

# Unsent Letters

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*Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid* (c. 1670–1671) by Johannes Vermeer, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

After a recent period of desolation, I found myself sitting with a kind of interior silence that was not peaceful so much as disorienting. Things felt emotionally unfinished. Conversations inwardly replayed themselves. Words I wished I had spoken surfaced long after the moment had passed, while other truths remained just beyond reach, felt but not yet fully understood. I was reminded that, in Ignatian spirituality, desolation is not simply sadness or difficulty; it is a felt loss of connection, clarity and interior steadiness. A collapsing of the spirit. And yet, hidden

within that experience, something unexpected began to emerge. I began writing letters I never intended to send.

At first, it was not a conscious practice, and it wasn't quite journaling in the familiar sense. These were letters addressed to people I could no longer reach clearly in conversation, or perhaps never could. Honest, unfinished, emotionally alive. At first I wondered whether this was simply anger and rumination disguised as reflection. But over time, the act itself began to feel almost like prayer. The page was not distancing me from the painful expe-

rience; it was bringing me into a truer relationship with it. Somewhere within the written word, I began to sense that healing could happen. There is a particular kind of writing that does not belong to publication, conversation or even resolution. It belongs instead to discernment. To the slow interior sorting of what is true, what is reaction, what is still asking to be understood and what has not been said. Long before modern psychology named the dynamics of repression, projection, or emotional avoidance, Ignatius of Loyola was paying close attention to the interior movements of the soul with remarkable precision. In the Spiritual Exercises, he does not rush toward resolution. He teaches noticing. He teaches discernment. He teaches the quiet discipline of distinguishing consolation from desolation, not as abstract theological ideas but as lived relational presence. Perhaps most radically, Ignatius assumes that God is in all things, not outside our emotional lives, but within. In Ignatius's own letters he does not write as someone detached from the human condition. He responds with care, empathy and attunement to the interior life of others and is honest about the complexity of his own.

I began to wonder if my unsent letters were less an emotional release and more of a form of prayerful discernment. In that sense, the unwritten letter carries something of the same movement as the Examen. It asks not simply 'What happened?' but 'Where was I moved?' 'Where did I resist?'

'What was stirred in me?' and perhaps most importantly 'Where is God in this?'

When we give ourselves permission

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to allow our truth to emerge without fear of interruption or rejection, things can become clearer. And this is where the discomfort began for me personally. Silence is not always choosing peace; sometimes it is simply what we hide behind. What appears calm on the surface can, at times, be a quiet disconnection from what hurts beneath it. Ignatian discernment does not ask us to suppress emotion in the name of spirituality. Instead, it invites us to become curious about what is moving within us. What draws us toward greater honesty, freedom, and love? What pulls us away? True consolation is not avoidance disguised as composure or spiritual bypassing; instead it is the deep peace that comes from remaining present to reality without disunity. A peace spacious enough to hold contradiction. To hold anger and love, loss and longing. This is where my practice of the unsent letter became quietly transformative for me. It offered a way for my truth to be witnessed, even if only on the page. Not every letter is meant to be sent. But perhaps some are written so that the soul can finally hear what it has been trying to say. To be held before God. And maybe that is the invitation to us all today. To write from the heart and bring it prayerfully into divine relationship.