

The Virtue of Detachment

Last week, our parish was paid a visit by a representative from the Jesuit offices in Chicago. His purpose was to listen to our parishioners and gain a greater sense of our people, community, and mission. One of the topics that came up in our discussion was “What makes St Xavier a Jesuit parish?” I ask that question of each parishioner?



Is it because we are named after a Jesuit saint?

No. St Ignatius Church in Monfort Heights is named after a Jesuit, but it's not a Jesuit parish. Maybe it's because there are Jesuits assigned here? Yes, but that only refers to the clerical leadership. We have a Jesuit school in Chicago with NO Jesuits assigned there. So it's not about how many Jesuits are on staff.

The parish is you. And so the question is: **What makes you a Jesuit parish?**

One solid reason is this: we are a Jesuit parish because we strive to be animated by the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola, as a way to love and serve Christ Our Lord. This is what we have in common with the companions of Loyola, the Jesuits who came after him, and all the lay followers in colleges, parishes, and schools sponsored by the Society of Jesus.

Since Jesuits are founded and grounded in the Spiritual Exercises, so also must be a Jesuit parish.

The *Spiritual Exercises* is a book written by Ignatius Loyola in 1548 to serve as the sacred foundation of the Society of Jesus. All Jesuits have participated in the 30-day silent retreat based on the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is our core experience of Jesus. And I think the more you live the Spirit of the Exercises, the closer our parish comes to loving and following Jesus Christ.

The very first meditation presented by Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises* is rightly called “The First Principle”. It is a foundation. It is a great place to start. The First Principle is of prime importance as one moves through the retreat and Jesuit life.

The meditation is only a couple paragraphs long. But if I could narrow it down to one word, that may be a good way to answer the question: What makes us a Jesuit parish? The First Principle in a word: **detachment**.

Detachment means a healthy impartiality, a distancing, an indifference. The opposite of detachment is possessive attachment. A disordered clinging to things, attitudes, habits, and even people that do not bring us any closer to God. When one is so possessed, one cannot freely make a decision for God.

For example, in the Jesuits, if a man is so attached to his family, his possessions, a particular city or job, he is not so free to be assigned or missioned in the service of Christ and the Church. So, Ignatius encourages Jesuits to remain detached from things, so as to **choose more freely** those things and attitudes that lead to God.

Today's Gospel is all about the virtue of detachment. Jesus was standing in the Temple with some people who were noticing all the expensive trappings, massive stones, and religious fixtures. His comments encouraged a detachment from these things in anticipation of the day of the Lord: *All that you see here-- the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another.*

He also warned them not to be taken in by people and voices that deceive. *"Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them!"* Jesus also reminded them to trust him, and at time of trial, only use those words of wisdom that come from him, *"Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking."* The lesson for us: nurture a healthy distance from the material world, so as to rightly opt for God's direction.

Jesus and Ignatius Loyola both knew well the limits of human freedom. We all cling to something that limits our freedom to choose. For example:
"We have always had two cars in the family. Therefore I must have a two car garage."
"Without a turkey at Thanksgiving, our family might just as well stay home."
"If my stamp collection were stolen from my house, my world would be devastated."
"Unless we live together beforehand, it's not possible to have a happy marriage."
"If I lost my job or my spouse, my life would be over."

In what ways do you cling to some idea that limits your ability to choose love and life?
"There will come that day, blazing like an oven when all will be reduced to stubble. But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays."

Detachment heals us from the need to possess things and habits that do us no good. Jesus says we will endure wars, insurrections, earthquakes, famines, and plagues and mighty signs. But if we are able to see Jesus and choose him freely, not a hair of our head will be harmed.

Ignatius teaches us all: With a foundation in Jesus alone, we will not be harmed.

God created human beings to praise, reverence, and serve God, and by this means, to save their souls. Not a hair on their heads will be destroyed, *“By your perseverance you will secure your lives.”*

Detachment. All the Jesuits you see here in painting and statues were grounded in that First principle. They all persevered in the spirit of these words from the First Principle mediation:

“We appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us grow as loving persons. But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God and so hinder our growth toward God.”

What makes us a Jesuit parish? For one, we too persevere in the virtue of detachment as Ignatius presents it. Also, we use the gift of Ignatian spirituality as a means to draw closer to God. And then, as the Gospel says, we are led to give testimony.

So, in the same way as I pass that insight on to you, so you must pass it on to others. To do that, I have placed this homily here and included a few links to the *Spiritual Exercises* below.

I encourage you to further study and a deeper reflection on this Gospel today and so to draw profit from the graces you receive from Jesus Christ.

“Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening his life in me.”

[CLICK HERE](#) to read a brief article on **Detachment**, by Margaret Silf from her book *Inner Compass*.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read a small passage about how **Detachment** helps in making decisions.

[CLICK HERE](#) to watch a video about the **First Principle** and Foundation in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Below is a modern translation of the First Principle and Foundation

The First Principle and Foundation

The goal of our life is to live with God forever.
God who loves us, gave us life.

Our own response of love allows God's life to flow into us without limit. All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.

As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us develop as loving persons. But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal. In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice and are not bound by some obligation.

We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a deeper response to our life in God. **Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to the deepening of God's life in me.**

—St. Ignatius as paraphrased by David L. Fleming, S.J.
from the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*

