

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2022 C

“Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will. All that I am, and all that I possess, You have given to me. I surrender it all to you to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and I will desire nothing more.” Perhaps you know those words, a prayer written some 450 years ago by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits. I still remember coming across that prayer for the first time while in the seminary, and to me, it remains one of the ***gutsiest*** prayers in the whole treasury of the Church. To pray this from the heart is an act of faith and courage that rightly makes us pause and ask: am I truly ready to give God everything? What might hold me back? What am I afraid of losing, or missing, if I hand myself over to the Lord? Because faith is a journey, we will have to pray this – as I am sure Ignatius did – over and over again, throughout our lives. God is infinitely patient with our sincere searching, and He knows our weaknesses. But this remains our ideal – to give our lives to Jesus, as He gives His life for us, because only then do we truly experience joy.

People today often claim that they are spiritual but not religious ... that organized religion doesn't speak to them and they find more meaning in their own spiritual path. While a strong personal spirituality is important, it can also too easily become self-serving. Of course it is easier to make up our own spiritual path, to choose only those interests that don't ask too much, those obligations that don't really demand a sacrifice. That does not limit God, but it does limit what God can do in our lives. The purpose of the spiritual life is not to feel good about myself ... it is to know, love and serve God; and that will cost us something. A true spiritual life leads us to live for God and for others as well, going beyond our own comforts and preferences to try, day by day, to become more merciful like the Father.

God meets people in different ways. Isaiah's encounter with God's power was dramatic and mystical – a vision of the throne of God, surrounded by angels, with earthquake and fire and smoke. Paul, too, encountered the Risen Christ in a vision of blinding light and a voice of rebuke: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” On the other hand, Peter's meeting with Jesus was quite ordinary – out in the boat, fishing with friends. But the reaction of all three was the same: an overwhelming sense of unworthiness before God's holiness, the hallmark of a genuine encounter with God. ***“Woe is me, I am doomed!” “I am not fit to be called!” “Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man!”*** We remind ourselves of the same thing just before we approach Communion, using a Roman soldier's words when Jesus comes to his home to cure his son: ***“I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.”*** BUT – only say the word, only call, only heal me ... and I will go, I will do your work, I will put out into the deep water.

Serving others as Jesus does draws us out of ourselves, but ***precisely to draw out the best of ourselves***. Isaiah the prophet dares to say: “Here I am, send me!” Mary shows us the same courage: “Let it be done according to your word.” Jesus Himself teaches us to pray this way: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.” Those are easy words to say, but they are something like handing a blank check to God and saying: “Here you go ... You fill in the amount.” And thus we come back to St. Ignatius. This week, do some act of mercy or kindness for someone that stretches you, be it large or small. Along with that, ask for the same courage of St. Ignatius to learn, even if little by little, to pray as he did: ***“Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will. All that I am, and all that I possess, You have given to me. I surrender it all to you to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and I will desire nothing more.”***