

St Mary's, Inverness

The RC Diocese of Aberdeen: SC005122J

The Year of St Ignatius

20 MAY 2021 >31 JULY 2022

FORTY-SIXTH IGNATIAN REFLECTION

THINKING WITH THE CHURCH



To think/to feel with the Church

While Ignatius was in Paris he was putting together *'The Spiritual Exercises'* which he WAS using to gather Companions of Jesus, friends who shared spiritual conversation, the fellowship of the table, and a common life of prayer and devotion. Ignatius, with Fr Peter Favre and Francis Xavier, were growing in their realisation that they were involved in a great Pilgrimage for Jesus. While they were at the University of Paris

there was considerable religious turmoil due to the impact of Protestantism. In various forms this had been spreading in Europe for about ten years. In 1533 the University Rector, Nicolas Cop, a friend of John Calvin, made it clear in his inaugural address that he clearly favoured Lutheran teachings and called for reform. He was not supported by the University 'establishment' nor by its Royal patrons. Sensing possible danger Cop travelled to Basle in Switzerland where he aligned himself with Protestantism. It was against this background, the assault on traditional Catholicism, that Ignatius in 1533-34 appended to *The Exercises* this final Chapter on "**Rules for thinking with the Church**". The context is important as the conflicts within the Church were confusing. It is addressed to pastors who might find themselves in opposition to Protestant reformers. The **Rules** are '**to promote prudent pastoral practice.**'

Ignatius himself had himself been accused, at various times, of being a 'heretic' one of the 'enlightened ones' who were being suppressed in Spain. He was taunted with being a Lutheran sympathiser, while at University in Alcalá. He appeared before 'The Inquisition' there but was subsequently acquitted. Yet again, while he was at the University of Salamanca, some Dominicans were suspicious that he was over influenced by the teachings of the Catholic reformer, Desiderius Erasmus. While in Salamanca he was charged with Lutheran heresy, resulting in three weeks in jail, but again he was acquitted and released. Vexatious questions about Ignatius' Catholic orthodoxy were raised several times, even in Rome many years later, but again to no success.

While in Paris and completing *The Spiritual Exercises* he was sensitive and alert to charges of heresy. Ignatius was a reformer within the Catholic Church and from time to time that raised suspicions.

In *The Rules* placed at the conclusion of *The Exercises* he was defending all the previous chapters from any detrimental interpretation. The strong pastoral thrust in Ignatius' dealings with people is *cura personalis*, caring for the whole person. The *Rules* are to be seen in that perspective. The phraseology reveals this pastoral purpose—"we should praise," "we must be careful in speaking," "we should be cautious".

Fr John W O'Malley SJ (A theology professor at Georgetown University) is helpful in discussing the intriguing Rule 13.

Does Rule 13 tell us, therefore, that we are to accept as an article of faith everything "the hierarchical Church" in some form or other communicates to us? Examine the text: "if the Church so defines." Ignatius wrote The Rules when he had been following theology courses at the Dominican school in Paris. Schooled in theological language he knew that 'define' was a technical term.

That simple fact puts Rule 13 into perspective. "What seems to me black, I will believe white." This is about the definition of Church teaching.

Let's translate that: "What seems to me bread, I will believe is the body and blood of Christ." Rule 13 is not super-orthodoxy but mainline Catholic faith.

There are eighteen **Rules** for *'thinking with the Church'*, and the context of the Protestant challenge is evident. We find *'putting aside all private judgement' and accepting that we should obey 'in all things...our Holy Mother the hierarchical Church'*, which is stated to be *'the true spouse of Christ our Lord'*.

This clear statement is then given practical application – Ignatius praises and commends Sacramental Confession and regular reception of the Blessed Sacrament, even 'every week'.

We find in the **Rules** approval of religious vows, veneration of relics, abstinence and fasts. In Rule 8 we find *'To praise the adornments and buildings of churches as well as sacred images, and to venerate them according to what they represent'*.

Clearly the iconoclasm of some Protestant reformers was in mind. The interpretation of this Rule was to lead to distinctive Jesuit building styles and ornamentation which were, and are, both devotional and educational.

In the **Rules** [14 & 15 ff] speaking frequently about Predestination is discouraged. Theories of Predestination so beloved by the Calvinists, were seen by Ignatius as not conducive to pastoral and spiritual health. He considered that some people could *'become apathetic and neglect the works that are conducive to their salvation and to the spiritual growth of their souls'*

In Rule 16 we find a modest correction of the Lutheran teaching on Faith and Works :

“be careful lest speaking too much and with too great emphasis on faith, without any distinction or explanation we give occasion to the people to become indolent and lazy in the performance of good works”.

The emphasis on Faith and Works is based on Love, the care of others.

Sentire cum ecclesia in our times.

In the modern media, the contemporary waves of news, whether factual or interpreted opinions, give rise to a confusing welter of ideas and views. The message of the Gospel of Jesus is not always easily presented. The Teaching Church [Magisterium] issues Letters, Encyclicals and other teaching in documents to address human life, the world in which we live, the Common Good and that salvation which we recall in St Paul’s words ***“God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”.***

When there is so much publicity about the failures of ‘the hierarchical church’ it can be perplexing, even exasperating, to ‘think with the Church’. Catholics, lay or ordained, are easily confused about their feelings towards the Church when there have been so many failures in the ministries of the Church, so many wounded victims, and factions seeking to be the true voice of the Church.

At the end of ***The Exercises***, Ignatius says that ***“we should value above everything else the great service which is given to God out of pure love”***

We believe that ***“between Christ our Lord, the Bridegroom, and the Church, his Spouse, there is the one same Spirit who governs and guides us for the salvation of our souls”.***

The Rules of "sentire cum Ecclesia" are as relevant today as they were to the life of the Church in Ignatius' day.

- They are a help to live the mystery of reconciliation that is every disciple's ministry : ***"God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself"***
- During the fourth week in ***The Spiritual Exercises***, the Lord introduces us to the work of being ***consolers*** towards our brothers and sisters. ***The Exercises*** invite us to continue on the road of praying discernment in our relations with others. [*We are a people of the Way*]
- In the ***Suscipe*** prayer : With open and generous hearts, we give to God 'all our liberty, memory, understanding, and will' so that He may dispose of all that I have 'according to His will'.
- We accept to put aside our own judgment so as to ***"keep ourselves right in all things" in the service of the true Spouse of Christ, our Lord, our holy Mother the hierarchical Church, in the one and same Spirit of love .***

Fr Hans-Peter Kolvenbach SJ, was a Jesuit General Superior who travelled extensively. 'He emphasized the need to make laypersons feel their place of equal partnership in the ministry of the Church, recognizing with Vatican II that ***"holiness is one - that sanctity is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God"***.' He expressed his belief that ***"the church of the next millennium will be called the 'church of the laity' ...this development is a 'grace of our day and a hope for the future'."***

This emphasis on our incorporation into Christ, all of us sharing a *“Common Life in the Body of Christ”, enlivened by the Spirit*, encourages everyone to *‘think with the Church’*. It is our task simply because ‘we are the Church’.

Our Holy Father, **Pope Francis**, from the Society of Jesus and thoroughly familiar with Ignatian thought and processes, gives further insights.



What does *sentire cum ecclesia* mean to him?

Pope Francis when answering that question reflected the teaching of the *Second Vatican Council [Lumen gentium 12]*, sensing the *wholeness of the holy, faithful people of God*:

Pope Francis : *‘The Church is the people of God on the journey through history with joys and sorrows. Sentire cum Ecclesia [to think and to feel with the church], therefore, is my way of being a part of this people.’*

For Francis '*thinking with the church*' involves dialogues among the whole people of God, lay-people, deacons, priests, the bishops and the Pope. For him, '*this church, with which we should be thinking and feeling, is the home of all, not a small chapel that can only hold a small group of select people.*'

In summary for Pope Francis :

- Proclamation of the Gospel should be '*simpler, profound or, more radiant*'. Once people rediscover the immediacy of the Gospel, moral consequences will then follow.
- Francis considers that the malady afflicting the Church most profoundly is *amnesia*. Too many within the Church, including its ministers, have forgotten the power of the Gospel.
- Taking their eyes off Christ, too many of its members have been caught up in the culture wars, politicizing intramural disputes [*Vatican politics*] and weaponizing the abuse crisis in the name of 'culture wars' in the quest for power and prestige.
- He urged Jesuits [*all in ministry?*] not to be 'clerical' but 'ecclesial'. [Men and women who 'gather', who are 'shepherds']
- '**Consolation**' rooted in prayer is needed not just to comfort an afflicted church, but for the faithful people of God. The task of evangelization requires that the Good News be announced in joy rather than sadness.
- **Consolation** is needed so that we do not 'despair in the face of the world's evils' or the sinfulness of the Church's members and leaders. For Pope Francis, '*joy is a clear indication of grace, it shows that love is active, at work, present*'.

- Pope Francis asks us '***to allow ourselves to be moved by the Lord on the Cross***'. This means being close to the many men and women who suffer, and showing real practical services of mercy to them.
- **Mercy is a lifestyle**, not an abstract concept. In drawing close to those who suffer, we are in touch with the people of God and thus with the suffering Church.
- We do this by first recognizing that we ourselves are touched by God's mercy: '***Only if we experience this healing power first-hand in our own wounds, as individual persons and as a body, will we lose the fear of letting ourselves be moved by the immensity of our brothers' and sisters' suffering. Only thus will we set ourselves to walk patiently with our people, learning from them the best way of helping and serving them.***'
- Finally, '***to think and feel with the church***' requires **discernment**, so that we speak and act with the 'good spirit'. Thinking with the Church, '***without losing peace and with joy, considering the sins we see, in us as well as in others, and in the structures that we have created, involves carrying the Cross and experiencing poverty and humiliation***'.
- It also requires acting against an anti-ecclesial spirit which cuts us off from others. There is no place for 'factions'.
- Authenticity requires us to walk with a heart that '***beats to the rhythm of a journey undertaken together with all the faithful people of God***'.

Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* invites '***all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter***

with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them’.

Pope Francis’ invitation to the whole Catholic Church *‘to think with Church’* is evident in his preparations for **The Way to the Synod of Bishops in 2023**.



Pope Francis opened the **Synod process** at the Vatican in October 2021. Every Diocesan bishop began the process in the Diocesan phase that runs until April/May 2022.

Questions have been circulated to promote reflection, seeking input and ideas from as many people as possible.

The Questions cover ten general themes which people can address considering what is most pertinent to their situation and ***"share with honesty and openness about their real-life experiences, and to reflect together on what the Holy Spirit might be revealing through what they share with one another"***.

Suggested questions include: "To whom does our particular church 'need to listen'?"

"How are the laity, especially young people and women, listened to"?

"How do we integrate the contribution of consecrated men and women"?

"What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded"?

The basic and most fundamental question guiding the whole process is:

"How does this 'journeying together,' which takes place today on different levels -- from the local level to the universal one -- allow the church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal church?"



Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary-General of the Synod of Bishops, explained the main objectives and characteristics of the synodal process; ***"a spiritual process" that requires listening to the Holy Spirit as well as to each other.***

The Cardinal urged press reporters to offer "correct communication" of what the Synod and 'synodality' are, including not representing it as "a parliament," or as different sides playing against each other "in which the one who has more strength influences or subjugates the other."

“What matters is the larger process that involves the entire people of God coming together to find common ground, which is not easy. ..So perhaps we have to insist more on how we can dialogue, converse, discern together in order to possibly reach this harmony..”

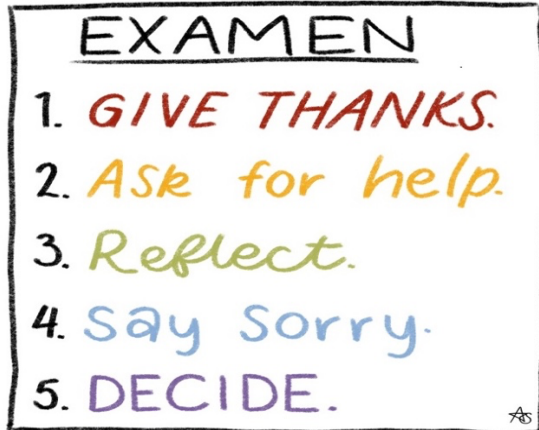
It is a matter of finding in Communion and Participation with the whole People of God a Way that leads to Mission. We *‘Think with The Church’*.

Points on which to Reflect :

- Thinking with Church also involves thinking about the Church- are we able to do this with prayerful trust in God’s Love?
- What are our feelings when we think about the Church? Are we able to experience the Joy of the Gospel?
- Are we prone to nostalgia, wanting things from ‘down memory lane’? Moving with the Church into the future can be perplexing>Do we want to be open to what ‘the Spirit is saying to the Church’? This calls for a process of prayerful discernment.
- The Church is a Reconciling people. We should be aware of our own need of Mercy. Being forgiven sinners we should welcome all who are in need of forgiveness. Are we over judgemental?
- The Way of the Synod has begun in the Diocese and parishes. Are you willing to take part in this exercise in ‘thinking with the Church’?

Clearing the lines of Communication : To enable us to hear the whispers of God we turn down our own busyness and noisiness. Then we can listen with the heart as well as the mind. St Ignatius encourages to be thankful and through our grateful hearts we open-up in friendship with Jesus seeking his assistance and

removing any obstacles to our conversation with Him. It is time for the EXAMEN with all its opportunities for creating a positive relationship with the Lord and all His friends.



Preparation for Scriptural Reflection :

- *We place ourselves in the presence of God – short prayer of devotion: 'My Lord, and my God'*
- *We open up to God, expressing our sorrow for sin and our gratitude for our blessings*
- *We ask God to receive our lives, our hopes, our best intentions and our prayers*
- *We begin to read the passage of Scripture slowly. It helps to say the words, even silently.*
- *We think **imaginatively** trying to see ourselves in the scene of the Scripture : what we see, what we hear, what it feels like, what we smell, what we might taste.*

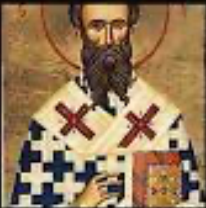
Passage for Scriptural Reflection : St Matthew 16.13-23

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' ¹⁴And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' ¹⁵He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

²¹From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' ²³But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'



— Ambrose —



It is Peter himself that He says,
'You are Peter, and upon this
rock I will build my Church.'
Where Peter is, there is the
Church. And where the Church,
no death is there, but life
eternal.

Points for Reflection :

- How do we think of Jesus? What does it mean to be 'the Son of the Living God'? Our conversation with Him is our prayer.
- The Church of the Apostles gives us a foundation for Faith- the ministry of Peter and his successors, the Bishops of Rome, guarantee that the Church leads through death to Life Eternal. The Catholic Church has graces, treasures 'old and new', to share. Are we graced to be builders of bridges and a focus for unity?

- Do we have difficulty with the Cross? Can we understand Peter's difficulty?

A Period of Silence in which we pray with St Ignatius, talking conversationally to God as Father : seeking understanding and insight, ever searching, ever finding, always willing, and Loving.

Suscipe

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.*

*You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.*

*Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.*



The Lord's Prayer

Jesus Mercy, Mary Pray

Laus Deo Semper : Thank God Always