



... Conclusion ...

kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, at other moments, his soul was prey to sadness, for the thought of his lady, he thought of chivalric glory. In this way his soul would receive inspirations from God, and later inspirations from the world, the flesh or the devil. After these various movements passed through his soul, Ignatius would examine them. He could see that when he was moved by good inspirations, he was full of peace and resolve, but when he was enamored of earthly things, his soul was troubled and sad. Making this discovery within himself, Ignatius resolved to fight the thoughts that led him to worldliness and to follow those that led him to God. And so the beginning of Ignatius' conversion consisted in the discernment of spirits, a special gift from God that would make him an unsurpassed practical genius in the field of Apostolic labors.

His recovery complete, Ignatius left his home and made an all night vigil in a Church before the Blessed Virgin after the manner of the Christian knight. In the morning he left at Her feet his sword and set out for Manresa where a hermit dwelt. On his way, battling his punctilious vanity, he exchanged clothes with a beggar. He spent the first three days making a general confession of his whole life and remained there in a cave for over eight months. In those eight months, Ignatius underwent severe trials, fought bitter temptations and received extraordinary graces that were to transform him completely and were to be the seed bed of the Jesuit Order. The result of these experiences was the first draft of the famous *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. The Ignatian Exercises are universally recognized as most excellent means of discerning spirits and of learning to follow the inspirations of God.

Following this period, Ignatius spent a year as a pilgrim visiting the Holy Land. Upon returning to Spain, he began studying grammar, and in the free time gave the *Spiritual Exercises* to those who would hear him. He did this in more than one city and more than once was denounced to the Inquisition. He was acquitted each time, but with the resolve that not only did he need to know the Exercises by experience, he would have to learn them also by theology. This he did, and by the conclusion of his theological studies in Paris in 1534, he had formed the nucleus of the Company of Jesus, giving all of his first six companions the 30-Day *Spiritual Exercises*.

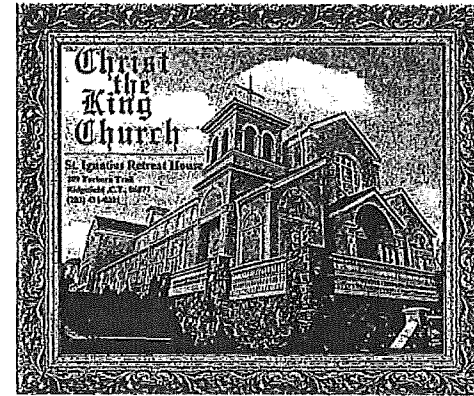
The Company of Jesus, or the Jesuits, rapidly became the elite shock troops to face the ravages of Protestantism. Their key weapon was the *Spiritual Exercises*. They were preached to the people in various forms, and to monks and prelates as well. In a short time the Jesuits were the fastest growing order the Church had seen and were making visible progress in stopping heresy and turning its impetus into the Catholic Reformation. Their work was so successful because it followed the principle of Divine Reform, return to the origins: return to the basics. The Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* are nothing more nor less than the Gospels organized to produce its supernatural effects in the soul through meditation and examination.

With the patronage of men like the Cardinal St. Charles Borromeo and St. Francis de Sales, the Ignatian Retreats were accepted universally and preached everywhere. The reforms of the Council of Trent added to the impetus and retreats became the generally accepted custom for the Catholic clergy. Later, Benedictines, Franciscans, Passionists and Redemptorists took up the work of retreats. By the 18th century, retreats and retreat houses were commonplace in the Catholic world.

The Ignatian Retreat is the retreat that is the most praised by the popes over the centuries. Pope Pius XI called St. Ignatius the "specialist in spiritual exercises" and listed Pope Paul III, Alexander VI, Benedict XIV and Leo XIII as those among his predecessors who had explicitly praised the *Spiritual Exercises*.



## Saint Ignatius Retreat House



Society of St. Pius X

THE HISTORY OF THE IGNATIAN RETREAT

By Fr. Timothy J. Pfeiffer, SSPX

The word "retreat" in its etymological meaning signifies a withdrawal. In Catholic parlance then, a retreat means a withdrawal from secular things in order to go to the supernatural, to leave the temporal in order to find the eternal, to sacrifice the human in order to obtain the divine. The whole of human history testifies to the fact that whenever God wished to make use of a man as a chosen instrument, that man had to "retreat" from the world and from his former mode of life, find God and become docile to his inspirations through this withdrawal and the inevitable asceticism or spiritual exercise this inevitably entailed. Such was the case of Abraham, who had to leave the "house of his father and his kindred." Such was true too of Moses, who was tempered by God in forty years of shepherding in the desert. It was true of the Apostles, who withdrew to the upper room for eight days under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This too was true of the Desert Fathers, the men who taught in word and example the essentials of Catholic spirituality. It was true of St. Benedict, St. Anthony of Padua and all others. A spiritual retreat of one kind or another always preceded the manifestations of grace in the servants of God.

The Retreat in the more formal sense of a place whither Christians hasten in order to spend a certain number of days in silence and spiritual exercises according to a set plan began with the monastic life. Men desirous to follow Christ by practicing the evangelical counsels left the world to enter monasteries where they labored in spiritual exercises. When monasteries were established and dotted the countryside of Europe, the Catholic laity would visit them for a brief period to consult with a holy monk, to follow prayers, meditations and holy reading.

### St. Ignatius and the Spiritual Exercises

The end of the Middle Ages was a time of many trials for the Church, a new age of the great Modern heresies. The end of the 1400s and the beginning of the 1500s were the seed bed of the loss of Faith of 1/3 of Europe including nearly all of England. The attack from the heretics of those days began from within. Their success was chiefly due to the indolence and decadence of Catholics who

## Parish Bulletin

209 Tackora Trail  
Ridgefield, CT 06877  
telephone: 203-431-0201  
fax: 203-431-0202



... continued ...

were, by and large, not living by their Catholic Faith. Bishops were often absent from their dioceses, concubinage among priests was not unheard of and many Monasteries had become worldly. God was to remedy this situation, as He so often does, by raising up a great saint and a great work to restore the ground lost by so much indifference and rebellion.

Accordingly, in 1491, a Spanish nobleman named Ignatius was born. Baptized and confirmed, he had become a worldly man devoted to a military career and to the pursuit of a lady of higher nobility. When duty placed him in Northern Spain to defeat the town of Pamplona against the invading French he found himself with far too few soldiers, and several senior officers suggesting surrender. Ignatius argued that it was better to die than to suffer the humiliation of surrender. A canon ball that broke his leg put him out of commission and without his leadership the town inevitably fell to the French.

After receiving care from the French, he was sent back home to the family castle to recover. Ignatius realized that the leg was not healing properly and would leave him with a limp and unsightly bump on his leg. He asked his doctors to fix it. They responded that they would have to break it again to repair it. Ignatius replied that they should go ahead and do it. With no anesthesia, he endured the pain without flinching. The results of the second try were no better than the first. Surely, if he were to gain fame and win the hand of the fair lady, such a blemish on his leg was unworthy. He demanded that the doctors try again, against their remonstrations. Once again, with stoic fortitude, he endured the pain. This too was unsuccessful. Still, he would not stand for the unsightly protrusion of a bone from his knee and he ordered it sawed off, enduring this too without anesthesia and with no expression of pain whatsoever. To fix his leg, he even tried putting weights on it to pull it longer so that he wouldn't limp, but all to no avail.

The boredom of being bed-ridden for a long time with a broken leg led him to ask for books to read. The good lady in charge was pious and she refused to give him the chivalric romances he requested. Instead, she gave him two books that were destined to change his life. The first was the Gospels. Ignatius picked them up, sensed his unworthiness, and read no further. He then picked up the second book, *The Golden Legend*, by a bishop of the Middle Ages, Jacques de Voragine. In this book he read of the exploits of the saints of God. He read of the conversion of great sinners who became great champions of the Faith, and who with the sword of the spirit fought against heresy and all forms of spiritual evil. He was deeply impressed by the mercy of God working powerful effects in the souls of so many men and women.

These stories stirred up emulation in his soul, if they did it, so could he! His chivalric and generous nature began turning over within itself the thought of leaving all things of the world to follow Christ and win the



... continued ...

were, by and large, not living by their Catholic Faith. Bishops were often absent from their dioceses, concubinage among priests was not unheard of and many Monasteries had become worldly. God was to remedy this situation, as He so often does, by raising up a great saint and a great work to restore the ground lost by so much indifference and rebellion.

Accordingly, in 1491, a Spanish nobleman named Ignatius was born. Baptized and confirmed, he had become a worldly man devoted to a military career and to the pursuit of a lady of higher nobility. When duty placed him in Northern Spain to defeat the town of Pamplona against the invading French he found himself with far too few soldiers, and several senior officers suggesting surrender. Ignatius argued that it was better to die than to suffer the humiliation of surrender. A canon ball that broke his leg put him out of commission and without his leadership the town inevitably fell to the French.

After receiving care from the French, he was sent back home to the family castle to recover. Ignatius realized that the leg was not healing properly and would leave him with a limp and unsightly bump on his leg. He asked his doctors to fix it. They responded that they would have to break it again to repair it. Ignatius replied that they should go ahead and do it. With no anesthesia, he endured the pain without flinching. The results of the second try were no better than the first. Surely, if he were to gain fame and win the hand of the fair lady, such a blemish on his leg was unworthy. He demanded that the doctors try again, against their remonstrations. Once again, with stoic fortitude, he endured the pain. This too was unsuccessful. Still, he would not stand for the unsightly protrusion of a bone from his knee and he ordered it sawed off, enduring this too without anesthesia and with no expression of pain whatsoever. To fix his leg, he even tried putting weights on it to pull it longer so that he wouldn't limp, but all to no avail.

The boredom of being bed-ridden for a long time with a broken leg led him to ask for books to read. The good lady in charge was pious and she refused to give him the chivalric romances he requested. Instead, she gave him two books that were destined to change his life. The first was the Gospels. Ignatius picked them up, sensed his unworthiness, and read no further. He then picked up the second book, *The Golden Legend*, by a bishop of the Middle Ages, Jacques de Voragine. In this book he read of the exploits of the saints of God. He read of the conversion of great sinners who became great champions of the Faith, and who with the sword of the spirit fought against heresy and all forms of spiritual evil. He was deeply impressed by the mercy of God working powerful effects in the souls of so many men and women.

These stories stirred up emulation in his soul, if they did it, so could he! His chivalric and generous nature began turning over within itself the thought of leaving all things of the world to follow Christ and win the