

Fr. Roger J. Landry
Retreat on Living Religiously By Faith in the Year of Faith
Sisters of Jesus our Hope, Bloomfield, New Jersey
July 29 to August 2, 2013
Ex 34:29-35; Ps 99; Mt 13:44-46

The Faith of Ignatius in Buying the Treasure and the Precious Pearl of God's Greater Glory

- At the end of *Porta Fidei*, the apostolic letter Pope emeritus Benedict wrote to announce the Year of Faith, he wrote an appendix to one of the most beautiful passages in Sacred Scripture, Hebrews 11, which describes the great cloud of witnesses who lived by faith and whose example shows what's possible for all of us and inspires us to obtain their same prize. Benedict focuses on the faith of the saints throughout the history of the Church, the faith of the Blessed Virgin from the incarnation through Calvary to Pentecost, the faith of the apostles in leaving everything to follow Christ and to spread love of him throughout the world, the faith of the disciples who freely gave everything in common to care for the needs of all, the faith of the martyrs who gave their lives and freely and lovingly forgave their persecutors, the faith of consecrated men and women who have left all things behind to unite themselves to the poor, chaste and obedient Christ, the faith of so many men and women who have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus in all phases of life. The lives of the saints are the greatest and most inspiring description of all of the life of faith, a description co-authored, we could say by God's grace and human response.
- Today we celebrate one of the greatest saints who ever lived, St. Ignatius of Loyola, a Basque who learned how to bask in God's love, a soldier who fought the good fight, an athlete who spiritual exercises, spiritual direction, and life helped so many others learn how to finish the race and fight so as to win. His life is a commentary on today's Gospel of the treasure buried in the field and the pearl of great price.
- Up until the time he was 30, Inigo Lopez was seeking his own glory on the battlefield. He had read so many of the romances about knights and courts and with his life he wanted to become the subject of other such epics. At the Battle of Pamplona, a cannon ball shattered both his left leg and his vain dreams. While convalescing in his family's small castle in Loyola, after he exhausted all of the other reading material, the only books left were a life of Christ and some lives of the saints. As he began to read them, a profound change occurred in him. He began to see that he was searching for the wrong pearl. He had been giving his life for a treasure he could see without recognizing that there was a far greater treasure that up until that point had been hidden to him and to most others. While his legs were still immobilized, his heart began to be profoundly moved by older soldiers whose stories made *El Cid* and *La Chanson de Roland* look like children's fables. He was led by the Holy Spirit to ask what I believe is one of the most important questions any of us ever needs to ask. "Why can't I do what Francis has done? Why can't I do what Dominic has done?"
- There would have been hundreds of other saints he could have named from the preceding 1500 years, but I think it's important to notice that among all the saints whose stories were told in the various books lying around the castle, he chose Francis and Dominic, the two 13th century mendicants who not only extravagantly gave up so much of what the world treasured in order to obtain a much more valuable fortune but who formed bands of brothers who joined themselves around them in order to help the entire world rediscover those hidden riches. Francis and Dominic were those who, when presented with the choice of the Rich Young Man to sell all they had in order to purchase the beautiful pearl of great price, the choice to leave their pleasures behind and pick up a cross, the choice between calling their own shots and seeking their own glory and following Christ to the glory of God the Father, didn't walk away from Christ sad but as the Gospel today says "out of joy" used all they had and were to seek the perfection Christ was offering and obtain that treasure. Like St. Paul, Ignatius accepted the loss of all things he had up until then and considered them like rubbish compared to the joy of knowing Christ, to letting himself be conquered by Christ and his love (Phil 3:7-8, 12).
- Hence, how logical it would be that someone who had made a choice like this would regularly renew it in prayers he had written. In his famous *Suscipe*, he prayed, Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To

you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.” He knew the Lord’s love and grace were a treasure worth selling everything else. Likewise in his beautiful Prayer for Generosity, he would say pray for the ability not to look at what he was freely surrendering to the Lord but to what he was gaining through giving of himself totally, “Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your will.”

- As soon as Ignatius legs were capable of walking again, he did his physical therapy by walking almost 300 miles to the famous Benedictine shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat in the mountains northwest of Barcelona, where he placed his weapons and his chic military outfits at the feet of the Madonna and began to discern the next step Christ would ask him to take. Close by he stopped in a cave next to a river to rest for a couple of days. There he began to pray. His prayer lasted there for more than eight months as the Lord began to reveal to him in meditation many of the things he would later share with all of us in his spiritual exercises. The Lord helped him to see that he was asking him to found an order. For that he needed an education, and so, very humbly, he went back to school, learning Latin with the equivalent of third graders, going to Madrid in order to study the humanities, heading to Paris in order to further his studies. The fact that he was the age of his peers’ grandfathers and fathers respectively didn’t matter. He had found the treasure and he was going to have it, regardless of how ridiculous it seemed to others. While in Paris, he zealously tried to convert his roommate, Francis Xavier, and other friends who would become the nucleus of the Company of Jesus. He persuaded them to prioritize their prayer and to seek with him not merely the glory of God but, when there was a choice between doing something that would bring God some glory and something else that they anticipated would bring him greater glory, to choose the latter. After their plans to go to convert the Holy Land for God’s greater glory didn’t work out, they entrusted themselves to the Holy Spirit, and placed their future in the hands of the Pope by a fourth vow, to use them as the Pope thought would most advance the glory of God here on earth, teaching us all a lesson that God’s greatest glory comes from imitating the obedience of Christ who after obeying until death on a cross was highly exalted ... to the glory of God the Father. And how much glory have the Jesuits brought God throughout the centuries? We think readily of the tremendous missionaries who heroically brought Christ to people who had never heard his saving name because of the laziness, cowardice and lack of faith of so many other Christians? We also can think of the many seminaries and universities that they founded at the behest of the Pope in order to teach the faith at a very high level in order to combat against and heal the divisions flowing from the Protestant Reformation. We can also think of how many baroque Churches the Jesuits built in order to show the beauty, richness and dynamism of our faith in contrast to the whitewashed boxes of Protestants. But more than anything we should consider the countless saints the Jesuits have given to the Church, both those who were actual members of the Society of Jesus, as well as the many more who were directed by Jesuits toward holiness. The real worth of any way of life is shown not in those who fail to live by its charism but by those who do. The last 50 years have been tough ones for the Jesuits world wide, years in which many Jesuits were not living and teaching adequately the faith of the Church. But now the whole world is seeing a glimpse of the real beauty of the Jesuit life in one who has fully embraced the charism lived by Saints Ignatius, Francis Xavier, Robert Bellarmine, Peter Faber, Aloysius Gonzaga and so many others — in our remarkable new Holy Father who is seeking to help us all live by faith.
- One of St. Ignatius’ greatest legacies are his meditations, compiled in his famous Spiritual Exercises, which have guided retreats ever since they were approved by Pope Paul III in 1548. In it he helps people to enter into his own journey, the true Christian journey, seeing the vanity of worldly things and the false treasures proposed by the devil so that we might make a definitive choice to embrace and march under Christ’s standard. He taught us all about the importance of exercising ourselves spiritually, of not taking our soul for granted, of staying in spiritual shape by keeping ourselves focused on Christ, inserting ourselves into the mysteries of his life and allowing him to enter into the mystery of our own. To put Christ at the center, to lose one’s life for him so as to gain one’s life forever. The spiritual exercises are fundamentally about strengthening us through prayer to live by faith.

- As Ignatius discovered in the castle of Loyola and the cave of Manresa, real prayer changes us and helps us to live no longer for ourselves but for God. It's not the activity itself that changes us, but the one we encounter in that activity who helps us to become more and more like the one we prioritize, to whom we draw near, who speaks to us, illumines us, looks on us with love, and places his trust in us. We see this transformation in Moses in the first reading. Whenever he returned from the presence of the Lord, his face was radiant, so transfigured in light it would blind the children of Israel. This was not Moses' glory, but the radiance of the presence of God to whom he would speak face-to-face reflecting off his face. Prayer changed him. Receiving God's light within, he then couldn't help transmit that light to others. Others in seeing him saw something of the light of God. Out of humility, he hid his face with a veil, except when he spoke to the Israelites about what God was enjoining on them — he wanted them at that point to see that what was coming was not Moses' thoughts but the path of light, the path of faith, God was asking of them.
- Jesus as God permeated Moses with his light, just as he suffused Ignatius with his glory, just as he has irradiated the spiritual cancers of so many who have done the spiritual exercises and made them whole and fair once more, so God wants to change us in our prayer and in particularly these spiritual exercises. He wants us to receive the light of his holiness so that it shines through the most important part of our religious habits and priestly vestments, our face, which is called to radiate the beauty and joy of the crazy love he has for us and we have for him in return. This radiance is not something we can obtain by our own work, but it is something freely given to us by God. It's a radiance that begins from within, as we allow him to become Lord of our heart, of our mind, of our soul, of our strength. Eventually that interior radiance can no longer be hidden under a bushel basket, but it's put on a lampstand for all the world to see as our life begins to glow with fervor. That's what we celebrate today with St. Ignatius, whose radiant has been put on a lampstand in heaven for the whole Church on earth and heaven to see. And today, Ignatius wants each of us to ask himself or herself, "Why can't I do what Ignatius has done? What I can't I do what Dominic and Francis, Therese and Catherine, Edith and Clare, and so many others have done?" By God's grace, we can! All we need to do is make the best and most important investment of our life, to renew that fundamental choice, and give up everything for the treasure of Christ, the pearl of great price, that in minutes will be hidden through the miracle of Holy Communion in the good soil of our hearts.
- We turn to that Precious Pearl who made Iñigo Lopez a great saint and with Iñigo's own words we pray for that same gift: "Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. Good Jesus, hear me. Within the wounds, shelter me. From turning away, keep me. From the evil one, protect me. At the hour of my death, call me. Into your presence lead me to praise you with all your saints forever and ever. Amen."