

THE IGNATIAN ANNIVERSARIES

THREE HOLY JESUITS

David L. Fleming S.J.

We are celebrating this year (officially beginning with the feast commemoration of St. Francis Xavier on December 3, 2005 and closing with his same feast in 2006) what is called the Ignatian Anniversaries. St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, died on July 31, 1556. We are remembering that it is now 450 years since his death. Ignatius's most famous friend and companion is St. Francis Xavier, the missionary *par excellence*, who was born in 1506. We remember that it is now 500 years since his birth. And the third Jesuit companion we celebrate is Blessed Peter Faber (also known by the French citing of his name as Pierre Favre) who, like Xavier was born in 1506. Faber, too, is remembered for the 500 years since his birth.

We might question how this celebration of Ignatian Anniversaries came about, with the mix of remembrances of death and birth. It could well be that Jesuits like parties, and they are inviting the whole church to join in the celebration. There is also the likelihood that Father Kolvenbach, the superior general of the Jesuits, is calling all of us Jesuits to claim our identity with these three founding members of the Society of Jesus. I can't say "claim our ownership" of these fellow Jesuits, because all three truly belong to the whole church. But Jesuits do make a unique kind of claim on these three men because as the founders they relate to us in grace, charisma, ideals, and inspiration as special patrons and mentors. But it remains true that the Ignatian Anniversaries celebration is not the preserve of the Jesuits but is truly meant to be a sharing of us Jesuits with everyone touched by these men both inside and outside the church.

By bringing these three men together for a celebration, there are many possible ways of comparing and contrasting their personalities and their gifts. It is easy to identify Ignatius as leader, Francis Xavier as missionary, and

Peter Faber as the "quiet companion," as one of his biographers entitled the book about his life. We could also signify Ignatius as the man of prayer, Xavier as the evangelizer, and Faber as the spiritual director. Then too, the three of them were roommates at the University of Paris; perhaps we could group them together as the holy guardians of dormitory life for our university students. Ignatius being ordained priest at the age of 46 could be celebrated as the patron of late or delayed vocations. Faber, for all his work with the Protestants, could be identified as an early ecumenist. Xavier, crossing the worlds between Spain and Paris and Rome to India and the Moluccas and Japan, may be the forerunner of the internationalist, the person identified with a world identity. Yes, there are many ways that we might draw insight and be inspired by these three Jesuits.

From certain emphases we find in Ignatian spirituality, I am looking at these three Jesuits. I intend to use the *Spiritual Exercises* as the lens through which we can view each of these men. Ignatius Loyola, being the author of the *Exercises*, is sometimes said to have provided us with his autobiographical signature throughout this very book. For his part, Ignatius thought that Faber was the best of the companions in giving the *Exercises* to others. And Francis Xavier was the last of the original six companions in Paris (and reputedly the most difficult one to work with according to Ignatius) to whom Ignatius gave the *Exercises*. I think that seeing these men in the light of the *Exercises*, especially in terms of their relationship with Jesus, we can find ourselves helped in our own relationship with God. In drawing upon these men's experiences, we will be moved more deeply in our appreciation for and identification with Ignatian spirituality and, for us Jesuits, our own Jesuit version of it.

Ignatius and God the Communicator

Ignatius is one who experiences God as a communicator. God speaks, and God is always desiring to be in dialogue with us. At the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius presents us with an exercise called the Principle and Foundation. At first, it would seem to be a simple statement about the kind of creator God we believe in. But Ignatius makes sure that we understand creation in terms of gifts. God presents us human beings with all of creation as gifts for us to help us to know and respond in thanks and love with the Giver of all good gifts. Within the text of the

Principle and Foundation Ignatius deliberately changes his language from a seemingly general human approach—an “everyman” approach—in the first two contextual paragraphs to an involving “we” in the concluding three paragraphs. It is necessary for us to make a choice among the multitude of gifts presented before us to determine which ones are more helpful to us for knowing and responding to God. Our response is a necessary part of the communication dialogue that God has initiated.

In the final exercise of the *Spiritual Exercises* book, Ignatius presents us with two prenotes to the exercise titled “The Contemplation on the Love of God.” The prenotes deal with what love means. Ignatius wants to remind us of two important aspects of loving. The first is that lovers want to put their love in deeds more than words. Then he adds the more essential second point. Lovers always want to share with the one loved whatever each has, for example, valuable things like rings or jewelry or expensive travel and vacations, or perhaps learning and appreciation of theater, dance, music, or art. Yet when Ignatius chooses a word for what lovers do in this second prenote, his Spanish word choice is significant. Ignatius chooses the Spanish word *comunicar*. Just as we hear it in English, *comunicar* includes all the connotation of “communicating.” All gifts are meant to communicate, open up to dialogue; all gifts are meant to speak. This essential aspect of gifting fills out concretely what the Principle and Foundation has already implied.

God is ever speaking to us in an enfleshed manner. All the gifts of creation speak to us of his love and care and concern. Jesus emphasized over and over from his own human experience how creation spoke to him of his Father’s love. In fact, his parables continue to draw upon ordinary human happenings to point to God’s presence and action. But Jesus further challenged us when he said that for us to know God we should look at him. To Philip who requested “show us the Father and that will be enough for us,” Jesus bluntly replies “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:8-9).

But I suggest that we go a step further in our reflections. We have made explicit in modern psychology that body language is a real language of communication. God also speaks through body language. God became human in Jesus so that we can even read his body language and understand a bit more about God.

For Ignatius this communication from God was what enlivened his approach to a contemplation of Gospel mysteries. For Ignatius,

contemplation means that we look, and we listen, and we drink in all the actions as we pray the Gospel mysteries which are the subjects of our prayer periods of the retreat. Over and beyond listening to the words of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, we are absorbing the body language of Jesus as we are being graced to come to know him more intimately. The growth in our intimacy with Jesus comes especially through our focusing on the body language that Jesus exhibits to us in our imaginative entering into contemplation.

Probably most of us who know Ignatius today only through his writings would not identify him as a writer of memorable and mellifluous words. But the experience of the first companions and later the early Jesuits impresses upon us that Ignatius was a very effective and impressive communicator. He was the leader because of how he communicated. How does this kind of communication come about?

Ignatius drew upon his insight of God as communicator to draw up a spirituality that is captured in the word *conversar*.

Although *conversar* can mean any dealings with another as well as conversation, for Ignatius the word took on a full richness of spiritual connotation. It pointed to three levels of our life: 1) our living with God—our times of formal prayer and all our dealings with God, our practical prayer; 2) our living with the people special in our lives—our common prayer, our sharing of faith, and all our work together; and 3) our living with persons in our ordinary dealings and ministry—our daily incidental conversations and our professional activities, especially sacramental and those in the name of the church.

We must be able to listen to all the ways that God wants to communicate with us, especially through Jesus and the Gospels. We need to take time to pray, to listen to and to dialogue with God, and then continue our daily life in his company. Similarly, we must truly communicate with those who are close to us—our families, our close friends, our religious community—what we call our support systems—and truly interact with

Ignatius drew upon his insight of God as communicator to draw up a spirituality that is captured in the word "conversar"

them. Flowing from the strength of these first two circles of communication, we find ourselves being the true ministers of God and God's word in our communicating with people who come into our ordinary life or into our specialized ministry.

*One way of understanding the gift of Ignatius to us today is to see a God who is always communicating with us and desiring us to enter into his way of communicating—an act of loving in the Ignatian sense of *comunicar* and *conversar*. Like Ignatius, our words and our writings may not be memorable or engaging. We need to remember that as leaders, no matter how our words and our writings come across, our body language, like Jesus' body language, may somehow always be communicating God's love to others. Our joyful and welcoming expression, our gift of time, our patience and non-judgmental attitude are the body expressions that flow from the grace of God's way of communicating to us. We are grateful to be able to enter into this kind of communication through the spirituality that Ignatius has been graced to share with us. We need to keep returning to our Ignatian contemplative prayer because of its privileged attentiveness to a communicating Jesus. Absorbing how to communicate like Jesus, we each in our own way take on the kind of leadership that Ignatius has made an integral part of the spirituality that bears his name.*

Francis Xavier and the Busy God

When we think of Francis Xavier, the image is likely to be of a man-in-motion. Francis Xavier, the patron saint of missionaries, was the first Jesuit to evangelize India, particularly the area of Goa claimed by the Portuguese. But Francis kept looking over the horizon to the Molucca islands, to Japan, and then even towards China. Ignatius appointed Xavier the first provincial of India. Shortly thereafter Ignatius raised an issue in a letter to Xavier whether as provincial he might better stay in India, taking care of the home base and sending some of his fellow Jesuits to Japan and China, rather than taking on the missionary venture himself. Ignatius was gentle and kind with this best of friends, and typically in his letter Ignatius adds one of his governing principles, that "of course, you [Francis] are on the scene and so are able to make the better judgment."

I believe that Ignatius may have seen Xavier as the "eternal scholastic." Let me explain this designation. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the

transition exercise between the First and Second Weeks is titled "The Call of the Temporal King as a Help to Contemplate the Life of the Eternal King." Ignatius gives an example—some commentators call it a parable—of a human king, with the favor of God, calling the people within his realm to a noble service of working together to overcome their enemies. For Ignatius, growing up in a Spain that had known this kind of appeal from its rulers to overcome the Moorish occupiers of their land, the image took on flesh and blood. Just as in his own conversion experience during his convalescence at Loyola Ignatius had transferred his allegiance from serving a human king to the service of God, so in this prayer exercise Ignatius next pictures the call of Christ to all his followers. Jesus calls each and every one "to come with me," "to work with me," in order "to follow and be with me in glory." Ignatius's emphasis on the Spanish word *comigo* brings home the necessity of Jesus' initiative in the call and in the work and in the success, always in terms of our "being with."

There is no doubt that this prayer exercise is meant to inspire minds, to appeal to ideals, and to inflame hearts. As a matter of fact, Ignatius seems to have known the kind of mesmerizing effect these reflections may have. At the time of retreat, instead of calling forth our own colloquy time, our own prayer response, Ignatius has us listen to and consider the response of a generous and great-hearted person. Ignatius would have us just take in the words of this kind of response. At this point in the Exercises, he is not asking us as retreatants to make a response. We need the following Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks' prayer periods of knowing and responding to Jesus for us to make the words of the generous person take on "flesh and blood" in us. The Call of the King exercise sets our sights on the direction we are heading and the response we want to make. For many a Jesuit, it is like being a novice or a scholastic still adjusting to the Jesuit way of life.

Just as this image of Jesus as a King issuing his call moved Ignatius in the first days of his conversion, so the Call of Christ exercise continues to capture the youth and idealism that remains in us all. We in the Society of Jesus associate that youth and idealism with our scholastic years of training in the Society. It is the same kind of youth and idealism that allows people to enter into marriage with such ardor. Practical details temper idealism and our dreams, hopefully without erasing them or rendering them impotent. Even Ignatius's own life, as recorded in his *Autobiography*, shows the tempering growth in his spiritual life, without the loss of idealism or dreaming great dreams.

Francis Xavier appears to be the companion of Ignatius who embodies the youthful spirit and idealism of the Call of the King exercise and seems not to know its tempering. In his hurry to go always to new lands in order to spread the Kingdom, we might wonder whether he is following Christ or he is leaping ahead. Maybe that is what Ignatius may have been asking Francis to think about in his somewhat chiding letter. Xavier certainly had the sense that he was always "working with Christ." In fact, that "working with Christ" may be what appears to us at times as Xavier's "driveness" about life. Yet "working with Christ" is what allowed him to overcome a preliminary personal failure, for example, in trying to work with the rulers in Japan. When he tried to enter into court with his threadbare cassock, he was given no ear. He came to realize that adapting the customs

*Xavier certainly had the sense
that he was always
"working with Christ."*

and dress of that country—just as Jesus took on the customs and dress of his country—was truly to be "working with Jesus." With Jesus in the lead, Xavier could be *imaginative* with children crowding around him, *fearless* before the sometimes unsavory

characters of his own countrymen on his voyages, and *hopeful* about the goodness of people however strange their customs and their beliefs.

Above all, for us today, Francis Xavier brings home that we are always working with God. God takes the initiative in the calling, and we follow. God is the one who works, who is busy, and we are the ones who work with God and we are the ones who are busy—not busy about many things like Martha—but busy *with God*. Like Xavier, gazing from the island of Sancian over to the China mainland, we may always be leaving something unfinished, especially as we near the end of life. But again like Xavier, we have success, no matter the apparent outcome, because we are "with the risen Christ." In Christ, we believe that the victory has been won, and we are "with Christ."

Francis Xavier will forever be the man of the Call of the King. Xavier will forever be busy, but busy with a God who works. And Xavier will always be working with his busy God. From Francis Xavier, then, we learn something about living with our ideals and our dreams, but more importantly we are moved to be busy about our dreams and ideals, always being shaped by our working *with our busy God*.

Peter Faber and the Eucharistic Christ

Peter Faber is the first companion to be ordained a priest. In fact, Peter Faber is the celebrant of the Mass at the Montmartre chapel where the first seven companions in Paris make their promises about going to the Holy Land. Although Peter Faber and Francis Xavier were born in the same month and year and so were the same age as they roomed together during their studies at the University of Paris, Faber always seems to come across as the "older," more serious, and more mature of the two. In some ways Faber seems "born older." Drawing from Faber's own testimony, we are dealing with a man who suffers from scruples, who has more of a melancholic disposition, and who seems to see the more serious side of life.

At the same time, Faber appears to be the one, after Ignatius, that all the first companions are drawn to. He is the one who listens; he is the one whose wisdom and counsel they readily accept. He truly merits the designation *companion*.

Faber captures, I believe, the relationship with God mirrored in the Third Week of the Exercises. He is the one who knows what it means to "stay with," to be compassionate, even, when they meet for the first time, with the older and struggling student Ignatius. As the first priest of the Parisian group, he relates to the Eucharistic Christ. The Third Week of the Exercises begins with a contemplation of the events at the Last Supper. Ignatius points or "gives points" in his threefold way: 1) Jesus celebrates the paschal meal with his apostles and predicts his death; 2) he washes the feet of his disciples; 3) he institutes the most holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, the greatest sign of his love. This prayer period gives direction and points the prayer periods of the Week. The richness of the Old Testament tradition of the paschal meal was likely available to Ignatius from his religious culture and his studies at Paris. The paschal meal, rooted in the Exodus from Egypt, emphasized the lamb as meal, the saving blood placed on doorways (later even on foreheads), and the food for the journey. The washing of the feet of his disciples demonstrated a life totally given in service. The Eucharist, as Ignatius pithily describes it, is the greatest sign of Jesus' love. Note now: Ignatius has described the Eucharist as the greatest sign of Jesus' love, even before we enter into the Passion and Death of Jesus on the cross. For Ignatius, the total giving of Jesus in Eucharist is the ever present reality that we are invited to participate in; the death on the cross is the actual historical event,

but truly the event signs this "greatest act of love." In other words, the cross is interpreted and given meaning by the reality of the Eucharist.

Peter Faber as the first priest received the gift of living out this Third Week grace in a way that stands out beyond all the other companions. He lived out the Jesuit charism of finding the Eucharist the center of his spiritual life and his prayer life as a Jesuit. From the Eucharist, he drew his strength to be companion—one who shares the Bread of eternal life—which makes the community one Body. From the Eucharist, identifying with Jesus who is in the eternal stance of giving over his life to his Father and to us, his sisters and brothers, Peter could give his life over to the work of reconciling the first Lutheran reformers. Faber was truly our first Jesuit ecumenist, and he did it lovingly. His letters and instructions always show him to be an irenic man. He holds to the truth as he believes it, but he is always willing to enter into dialogue with those who see it otherwise. He is always slow to condemn, for who can take the place of God the Judge? Just as *eucharist* always means an expression of gratitude, Faber lives a life of gratitude to God. He lives his Eucharist.

From his centering in the Eucharist, Peter Faber the Jesuit is the true picture of the companion, the one who gives himself to his brothers for their support and friendship. Peter Faber is the one who is vowed to the service of the Church under the care of the Pope. And so Peter is the first of the companions to be sent on mission by the direct order of the Holy Father to various meetings and conferences in different countries and one of our representatives expected to be at the first sessions of the Council of Trent. Peter is the best of the directors of the Exercises because he is so identified with the Eucharistic Christ—one who hiddenly listens so well and guides with the lightness of an angelic touch. Peter has no agenda of his own; he knows only Christ crucified, and that is what he lives and preaches. Like Jesus, Peter is, even more obviously than Francis Xavier, one who is sent—and it is in the process of responding to another sending that he lays down his life, just as Jesus did, at a comparatively young age (Peter was forty when he died at Rome before he could go on to Trent).

Although Faber is the first of Jesuit priests, he remains a symbol for all Jesuits—ordained or not—and for all people finding life in Ignatian spirituality to find our deepest relationship to the Eucharistic Christ. The Eucharist must remain the central daily celebration of the ones who designate themselves as Companions of Christ. The Eucharistic Christ is the center of the community life and of parish life, the center of personal and community

prayer, and the center of strengthening missionary outreach. For Jesuits, it is their daily "sending," the root of their "missioning" obedience. The Eucharist expresses the reality of our spiritual attitude: a people ever grateful to God in our whole way of proceeding.

Summary Reflections

In this year designated for the Ignatian anniversaries, we can come to a renewed and deeper appreciation for these three of our founding members who shed their own special light upon our Ignatian charism and give insight into our own living of Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality.

Ignatius Loyola, the founder and leader of the fledgling Society of Jesus, shows us that the way of an evangelizing leadership is through communication. Ignatius facilitates communication by giving us an important key, his way of contemplating the Gospels. And he expands our outlook on communication through his use of the Spanish word *comunicar* to make sure that we understand about lovers—that in their very being and in their gifts and actions they are trying to communicate. In addition, Ignatius uses the Spanish word *conversar* in an inclusive way to describe the fullness of our relationship with God, with our community and support persons, and with all those to whom God sends us. We rejoice in our responsibility of being communicators because we make real that we are created in the image and likeness of our communicating God.

Francis Xavier, one of the great missionaries of the Western Church, brings home to us the importance of living one's dreams and ideals—always being shaped by our working with Christ. To be called by Christ, to be sent by Christ, to work with Christ, and to rejoice with Christ sum up the busyness of Xavier's life. With Xavier, we are to be people alive with our ideals and dreams, but always a people busy, with a busy Christ—the Jesus who identifies his Father as One who works, the One being busy about the Kingdom.

Peter Faber, the first priest, the quiet companion, emphasizes for us the centrality of the Eucharistic Christ for living an Ignatian spirituality. We might be tempted to say that Faber represents the life that is hard and painful.

———— IGNATIAN ANNIVERSARIES THREE HOLY JESUITS ————

Faber would not deny that hardship and suffering are a part of this pouring out of one's life after the manner of the crucified Christ. But we look to the generosity of love, to a life of loving surrender that mirrors the Eucharistic Christ. We become what daily nourishes us. Faber shows us that the relation to the Eucharistic Christ is the foundation of all our ministries—of counseling, of preaching, of dialoguing, of teaching, of pastoring, and so on. For us, Faber points to the sacramental center of Ignatian spirituality—our relationship to the Eucharistic Christ. To live the Eucharist is to live each day in gratitude to God.

We celebrate this year these three holy Jesuits—models, intercessors, and brothers (in a special way for us Jesuits). Each of them highlights for us the integration of our relationships with God in the living of our Ignatian spirituality. Let us celebrate and let us help our sisters and brothers in the church and beyond to be inspired and to rejoice with us.