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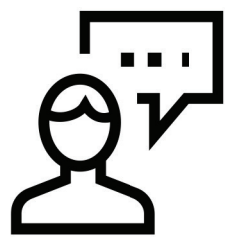


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VOLUME 01 - POST 04

**A Peep into the  
New Normal in  
Ignatius of Loyola**

Fr Joseph A. D'Mello, SJ



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# A Peep into the New Normal in Ignatius of Loyola



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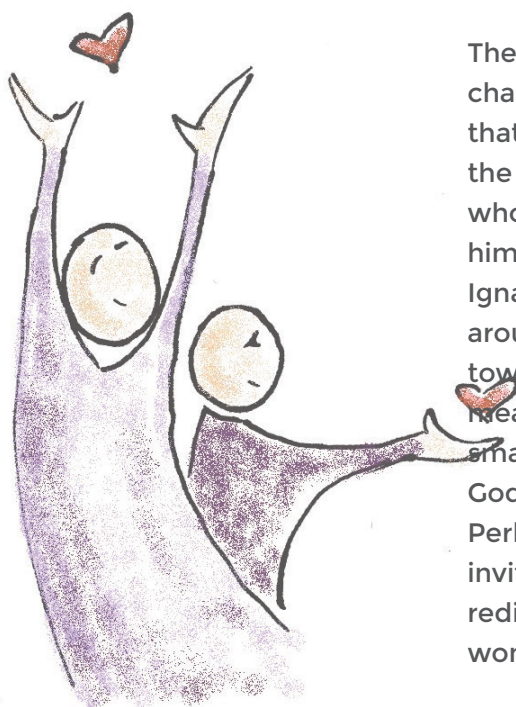
Fr Joseph A. D'Mello, SJ

The invisible virus that has devastated the entire world has made us realise how vulnerable and fragile we human beings are. This realisation that we are no more Masters of this world has compelled us to review our way of thinking, relating and living. Ignatius of Loyola who lived in the 16th century was infected by the invisible virus called the 'self-centredness' up to the age of twenty-six. The cannon ball that struck his leg shattered the dreams of a worldly career; but that was not the end of the dream of his life. God who intervened in his life through an apparent failure, a crisis, opened up another door that ushered in a new horizon in his life and enabled him to move from the 'old-normal' to the 'new normal'.

## A New Normal - God and Other Centredness

The very first paragraph of the Autobiography of Ignatius characteristically sums up the first twenty-six years of his life saying that he was a man of self-glory, name and fame. The last chapter of the Autobiography succinctly describes him as a God centred person who had ease in finding God. His deep familiarity with the Lord made him passionate about helping souls in order to glorify the Lord. As Ignatius' goal was higher than self, his meaning system revolved around God and neighbour. All his studies and activities were geared towards glorifying God by helping souls. Because of this 'new' meaning system, the entire world was opened to him and not just the small kingdom in Spain, and he was ready to go to any extent to serve God and his people as confirmed by the vision at La Storta.

Perhaps God is intervening into our life during this pandemic and inviting us to revisit our meaning system in order to hold on to him, to rediscover the meaning of our life, and continue to be men and women for and with others.



## A New Normal - The Inner World

As a knight, Ignatius' dream was to conquer his enemies in the external world. During his convalescence at Loyola, 'his interior eyes were opened a little' as he began to notice a bigger enemy, an invisible one, dwelling within him and influencing him to choose the culture of death. This led him to become aware of the presence of the two forces within him, of the need to have an insight into their operation and of the courage to choose life. Since he firmly believed that God spoke through one's interior movements, Ignatius insisted on employing the daily tool called consciousness examen to review one's life in order to lead a qualitative life.

Presently, as there is less activity in the external world due to the lockdown, it is good to explore our inner world and ponder over the language of God. The depressive environment all around can make us pessimistic filling our inner world with sadness, despair and hopelessness.

Here one needs to be alert and process the inner world contaminated by the toxic environment, lest one ends up making life destroying choices. Such processing of our inner world will contribute immensely towards leading a qualitative life.



# A New Normal - A New Way of Being Religious



The Church is a divine-human reality. During the time of Ignatius certain weaknesses, scandals and abuses had tarnished the image of the Church. As a result, many left the Church out of frustration and shame. But Ignatius remained faithful to the Church and he called the Holy Father as the Vicar of Christ on earth. Moreover, Ignatius called the fourth vow, the special obedience to the Pope, as 'our principle and main foundation.' Besides, the Jesuits were exempted from chanting the Divine Office in common and wearing a particular habit associated with the order. The Jesuit communities were *communitas ad dispersionem* meant to go and work anywhere. It was in sharp contrast with the religious communities of the time who lived, prayed, worked together in monasteries, venturing out very rarely.

The context of the pandemic invites us to pause and review our way of being religious today. The present crisis has the capability of making us inward looking religious living with fear and insecurity. Today some of us

are like the disciples on the way to Emmaus who were crestfallen at the death of Jesus. However, after their encounter with the Lord, they went back to Jerusalem as renewed disciples. We need openness and courage to review our life journey as religious with the Lord and perhaps there is a call to rediscover our identity as religious, our vocation and mission, to move from religiosity to spirituality, from superficiality to depth, from being exclusive to inclusive, and from being administrators to animators. In fact, we must heed to the call to go back to our 'Jerusalem', to the mission of God as renewed religious. Like the first companions of Ignatius who were close to the poor, today we need to walk with the migrants, the unemployed, the vulnerable, those who lack food and need to stand for their rights and be true witnesses to Jesus of the Gospels.





# A New Normal - A Contemplative in Action

Though the spirituality of Jesus was a holistic one, integrating body, mind and spirit, one observes in the Christian Spirituality of the 16th century, a duality between spirit and matter, soul and body, spiritual and temporal, contemplation and action, faith and life. As a consequence, contemplative life was extolled and active life was looked down upon. Ignatius instead of following the 'run away from the world' spirituality, found God in the busyness of life, found him labouring in every creature. It was a world affirming spirituality. This is seen particularly in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises where he calls every retreatant to ask for the grace 'to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things'. His enlightenment at river Cardoner enabled him to look at God-world-humans in a new way as an interconnected and interdependent reality. Though the term 'contemplative in action' was coined by Jerome Nadal, Ignatius was truly a contemplative in action. With this new insight, our every activity, though mundane, becomes a divine one when it is done with the intention of serving one's neighbour and glorifying God.

The pandemic has taught us a hard lesson to look at the world as one whole, as interconnected and interdependent reality:

God-cosmos-humans. In the context of places of worship being closed down, we are invited to find God within each of us, in our families, and in suffering. The incarnate God calls us to co-labour with him by extending our hands to those who are infected and affected by the Covid 19. This we must consider as divine work, a worship when we partner with God and others in the work of transforming the world.

St Ignatius who chose the path of new normal with hope and courage, may inspire us to choose the new normal with a spirit of openness so as to be better instruments of peace, justice and reconciliation in today's world.



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