

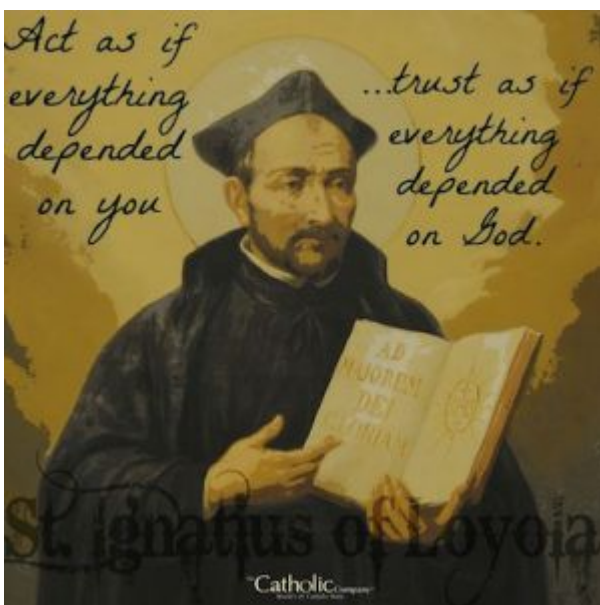
# The Ignatian Qualities of the Petrine Ministry of Pope Francis

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Reflection on the Feast of the Founder of the Society of Jesus

July 31, 2018

For the July 31st Feast Day of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, I offer you the following reflections about this great saint and how his vision for the Church and for Christians has found a home in the life and witness of Pope Francis. One of the main themes permeating the thought of St. Ignatius of Loyola is his exhortation "*Sentire cum ecclesia*" or "think with the Church." "*Sentire cum ecclesia*" also means to feel with the Church and to love the Church. It is necessary to cultivate this communion of shared devotion, affection, and purpose in a very disciplined way, for not all aspects of the Church are lovable, just as we are not always lovable as individuals. The structures of the Church cannot exist without human mediation, with all its gifts and defects of the persons present in the Church. Such thoughts are vitally important, especially in the midst of current crises facing the Church, Catholics and Christians around the world.



Ignatius of Loyola founded the society after being wounded in battle and experiencing a religious conversion. He composed the Spiritual Exercises to help others follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. In 1534, Ignatius and six other young men, including Francis Xavier and Peter Faber, gathered and professed vows of poverty, chastity, and later obedience, including a special vow of obedience to the pope in matters of mission direction and assignment. Ignatius' plan of the order's organization was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540 by a bull containing the "Formula of the Institute".

The Society of Jesus is present today in education, schools, colleges, universities and seminaries, intellectual research, and

cultural pursuits. Jesuits also give retreats, minister in hospitals, parishes, university chaplaincies, and promote social justice and ecumenical dialogue. One of them with a longstanding Jesuit identity happens to be leading the Catholic Church at this moment in history. Francis of Argentina is the first pope from the Society of Jesus – this religious congregation whose worldly, wise intellectuals are as famous as its missionaries and martyrs. It's this all-encompassing personal and professional Jesuit identity and definition that the former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio brought with him from Buenos Aires to Rome, and one that continues to shape almost everything he does as Pope Francis. From his passion for social justice and his missionary zeal to his focus on engaging the wider world and his preference for collaboration over immediate action without reflection, Pope Francis is a Jesuit through and through.

### ***What kind of a Jesuit is Francis?***

Jorge Mario Bergoglio fully embraced the Jesuits' radical turn to championing the poor; though he was seen as an enemy of liberation theology by many Jesuits, others in the order were devoted to him. He turned away from devotional traditionalism but was viewed by others as still far too orthodox. Critics labeled him a collaborator with the Argentine military junta even though biographies now clearly show that he worked carefully and clandestinely to save many lives. None of that ended the intrigue against Bergoglio within the Jesuits, and in the early 1990s, he was effectively exiled from Buenos Aires to an outlying city, "a time of great interior crisis," as he himself described it. As a good, obedient Jesuit, Bergoglio complied with the society's demands and sought to find God's will in it all. His virtual estrangement from the Jesuits encouraged then-Cardinal Antonio Quarracino of Buenos Aires to appoint Bergoglio as auxiliary bishop in 1992.

In 1998, Bergoglio succeeded Quarracino as Archbishop. In 2001, John Paul II made Bergoglio a cardinal, one of only two Jesuits in the 120-member College of Cardinals at that moment in history. The other Jesuit cardinal was Carlo Maria Martini of Milan. We all know what happened to Cardinal Bergoglio on March 13, 2013, when his brother Cardinals elected him Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter during the Conclave that followed the historic resignation of Pope Benedict XVI from the papacy.

### ***The Pope among his brother Jesuits***

On Monday, October 24, 2016, Pope Francis went to the General Congregation of the Jesuits – their general chapter underway in Rome – with a message. His whole address was characterized by an openness to what lies ahead, a call to go further, a support for *caminar*, the way of journeying that allows Jesuits to go toward others and to walk with them on their own journey.

Francis began his address to his Jesuit confrères quoting St. Ignatius and reminding them that a Jesuit is called to converse and thereby to bring life to birth *“in every part of the world where a greater service of God and help for souls is expected.”* Precisely for this reason, the Jesuits must go forward, taking advantage of the situations in which they find themselves, always to serve more and better. This implies a way of doing things that aims for harmony in the contexts of tension that are normal in a world with diverse persons and missions. The pope mentioned explicitly the tensions between contemplation and action, between faith and justice, between charism and institution, between community and mission.



The Holy Father detailed three areas of the Society’s path, yet these areas are not only for his religious family, but for the universal Church. The first is to “ask insistently for consolation.” It is proper to the Society of Jesus to know how to console, to bring consolation and real joy; Jesuits must put themselves at the service of joy, for the Good News cannot be announced in sadness. Then, departing from his text, he insisted that joy *“must always be accompanied by humour,”* and with a big smile on his face, he remarked, *“as I see it, the human attitude that is closest to divine grace is a sense of humour.”*

Next, Francis invited the Society to “allow yourselves to be moved by the Lord on the cross.” The Jesuits must get close to the vast majority of men and women who suffer,

and, in this context, it must offer various services of mercy in various forms. The Pope underlined certain elements that he had already had occasion to present throughout the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Those who have been touched by mercy must feel themselves sent to present this same mercy in an effective way.

Finally, the Holy Father invited the Society to go forward under the influence of the "good spirit." This implies always discerning, which is more than simply reflecting, how to act in communion with the Church. The Jesuits must be not "clerical" but "ecclesial." They are "men for others" who live in the midst of all peoples, trying to touch the heart of each person, contributing in this way to establishing a Church in which all have their place, in which the Gospel is inculturated, and in which each culture is evangelized.

These three key words of the pope's address are graces for which each Jesuit and the whole Society must always ask: **consolation, compassion, and discernment**. But Francis has not only reminded his own religious family of these three important gifts that are at the core of Jesuit spirituality, he has also offered them to the universal Church, especially through the recent Synods of Bishops on the Family. As Pope Francis goes about his daily work and slowly implements the reform that he was commissioned to bring about in the Church by his brother Cardinals, it has become clear that his aim is to make the Church the Church of Jesus Christ, welcoming to all, and appealing and attractive because it shows its care for all people.

### ***Discernment***

Over the past five years, Pope Francis has stressed that quintessential quality of Ignatius of Loyola: discernment. Discernment is a constant effort to be open to the Word of God that can illuminate the concrete reality of everyday life. A clear example of this discernment emerged at the 2015 Synod of Bishops on the Family and in the Synod's Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. It was a very Ignatian principle that illustrates the Church's great respect for the consciences of the faithful as well as the necessity of formation of consciences:

*"We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life. We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden. We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful,*

*who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. **We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.**" (37)*

The Church does not exist to take over people's conscience but to stand in humility before faithful men and women who have discerned prayerfully and often painfully before God the reality of their lives and situations. Discernment and the formation of conscience can never be separated from the Gospel demands of truth and the search for charity and truth, and the tradition of the Church.

In keeping with his own Jesuit formation, Pope Francis is a man of discernment, and, at times, that discernment results in freeing him from the confinement of doing something in a certain way because it was ever thus. In paragraph 33 of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. Francis writes:

*"Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way". I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory."*

The first Jesuits were "a holiness movement," inviting everyone to lead a holy life. Francis of Assisi was committed to a literal imitation of the poor Christ. Ignatius was inspired by that poverty and originally planned that Jesuits would follow the same route. But as the renowned American Jesuit historian Fr. John O'Malley has indicated, just as Ignatius learned to set aside his early austerities to make himself more approachable, he later moderated the Society's poverty to make it possible to evangelize more people especially through educational institutions. Even evangelical poverty was a relative value in relation to the good of souls and their progress in holiness. That same apostolic reasoning is found in Pope Francis' instructions to priests around the world about their ministries.

### ***An inclusive, listening Church***

The spirit of openness is foundational to the Jesuit way of proceeding. Jesuit parishes are known for their inclusiveness and Jesuit confessors for their understanding and compassion. Ignatius insisted in favour of the goodness of everyone we encounter and a prescription for a style of encounter that makes condemnation of those in error a last resort. Early in his Pontificate when Pope Francis made his controversial statement about even atheists having a chance to get into heaven, he was following the teaching of Vatican II, but he was also following a very Ignatian approach to the good of souls.

### ***Care of those most in need***

Ignatius of Loyola's recommended style of ministry anticipates the positive pastoral approach Pope Francis has taken to evangelization. Pope Francis' attention to refugees, the abandoned elderly, and unemployed youth exhibit the same concern as the first Jesuits for the lowliest and neediest people in society. Ignatius' twin criteria for choice of ministries were serving those in greatest need and advancing the more universal good. The Jesuit Refugee Service and creative Jesuit projects in education, like the Nativity and Cristo Rey schools, are contemporary embodiments of the same spirit of evangelical care for the neediest. These apostolates are part of the post-conciliar renewal of the Society of Jesus, but they have deep, formative roots in Jesuit history and spirituality as well. In the mind and heart of Pope Francis, even elite Jesuit institutions can combine the intellectual apostolate with service to the poor in the spirit of Ignatius.

### ***Humility and clerical reform***

Pope Francis' humility has impressed many people around the entire world. His style has truly become substance. It is the most radically evangelical aspect of his spiritual reform of the papacy, and he has invited all Catholics, but especially the clergy, to reject success, wealth, and power. Humility is a key virtue in the Spiritual Exercises. One of its key meditations focuses on the Three Degrees of Humility. In Ignatius' eyes, humility is the virtue that brings us closest to Christ, and Pope Francis appears to be guiding the Church and educating the clergy in that fundamental truth. Reform through spiritual renewal begins with the rejection of wealth, honours, and power, and it reaches its summit in the willingness to suffer humiliation with Christ. Humility is the most difficult part of the Ignatian papal reform, but it is essential for the Church's purification from clericalism, the source of so many ills in the contemporary church.

### ***How can we characterize Francis' leadership and how is that leadership "Ignatian"?***

Ignatius did not use the word "leadership" as we commonly do today. Jesuit or Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit traditions lend themselves well to manifesting leadership in one's life and work. Someone whose style of leadership is inspired by the Ignatian tradition will particularly emphasize certain habits or priorities as a leader, in ways that distinguish him/her from the way leadership is generally taught and practiced. Those habits or priorities include the importance of formation – not just learning to do technical tasks (like strategic planning) but also commitment to lifelong self-development; the importance of deep self-awareness (of coming to know oneself, for example, as happens in the Spiritual Exercises); becoming a skilled decision-maker, as happens through the discernment tools of the Exercises; committing oneself to purposes bigger than self, to a mission of ultimate meaning (Jesuits often refer to this commitment by the expression of "*magis*"); deep respect for others, "finding God in all things." Yet the difference between the worldly style of leadership and that traced by Ignatius is that the Jesuit style of leadership always points to God, the ultimate source of meaning. Great Jesuit figures like Peter Faber, Francis Xavier, Matteo Ricci, or Alberto Hurtado were able to accomplish the feats they did not simply because they had some good leadership skills but because they were inspired by love of God.

### ***What does a Jesuit pope mean for the church?***

The Jesuit pope is well versed in the Spiritual Exercises, so able to spread the knowledge and practice of this counterfeit way of conversion – a way that does not use the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to simply convict his hearers of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come but invites people to experience Jesus, his mercy, his love, his goodness, and his invitation to sinners to draw closer to him. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* invites people to imagine the gory details of hell, the warm embrace of the prodigal father, and the presence of Jesus walking with people on the highways and byways of life. Ignatius learned this way of meditation from his reading of the lives of the saints and mystics, but it is not necessarily the way of Scripture that can at times be devoid of imagination. Pope Francis follows Ignatius' imaginative method in a remarkable and vivid way. He reminds us day in and day out that Jesuit spirituality is not only mystical, but it is ethical and can help us in our daily living.

The whole concept of setting up committees, consulting widely, convening smart people around you is how Jesuit superiors usually function. Then they make the decision. This sort of discernment – listening to all and contemplating everything before acting – is a cardinal virtue of the Ignatian spirituality that is at the core of Francis' being and his commitment to a "conversion" of the papacy as well as the entire church. It's hard



to predict what will come next. Francis is shrewd, and he has repeatedly praised the Jesuit trait of "holy cunning" – that Christians should be "wise as serpents but innocent as doves," as Jesus put it. The pope's openness, however, also a signature of his Jesuit training and development, means that not even he is sure where the spirit will lead. He has said: *"I don't have all the answers. I don't even have all the questions. I always think of new questions, and there are always new questions coming forward."*

Pope Francis breaks Catholic traditions whenever he wants because he is "free from disordered attachments." Our Church

has indeed entered a new phase: with the advent of this first Jesuit pope, it is openly ruled by an individual rather than by the authority of Scripture alone or even its own dictates of tradition plus Scripture. Pope Francis has brought to the Petrine office a Jesuit intellectualism. By choosing the name Francis, he is also affirming the power of humility and simplicity. Pope Francis, the Argentine Jesuit, is not simply attesting to the complementarity of the Ignatian and Franciscan paths. He is pointing each day to how the mind and heart meet in the love of God and the love of neighbour. And most of all, he reminds us each day how much we need Jesus, and also how much we need one another along the journey.