

St Mary's, Inverness
The Year of St Ignatius
20 MAY 2021 >31 MAY 2022

NINTH REFLECTION : Manresa and The Imitation of Christ



Context : Recalling that Ignatius was profoundly affected by the 'illuminations' which he experienced at Manresa while sitting beside the River Cardoner we find his own words expressive of that :

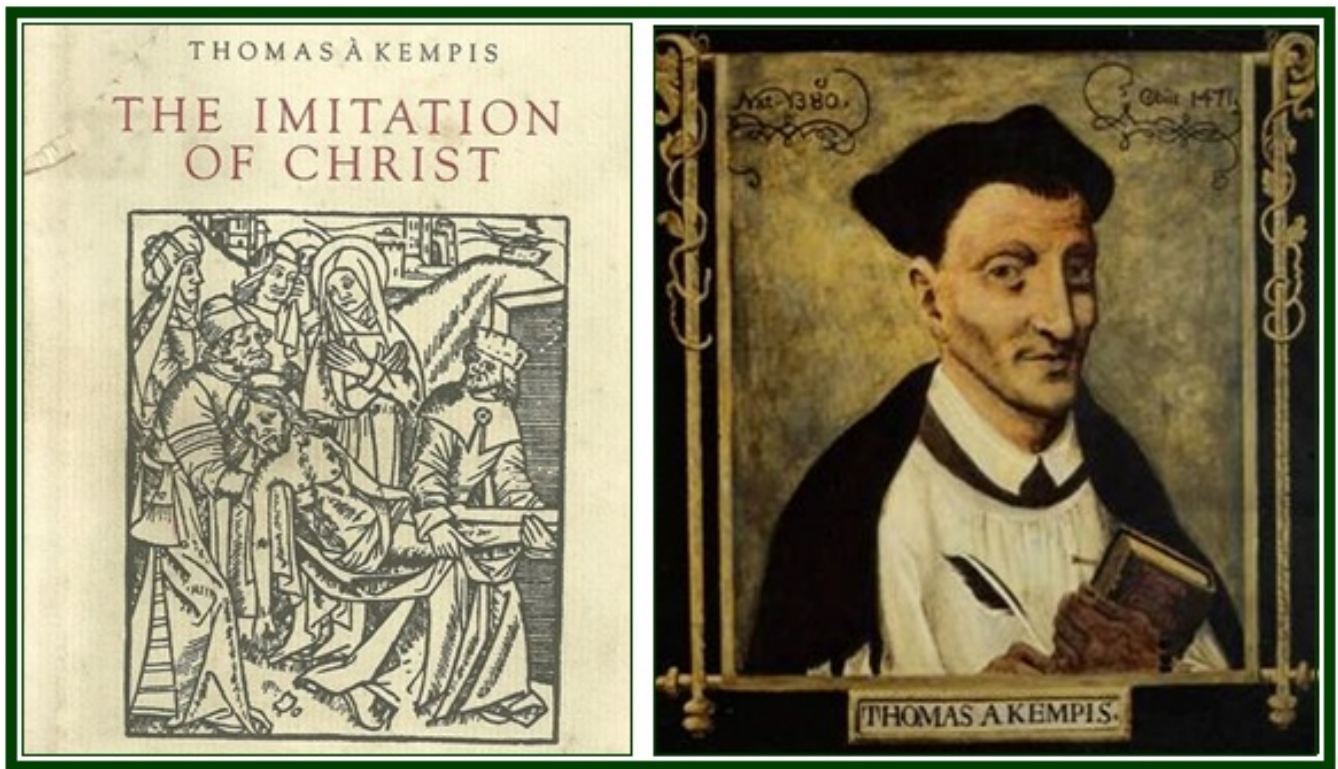
"The road followed the path of the river, and he was taken up with his devotions; he sat down for a while facing the river flowing far below him. As he sat there the eyes of his understanding were opened, and though he saw no vision, he understood and perceived many things..."

How did this particular grace, gift from god, come about?

We need to picture Ignatius, confronting his past, spending his carefully managed time observing the Prayer of the Church – seven hours of prayer, and in addition to that he read and reflected deeply.

One of the books that was most influential, indeed formative, for Ignatius was “The Imitation of Christ”. This is a dynamic book, a challenging series of dialogues and reflections between a person, his spiritual guide and God. It came from a new spiritual movement, the Devotio Moderna, which challenged so much of the arid spirituality of rules, reasoned arguments and tiresome debates about the meaning of doctrines. The new movement, Devotio Moderna, was a consequence of the new insights which were also shaping the demands for reform within the Catholic Church. Erasmus the renowned Dutch Catholic reformer was a key player. The great intellectual power-house that was the University of Paris had a renowned Chancellor in Jean Gerson. Many in Ignatius’ day attributed authorship of the “Imitation of Christ” to Jean Gerson. Indeed Ignatius himself referred affectionately to his own much used copy of “The Imitation” as his “little Gerson”. Later in his life, writing in 1557, Ignatius affirmed, : ***“it was at Manresa that I saw the Gerconzito [little Gerson’] for the first time, and since then there is no other book of devotion that I like more.”***

Certainly daily reading of “The Imitation” became a staple of Ignatius’ daily regime. Reading “The Imitation” daily is a useful, and challenging exercise in preparation for prayer and true devotion. Nowadays the authorship of “The Imitation” is ascribed to Thomas a Kempis, who was the Master of Novices in The Brotherhood of the Common Life.



It seems to have been based on addresses, colloquies and meditative prayers, and was finding favour since about 1420. The renowned English translator, Monsignor Ronald Knox, wrote of it "there are no frills about 'The Imitation'...If a man tells you that he is fond of 'The Imitation', view him with sudden suspicion: he is either a dabbler or a saint. No manual is more pitiless in its exposition of the Christian ideal, less careful to administer consolation on the way...It offers consolation here and there, but always at the price of fresh exertion, of keeping your head pointing up-stream. Heaven help us if we find easy reading in "The Imitation of Christ".

Whatever notes he had made of the books he had been reading, "The Exercises for the Spiritual Life" by Abbot Cisneros, given to him at Montserrat, and "The Imitation" that he discovered at Manresa, these became the raw materials for Ignatius' own reflections, which rooted and grounded in prayer became his own, "Spiritual Exercises".

The illuminations at the River Cardoner, the whole Manresa experience, emphasise the transformation of Ignatius Loyola from a vainglorious, violent, nobleman, soldier-courtier into a dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ. Dr William Meissner, a

Jesuit psychiatrist, in describing this transformation calls it 'transvaluation'. Meissner deals with this in terms of "the Imitation of Christ".

So we are in serious territory, in following "The Imitation of Christ" with Ignatius Loyola we are open to radical transformation, so that our every-day values may be challenged. The authentic voice of Jesus echoes through the centuries, as we are invited to more profound humility, and to walk with Him on The Royal Road of the Holy Cross. [Imit Bk 2. 12]

Take up your cross and follow Jesus, and you will inherit everlasting life. There is no other way to life and to true inward peace than the way and discipline of the cross. Go where you will, seek what you want, you will not find a higher way, nor a less exalted but safer way, than the way of the cross. Arrange and order everything to suit your desires and you will still have to bear some kind of suffering, willingly or unwillingly.

The cross, therefore, is unavoidable. It waits for you everywhere. No matter where you may go, you cannot escape it, for wherever you go you take yourself along. Turn where you will – above, below, without, or within – you will find the cross.



While reading the "The Imitation" it is useful to read chapters from the final section "Book Four' about The Blessed Sacrament intermittently with the preceding three sections 'Books 1-3'. In this way we can give thanks and reflect that : "***How wonderful are your ways with us, O God, unseen maker of the world! How sweet and gracious your dealings with your chosen, when you first offer yourself to them to be received in this Sacrament! It goes beyond all that the understanding can grasp; for devout souls it has a unique attraction, kindling in them the flames of love..***" *Imit. Bk 4. 1/10*

At Manresa Ignatius experienced through his prayer insight or illumination, and appreciation of the Sacraments which enhanced his understanding of his spiritual journey. He was confirmed in his dedication to his vocation, a real sense of perseverance in following Christ as a Pilgrim. Now he was ready to travel to the Holy Land, and so about 17 Feb 1523 Ignatius set out for Barcelona, to a house near the harbour owned by a widow, Ines Pascual whom he had met at Montserrat and who was to remain a friend and benefactrix throughout her life.

Prayerful Reflection :

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O Good Jesus, hear me.

Within your wounds hide me.

Permit me not to be separated from you.

From the wicked foe, defend me.

At the hour of my death, call me

and bid me come to you

That with your saints I may praise you

For ever and ever. Amen.

POCKET EXAMEN

The Ignatian Examen is a 5-step method for reviewing your day and giving thanks to God.

1. CENTER

Take a moment to become aware of God, myself and my surroundings.

2. GRATITUDE

What am I especially thankful for today?

3. REVIEW

What brought me joy? What challenged me?

4. TURN TO GOD

What could I have done or said differently?
How can I improve?

5. LOOK FORWARD

In what spirit do I want to enter tomorrow?

CAMPUS
MINISTRY

Seeking the good and avoiding the evil: day by day, our daily thanksgiving and amendment of life.

Scriptural Reflection: The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price Matthew 13.45-46

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."



Imagine how Ignatius must have felt when he saw his faith in the light of God. Perhaps the fragile beauty of the human endeavour, souls seeking God, heart to heart, is not unlike the search for truth, beauty and love, all encapsulated in a Pearl.

A Period of Silence in which we pray with St Ignatius seeking understanding and insight, ever searching, ever finding, always willing. Faith seeking understanding

The Lord's Prayer



Jesus Mercy, Mary Pray

Praise God Always !

It is not hard to obey when
we love the one whom we
obey.

Saint Ignatius

