

What Does God Expect from Us?

LESSONS FROM IGNATIUS ON THE ROAD

by Edward W. Schmidt, SJ

Ten miles northwest of Rome, a weathered chapel sits at a point where two roads merge to make their way together into the city. Its façade is no match for the baroque splendors of Jesuit churches in the capital, just a door flanked by two barred windows with a high round window below the pitched roof. This is the chapel of La Storta.

Now just a few feet from a busy road, La Storta in the time of St. Ignatius was a rustic resting spot where a traveler could gather his thoughts and his prayers and perhaps his nerve before plunging into the rush of Rome. This is, in fact, exactly what Ignatius did in October 1547 before he and two friends went on ahead to see the pope on behalf of their small group of ten “friends in the Lord.”

Seven years earlier in Paris, the original group, filled with fervor and holy desires that their leader Ignatius had helped them articulate, had vowed to live an evangelical life committed to poverty and chastity. Besides that, desiring to live and work not only for Jesus but even where Jesus had, they also vowed to go to Jerusalem and live there serving others. Realists that they were, however, they stipulated that if Jerusalem



Engraving from an illustrated biography of Ignatius, early 1600s. “God the Father showed himself to him [Ignatius] as he prayed, commending him to his Son who was carrying the cross. Pronouncing the words “I will be propitious to you in Rome,” the Father took him under his protection.

became impossible, which it did because of war, they would ask the pope to send them where he judged the greatest need to be.

Thus Ignatius, Peter Faber, and James Laínez, set out to present themselves to Pope Paul III.

Ignatius was not, however, without fear, because two influential people with whom he had experienced misunderstandings were now in Rome. One of them was Dr. Pedro Ortiz, who thought that the charismatic Ignatius was distracting fellow students at the University of Paris from their studies and therefore challenged him. Now in Rome as a diplomat, Ortiz turned out to be a great friend and generous helper. The other, Cardinal Gian Pietro Carafa, never became a close friend of Ignatius; he did, however, become Pope Paul IV in 1555 and Ignatius served faithfully under him.

On his way to Rome, Ignatius had often prayed to the Virgin Mary that she would “place him with” her Son. Now at La Storta, about to face the future for himself and for his group, he again stopped to pray. His biographer, Luis Gonçalves da Camara, recorded Ignatius’s account of the event: “One day, a few miles before reaching Rome, he was at prayer in a church and experienced such a

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change and saw so clearly in his soul that God the Father placed him with Christ his son that he would not dare doubt it . . .”

The two companions did not see anyone except Ignatius, but one of them later reported on what Ignatius told him. Ignatius felt a change come over him, James Laynez reports, and saw a vision of God the Father with Jesus, who carried his cross. He then heard the Father say to Jesus that he wanted Jesus to take Ignatius as his servant, which Jesus did. The Father then said, “I will be favorable to you in Rome.” Ignatius rested full of consolation. He did not know how this “favorable” would play out and wondered if it might mean that the companions would suffer a great deal in Rome. Either way, he was still consoled because he knew God was directing him to whatever lay ahead. He and his friends were now companions of Jesus.

From this point on, Ignatius insisted that his group be called the Company of Jesus (in Latin, *Societas*, thus the English *Society*). But in a larger context, this mystical experience relates to our common Christian understanding that we can know what God expects of us or where God is leading us. And knowing that, we know the consolation of the faithful. Adversity may come our way, or perhaps great accomplishment. We may fail, or we may succeed. We may find disaster or triumph. As Ignatius’ First Principle and Foundation teaches, these do not matter, just as riches or poverty, health or sickness, long life or short life do not matter. What matters is that we be faithful servants of God, like Jesus our companion. And in doing so, we find our true way.

The vision of La Storta is a highly charged image for the Society of Jesus. Members of General Congregation 35 often referred to it when speaking of Jesuit mission and identity. It articulates our Christian trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide our way and in the consolation we experience when we follow the Spirit’s lead. ■



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Service & Ignatian Spirituality



For Teens: *iDive, iPlunge*

Six-day *iPlunge* July 20–25

The Jesuit Spiritual Center at Milford is sponsoring a service learning retreat for teens, a 6-day *iPlunge* July 20–25. The retreat will combine volunteer service in the Greater Cincinnati area with Ignatian study and prayer, and will offer 13- through 18-year-olds an opportunity to put faith into action. Retreatants will be housed at the Jesuit Spiritual Center and will spend their days alternating between work projects and service learning experiences at such helping organizations as Tender Mercies, Mary Magdalene House, and the Free Store Food Bank.

For more information, contact JSC youth directors Stephen and Angie Poat at (513) 248-3500, ext. 11, or email poat@jesuitspiritualcenter.com.

For Young Adults (20’s & 30’s)

New Arrival Open House, September 28

Join Charis ministries on Sunday, September 28 from 4:30–7:30 P.M. in downtown Chicago for a Catholic open house. This event is open to all who are recent college graduates, new to Chicago, or interested in finding places to learn about, share and experience their Catholic faith. Charis ministries and several young adult friendly parishes and organizations will be on hand to tell you exactly what they have to offer, and provide you with a free dinner.

For more information, call 773-508-3237 or e-mail charis@charisministries.org.



For Adults 50 and over



The Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC) offers men and women age 50 and over opportunities to serve the needs of people who are poor, to work for a more just society, and to grow deeper in the Christian faith by reflecting and praying in the Ignatian Tradition. IVC’s Cincinnati and Chicago Chapters welcome new members to begin serving the poor in September 2008.

For more information about joining the current 58 IVC members, please contact: Sam Schloemer (Cincinnati): 513-608-5551; sschloemer@ivcusa.org George Sullivan (Chicago): 773-975-6871; gsullivan@ivcusa.org

The national IVC office has 13 cities with over 250 volunteers: 888-831-4686; www.ivcusa.org