



Where does Ignatius of Loyola come from?

Ignatius was born in the "castle" (more like a fortified house) of Loyola, in the Basque country, in 1491 and grew up in the context of the great disruptions of the Renaissance, which was pushing back the boundaries of what is possible.

- Technical and scientific upheavals with the rise of the printing industry, the maritime maps, the compass, astronomy and the navigation progress with Christopher Columbus who arrived in America in 1492;
- Cultural and political upheavals asserting the predominance of the subject; modern states gradually emancipating themselves from the Roman Catholic Church authority;
- Economic upheavals with discoveries and the conquest of the Americas, the African and Asia continents...
- Religious upheavals with the Reformations: from the ancient vision of a still standing God, unchanging & dominating through a fixed order, to a humanist vision where God never stops creating, inventing, informing time, in full cooperation with men being free.
- The question is then: how to order the multiple possibilities to the end that God is and how to choose for the best? Ignatius grows up in that context.

Three events have marked Ignatius childhood and youth.

- Being the youngest of thirteen children, Ignatius lost his mother at the age of seven and is taken in by his older brother Martin and Magdalena, his sister-in-law.
- Ignatius left the family home at the age of 15 to become a page and then secretary to the treasurer of King Ferdinand the Catholic. He became an educated gentleman, a shrewd negotiator, with a taste for weapons and women, with a strong temperament, leading a rather dissolute, worldly court life.
- In 1517, at the age of 26, after the death of King Ferdinand, he entered the service of the Viceroy of Navarra, which had recently become part of the Kingdom of Castile. Ignatius lived there for four years, in a less worldly environment, closer to the Gospel, which would undoubtedly prepare him for his conversion.

Ignatius' youth is summarized in three lines at the beginning of *A Pilgrim's Journey*: "*Until the age of twenty-six, he was a man indulging in the vanities of this world; he enjoyed above all the exercise of arms, with a great desire to gain honor.*" This brief summary of Ignatius' youth may remind the Gospel, retaining few or nearly nothing about Jesus' youth in Nazareth... It seems that Ignatius did tell about this period and the deviations of his youth, but the early Jesuits were far more interested in how our Lord guided Ignatius as from his conversion.

1. The Pamplona Ball

In May 1521, Pamplona was under siege: the French and the Navarrese wanted to take the city and the Navarre region back from the Spaniards of Charles V. On the Whit Monday of May 20st, Ignatius was defending the fortress. He was galvanizing the defenders and refused to surrender when a cannonball was fired between his legs, breaking the right leg and injuring the left one. Transported to Loyola, he has undergone several operations, ready for anything to regain his seductive abilities.



During his convalescence, **Ignatius was bored** and asks for knighthood novels, recounting the songs of errant knights, such as Amadis of Gaul, whose contemporary equivalents would be James Bond or Largo Winch. But there was nothing like that at the castle. Magdalena, his sister-in-law gave him a kind of summary of the Gospel, the "Life of Christ" by Ludolphus the Carthusian and the "Golden Legend" which is a life of the saints, written by the Dominican Jacques de Voragine. While reading, he is dreaming about the great deeds he could accomplish for a noble lady, one of those he had known at the courts of Castile and Navarre.

Fascinated by the life of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic, he is dreaming of doing the same: living in poverty, begging, following Christ... In spite of his suffering and his handicap, **Ignatius remains a man of great desires!** He is always driven by an **entrepreneurial energy**. His desires will certainly have to be purified, but they will also be the driving force of great achievements! For the time being, his heart and mind are balancing between courting a noble lady and living a poor life following Christ...

As he continues his readings, Ignatius realizes that accomplishing high deeds for a noble lady makes him enthusiastic at that moment, but dry, sad and tired in the long run. Whereas living a poor life following Jesus Christ leaves him enthusiastic, but that there is also a feeling of joy and peace persisting in the long run. **This is one of the essential features of his spirituality** which is appearing and which will be refined in the rules of discernment: **to decide for God goes through the examination of our thoughts and their effects**, and of what they make us feel interiorly, durably, in order **to identify those which go in the direction of God...** and those which turn away from Him.

The rudiments of discernment (already found in the monastic tradition of the Desert Fathers or in St. Benedict's tradition), **are to look at the effects of the different thoughts that cross my mind and to learn step by step how to sort out those that leave me joyful and peaceful in the long run and pull me upwards (appreciation of myself, of God, of the others), and the ones that leave me sad, worried and pull me downwards (depreciation of myself, of God, of the others).**

Once I have identified these different effects of my thoughts, my freedom is called upon to choose and decide for the way of God: I am called **to listen to the thoughts** that have been identified as coming from God and I am called to refuse **and to deny the thoughts** that have been identified as coming from the adversary, the tempter, the one who divides (dia-bolon), the one Ignatius calls *"the mortal enemy of our human nature"*.



Ignatius decides to follow the poor Christ and to go to Jerusalem, physically following Jesus' footsteps... **One night, he has a vision of the Virgin Mary which confirms his decision.**

This was the first ball and chain in Ignatius' life, the first conversion of this Pilgrim of the Absolute.

To reflect...

- What does this report inspire me? Does it echo a situation I have experienced or witnessed?
- What are the great desires that I have? At the beginning of this retreat, I write them down in my notebook.
- Ignatius of Loyola discovered the rudiments of discernment by examining his thoughts and their effects. For a moment, I take a moment of silence to listen to my own thoughts, to the spiritual life that inhabits me. What leaves me joyful and peaceful?

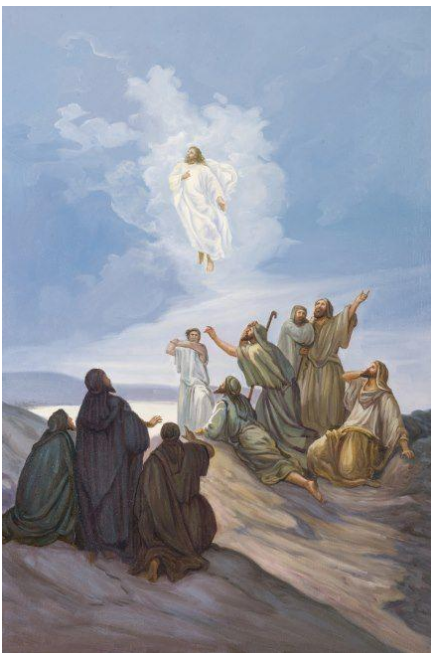
I can leave a note on the spiritual wall of the retreat

I prepare for this personal time of prayer:



- As I approach the place of prayer, I remember that I am going to spend a moment of intimacy with the Lord.
- I decide on a time for this prayer (15 minutes? 20 minutes?)
- I look for a space and a position that helps me to be present.
- I am silent, I turn off my mobile phone, I breathe slowly: my whole body calms down.
- I realise that I am entering the presence of the Lord. I look at him as he looks at me.
- After a sign of the cross, I ask the Holy Spirit to support me in listening to the Lord during the time of prayer. May everything that happens help me to find Jesus Christ, to know him better, to love him more and to follow him more closely.

BIBLICAL TEXT: ACTS 1, 1-11: THE DEPARTURE OF JESUS



Introduction

Today, we contemplate the Ascension, the departure of Jesus to join his Father - a real upheaval for the disciples, but a condition for them to become his witnesses. May the meditation of this story offer us the opportunity to find God's loving presence in our daily lives and to witness it. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Bible passage reference

Today's reading is from the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, CH 1, 1-11.

Point 1

The writer addresses a mysterious Theophilus, literally "*the one who loves God*". That means that he is addressing us all. For a moment I remember the stories and words of Jesus, his passion, his resurrection and his appearances during 40 days. Faith is born from the experience of an encounter with Christ.

Point 2

I now stand with the disciples: on one hand, Jesus announces great news: "*Within a few days, you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit.*" On the other hand, their hearts seem to be preoccupied asking themselves if "*the time has come when the kingdom will be restored to Israel...?*" How can we understand such a discrepancy?

Point 3

Finally Jesus rises, and a cloud comes, removing Him from the eyes of the disciples. With them, I watch this departure without fanfare or trumpet. And I hear this voice addressing me: *"Why do you stay there, staring at the sky?"* What do I answer?

Introduction to the second listening

I listen again to the beginning of the book of Acts of the Apostles. It is also the beginning of the Church that is being played out here.

Invitation to a personal prayer

A promise has been made to us: *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."* In my turn, I address God and ask him to prepare my life in the best possible way to receive the Holy Spirit.

Final prayer

Glory to the Father...

At the end of the prayer

- I take a moment to look at the way it happened, to see if the setting was appropriate (place, time, duration etc.)
- I write down a fruit of the prayer in my notebook
- I can leave a note on the spiritual wall of the retreat

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