with it or not. Beyond our greater or lesser achievements, beyond our successes and failures, beyond all our self-centered dualities, everything is experienced as being from God, in God, and toward God. We are not just individuals; we are called to live with others, in community, as part of a corporate body in which all share the same mission in the world.

Viewing the reality of the world with consolation is not being naïve; it does not mean that we think that everything is just fine; Rather, it means that, even in spite of great difficulties, we remain aware of the fact that we are immersed in the process

of Christification, and this is what gives us consolation. Nothing can be separated from this “already.” To be sure, in order to live this way we must leave behind “our self-love, self-will, and self-interests” [SpEx 189], for these are the snares that make us value things egotistically and so act in ways that are shortsighted and unworthy of us. Consolation comes from fully experiencing the divine immensity that unfolds around us in so many ways, going far beyond what we may like or dislike. Consolation is the art of going beyond our likes and dislikes, and of placing ourselves in this Space that sustains us and makes us aware that what we achieve does not belong to us, for everything is drenched in a far greater totality in which we are participants.

## In Conclusion, Living in God

Then as now, the unique contribution of Ignatian spirituality and mysticism is to prepare people for a state of openness to reality that brings together three dimensions: 1) the unattainability of the God who is The-Far-Beyond and The-Right-Here of everything, 2) the unrepeatability of each human being, and 3) an swiftly changing world that needs our participation. Ultimately, Ignatian spirituality and mysticism can be understood in terms of a sacred listening to reality. Everything is open, everything is possible, and at the same time, every situation is concrete and demands a specific response and action.

There are, then, three ways for us to pay attention: 1) engaging in prayer and contemplation to open ourselves to the God who is ever-greater and ever-more-intimate; 2) understanding ourselves and paying attention to the movements of consolation and desolation that help us to recognize our personal calling; and 3) listening to the world, which we are called to serve and transform.

But these are not three separate things; they are just one. Each of them contains the totality: to the extent that we open ourselves wide, what happens in us is a manifestation of God. God is the One who cannot be named, but is also the One by whom all things are named; God is the One who cannot be seen, but is also the One by whom all things are seen; God is the one who cannot be heard, but is also the One by whom all things are heard.

God reveals himself in a unique and unrepeatable way through each one of us. God comes into existence in us. God shares in our “we-ness,” which is contextualized in each moment of history and at each place on earth. Finally, God needs our commitment so that his Kingdom becomes real on earth.

Our listening is not only personal; it is also communal and ecclesial. In this regard, Pope Francis is crowning his pontificate with his promotion of a synodal process that will be supremely important for the future of the Church. Synodality requires a

true conversion and a new way of proceeding, one based on the participation of the whole Christian community through spiritual discernment and shared listening.

May we experience in our lives together the sentiment that Saint Ignatius expressed at the end of almost all his letters: “May the supreme divine Goodness grant all of us the grace to feel and to know his will and to completely fulfill it.” We are called to fulfill God’s will, that is, to become God’s will, which means nothing more and nothing less than becoming “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). In this way we will be the “already” in the “not yet” of history and humanity.

## Questions for Reflection

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1. From what you have read in these two texts, how is the time of Saint Ignatius different from our own time, and how are the two times similar?
2. Mariola asks us: "What are we carrying within us that robs us of our spirit, that makes us work and serve with sadness in our eyes?" Have you ever asked yourself this question? What conclusions have you drawn?
3. In what sense do you think that the gaze of the God of Jesus is healing and empowering?
4. What relationship does Mariola López establish between gratitude and attention? Do you agree with her?
5. If God, according to Mariola's text, resonates in all that is tender and vulnerable, how can we show vulnerability in a world where self-sufficiency and image worship hold sway?
6. What is the meaning of the expression "to help souls," according to the updated interpretation of Javier Melloni? Do you think that such "help" or "service" is still necessary today?
7. Why is discernment so important for Javier Melloni?
8. What would be a good explanation of the Ignatian *magis* (as explained in Javier's text)?
9. What are two ideas, feelings, or questions that reading this booklet has awakened in you? Do they speak to your present experience?

'Guides', with this word Ignatius Loyola modestly expresses his great desire to help others. It is under this motto connoting service and simplicity that Cristianisme i Justícia and its Escuela Ignaciana de Espiritualidad-EIDES ( Ignatian School of Spirituality) offers this series of materials.

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