

St. Ignatius Loyola Feast Day Reflection (based on Lk. 14:25-33)

July 31, 2020

By Fr. Thomas Chillikulam, SJ

Before I begin this reflection let me wish you all a happy feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola! The hyperbolic statement of “hating” one’s family, with which the gospel reading begins, is understood, obviously, not as disliking or hating one’s family but as putting Christ first and considering everything else as secondary. This could seem a hefty and impractical demand for those of us who love our families and value familial bonds. If we understand this demand of Jesus merely as renouncing family, relationships, and wealth to follow him, only a few super-spiritual Christians can be following Christ. But that is not what it is about. In fact, the focal point of “hating” one’s family is not as much about giving up the world or turning away from loved ones as reaching out to or embracing a wider world. A true disciple of Jesus enlarges the very understanding of family to go beyond the confines of biological, socio-cultural, racial, linguistic, or national affiliations and relations to embrace everyone as father, mother, sister, brother...

The life of Jesus and the lives of many great saints show how detachment from their family meant not exactly an aversion to life in the family but an openness to a wider web of relationships. Well known to all of us is the story of St. Ignatius of Loyola leaving behind his family, a career in nobility, personal ambition, the woman he desired, and great comforts; exchanging his sword for a walking stick, and costly robes for a beggar’s tunic. But less known is how his renunciation resulted in a broadening of the horizon of his world and relationships. A few examples will suffice. At the founding of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius wanted all Jesuits to get out of their socio-cultural comfort zones and see the world of the other. Most of the first companions of St. Ignatius, including Francis Xavier, were of nobility and graduates from the University of Paris. In the initial days of their ministry Ignatius send all his companions to attend to the sick in the Roman hospices. Roman hospices of that time were places of misery where the abandoned and destitute of the city were kept. The scholarly Jesuits attending the Council of Trent were told to go out of the Vatican at the end of the day and teach the children roaming the streets. Ignatius’ area of action did not confine to Europe. Within months of the founding of the Jesuits, he sent Francis Xavier to India. Ignatius considered people in far off lands, whom he had never seen, as much a part of the family as the people he knew in Europe. This is what made the early Jesuits to exclaim: “The World is our House”. In one of his letters to Francis Xavier in India, St. Ignatius strongly admonished Xavier for refusing to admit local Christians to the Jesuit order. Again, a testimony to how, for Ignatius, leaving his family entailed not a rejection of familial affections but an openness to overcome racial-cultural prejudices and to embrace the entire humanity as God’s children.

As I reflect on the significance of Ignatius leaving his home, my own story of renouncing my family comes to mind. Leaving behind my biological family as an 18-year-old, 11 siblings, parents, grandparents, and leaving for North India thousands of miles away to join the Jesuits was painful; getting adjusted to the new North Indian culture, language and people was indeed hard. But while I had to distance from my biological family and cultural setting, my horizon of relationships expanded. Again, leaving the familiar shores in India and coming to USA 5 years ago was challenging. However, the more

I came out of the spaces of my comfort, the more am I able to see people as part of a family, no matter what their culture, color or nationality is.

A follower of Jesus must model his message to love one's neighbor and immediately know that my neighbor is not constricted to geographical, cultural, racial, or religious boundaries. A follower of Jesus must love and care for own family and country, and yet know that the sense of "mine" must expand to embrace every human being, everywhere. We are living through highly charged atmosphere in America these days. The centuries old practices of racism and racial discrimination is forcefully challenged by a growing number of people today. Any violation of the inherent dignity of the human person based on race, nationality or language is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus. The gospel calls for a globalization of brotherhood and sisterhood. A disciple of Jesus cannot condone systems that deny justice and equality and cannot remain muted on the sidelines of people's struggle for dignity. Christian faith demands a practice of empathy that enable us to stand where the other person stands, and to feel the pain the other person feels. We as a university hold high the Ignatian ideals of 'Persons for others' and "Finding God in Everything"(and in Everyone), because we draw from Jesus' vision of the Kingdom where nobody is the "other", but everyone belongs as one family of God. May the great example and the powerful intercession of St. Ignatius of Loyola, our patron saint, help us to live this ideal the best way we can, as we give and receive education in Loyola University, Chicago. Again, I wish you all a happy feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola!

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By Ginny McCarthy, MDiv, MPH

Director, Health Sciences Ministry

It turns out, it's always a tough time to be a prophet. And what is more, there seems to exist a perpetual need for just the type.

In today's first reading, we hear from the prophet Jeremiah. By definition, a prophet is appointed by God to speak truth to the world, to a community, to leadership when the path deviates from the pursuit of God. Prophets denounce injustice; they speak counter cultural truths. They are often unpopular. Prophets remind us that, through word and deed, action and inaction, we are in a constant state of choice—either choosing to follow God, to give freely and fully of ourselves to be who we were created to be and to move through the world as vessels of God's love OR choosing against these options. And in this moment, Jeremiah is not finding his prophetic role to be easy nor particularly rewarding, but he also admits that he cannot stop—he must denounce the violence and the troubling situation of his times. Jeremiah is growing tired, and I can't help but think that you, that we, might also feel tired right about now.

And to what do we owe this fatigue? This exhaustion? Amidst a global pandemic, the call to live prophetically can feel both urgent and relentless as we hold a deep commitment to personal safety and the safety of the community. And perhaps we feel ill-prepared. Without a background in contact tracing, risk management, or epidemiology, we are bound by the ethical obligation to keep a running tally of who we have seen, where, for how long, and ready to report out, sometimes several times a day, to others in order to maintain a base of honesty and transparency and keep us all as safe as possible. And these conversations are not easy.

Additionally, we know that this pandemic has forced itself upon vulnerable populations, particularly people and communities of color, as the burden of disease follows deeply entrenched fault lines of systemic injustice. And in the wake of the death of George Floyd and so many other lives taken senselessly and unjustly, we are called to listen, to learn, to do the work needed in order to begin to reverse deep-seated racial injustice and systemic oppression in various and intersecting forms. This is hard work. This work often comes with a personal cost. We likely disagree with friends and loved ones about both cause and solution. We grow tired. We succeed and we struggle to varying degrees over time. But we do well to continue to ask the question, what does it mean to live prophetically during these times? What has it meant for you?

For just a moment here, I'd invite you to call to mind a time during these past several months when you felt called to live prophetically, when you denounced injustice, when you moved against the cultural grain, when you felt tired.

And as you consider these experiences, and as we celebrate today the Feast of Saint Ignatius Loyola, I'd like to ask: was St. Ignatius a prophet? Well, perhaps not technically. He aspired to emulate the selflessness of the saints in their response to the call to follow Jesus, our greatest prophet in Christianity. He founded the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, on the basic premise that we were created to love God above all things and, by extension, to love others as also created in the image and likeness of God. We heard this very exhortation from St. Paul just moments ago in our second reading.

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "whatever you do, do for the greater glory of God". This notion of working for the greater glory of God serves as the first principle and foundation for the Jesuits.

You don't have to move through the Jesuit world for long before becoming quite familiar with the phrase "for the greater glory of God;" this Jesuit charism is all around us. You'll likely recognize it in its Latin form, too: Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, or it's shorthand: AMDG. These Latin words literally hold up, and also nearly embrace, the Loyola family crest, the crest of our University. And what could be more appropriate? What could more fully describe that to which we are called as students, as educators, as people of good will, than to live for the greater glory of God? And while our attention is still on the Loyola family crest, I'll spend just a half of a minute more drawing your attention to the wolves and the kettle featured there. The Loyola family is suggested to have been so generous that they even made sure the wolves surrounding their estate had food to eat. Formed by this familial practice of generosity, through his teaching and practice, and through his very life of service to God and others, St. Ignatius pivots on material generosity to embrace a vow of poverty, carrying forward a generosity of spirit, or the urging to assume the most positive of intentions of all whom we encounter. I'd like to invite us again now to take a moment to reflect. Perhaps you'll call to mind a time where you have been generous in the past months? When have you been the recipient of generosity?

And in honor of St. Ignatius, may we hold these very principles as those which guide us into this new academic year, through the remainder of 2020, into greater pursuit of racial justice, and into our postpandemic existence. In times that can feel endlessly difficult and supremely important—times where true prophets are needed—may we dig deep into our wells of goodness, time and time again, for a spirit of generosity as we continue to navigate these tumultuous and tiring times, attempting to live prophetically, so that we may live fully and passionately for the greater glory of God.