

IGNATIUS, FABER, XAVIER: . WELCOMING THE GIFT, URGING THE MISSION

Jesuit working group
Provinces of Spain

"To reach the same point as the earlier ones, or to go farther in our Lord" Const. 81

Levent of 1539 was approaching. Ignatius and the first companions know that in putting themselves at the disposition of the Pope, thus fulfilling the vow of Montmartre, the foreseeable apostolic dispersion will put an end to "what God had done with them." What had God done in them, and why don't they wish to see it undone?

Two lived experiences precede the foundation of the Society which will shape the most intimate desire of the first companions, of their mission and their way of proceeding: the experience of being "friends in the Lord" and their way of helping others by living and preaching "a la apostólica" (like apostles). The first expression belongs to St. Ignatius: "Nine of

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my friends in the Lord have arrived from Paris," he writes to his friend Juan de Verdolay from Venice in 1537. To what experience of friendship does Ignatius allude? Without a doubt it refers to a human friendship, born of closeness and mutual support, of concern and care for one another, of profound spiritual communication.. It also signifies a friendship that roots all its human potential in the Lord as its Source. It is He who has called them freely and personally. He it is who has joined them together as a group and who desires to send

them out on mission. The experience of being "friends in the Lord" has entailed for them a true *human friendship* with consecrated roots *in the Lord*, in spite of their differences of character and the presence of internal conflicts. It is this friendship, above all, that they do not want to see disappear, even if the Pope disperses them.

The second expression *like apostles* expresses the apostolic horizon and the way of life to which they feel called as companions. It is not difficult to discover in it the content of their desire. Their affective center is Christ: they are the Society of Jesus. Their goal is the same as that of Christ: to work with Him in his vineyard. Their lifestyle and way of proceeding: that of Jesus and his disciples.

1. Making a pilgrimage to the origins

1. We, the present-day Society of Jesus, are a *community of memory*. A community of memory does not invent itself, rather it receives itself from an initial and original event that it wishes to prolong in time. For this to succeed the community of memory recounts its past and remembers the example of those men or women who have best incarnated the meaning and purpose of that community. Thus it is that "communities of memory that connect us with the past, at the same time direct us towards the future as communities of hope."

Such is the *raison d'être* of these jubilees which we are celebrating. Ignatius, Faber and Xavier belong to our past, but we need to turn to them, "try on their story," to orient our mission in the present and as we face the future. These first companions, Father General affirms, evolved such a high degree of creativity in their response to the gift they had received that their example remains a challenge for us even today. From them we can learn how to make modern and up-to-date the mission that they have handed on to us.

This being said, every grace requires our openness to receive it and awaits a response. It is within this subtle but decisive connection between divine offering and human acceptance that we need to ask ourselves the question: "*What must we Jesuits of today be and do so that the Society of Jesus, born of the gratuitous and free love of God, will continue to be a gift of God to the world and to the Church?*"

To shed some light on this crucial question we need to journey towards the origins of the Society, drinking more from our sources, being configured by them. What do we find in these origins?

We find a group of men who, under the guidance of Ignatius, have been grasped and changed by the Lord; ten companions who out of this experience of God gaze upon the world to see it with the eyes and the heart of the Trinity; a shared decision to "reduce themselves to a single Body" to serve in the Church God alone and his Kingdom under the banner of the Cross and at the disposition of the Roman Pontiff. Will it not be here, in the re-creation of this triple foundational moment, that we will find the secret of the creative fidelity to which we are constantly being called?

2. We Jesuits can differentiate ourselves in many things, but there exist in our spiritual patrimony certain "words" which identify us most deeply, "keys which make our strings vibrate, "birthmarks" which give shape to the kernel of our most cherished and deepest sense of identity. Even though we may be very far from the goal to which these words point us, feeling that we know not how to incarnate them in ourselves let alone transmit them to others, let alone suffer for them.. their power to move us inside and to con-voke us around them remains, nonetheless, Ignatius, Faber, and Xavier. Receiving the gift, taking up the real mission. Pronounced in the proper context, we can feel these words stirring up in us the grace of our vocation.

"Rekindle the gift of God that is within you," Paul exhorts his friend and disciple Timothy. It is an invitation to re-animate the grace that the Other has placed in our hearts, not to produce it ourselves, a grace which the passage of time, the difficulties of life and our own wayward inclinations and sin may have covered over with ashes, so that it is now very weak or all but gone out.

"Reaching the same point as the earlier ones or farther in our Lord," we will arrive there only if we are filled with the gift of God which is within us, not with our ashes; placing our personal, community and apostolic situations in contact with these burning embers with which we were gifted from the beginning.

To what embers are we referring? And which of our situations need to catch on fire?

II. Primo Deum

One initial gift from which the Society proceeds, and ourselves in it, is the faith in God of our first companions. A God who may be addressed as "*our Creator and Lord*": *someone who is real, present, and active in the world; God who desires to communicate freely with creatures and renew the world through them; the Creator and Lord also of the Society of Jesus.*

It is an invocation that invites us to situate all of reality under the gaze and the action of God, and not under our own, often distorted calculations. Thus it was that, supported in this faith full of confidence, and in circumstances at least as complicated if not more so than our own, that first Ignatius, Xavier, and Faber, and later the rest of the companions, created the human, religious and apostolic fabric of the Society of Jesus which we have been entrusted to incarnate and re-create today.

Only such a faith frees us from the fears of the present and of the incertitude which the future raises in us, fears and uncertainties which block any initiative for change. Is it not a fact that when concern arises among us about the future of the Society, we find ourselves thinking more of ourselves than of God? Nevertheless, the future of the Society, as well as of the Church and of the world, does not depend on us; it is merely in our hands. Ours is to be confident and to collaborate with God. That is all.

The Society arose from nothing and the gratuity of this origin must be maintained. Everything is grace. Ignatius knows very well, with a wisdom not only conceptual but also of the heart, that he is not the true founder of the Society of Jesus, but rather that it arises from the free will and the love of God for the world and for the Church. For this reason, from the Preamble of the *Constitutions* to its final part, he never ceases to repeat to us that the future of the Society depends on God, just as did its birth. Therefore "in Him alone must be placed our hope."

Where might this initial gift to the Society find application today?

To begin, we might apply it to *the place which God occupies in our lives*. It is surprising that, for an apostolic order whose aim is to help one's neighbors, the Formula of our Institute insists that the first concern of each and every Jesuit, for as long as he lives, must be to "to keep before his eyes God." Shouldn't our neighbors have this first place? We know that St. Ignatius

rejects this shortcut. Our neighbors belong to God, not to us. The poor are "Christ's poor" before our own. In order for our love of them to be pure, transforming and enduring, it must be inserted into the love that God has for them. Experience shows again and again this supposed shortcut leads not to greater love, but frequently to love that is less and more ambiguous.

And, to continue, we could relate *Ignatian prayer* to our habits of prayer. In many aspects the charism of Ignatius still belongs to the future, and this experience of God and Ignatian prayer is one of these aspects. We still have not appreciated its uniqueness in depth. To claim, for example, that prayer is not important for St. Ignatius, that what is truly important is action and service, is a trite oversimplification. Justifying this statement by alluding to the well-known but inexact phrase "contemplatives in action" represents an unwarranted simplification of what St. Ignatius truly thought and felt.

As Fr. General has insisted, the problem for Ignatius lies neither in prayer nor in action, but rather in the heart of the person who must find God in all things, when at prayer and when at work, by uniting him or her self in these things to God's

saving activity. Ignatius reminds the Jesuits of his time, who were so attracted to finding God in prayer, of the uniqueness of the spirituality and of the Order that he had inaugurated: God must be found, not only in the time of prayer, but also in the long and sometimes exhausting service of helping one's neighbors, that is in all things, because all are the text of God, the place where God dwells and awaits us.

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III. Companions

5. The first initiative of God with respect to Ignatius, Xavier and Faber manifested itself in the confluence of their personal stories, grouping them together and later on with others. Their response to this initiative of God was uniform: "We ought not to break up the union and congregation that God had made, instead we should confirm and establish it, becoming a

single body, caring for each other and maintaining contact with each other for the greater fruit of souls."

What makes the first companions great is the *group: a mysticism of the Body* which predates the formal constitution of the Society and becomes an essential part of the same. This union of hearts around Christ and his mission, through their mutual love and concern, through discernment and the service of authority, will be for them a reference in dispersion and a source of apostolic energy. It will make possible the miracle that, although they were of diverse origins, cultures and temperaments, they came to form a Body for the Dream of God in the world.

How was this first union forged? What cemented it together and how did it remain standing in such diverse circumstances?

This mystical cluster did not arise out of nothing. Between 1528, the date when Ignatius met Faber and Xavier for the first time at the Sorbonne, and 1539-40, when the Society was born, eleven years had passed of interweaving intense spiritual and human relationships among the companions. These human, religious and apostolic associations were solidified in their common experience of the Exercises, but also in comradeship, in their help and concern for each other, through long hours of spiritual conversation, in the joy and happiness of living together, in their shared experience at "helping souls,"... all this grafted upon the Lord whom they sense and confess as their true Leader and Head, as their King and Lord, a God to be served.

6. We are called to revive today this precious gift of our origins, the grace to be companions called and brought together by the Lord.

It is important that we respond decisively to this call in such a time as ours in which the centrifugal pressure of individualism threatens the union and the cohesion of the Body of the Society. Without this union and cohesion we run the *risk of humanly deceptive and apostolically sterile fragmentation* of lifestyles little ab-negated.

A surrendered person is one who no longer puts him or herself in first place. An "I" turned inward fills itself with needs and experiences poverty, chastity, and obedience as burdens, not as gifts received and placed in the service of love and devotion to others. Self recognition becomes an overriding concern, which in the end leads to total dissatisfaction..

The three saints whose jubilee we are celebrating tell us that this union and solidarity are possible. We still need—and hopefully we will desire it—to embrace this grace of the Body, lived as a fruit of our being

called together by God and not by chance or by our own desire, caring for and becoming responsible for this body in its triple and inseparable human, religious and apostolic dimensions, discerning the cultural impacts and the internal forces which tend towards affective, ideological and practical disintegration both within itself and in its mission to the world.

This gift challenges us to maintain the Lord as the center of this con-vocation in such a way that we can dwell with Him in "places of question," where the world asks itself if its salvation will be possible or not and where communities decide either to live or perish. It challenges us also to create among ourselves a greater unity and involvement in the search for how and where our greater service of God may be. Isn't the conviction growing, perhaps, that, if anything can weaken the apostolic Body of the Society today, it will be the weakening of our shared ideals on the one hand, and on the other, our scant interest in the internal network of our spiritual and human relationships and needs?

We are not heroes, Fr. General commented, but rather poor men who need the help of our brothers. He added: A Jesuit who thinks he needs no one to live is no model of being a Jesuit. Why not give back to the Lord the power to call us together around Him, attracted by his person and his plan, as happened to Ignatius, Francisco and Faber? Let us allow this gift of God to the Church which the Society of Jesus is, burn away the ashes of our skepticism and despair, of this "emotional heresy" which is so subtly penetrating into many hearts. Let us foster human and spiritual experiences of companionship and forge shared links and ideals. Let us make real the experience of helping each other so that we can serve others better. This will be a source of spiritual consolation, encouragement and apostolic joy.

IV. "This Society, founded chiefly for..."

7. The Society of Jesus is born *by* a mission as well as *for* it. The mission is not at the end of the plan of the first companions, rather at its beginning. It is its motor. It brings them together as "friends in the Lord" and moves them to "live and preach like apostles." The oldest formulation of this mission is *helping souls*. "Helping, not imposing, in order that Jesus Christ and his gospel may be received as Good News by every person and that each person will allow him or herself to be configured by Him."

Mission, for St. Ignatius, is, first of all, being sent. This is the meaning which our founder privileged above any other. A being sent that is radically from the Lord, although its historical concretion comes about through the Pope and the superiors of the Society. It is a mission that is not accomplished alone, but as companions of the Sender. He is the Owner of the mission, not us. We are not autonomous workers in the mission, but rather we are acting with Him and according to his Spirit. Our highest aspiration will always be to find ourselves inserted in the work of God as collaborators in the mission of Christ.

Where will we learn to see ourselves and to live in this way? What words and what gifts from our spiritual inheritance will revive in us the desire to see and to act in this manner?

A comprehensive report on the present state of religious life links its future to the capacity of the different Congregations to "respond to some of the basic human needs which are still not being satisfied" and that this response ought to be accomplished "through a spirit capable of drawing their members together as a Body." We have already spoken of this second condition above. In respect to the first, we would need to be very aware of the fact that these basic and unsatisfied human needs vary with the passage of time and the change of circumstances. Yesterday's needs may have been education, health, misery... Today they may be called: society of risk, ecology, sexism, women, globalization, poverty, asphyxia of spirit..

It is very important to be aware of these transformations in human needs, both for imagining new forms of direct presence in their regard as well as to re-orient the goals of our previous involvements. Our minds must remain alert to the analysis of these changes because God is calling us through them.

Were not these first companions much freer, more imaginative and decisive that we are in intuiting God's path through these historical changes and in placing themselves eagerly at God's service? Why do we not open ourselves to the hope that, if we join them on their spiritual wave, we will discover many paths we have not traveled, many charismatic potentialities that we still have not activated?

What was "their secret" so that we can make it our own, to claim our inheritance?

Let us make no mistake. The secret is grounded not in the exterior difficulties of their mission in comparison to ours, nor in concerns within

the Body, nor in their own personal challenges. It was in their continual questioning *directed to God* as well as in their personal uncertainty: "Where do you want to lead us, Lord?" as also in their missionary or group crossroads: "To become a single Body?" or in the decision to give the Lord the last word and total confidence: "Following you, my Lord, I can never be lost."

Indeed Spirit and Mission, Spirit and Apostolic Body, Spirit and our way of proceeding are inseparable in our spiritual tradition. To be sure that what we are doing is the will of God and not merely our own designs, place and time must be given to the Spirit. This attentive group listening first to the Spirit was what preserved our first companions from all tinges of escapist spiritualism as well as from merely secular analysis. This space conceded to the Spirit was equally the secret that kept each of them from being enclosed in fixed ways of thinking and acting, which would have impeded their coming together around a common decision and mission: "Serving Christ, Lord and Savior, continuing his work in the world."

9. *How might we Jesuits of today rediscover the apostolic imagination and creativity of our first companions? What situations of our day would expose us to this same Spirit?*

Our present moment is going through a certain apostolic weariness, "compassion fatigue," a marked losing of heart, and of a not-knowing-what-to-do. We are like those disciples of Jesus who, after toiling away all night, must confess their ill fortune that they had not caught any fish. These times of low expectations wear us down to the point of becoming a dangerous temptation..

Very often we find ourselves *without words before many new and entirely unforeseen situations*, for which we seem to have no solution. An impression of cultural breakdown and of the collapse of the faith and of the Society may have taken nest in our hearts. More serious yet: announcing Jesus Christ and his gospel in this culture may seem to be so "politically incorrect" that we give up speaking of him directly at all.

Nothing of this ought to alarm us, for an excess of dramatization on this point will be of no help whatsoever in the long run. The difficulty lies not in what befalls us but rather in asking ourselves before the Lord and with Him what ought to be done with what has befallen us; with what has befallen the world, with what has befallen the Society, with what has befallen each one of us. Such is the secret that we have inherited from our elders: that God remains present in the brokenness of our time, a God as work as

St. Ignatius saw in the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God. A Living God who stirs up movements, some visible, others under the surface, in a history that, thanks to God's presence, never is "fallen nor definitively defeated."

Are we not called, all this having been said, to come together and "join shoulders" with all those whose aim is "a worldwide solidarity before the globalization of interests"? From Fr. Arrupe and the spirit of GC 32 we have inherited the definition of the Jesuit as a *man for others*. From Fr. Kolvenbach and the spirit of GC 34 comes the additional definition *men with others*. Collaboration with lay people in the mission of Christ is, without doubt, one of the most promising realities of the present moment. We ought to prepare ourselves for it, accepting it as a new gift from God, rather than viewing it with distrust, skepticism or as a threat. If indeed Ignatian spirituality is exerting today a powerful attraction on many believers, why not help this initial attraction develop into a deeper understanding and experience of this spirituality and into diverse forms of mutual apostolic collaboration?

The "political" imagination of Ignatius of Loyola, the passion and urgency to announce Christ of Francis Xavier, and the art of accompanying and closeness of Peter Faber constitute three "potentials of the Reign of God" which we still have not sufficiently explored.

V. "That I may love Him more and follow Him more closely"

10. Ignatius has left us a legacy that on several occasions sounds paradoxical. He founds an apostolic order and tells us that *the first concern of the Jesuit must be God*. He recognizes the importance of human means to help our neighbors, and assures us that those which unite the instrument with God are more important than these. He trusts in God as if everything depended upon himself, and puts everything into play as if all depended upon God. He experiences at every moment familiarity with God and gazes intently at every thing.. How is it possible to live such paradoxes today?

The secret is Jesus: knowing him internally in order to love and follow Him, to be placed with Him. The petition of the Second Week of the Exercises should never fall from our lips or our hearts. The same holds for the petition of Ignatius to the Virgin, "that she would deign to place him with her Son." The experience of La Storta was central in the life of Ignatius and should be equally so in our own. More important than saying his first

mass before or after, once ordained a priest; more than if the future of the fledgling Society will be Jerusalem or Rome; more important and primordial to Ignatius than anything that might happen to the Order is that the Father place him with his Son. This is his primordial desire, the evangelical condition of everything else. After La Storta what ever happens is fine: Ignatius will live from then on from his new condition of being admitted into the Trinitarian sphere of the love and the mission of Jesus Christ "carrying the Cross."

Because the Christ of Ignatius, and later of Xavier and Faber, is not a Christ who is culturally determined, a product of the environment or passing interests, He is the Jesus of the Gospels, poor, humble and humiliated, in whom Ignatius recognizes one of the Trinity with us to "work the redemption of the human race." He is the universal King who calls us to unite ourselves with Him and to conquer the world for his Father. He is the supreme and eternal Captain who calls us forth against the powers of the Evil One. It is He who suffers death on a cross for me and once resurrected exercises with all of us the "office of consoler"...This is the Christ who fascinates Ignatius, Xavier and Faber, the one they love and to whom they dedicate themselves with all their hearts. Before whom they ask themselves, raised up with an admiration and gratitude without limits: what ought I to do for Christ? What do you want me to do?

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11. Here is yet another cherished conviction of Ignatius: before we decide to do something *for* Christ, and in the interior of the action itself, we must ask ourselves who He is for us, that is, whether our faith and our love are directed towards Him and with Him we have opened ourselves to the world, or else, on the contrary, they are fixed upon other objects instead. Here also, (and to what a point!) we need to embrace this gift: to make ours the Christ of the Exercises who, in our case as jesuits, makes himself real and concrete in the Constitutions.

Without this love and *passion for the Christ* who opens us to the world, it is not possible to be a Jesuit. In Him our vocation begins and ends.

We do not follow an idea, a program, or a humanistic cause and nothing more. We follow Him, who certainly has a plan and is committed to the cause of universal salvation. Loving Him also carries with it inseparably loving those for whom He gave his life: all humanity, but in a preferential way the victims of dis-love. It also entails loving and caring for our companions, con-voked by the same call as ourselves.

From Jesus we learn to *receive ourselves* only from God and to give ourselves only to his *Kingdom*. He reveals to us this horizon and proposes it to our freedom, making possible in our life that "familiarity with God" in which our father Ignatius was growing all his life and which Nadal considered as a grace offered by the Lord to the entire Society.

Why do we not dare to accept Jesus Christ as our "*interior master*": to follow his lead at the great crossroads of our life: to travel new paths guided by his Spirit? Are we not perhaps called to pattern our way of being and proceeding by his, as St. Ignatius desired and Fr. Arrupe asked of us?

VI. The surrender of self-love

12. The grace of God is always grace offered, but not always grace accepted by us. This requires, as we said above, human collaboration. St. Ignatius was very conscious of this fact. This is why he insisted so on the need to "dispose ourselves" to receive it. How? We know. The Ignatian key which makes possible the free and gratuitous self-communication of God to us is this: the surrender of self-love and our own will and interests, through gratitude, abnegation, humility, and poverty... Surrendering self-love and our own will and interests is not primarily an ascetical program. It is more the condition of a promise: that God, the world and ourselves have become transparent to each other. Without *surrendering* one does not see well, one can neither *seek* nor *find*, things deny us their secrets. How could they possibly show us that they flow from the love of God and exist in Him if we do not break the narcissistic circuit which keeps us turned inward upon ourselves? Rightly St. Ignatius saw in this surrender of oneself the most authentic thermometer of all the spiritual life, the key to all existence that seeks to reveal the being and activity of God in the world.

13. Let us ask ourselves again what situations our spiritual inheritance is called upon to address.

This "surrendering of self-love and our own will and interests" of the Exercises, in the Constitutions Ignatius calls *abnegation and continual mortification* in all things possible. This language sounds hard, behind the times. Perhaps it sometimes needs to be substituted for with other words, but the insight that they point to cannot be substituted. The center of the scene, the interior and the external, is not occupied by myself with its old fits of greed, vain honor and pride, but rather God. From this place of adoration and encounter our self opens to the interests of God, the Kingdom. God and his Dream for the world become the new object of our desire, the "found treasure" for which one is joyfully willing to sell everything else.

Ignatius was very clear in this point as he taught the first companions and left us the Constitutions: non-abnegated Jesuits will make this union difficult and without it there is no Body, and if they are just a "mob" it becomes completely impossible.

The question directed to God in apostolic discernment, "Lord, how are you present in this concrete problem that brings us together and what do you want of us?" can only be asked by Jesuits who have previously stripped themselves of their pre-judices in order to hear the cries and whispers of God present in the reality under consideration. Friendship among companions supposes placing the other in the center of our attention and love, squelching as much as possible this "hyperinversion of concerns of the I" which is so characteristic of our present moment.

To preach in poverty, humility and gratitude as our first companions desired has become for us a difficult aspiration to realize both individually and as a body. The desire is not always lacking, of course, but it is also because we have not gone about it intensely, accepting all the consequences. If it is true that "although obedience sends us, it is poverty which makes us credible," this is a wound that we must always leave open *without trying to close it falsely.*" Even taking into account its eternal complexity, we have much further to go in this area..

VII. In all things

14. What God did with Ignatius at Manresa assumed such a momentous role in his life that it transformed him from a hermit into an apostle. Those five graces of which the Pilgrim speaks in the *Autobiography*, especially the illumination at the Cardoner and the understanding of how

God had created the world, are at the base of this radical change. If the world flows from the love of God, then *it is not only a thing but also a gift*. And if God is the reality "giving the gift and giving Himself in it, living in it, working in it, coming down to it," then everything is a sacrament of God, a place of adoration, meeting and service, a "divine milieu." It will no longer be possible for Ignatius to love and serve his Lord without living and serving God's world. This will be his great passion: seeking and finding God in all things, joining his freedom to the plan of God, being an instrument in God's hands.

These are a few more of these foundational words in which all Jesuits can find ourselves, other keys which can move us and make our heartstrings vibrate: "It is essential to see and find God in all things.. loving Him in all things and all things in Him in conformance with his most holy and divine will." Being contemplative in action and active in contemplation, such that when we find ourselves with "things" we discover God in them, and when we find ourselves with God we see and love all things in Him.

And yet with all this.. it is possible that, for understandable reasons, although not evangelical or Ignatian ones, the socio-cultural evolution of our society has covered our gaze with a systematic suspicion of the world, which we now approach with a certain hesitation and tendency to withdraw from it. We can gaze upon the world as if from outside, but with a certain hopelessness about the future.. It is possible that this same evolution has left us dis-adapted and speechless before new situations, in a kind of internal holding pattern that frequently leads to fits of revulsion, frustration, and aggression.. It is possible that, without being totally conscious of the damage that we are doing, we may be increasing the resultant spiritual desolation in stead of "moving intensely against it"...

15. What would happen, on the contrary, if we were to approach such situations with this primordial gift with which the Lord desired to bless the Society: "Seeking and finding God in *all things*"? Perhaps even things as desirable and precious as these:

- Inserted into the workings of God, we would recover a sense of peace, confidence, and of Christian abandon. We would feel internally that, because God has touched the world in creation and above all in Jesus Christ, nothing can ever fall from God's hands, although many times it is not in our reach to know how this can be; and we would rejoice for it. We would once again be more assertive and less judgmental about the world; more prophets

of life and less of doom; more obedient to God and finding ourselves enjoying more speaking of God and of God's promise to our brothers and sisters..

- Following in the footsteps of Jesus we would expose with solidarity the suffering of the people: "Letting pain speak is the condition of all truth." We would be available for all, but with our gaze always on the poor, a requirement of any salvation which pretends to be universal..

- In our decision making, both personal and as a community, we would give more attention to God through *spiritual discernment*, personal and in common, conscious of the complexity of the world of today, on the one hand, and our propensity for self-deception, on the other..

- We would not let ourselves succumb as easily to depression over the phenomena of diminution which we are observing because we would be experiencing it with God, always attentive to God's guiding action, deep and powerful, pruning and, at the same time, life-giving, correcting our erring ways.

- Buoyed, finally, by the spirit of the Exercises and the Constitutions we would try to find and unite ourselves actively with God, not only where God's presence is obvious but also where God's presence is despaired of and could even be seen as scandalous: *in the cross* that accompanies our lives or which hovers menacingly over the lives of others. We would come to understand that, in order to find God "in all things" without confusing God with an idol of our own design, it is essential to find God also in places where it is difficult to accept that God would ever be.

VIII. Spiritual conversation

16. "Conversing" is one of the apostolic tools most used and appreciated by St. Ignatius from the time of his convalescence at Loyola until his death: "He would spend time with those in the house in conversation about the things of God, which he found profitable for their souls." Towards the end of his life, Ignatius will remember how this taste for spiritual conversation was born in him by his experiencing the fruits that it produced.

We know from Faber, by way of his *Memoriale*, that he was Ignatius' most outstanding student in this art of spiritual conversation. All who dealt with him will remember him for this gift and for the fruits which it produced.

As for Francis Xavier, his letters—another means of spiritual interchange—give testimony of similar practice and appreciation

Spiritual conversation is an interchange of spirits. It is the act of sharing what the Holy Spirit is whispering to us: the desires that the Spirit places in our heart, the memory of Jesus and the apostolic imagination inspired in us, the consolations that we are given. Spiritual conversation also shares the weakness that surrounds us, the temptations which assault us.. Thus a conversation requires a special type of communication and of listening to which we are not very accustomed and in which we need much practice to grow. Without this communication and listening, spiritual conversation cannot take place.

17. *Why would it be important to encourage spiritual conversation in our life as Jesuits?*

Spiritual conversation is an interchange of spirits. It is the act of sharing what the Holy Spirit is whispering to us

The faith has lost the social supports that it enjoyed only a few years ago. Our identity as believers, and even more as religious, has become for this reason "culturally fragile." Our identity regains its plausibility as

it is supported by the personal and internal experience of those who think, feel and pray in a similar manner. Meanwhile, our external supports continue to dry up. In such circumstances, it is an uncontested fact that "the faith of my brothers and sisters confirms my own faith." It is probably also a necessity. As we narrate the faith one to another in the sense indicated above, conversing spiritually becomes a condition of internal vitality and apostolic protection; a therapy of the Spirit against the sensation of loneliness and in-significance that can invade us.

We are living, moreover, in an historical moment in which, even armed with the Gospel in our hands and above all in our hearts, it is never easy to know what to do and how to do it. For this reason, today more than ever, a community for mission is equivalent to a community for apostolic discernment. But what sustains this discernment is true spiritual conversation, along with other means that are also proper, such as prayer, analysis, consultation..

Ought we not to give more space, therefore, to this type of mutual communication? Could we not recover thereby the importance that it had for Ignatius, Javier and Faber, as their source of friendship and union, their realm of shared meaning and apostolic searching?

IX. Proposals

18. The memory of the first companions, to which Ignatius invites us repeatedly in the Formula of the Institute and the Constitutions, calls us today to make fruitful the same grace of the vocation that we share with them. To respond to this ideal and reach the same point "or farther in the Lord," although the gift of the Spirit is what ought to guide and move us, we can also learn, in the school of the first companions, the means that they used. What was, then, the process followed by these companions to form that original union of "friends in the Lord?"

Let us focus first on Ignatius. He first passed through a personal transformation through spiritual readings, prayer and penance, poverty and contact with the poor and the sick, combat. Finally, taught by the Lord "in the same way that a school master teaches a child," he received "an illumination so great, that it seemed that all things were new" and he no longer thought of anything but helping his neighbor. Here began his long pilgrimage.

Next let us focus on Faber and Xavier. In Paris they join Ignatius, conquered by the Spiritual Exercises they had practiced with extreme fidelity. They and the others who were added later to the small group progressed in the life of faith with prayer and penance, with the apostolate and their dedication to their studies, with a poor and shared lifestyle, helping each other in spiritual and material ways and with frequent friendly encounters, of prayer and discernment. Further along, in Italy, they experience together extreme poverty and solidarity, and dedicate themselves to the apostolate, above all with simple people..

Thus, from the individual experience of Ignatius and later of the companions the life of the early Society was born. Later on: this way of proceeding of Ignatius and the first companions became part of the mystagogia of the Spiritual Exercises and the way of Jesuit formation.

The Exercises, by means of a variable and ordered set of "spiritual operations," offer an integrated mystagogia of the interior and the corporal, of intimate experience and spiritual dialogue, of attention to the personal

and the material, of spiritual combat and confident abandon in God. And the formation proper to the Society, as can be seen in the Examen and in the Constitutions, embraces prayer, profound experience of God, simplicity of life, poverty, contact with the poor and sick, confidence and abandon in God, as well as practice of the apostolate with simple persons. What the first companions took upon themselves to advance in the way of the Lord and that they believed could be of benefit to the followers in their way have been structured into our fundamental documents.

19. Taking inspiration from them, we can devise ways today that may help make our desires to continue what they have begun more efficacious. We will next indicate some of these means, with the intention that they might suggest others which can be adapted to the various circumstances in which our life as Jesuits unfolds.

a) *Let us insist upon our personal experience of God.* Therefore,

Let us spend time in reflection and personal prayer. Let us use the different parts of this document for reflection, prayer and personal review. Let us try to apply the points in the document in the concrete circumstances of each one of us and each ministry. They can serve as guides sent to each Jesuit.

Let us make our Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius formed and united as companions Faber and Xavier by means of the Spiritual Exercises. Let us program time for this annual practice, perhaps making them with individualized accompaniment and according to the complete Ignatian method or mystagogy. We can take advantage of offers of accompaniment and hospitality that are made in many of our houses throughout the year.

b) *Let us take up spiritual reading.* The year could be an occasion to read a life or study of the saints of the Jubilee, as Frigo in Loyola allowed his reading to move him. Some suggestions:

English-Language Sources for the Jubilee

Joseph Conwell, "A Brief and Exact Account": *The Letter of Simao Rodrigues on the Origins and Progress of the Society of Jesus* (Institute of Jesuit Sources 2004)

M. Joseph Costelloe, *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis 1992)

Manuel Ruiz Jurado, *For the Greater Glory of God. A Spiritual Retreat with St. Ignatius* (The Word Among Us Press, Ijamsville, Maryland 2002)

Kolvenbach, Peter-Hans, *The Road from La Storta* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis 2000)

Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company that Changed the World* (Loyola Press, Chicago 2003)

Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism. A Dynamic Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (Loyola Press, Chicago 2004)

Edmund Murphy and Martin Palmer, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis 1996)

John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1993)

c) *Let us add momentum to our apostolic community.*

With this in mind, let us show concern about our community meetings. We could dedicate one meeting to sharing the distinct "impacts" that this document or part thereof had on each person present. Let us speak more from our personal "feeling" and practice the art of listening, to engage more in dialogue than in debate..

Let us get the apostolic sectors and the Province involved as well. It would be helpful to suggest a meeting or retreat for this purpose, or perhaps an occasion which would combine times for prayer, sharing, liturgy and celebration. This would be an "event" and not merely a pious exercise.

d) *Let us recover our relationship with the poor and our exposure to poverty.* Let us return to the Ignatian *experiments*. Beginning with the practices which helped the first companions and that they propose in the Constitutions, we might find that some of them might help transform our behaviors and attitudes, and not merely serve as more information or familiarity. For example, try to spend time in the field of marginalization, in ministries with simple or poor people, taking the place of a companion during the summer, in a province infirmary (your own or another's) sharing the life of persons in poor areas, etc.

20. "...that God be truly and existentially the first served in our every manner of living our vocation; that in following our Lord, the Society remain conscious of the urgency of its mission; that, seized by the Spirit, we may live personally the ministry of consoler who comes to represent the risen Lord ..."

Thus Fr. General summarizes the challenges that come to us today through St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier and Blessed Peter Faber. It is up to us to receive the gift and resolve to see it bear fruit.

Translated by Robert E. Hurd, S.J.