



St Ignatius for Today

Patrick Corkery SJ, a Jesuit student from Cork, now teaching as part of his placement on the path to priesthood, reflects on three lessons from the life of St Ignatius, whose feast day is 31 July.

Talking to a millennial about a sixteenth-century saint may seem somewhat counterproductive. However, I am convinced there is much that each of us can learn from the life of St Ignatius. With that in mind, here are three life lessons from St Ignatius, which will hopefully make sense to millennials and readers of all generations.

Lesson One: Community Is Vital

After his religious conversion, St Ignatius came to realise that the insights God was giving him had to be shared, and he sought out like-minded people with whom to do so. Much of his early ministry was focused on the sharing of his Spiritual Exercises with various women, who would form the financial and prayerful backbone of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Ignatius's voluminous correspondence contains many letters to these women, showing how their friendship and prayers motivated him into greater service of God.

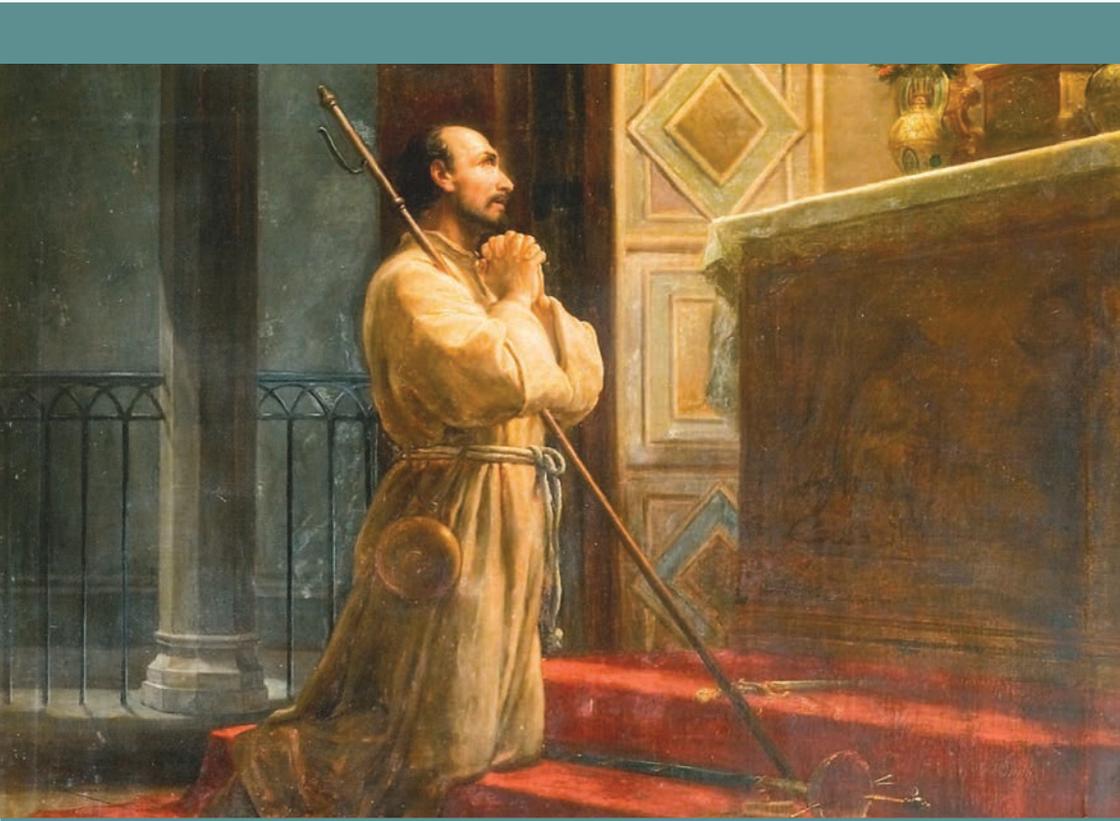
His apostolic zeal was strong, but he also saw that he needed help in bringing his Spiritual Exercises to a broader audience. This motivated him to join with his roommates at the University of Paris, St Peter Faber and St Francis Xavier, to found the Jesuits, and they encouraged others to join

them. Ignatius learned he could not go it alone and that relationships with others are meaningful.

Lesson Two: Change Is OK

St Ignatius had his life mapped out for him. He was going to be a soldier. God had other plans, though, and the impact of a cannonball not only shattered his leg but left his plans in tatters, too. In a world where we are expected to have everything in order and certainty is so important, we leave little room for life-changing events. While all change is not necessarily good, we have to make room for change and to explore where it can lead us.

St Ignatius did not embrace the change productively at first. His early endeavors were often met with failure and disappointment. Things got so bad that he even considered taking his own life. At this moment he caught a glimpse of hope, which helped him to carry on. While his unfortunate encounter with the cannonball caused his existing plans to be destroyed, St Ignatius opened himself to exploring change. Over time he came to see that the change turned out to be beneficial and brought him infinitely more satisfaction than the certainty of his previous life.



Lesson Three: Make Time for Contemplation

While recuperating from his wounds, St Ignatius spent a good deal of time in bed. He had a lot of free time and was looking for entertainment. Initially, he wanted to read popular works of fiction to satisfy his active imagination. He was disappointed to find out that the books he wanted were not available, and he had to make do with holy books instead. Reading these books left him time to think about Jesus and the lives of the saints. At first, he preferred to imagine more worldly things, but progressively he found greater pleasure in daydreaming about

Jesus and the lives of the saints.

By making space for something new, Ignatius began to contemplate things beyond his standard frame of reference. He began to consider the possibility that God loved him and wanted to be in a relationship with him. By opening his mind to this, Ignatius was able to make sense of things and see that he was called to a greater form of service than he had previously envisioned. The more Ignatius moved into contemplation, the less relevant his previous enjoyments came to be. In their place he discovered real fulfilment and contentment. 💙