

Homily for Ignatius Loyola, Priest and Monastic, July 31, 1556  
July 31, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1, Psalm 34:1–8, Luke 9:57–62*

The life and witness of Ignatius of Loyola, a Roman Catholic priest and founder of the Society of Jesus, is an optional commemoration in the Episcopal Church. He died on today's date in the year 1556. Yet today's date has not always belonged to him. Before the 1994 revision of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, today was the feast of Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>1</sup> When today's commemoration was added to our calendar in 1994, Joseph of Arimathea was moved to the next free date, August 1. I confess, with respect, I would not have voted to make that change.

It is traditional to retain New Testament commemorations on their historical dates. Joseph was the man who risked a great deal to receive and bury the body of Jesus. All four of our gospels tell this story.

If Father Jay Smith, who went to the Jesuit high school in Buffalo, was not my highly valued colleague

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<sup>1</sup> *The Calendar and the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels for the Lesser Feasts and Fasts and for Special Occasions* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1963), 9.

and friend, I think we would keep Joseph today and Ignatius tomorrow. Of course, much of the work of Ignatius of Loyola continues to bear fruit, not only in the Roman Catholic Church but also among other Christians.

At some point earlier this year, I read that Pope Paul VI, when canonizing the Roman Catholic Martyrs of Uganda in 1964, recognized that Anglican clergy and Christians were the first to be burned to death for being Christians. Many Roman Catholics would suffer too.<sup>2</sup> Paul VI had said famously in 1967 to the Vatican's Secretariat for the Unity of Christians, "The Pope, as we well know, is undoubtedly the greatest obstacle on the path of ecumenism."<sup>3</sup> There has been a significant diminution of the ecumenism since then.

*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* says from the beginning, the Society of Jesus would "have no permanent property, except colleges, schools and

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/homilies/1964/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_hom\\_19641018\\_martiri-uganda.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/homilies/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19641018_martiri-uganda.html), (accessed 31 July 2020). The text is available only in Latin and Spanish.

<sup>3</sup> "Le Pape, Nous le savons bien, est sans doute l'obstacle le plus grave sur la route de l'œcuménisme." [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/speeches/1967/april/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19670428\\_unione-cristiani.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/speeches/1967/april/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19670428_unione-cristiani.html), (accessed 31 July 2020). The text is available only in French.

other things necessary for education”<sup>4</sup>—for which they continue to be held in high honor. Of course, the current pope is the first Jesuit to be bishop of Rome.

Ignatius was born in a castle, a son of a noble Basque family in 1491. First, a soldier, in 1521 he was wounded in battle. His recovery was prolonged. At the end of it, he confessed his sins and hung up his sword. He then spent a year Manresa, in Catalonia, in prayer and fasting. His spiritual experiences would shape his *Spiritual Exercises*, which continue to bear fruit for Christians of many backgrounds.<sup>5</sup>

After a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1523, he returned to Spain to study in Barcelona and Salamanca. In Paris, he and six others, including Francis Xavier, made vows of poverty and chastity. Then it was on to Rome in 1537. In 1540, the Society of Jesus was born.<sup>6</sup> It was an age of faith.

There’s faith in our time too. Yesterday I had an appointment with a sound engineer. He seemed interested in the church. At some point, I asked, “Are

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<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Ignatius Loyola, St.,” 689–90.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “Spiritual Exercises, The,” 1300–01.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “Ignatius Loyola, St.,” 689–90.

an Episcopalian?” No, I’m a Christian. He volunteered that his church was having a hard time figuring out how to share Communion. I think I said something like, “We all are.” It was a real blessing for me that, I’m guessing, a maybe-thirty-year-old was comfortable speaking to me about his church. It may be that it is in the simple encounters of our faith that the foundations of our lives grow stronger.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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