

**St Mary's, Inverness**  
The RC Diocese of Aberdeen: SC005122]  
**The Year of St Ignatius**  
**20 MAY 2021 >31 JULY 2022**

**TWENTY-NINTH REFLECTION**  
**ROME, WOMEN MEMBERS & WOMEN'S VOCATIONS**



**CONTEXT:**

At the headquarters of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius begins the work of establishing the new Society, writing up the Constitutions, supervising the Mission of outreach, caring for the Roman projects given him by the Pope, giving the Exercises and keeping in touch with the Society members wherever they were.

**Building for the future, structures:**

Ignatius with his small retinue of Jesuit fathers was planning for the growth of the Society and making a permanent base in Rome. The construction of new buildings beside the Church of Madonna della Strada was to prove an

unexpected blessing. While the foundations were being dug deeply into the Roman soil several ancient marble statues were uncovered. These were from the time of the Emperor Pompey and were much sought after- there was a renewed interest in Rome's imperial past. The statues sold for one hundred gold scudi- this good fortune enabled the required premises to be built.

The 13th-14th century wall painting, below, was painted on the wall of Santa Maria della Strada [Saint Mary of the Way] in Rome, the church of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), given to Saint Ignatius by Pope Paul III in 1540.



In time this Church was incorporated into the Church of the Gesu, beside the Jesuit quarters where Ignatius had his office.

**Premises for the future of civil society** : Using the word 'premise' in its meaning other than buildings, namely that *of 'an idea or theory on which a statement or action is based'* Ignatius considered that ***“the whole foundation of Christian society rests in the first instance on the peaceful and honourable conduct of married people”***.

This lay behind the creation of the House of St Martha for girls and women, often daughters and mothers in moral danger. It was a marvellously successful rescue operation of which St Ignatius was justifiably proud, mentioning it in many letters, even to Francis Xavier far away in India. Many of the residents were able to leave and make new lives for themselves based on the loving respect and the family values that they had known. No small part of this was the teaching of Ignatius as we see from a letter from one of the ladies : ***“Please preach to us two sermons tomorrow, one in the morning and one in the evening, so that we may have a little consolation.”***

From that simple plea one can readily realise the tender warm-hearted approach of Ignatius, like his Master Jesus, not condemning but lifting-up and giving right direction.

**Ignatius and the favourable Ladies :** Those familiar with the earlier Reflections may recall that the young Ignatius received much assistance from good ladies in Barcelona. Some of these he had met at Montserrat, others were introduced by his connections among the Spanish nobility. One was Isabel de Josa who was herself a very well- educated lady who had been most helpful to Ignatius when he was studying Latin at Barcelona. By 1543 Isabel de Josa was in Rome giving lectures to Cardinals, and perhaps even the Pope, speaking in Latin and teaching the philosophy of the Scotists [those who follow John Duns Scotus, the Scottish Franciscan philosopher].

Around the same time the aristocratic Isabella Roser, now a widow, arrived in Rome with her maidservant Francisca Cruillas.

These three women had been helpful to the young Pilgrim Ignatius They had continued in supportive correspondence over the years and now in Rome they wanted to join the Society of Jesus. While Isabel de Josa accepted Ignatius' decision not to admit them, not so the determined Isabella

[Elizabeth] Roser. She was by this time joined by another would-be postulant, Lucrezia da Biadene who was extremely well-connected. With the help of friends in high places she received from the Holy Father, Pope Paul III an instruction to Ignatius that he should admit the three ladies.

On Christmas Day 1545, faithful to his obedience to the Holy Father, Ignatius received the solemn vows of the three women.

While Ignatius found a role for Isabella Roser in caring for the House of Martha, it was not without its difficulties. At about the same time there were many other women in Spain, on hearing about Isabella Roser were writing to gain admission. This was not as Ignatius had planned, and he took his difficulties to the Holy Father. Pope Paul III proved sympathetic and gave permission for the women to be dispensed from the vows and leave the Society. It says much for the sympathetic eloquence of Ignatius, and his understanding of people that Isabella Roser, without rancour, returned home to Barcelona. In time Isabella Roser moved to Jerusalem where she lived in a Franciscan convent until her death.

Another Jesuit Superior, in the Netherlands, was considering accepting women, when he received a clear statement of policy from Ignatius,

***“Our Society does not and cannot accept the charge of women. Counselling, of course is excepted.....we went to great pains to secure this exemption from the Supreme Pontiff and made this provision both for ourselves and our successors”.***

### **The Exception that tested the Policy : Joanna of Austria**

This grand lady was a daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and his wife Isabella, Empress of Portugal.



Born in Madrid in 1524, due to the early death of her mother, and the absence of her father on military campaigns she grew up close to her sister, Maria and her brother Philip [who became Philip II and after the death of his first wife, Maria Manuela, he became the husband of Queen Mary of England the staunchly Catholic daughter of King Henry VIII].

Joanna of Austria married Juan Manuela of Portugal [brother of Maria Manuela]. This marriage was happy enough but sadly her husband died before the birth of their son, Sebastian.

In the complicated welter of European politics, Joanna was sent to Spain to act as Regent. The Portuguese Queen, Catherine took over the care and education of the young Sebastian.

As the Regent, Joanna, dedicated her life to the governance of Spain, and nurturing the Catholic Church.

Her real religious interest had been whetted by the Ignatian Exercises and the way of life of the Companions. She was guided by the Jesuit Fr Francis Borgia, the Duke of Gandia [1510-1572]



Francis Borgia was influential in promoting Joanna's application to the Jesuits that she be accepted as a member. Due to her royal pedigree and the support of Francis Borgia she did manage, using the man's name 'Mateo Sanchez' as a pseudonym, to make her vows as a Jesuit. Even when her faith journey

became more committed she found that she could not publicly be admitted to the Society of Jesus. Prudence and discernment lead her to establish, in Madrid, the Convent of the Descalzas Reales [the Barefoot Royals] where a congregation of Poor Clare sisters lived an austere life of prayer. It was constructed in and around the Palace in which she had been born. Later in life she was resident there. She died there on 7 September 1573 of a cerebral tumor. She was entombed in the Convent Chapel, in the same premises in which she had been born..



**Other women sought to follow the Ignatian Way in serving Jesus.**



**Mary Ward** : Mary Ward was an English lady of formidable strength of character and a deeply devout Catholic. She wanted to follow the Ignatian Way to Jesus and to further this she founded the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary [IBVM] on 1609. She was not understood in her day, and was considered by some to be heretical. Her perseverance was rewarded as her witness continued to inspire many women to join the IBVM. In a healthier Church climate her labours have been recognised and she has been declared 'Venerable', a step on the road to canonisation.

The first convent to be opened in England after the Reformation, in 1686, was that of IBVM at Micklegate in York, commonly called the Bar Convent. It is still in use as a Convent, and it has a thriving B&B business, as it has a surfeit of rooms.



**Marie Madeleine d'Houet** : In 1820, in France, Marie Madeleine d'Houet founded the Faithful Companions of Jesus [FCJ] based on the Ignatian Way and the spirituality of the Exercises. This is now an international sisterhood whose members are involved in teaching, theological work and in missions. Marie Madeleine made retreats using the Exercises with Jesuit priests. These experiences were transformative in helping her to understand her relationship with God and from it grew the desire to follow the will of God *faithfully*. This was to blossom into the founding of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. Her life story will be considered in a further Reflection, but for the moment we see how a gifted lady, a wife then a widow, a mother and grandmother was able to discern the purposes of God in her life, and then to use her skills, experience and prayer ***'To the greater Glory of God'*** [AMDG] in the Ignatian Way.

**Mother Cornelia Connelly** : Cornelia was born in Philadelphia in 1809. She married Pierce Connelly, an American Episcopalian [Anglican] priest with whom she had five children. Pierce Connelly converted to Catholicism and in time became a Catholic priest. This was the effective end of their marriage, even although Cornelia supported him, becoming a Catholic herself. In time she took a 'vow of perpetual chastity'.



Later when Pierce Connelly abandoned the priestly life he wanted to resume married life. But Cornelia was made of sterner stuff and was faithful to her decision and vows. There were years of distress, and the children were taken from her by her former husband. Through all of this heart-ache her resolve to found an order of religious women was supported by the Holy Father. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus [SHCJ] was founded, with its base at St Leonard's, later at Mayfield in Sussex. This school is still operating under the governance of the SHCJ.

Mother Cornelia recognised that the Ignatian *Exercises* are an invitation and opportunity to deepen personal relationships with God. The Exercises and the Ignatian Way with its spirituality of '**seeing God in all things**' is at the heart of the life of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

Mother Cornelia Connelly was declared "Venerable" by the Vatican in 1992, the first step towards sainthood.

Her order, the SHCJ, has houses of ministry '*Action not words*', dealing with education, community development and Mission throughout the world, in Europe, the Americas, in Africa, and especially in Nigeria.

The Venerable Cornelia Connelly is buried in the Convent Chapel of St Leonard's School, Mayfield. There was an attempt in recent times to have her remains returned to the USA, but her stated wish to be buried at Mayfield was respected, supported by the prayers and protests of many former pupils. The spirit engendered by the life and achievements of Mother the Venerable Cornelia Connelly is alive and well.



The Tomb of Cornelia Connelly at Mayfield

### Thoughts to Consider:

- The place of Mary : Mary of the Way : Mary as an everyday presence in the Journey, the Pilgrimage of Life : Intercessor and familiar Mother, always showing the Way to Jesus
- Prayer to Mary, recollecting her Rosary mysteries and refreshing our minds with the Way of Jesus
- Valuing the prayerful support and assistance of women, recalling the friendship and prayerful companionship of women.
- Realising that some vocations are for men, and some for women, and some may be for both. Overcoming prejudices and biases we recall the employment of women in contemporary society. We praise God

always for their work, witness, and faith. In the Synodal Process now being undertaken women will be taking a proportionate share- more than half of humankind!

- Priesthood : all the baptised share in the Royal priesthood of Jesus. Particular charisms are gifted for ministerial service. We reflect on the witness of Scripture, the place of Tradition, and the place of prayerful consensus within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in regard to the shape and pattern of ministry.
- The Ignatian Way in religious orders founded by Women : we can see how to be Ignatian is not the same as being a member of the Jesuits. Many of the insights, ways of proceeding, and the spiritual companionship of the Society of Jesus are gifts which many have found to be transferrable. Women have been enriching lives, transforming relationships, educating in the Faith, and bringing others to '*Praise God Always*' by their own participation in the Way of Ignatius in companionship with Jesus. Prayers for Vocations is a useful intention for all Catholics.

### **Suscipe**

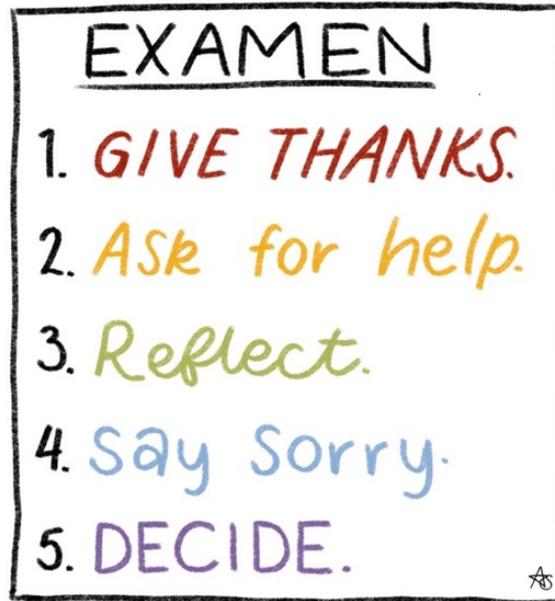
Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding,  
and my entire will,  
All I have and call my own.

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 EXAMINATION OF OUR LIVES [THE EXAMEN]

**Daily Examen** : Looking with quiet sincerity and simplicity of heart at the day:



**Scriptural Reflection** : St Luke 10 : 38-42

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*



## Thoughts for Scriptural Reflection:

This is about our priorities:

- To understand Jesus we need to spend time : opening hearts and minds
- The business of the day is important but have we allowed the 'daily tasks', our work and whatever to become unbalanced – how often do we discover that we have 'no time to pray'
- How resentful are we about other people's lives?
- Getting the balance right for each of us is an exercise in sensitive but determined prayer and action : Martha & Mary /Mary & Martha

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

***"For those who love, nothing is too difficult, especially when it is done for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ."***  
***Ignatius Loyola***

## The Lord's Prayer

***Jesus Mercy, Mary Pray***



***Praise God Always***