



CE3: St Ignatius of Loyola – Attentive to the Will of God

Introduction

Hello, and a very warm welcome to the third episode of the Catholic English Podcast, where you can learn English with the saints. I'm your host, Henry, and I'm very happy to be here with you again.

Welcome back to everyone who's listened from episode 1, and also a big welcome to any new listeners. New listeners can find lots of information about how these podcasts are going to work by going back to episode 1.

Episode 2, for anyone who hasn't listened to it, was an introduction to my Beginners' Catholic English course, where each week you'll be able to listen to part of one of the bible readings from the Sunday Mass, with explanations of the special vocabulary, speaking practice, and more.

Really, this feels like the first proper podcast. The introductions are over, we know where we are and what we're doing. It's time to get to hear from the saints, and see how they can help us. I said in the first episode that 'it seems to me that most of the good advice that is offered in the world today is a kind of weaker version of the advice which the prophets, Jesus, and the saints have been giving us for thousands of years.'

It's clear that the saints are like models of good living, and they can inspire us to change our lives, in big ways or small, or at least begin to desire to change our lives. Reading about their lives, their thoughts, can be interesting, and that's enough to keep us listening to and reading an English podcast. But what are these changes really? Are they really any use to us in the modern world? Can things that happened 500 years ago even still make sense today?

That's enough of an introduction for today I think, so let's get straight on to the real subject of the podcast, and let's see what you think... Is it useful? Remember to let me know in the comments or through the contact form on the Catholic English website.

Íñigo

Íñigo was born on 23 October 1491 (later he changed his name to Ignatius, the Latin form, to make it easier for French and Italian people.) He was the youngest of thirteen children, and sadly his mother died not long after he was born. His family was fairly rich, members of the 'minor nobility.' The most important nobility are the kings and queens, followed by dukes and various other noble titles. Another name for the nobility is aristocracy. But the *minor* nobility are not kings or dukes, but something less important. Although Íñigo's family were only minor nobility, they did own property, and they were involved in the wars of the times.

As a teenage boy, Íñigo was very happy to get involved in all the worldly attractions that were available: fighting, dancing, gambling (betting money that something would happen, often with cards or dice or horses), and chasing after girls. He 'went into service as a page' for a relative, the treasurer of the Kingdom of Castille, Spain. Being a 'page' is a kind of job for a teenager, delivering



messages or carrying bags. ‘Going into service’ was basically ‘getting a job,’ working for a member of the nobility, or for a wealthy lawyer or merchant. Later, when he was 18 he ‘took up arms’ (became a soldier) for a Duke.

According to historians, and according to his own autobiography, Íñigo was a good soldier, a good leader, and had good diplomatic skills (skills of persuasion and negotiation). At this time he was mainly motivated by dreams of success, and dreams of marriage with a rich and beautiful lady. He was living a life of daring and adventure, and he was proud of his successes. In his own words his ‘heart … was enthralled with the vanities of the world.’ (St Ignatius’ Autobiography) If you are *enthralled* by something, that means you only pay attention to it, and the *vanities* of the world are the unimportant, surface things, like beauty, money and success.

All seemed to be going well for him until on 20 May 1521, when he was 29 years old, his right leg was hit and broken by a cannonball. It was a very serious injury which meant that he had to spend months in bed. The bone healed badly, so it had to be re-broken (broken again) and re-set (to ‘set’ a bone is to fix it in the correct position for it to heal). He also decided later, after it had healed (according to his autobiography) to have another operation, with no anaesthetic or pain relief, to cut off a bit of bone that was sticking out of his leg, making a large lump under his skin.

Us

Let’s pause a little and consider how we relate to this young man. Time has moved on 500 years and the world looks very different these days, but maybe we can see some similarities.

The ‘vanities of the world’ have changed a little. They now include travel as well as fashion, watching war films as well as going to war, reading crime or horror fiction as well as romances; but still eating richly, drinking alcohol, partying (revelling, as St Paul described it), are very popular and millions of people in the world see no problem with these things.

In fact, I need to quickly say that I’m not a ‘puritan’ (someone who condemns all non-pure behaviour as evil, someone who says that people who do these things are going to go to hell.) No, just as Jesus didn’t come to condemn, but he ate and drank with prostitutes and tax collectors, and he encouraged people to give up their lives of sin and follow him.

When I was younger I certainly wanted to enjoy the pleasures of life, as much as anyone else, and now, a little later in life, I can look back and be grateful for many of the mistakes I made and the lessons I learned.

I don’t believe that we can tell people how to live their lives so that they become ‘good’ people. Just as we can’t tell someone how to speak English and expect a miracle. Each of us, in our hearts, want to be better; and we all struggle. We all have our own personal lessons to learn, and we need to have the freedom to make mistakes in order to learn those lessons.

We do need encouragement to have the desire to try to be better, and it’s helpful if people share information about their struggles and successes. Íñigo may have lived 500 years ago, but he’s still one of us, and there’s always the chance as we listen to his story, that we might hear something that touches our heart.



Never write anyone off. That means never decide that someone has nothing to offer, that they don't know anything, that they come from the wrong political party or the wrong religion or the wrong country. To 'write something off' is to forget about it, to reject it. If we have a bad car accident, our car might be 'written off' which means it will cost more to fix it than it costs to buy a replacement car, so we just throw away the old car. Don't do this with people.

What happened next with Íñigo?

Íñigo had to spend months in bed, while his leg injuries were recovering. He wanted to read books about heroic knights who saved Princesses and then married them, but, where he was, there were no books like this. There was just a book about the lives of saints, and a book about the life of Jesus.

He had to read something to help 'pass the time' in bed (to 'pass the time' is to do something when you have nothing else to do, to avoid being bored), so he read these books.

He still had his imagination, his dreams. He dreamed of one particular 'illustrious' lady (very famous and much admired). He wanted to attract her attention by being a successful army officer, and he dreamed that one day they might get married.

And then he returned to the lives of the saints.

And then he dreamed of returning to battle, of being a heroic soldier and leader of men. He dreamed of success, of being respected, of honours and money.

Then he dreamed what it would be like to live in poverty (with no money or possessions) like St Francis. He asked himself 'What if I did what St Francis did?' 'What if I did what St Dominic did?' He 'pondered over these things' (he thought about them carefully, for a long time) and he 'kept [he did it again and again] continuously proposing to himself serious and difficult things.'

'He seemed to feel a certain readiness for doing them [these serious and difficult saintly things]' he continued. He thought 'St Francis did this; therefore I will do it.' [I'm ready to do it.]

He continues: 'When he thought of worldly things it gave him great pleasure, but afterwards he found himself dry and sad. But when he thought of journeying to Jerusalem, and of living only on herbs ... he found pleasure not only while thinking of them, but also when he had ceased [stopped thinking about them].'

'This difference he did not notice or value [see as important or useful], until one day the eyes of his soul were opened and he began to enquire [to ask, to think] the reason of the difference. He learned by experience that one train of thought¹ left him sad, the other joyful. This was his first reasoning on spiritual matters.'

Isn't this amazing? God often uses the most unlikely people, in the most unlikely ways, and these thoughts of a wounded soldier lying in bed 500 years ago have helped probably millions of people since, and have been very influential in the Catholic Church.

1 A 'train of thought' is a series of linked thoughts, like a series of linked train carriages.



Can we experience the same thing today?

Of course Íñigo wasn't alone in noticing these feelings, or in having them. He just happened to be the one who worked with them and worked with other people to open the eyes of their souls too.

So I wonder, are you familiar with these feelings? Do you notice the difference in your feelings between reading a holy book, compared to reading about worldly things? I'm sure some of you are aware of this, but if not, there's a really good, simple exercise that anyone can do here. I really recommend it. It worked for me and I found it very helpful.

1. Prepare two books: one that you definitely know is holy (the Bible is always good), and one that definitely isn't (this could even be a magazine or newspaper, or a website.)
2. Spend a minute or two reading the holy book, and pay attention to how you feel.
3. Then spend a minute or two reading the other material (book, magazine, web page, etc.), and again pay attention to how you feel.
4. Return to the holy book, and then to the other book. Do this a few times.
5. At the beginning it's usually difficult to feel the difference. You may need to repeat this exercise occasionally for weeks or months. You can pray for assistance.
6. There are many stories in the bible and from the saints that describe the feeling you can sense. For example the disciples on the road to Emmaus later said "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road," (Luke 24:32)
7. You might feel something like this sensation in your heart too, when you read the Bible or other holy material. St Ignatius calls this feeling 'joy.'
8. When you read about crime, or fashion, for example, you may feel some kind of excitement, but there in your heart really you can feel a sadness or heaviness dragging you down – the opposite of the uplifting feeling of joy from the Bible.

This is why I had to start this series of podcasts with St Ignatius. It seems to be an important foundation to know that we can all be aware of the different way our bodies and souls react to holy things compared to worldly things.

Joy, as the saints describe it, is how we feel when we meet the holy in our life, communicate with the holy. Sadness is how we feel when we are 'enthralled by the vanities of the world,' enthralled by the unholy; when the unholy takes our attention away from the way, the truth and the light.

Joy is not the adrenaline rush of excitement we get from riding on a roller-coaster, parachuting out of an aeroplane, or skiing down a mountain. All of these feelings fade and leave us wanting more, like a drug makes us want more: they leave us feeling sad.

Today there is a huge problem of sadness in the world, and we sometimes struggle to know why. Of course we can see all sorts of problems in the world, but we have more stuff, and we can do more things to make us 'happy' than ever before.

I think this old saint from 500 years ago can help to teach us how to see things in a different way, that he can help us to understand things in a different way, and we can begin to make better choices in our lives.

Many of the other saints have their own similar contributions to offer. Through their devotion to God, they came to understand the truths of being human, they came closer to being like Jesus



Christ, our very model of what it is to be human. Many of the saints have left clues for us to understand and share in their revelations (modern psychologists would call them discoveries).

How can St Ignatius of Loyola help us to learn English?

I hope that Ignatius has caught your attention. He wants to help you in your life today. He's with you right now.

He can help you learn English as well, because what he said and did is interesting, and it's relevant to our lives. It's a lot better than most boring English text books. So now you can learn about St Ignatius and learn English at the same time, and they both help to motivate each other.

Remember, at the moment, although I've switched to calling him Ignatius, he was still Íñigo at this time; a soldier recovering from a badly broken leg, noticing that holy books affect him much more positively than popular heroic, or chivalrous², romances. He has some ideas about doing saintly things, but he's still a long way from becoming a saint.

I will also note here that in his autobiography, Ignatius talks about himself in the third person: he. Instead of saying 'I continued my reading,' he writes 'He continued his reading.'

This is an effect of modesty. Ignatius didn't want to boast about himself 'I did this' and 'I did that.' It doesn't sound good. By writing about himself in the third person he gives a little more distance and respect. I'm reminded about the autobiography of Blessed Henry Suso who also referred to himself in the third person ('the servitor' or servant) a couple of centuries earlier.

Let's see what else his life story has to offer us. All the quotations below are from his autobiography unless I say otherwise.

Ignatius had made some decisions, as we heard earlier, to follow in the footsteps of the saints: 'St Francis did this; therefore I will do it.'

'His resolve [his decision, his determination, his commitment],' he said, 'was not more definite than to promise with the help of divine grace that what they had done he would also do.'

This is a nice, simple start. Not too ambitious, not too grand. 'Divine grace' is what God gives us to help us do things. We can say that 'God has graced us with the health to be able to do this,' or in Ignatius' case God graced him with months in bed recovering from a broken leg. In reality, we can do nothing without divine grace, and we're grateful to divine grace for everything that we have and everything that we do, although most people today have forgotten this.

'After his recovery his one wish was to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. ... He continued his reading meanwhile [during that time], and kept the holy resolution [decision, from resolve] he had made. At home his conversation was wholly [completely] devoted to [given to, focused on] divine things, and helped much to the spiritual advancement of others.'

² Chivalry was the code of honour of a knight. The heroes were from Greek legend. Nowadays the code of chivalry, stories of being chivalrous, are out of fashion, but heroes are certainly still in fashion.



Once you find God, once you hear his call, a couple of things happen. Firstly you are tempted by doubt (this can and does happen at any time of course), tempted to go back to the world, but Ignatius kept his holy resolution. Secondly, you want to share the good news and talk to people, which is good, but you have to be careful to respect their dignity as persons (to use the phrase of St Pope John Paul II). Be careful to share in a way that agrees with and supports their spirit, not in a way that leads to arguments or rejection.

Ignatius found his voice, and he was able to share the good news in good ways. He was always a good leader and diplomat.

He started his journey towards Jerusalem on foot [walking]. He left his home region, where he was known and recognised. He gave away his expensive clothes, bought sack cloth [rough, cheap cloth for making sacks] and made some rough garment [an old word for an item of clothing] to cover himself. He begged for alms [food, clothes or money given to the poor], he fasted every day except Sunday, he gave up meat and wine.

He also practised some quite severe [extreme] ‘mortifications’ on his body. Mortifications were quite popular practices in the middle ages [about 1000 to 1450AD] that made the body very uncomfortable, like sleeping on the floor, not wearing proper clothes in the winter, so that you’re constantly cold, or whipping [or scourging] yourself. This was done in the belief that these personal sacrifices would please God, although this seems wrong, there are many dangers and nowadays these practices are actively discouraged by the Church.

It’s interesting to see what Ignatius said about his mortifications. Firstly, he admits that although he had ‘an ardent desire of serving God, yet his knowledge of spiritual things was still very obscure.’

Ardent is an adjective that means strong, passionate. We only use it with words like desire, love, longing, passion. You can’t have an ardent hunger for pizza, no. Obscure usually means ‘little known,’ difficult to see, difficult to understand, but here it means very small, undeveloped.

He just wanted to do these mortifications as ‘something pleasing to his Lord.’ He wasn’t whipping himself for all the bad things he had done in his life. He wasn’t thinking about his past life, and he wasn’t thinking that he was a bad man who needed punishment. He wasn’t thinking about his sins, just about copying the saints that had been before him.

Thirty four years later, dictating his autobiography, he says that he knew very little about humility, charity or patience – the virtues which the saints had been seeking when they practised these mortifications – and ‘still less the value of discretion, which regulates the practice of these virtues.’

In this state of ignorance, lack of knowledge, these mortifications could have been very dangerous for him. He could have done them for the wrong reasons, and they could have led in bad directions. For example today people starve themselves, or cut themselves, because of fashion or depression. They’re ignorant of the truth, they have no proper context for what they’re doing. Their teachers are no longer saints, but celebrities, or whatever they see in the popular media.

Luckily, Ignatius simply wanted to copy the saints, and his resolve [determination], his prayers, and his openness to God saved him.



He stopped for a few days atMontserrat, made a general confession (he spent three days writing all his past sins, so he could confess them), and then spent a whole night in prayer at an altar of Our Lady, kneeling and standing, dedicating his whole self to the service of Christ. Then he travelled on.

He stayed in the hospital and later in a Dominican monastery in Manresa, writing notes in his notebook, going to Mass daily, praying for seven hours a day. Here he was attacked by doubts. He heard a voice in his head saying “How can you keep up for seventy years of your life these practices which you have begun?”

‘Knowing that this thought was a temptation of the evil one,’ Ignatius continues, ‘he expelled it by this answer: “Can you, wretched one, promise me one hour of life?”’ [Expelled means ‘threw out,’ wretched means ‘very bad’.]

Then he was attacked by ‘scruples.’ This means that all the impure things that he had done in his life, regardless of how small, no matter how small, kept on coming to his mind. He had made a detailed general confession, where he tried to confess all the sins of his life and receive absolution, have his sins forgiven. But he was attacked by thoughts that there was still many things he had not included.

He tried confessing them, but they kept on coming, he couldn’t free himself from them. Eventually his confessor ordered him not to confess anything from his earlier life unless it was essential, but all of these things seemed essential to him, so that didn’t help. He spoke to ‘holy persons’ trying to get their advice, but nothing worked.

These scruples had been tormenting him for months. He prayed for help. At one point he was tempted to kill himself to escape from the torment, the torture, the severe pain of these scruples that were attacking him, but he prayed “O Lord, I will not do anything to offend thee.” Eventually he tried a complete fast. He didn’t eat or drink for seven days, until when he went to confession his confessor ordered him to stop his fast.

For two days the scruples left him, but then they returned even more fiercely. He was taken over [‘seized’] by ‘a sort of disgust... so that he felt in inclination [a temptation] to give up the life he was leading. While in this state, God was pleased to arouse him as it were from sleep, and to relieve him of his trouble.’ To arouse someone from sleep is to wake them up. ‘As it were’ or ‘as if it were’ or ‘as if’ means it was *like*, or *similar* to waking him from sleep. He wasn’t physically asleep, but God woke him up, aroused him.

He realised that the scruples had been caused by a spirit which ‘had entered into possession of his soul.’

‘Then he resolved never again to speak of his past sins in confession. From that day he was free from scruples, and felt certain that it was the will of our merciful Lord to deliver him from his trouble of soul.’

We often find, in the stories of the saints, this kind of grace given by God only at the end of a long hard struggle. Most of us feel like we would give up long before this, but God knows us very well: he knows exactly how much we can take, how much we can give, and he gives us challenges that are just within our strength. That means that we get challenges, and they’re not easy, they really are hard, but they’re not impossible. We just have to keep on going, being patient, being hopeful, loving God, and we will receive our graces just as the saints received them.



There's another thing to notice here: Ignatius said, basically, that he had been possessed by a spirit. Nowadays we're usually encouraged not to believe in such silly things. We're told that ideas of spirits come from the ancient past, before modern science, medicine and psychology came to explain everything.

At the same time, in popular culture we're surrounded by images of witches and fairies, vampires and demons, and in popular spirituality we're often offered much of the same.

On the one hand, modern rational man is told not to believe in spirits, but on the other we are clearly enthralled by them (remember that Ignatius said he had been enthralled by the vanities of the world?)

And again, without the guidance of the saints, it's hard to find out where we stand. Where is the truth? How can we 'discern' it? How can we 'see' the truth, 'make out' the truth? At the moment it's 'obscured' or made difficult to see by all the confusing images. We'll come back to this question before the end of the podcast, but for now, let's get back to Ignatius' life.

Much more happened to him there in Manresa, where he was for a year. You can read all about it yourself. My version is public domain (free from copyright) and you can download it for free in many places including Project Gutenberg. [Here's the link for anyone who's interested.](#)

Only three companions – Faith, Hope and Charity

In the beginning of 1523, he set off for Barcelona, to get on a ship towards Jerusalem. Many people offered to travel with him. They warned him that it would be difficult for him, especially since he didn't speak either Italian or Latin.

But the only travelling companions he wanted were the three virtues – Faith, Hope and Charity. He argued that if he went with a human companion: 'when hungry, he would look to his companion for food; if exhausted, he would call on his companion for help; and so [similarly, likewise] he would confide in his companion, and have some affection for him: whereas he wished to place all his confidence, hope, and affection in God alone.'

We say that we should 'look to teachers for guidance' for example, or 'look to politicians for leadership.' Looking 'to' something is very different from looking 'at' something. When we look 'to' something, we're using that thing as a model or an ideal or an answer. If Ignatius was hungry he would look to his companion for food, means he would seek the answer to his hunger from his companion.

But really, as I already mentioned, God has everything, and everything that we need and everything that we have comes from God. Somehow we need to find that faith in God, that he will provide, but if we spend all our life relying on other people, we may miss the fact, we may be unaware, that it's actually God who is providing us with things, not other people. They may be, and very often are, the 'conduit,' the agent, through which God delivers.

That's not to say that we need to 'test' God. That's not going to work. Jesus was tempted this way: throw yourself off the roof of the temple, the devil encouraged him, and God's angels will catch



you. Jesus replied to him “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Matthew 4:7). But then a few chapters later we read, ‘Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”’ (Matthew 14:31)

So we must act, we must be responsible (as Lonergan reminded us in the first podcast), and we must have faith that, if we need it, God will catch us. Christianity is full of these apparent paradoxes, things that appear to be paradoxes, things that look like paradoxes. For example, we cannot test God, but we must live, act, in faith and trust that he gives us everything we need.

Ignatius decided to go to school

Ignatius managed to get to Jerusalem, despite many difficulties and dangers. He’s supported and rewarded along the way by visions of Christ. He’s not allowed to remain in the Holy City because of the dangers. The city and indeed the whole of the region was then controlled by the ‘Turks,’ which means the Ottoman Empire, who were not friendly towards Christians, and were even threatening Venice and Spain at the time.

It’s now about three years after his conversion, and he’s been praying, reading, seeking the council of holy people, attending daily Mass, and talking to people about his faith and trying to help people. After his expulsion from the Holy Land he thinks about what to do next, and he decides that he should go to school; in his words ‘to enter upon a course of study in order to be better fitted to save souls.’ Today, instead of ‘to enter upon’ we would say ‘start’ or ‘enrol on.’ To ‘enrol’ is literally to have your name put on the roll, or the list of students. To be better fitted to do something means to be better qualified, or more qualified, to be better able or more able to do something.

He returned to Barcelona to go to school. He studied for two years, 1524-1526, and apparently made good progress, then he went to the University in Alcala where he studied theology and Latin (according to Wikipedia). In Alcala he continued to talk to people, which sometimes got him into trouble. He was reported to the Inquisition on several occasions, and once, after a rich woman and her daughter disappeared on a pilgrimage, he was put in prison until they returned 42 days later, accused of encouraging their dangerous behaviour. The religious authorities also forced him and his friends to wear shoes, stopped them from wearing the same clothes (because it made them look like members of a religious order), and told them to stop ‘preaching the truths of faith until they had completed four more years of study.’

Ignatius at this time always said that ‘his knowledge was not very extensive, as he had never laid a solid foundation.’ I could say the same, although it seems like the research and writing of these podcasts is certainly helping me to think more clearly and to ‘join the dots’ as we say informally – to see the links between things – to be intelligent in Lonergan’s words.

He and his friends moved to Salamanca. He was invited to dinner in a convent, but it was a trap. A monk asked him ‘Why... do you preach?’ Ignatius answered ‘We do not preach, we are wont to talk familiarly about divine things with some, in much the same as after dinner we converse with our host.’

To preach means to teach people about religion. ‘We are wont to talk’ means ‘we have a habit of talking.’ For example, ‘He is wont to go to sleep after lunch.’ We pronounce it exactly the same as want (e.g. I want to go to sleep). It’s got nothing to do with won’t which is short for ‘will not.’



To talk familiarly means to talk as if among friends, not formally as experts might talk. They talked familiarly with ‘some’ – this means with ‘some people’ which should be quite clear from the context. English speakers quite often drop, miss out, omit the object (e.g. people) if it’s clear from the context.

‘In much the same as’ seems to me to contain an error, or rather miss a word. It should read ‘In much the same *manner* as’ or ‘In much the same *way* as....’ This is simple a long way of saying ‘like’ or ‘as if.’ Converse means talk.

So the whole thing in modern English could be: ‘We don’t preach, we just chat about divine things with people, like people chat about things after dinner.’

Again, this feels like what I do. I’m interested in these subjects, and I just want to chat about them. I want to engage with people. Sometimes we have to find opportunities to talk about serious matters in informal ways. I’m not qualified to teach theology, but I’m not trying to do that, I’m not trying to tell people how to live their lives. I think there are people in the world who will appreciate this approach, and I thank Ignatius for opening the door to show that this is a possibility. And I also thank St Francis of Sales who also develops these possibilities, as we’ll hear in two weeks time.

Unfortunately, the monks trapped him, he was held in prison again, questioned by the judges of the inquisition. Interestingly, he gave them the text of his Spiritual Exercises, amongst other papers. These were composed between 1522-1524, before he even started his studies, with revisions up to 1548 when they were finally given the approval of the Pope. He used these when he was talking with people, and many people found them very useful.

Something is stopping me from reading the Spiritual Exercises. I feel like I should only read them if I’m sure that I’m going to use them seriously. At the moment I have plenty of other things to focus on. Maybe some time in the future...

Ignatian discernment

Soon, Ignatius will leave for Paris, and there he will form the group that will later become the founders of the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, and ‘the rest is history’ as we say (meaning, the rest is well known.)

In this podcast I wanted to focus mainly on his beginnings: his conversion; his first discovery of feeling the difference between the joy caused by holy thoughts or reading, and the sadness caused by worldly thoughts; his experiences of evil spirits causing him doubts and scruples, and holy spirits giving him joy and strength; his determination to study in order to be better able to guide people spiritually.

We can’t finish however without a few words about Ignatian discernment. I talked about this at the end of Episode 1. Bernard Lonergan was a Jesuit, and his notes on method show his connection to St Ignatius.

Remember the steps: be attentive (look), be intelligent (see the links), be reasonable (think) and be responsible (act).



These are broad general steps, suitable for the whole of life as well as more specific questions, but let's start today thinking about a more specific question. Usually it's a question about 'what should I do now?' For example, what should I study? what job should I get? should I stay friends with this person and help them change their life, or escape from a bad relationship?

If you're facing a question like this, and they come to us all at different times, how can you find an answer?

I can only give a very limited overview here, because this is an English lesson, not a lesson on Ignatian discernment, so if you're interested I recommend the writings of people like James Martin SJ, Henri Nouwen, etc. There are hundreds of books on this subject available on Amazon and from other reputable sellers.

My first response is to recall that 'you' are not going to find an answer to a difficult question like this. You will make a decision, move on, but often with a feeling of uncertainty, doubt. So if you want an answer, you will need to find it somewhere else.

Where can you find it? "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." (Matthew 7:7) Start with prayer. Ask for guidance.

Secondly, trust that the answer will be given to you, and look for signs. God isn't going to phone you and say, 'I got your question, here's the answer.' His answers come in more subtle ways. It could come in a sermon in church, about something completely different, but one sentence just hits you. It could come in an overheard conversation between two other people. It could come from a book you find on a park bench.

You may well have to actually go and ask someone for advice: family, friends, a priest, a teacher. Remember that they don't know the answer either (how can they know what's right for you?) but they might just say something that 'clicks,' something that makes you have that aha moment that I mentioned in episode 1.

Thirdly, you need to think and make a decision. This stage may only begin after a few difficult days, weeks or even months. If it's an important decision, it needs time. When you feel ready though, look at the fragments of answers that you've got, and work out what decision they're pointing to.

The point is, without going through this process you would have made a decision anyway, but possibly with a great deal of uncertainty. Now you have guidance, you have some assurance that you can make a better decision. And after you have made the decision, you can feel more confident that it was good.

Finally, act on your decision, trusting again that it is good. Feel calm, be hopeful, and carry on.

There are two other things I must talk about. I promised to return, before the end, to say more about Ignatius' possession by bad spirits that caused his doubts and scruples in Manresa. I also need to share a little of what he said about consolations and desolations. I'll start with this.

If someone is sad or upset, we can 'console' them, try to make them feel a bit better. Similarly, if we're going through difficult times, God sometimes consoles us by giving us consolations. Consolations are often like an awareness that God is happy with us or that we are on the right path.



Consolations make us feel joyful – the real, steady, sustainable joy; not the fake happiness of the world that soon disappears.

The opposite of consolations are desolations. Sometimes we feel desolate, which means lonely and alone, just as Jesus, dying on the cross, cried ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matthew 27:46). But remember he’s quoting the opening line of psalm 22, and after all the crying and the problems of the beginning of this psalm comes the most beautiful praise, ‘For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted.’ [despise = to look down on, to have no respect for; abhor = to hate and to go away from].

The important thing to remember is that desolations and consolations come one after another, just like in psalm 22, and like in Ignatius’ life. If we know that consolations will come eventually through our patience and perseverance, then the desolations are easier to get through, to survive.

We should try to notice the consolations when we receive them, so we can feel how sweet and good they are, and we should try to remember these feelings, so that when we go through experiences of desolation, we know what’s coming, that life isn’t going to be like this forever.

Following Ignatius’ conversion he experienced many joyful consolations and he was able to ignore the doubts that certainly must have come to him sometimes. After he dedicated himself completely to the service of our Lord however, these doubts and scruples soon began to increase to an almost unbearable level.

We can certainly say that he was going through a stage of desolation. His problem was what to do with these scruples. He prayed for help, he asked for help, he searched for help. Eventually, when he had suffered as much as he could, God gave him the grace of no longer suffering scruples, and at the same time of understanding that he had been possessed by an evil spirit which was trying to divert him from his holy path.

Sometimes the problems that face us are not as simple as ‘what am I going to study?’ They can be as serious as ‘Am I being attacked by a demon?’ This is a challenging question to ask, or even for me to write. We’re not supposed to believe in such things. There’s no time for me to address this in detail now, but I think we have the beginnings of a foundation for understanding, and I’ll return to this subject in a later podcast.

Conclusion

That’s all I have to say today on the subject of St Ignatius. Thank you to all of you who have joined me. I hope that you have found the podcast understandable and interesting.

Congratulations to all of you who have managed to stay listening to the end. I encourage you to listen again and to read the transcript which is available for free on the website www.catholicenglish.org. I especially encourage you to listen and read at the same time if possible, to make notes, to look up unfamiliar words and phrases in a dictionary, to comment, ask questions.

Where in the world are you? I see that people have already been checking out the website from the USA, India and Brazil! Why are you learning English? Maybe you’d like to make a short recording about your English learning that I could share in the podcast. It would be great to get some inspiration from other people who are learning English.



I'm aiming for a new podcast every two weeks, and with the help of Mary, the Holy Spirit and my guardian angel, I feel full of hope.

Goodbye for now, and God bless.