

## The Virtue of Detachment

Last week, in the bulletin I published a few excerpts from our parish survey. One of the questions that elicited a variety of responses was the one that went like this: **St Xavier is a Jesuit parish. What does it mean that we are a Jesuit parish?**



The simple answer is that we are inspired by Ignatian Spirituality. If the Jesuits follow Jesus Christ, animated and inspired by the spirituality of Ignatius Loyola, then this parish tries to pass that on to you. **Ignatian Spirituality.** If we Jesuits are animated by the Spiritual Exercises as a way to love and serve Christ Our Lord, then we want that for you too.

The Spiritual Exercises is a book of meditations and practices written by Ignatius Loyola in 1528 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 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, and so share it with you, that may be a good way to answer the question: What makes us a Jesuit parish? The First principle of Ignatian Spirituality 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 by things, 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 us to remain detached from things and bad habits, so as to choose more freely those things and attitudes that lead to God.

Today's Gospel is all about the virtue of detachment. Using Ignatian imaginative prayer, picture Jesus standing in the Temple with some people who were noticing all the expensive trappings, massive costly stones, and religious fixtures, votive offerings. You hear the passionate words of Jesus encouraging 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.*

His words also had a tone of warning: not to be taken in by people and voices who deceive. *"Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them!"* Jesus reminds the people 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."*

Today, we are to practice detachment. We can nurture a healthy distance from the material world, and cute intellectual arguments, so as to follow in God's direction. Jesus and Ignatius Loyola both knew well the temptations of the age. We all cling to something that limits our freedom to choose the good. For example, maybe you've heard words like this:

- 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 as well not come together.
- If my stamp collection were stolen from my house, my world would be devastated.
- I only watch one cable channel. *"See that you not be deceived"*
- 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? In our first reading, Malachi warns about putting too much stock in things of this world:

*“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 separates us from inordinate powers and 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. He wrote: “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 our church paintings and statues were grounded in that First Principle. Imagine Francis Xavier saying to Ignatius, “I can’t go to the Indies, I’m from a wealthy family of nobility.” No, Xavier was free to go. And he never saw Europe again.

Have you ever heard the name Dean Brackley? Dean Brackley is a Jesuit priest from upstate New York. He entered the Jesuits at age 18 and today he is 73 years old.

30 years ago, when he was 43, Dean Brackley volunteered to go to El Salvador and take the place of a Jesuit university professor who had just been murdered at the Jesuit house in San Salvador along with his 5 Jesuit brothers and their housekeepers. Yesterday was the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jesuit martyrs. Fr. Dean Brackley is still there. He is the author of a book entitled “The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola” (2004)



Fr. Brackley was able to discern a principled call to serve in a dangerous position in a threatening country. He was well schooled by the sense of Ignatian detachment. To be so free from worldly influences so as to follow Christ where he leads.

Here's what Ignatius wrote.

“We appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us grow as loving persons. But if any of these gifts or concerns 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 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. Like Francis Xavier, you are also free. Like Dean Brackley, you also are called to make hard decisions.

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.”

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[\*\*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*

