

Reflection for Sunday 27B, 3rd October 2021

Monday marks the close of the season of creation of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. As Glasgow waits to host COP26, this year's season of creation has had a particular focus, with so much uncertainty and insecurity for people across of the world. Peoples' homes and places of employment seem to be threatened particularly on the Spanish island of La Palma where residents have been evacuated from their homes. The pictures transmitted via television and the internet are both tragic and emotional for the residents of this island. We are reminded yet again, how mother nature can cause chaos and havoc to our contemporary world. The implications for local industries which have already suffered, as a result of the pandemic, wait to be seen for the residents of the island. As people of faith, we search for answers to these difficult questions that the contemporary world seeks to find.

Seeking answers to many of life's questions are part of life. However, if we were to look at history, we will discover that humanity has always been trying to answer life's questions, but it is just more conscious of it in the digital era. The Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, is currently celebrating the 500th anniversary of St. Ignatius' cannonball experience. It proved to be a significant turning point in his life. The pandemic has become for the whole world, a cannonball experience that has changed our outlook on life and has turned the world upside down. The forthcoming COP26 meeting in Glasgow has the potential to be the world's cannonball experience for creation and for care of mother earth. We wait to see how world leaders, dignitaries and leaders of religious faiths across the globe will use this meeting to address a post-pandemic world whose effects are still to be felt in the long term. St. Ignatius' time of reflection caused him to write "the Spiritual Exercises," and how to find God in all things. Today, we find ourselves in Ignatius' shoes after a global pandemic. These words from Pedro Arrupe may be for us a moment to reflect on the Pandemic, the season of creation and the forthcoming COP26 meeting.

"Ignatius's conversion led him, not to give up the ideal of service, but to find a new "lord". During the first phase of his conversion, he had in mind to serve the Lord in a way that was still worldly – not to say belligerent and competitive! – "St. Francis did this therefore I have to do it." It is only later, through a graced masterpiece of introspection and discernment, that he takes apart and analyses all the different elements that have combined to form this ideal. Ignatius purifies his idea of service and then proceeds to build his whole spirituality on the foundation of this purified concept – which becomes the first principle and foundation of the Exercises: "Human beings are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord."

For Ignatius, service of the Creator is axiomatic – there is simply no call to justify or prove it. It is the natural condition of "the creature": he is created "for," that is to say for a purpose which binds him to the One who gives him his very existence. Two elements of service progressively develop in the dynamic of the Exercises: service in love (the final contemplation in the Exercises is precisely aimed at seeking love), and the person one serves out of love: God the divine majesty, the Three Divine Persons, Christ in his Incarnation, his passion and in the glory of his resurrection.

All the Exercises will be based on the concept of service in one way or another, the words "service" or "to serve" will appear fifty times. Even Christ's relationship to the Father is seen as one of service. For Ignatius, the service of God is the criterion of discernment in the ordering of one's life. "The reason, the retreatant wants to retain anything will be solely the service, honour and glory of the Divine Majesty." Service is an unconditional attitude. "The retreatant should enter upon the Exercises with magnanimity and generosity towards his Creator and Lord, and offer him his entire will and liberty, that his divine majesty may dispose of him and all he possesses according to his most holy will." This service of God disposes the retreatant" for the way in which he can better serve God in the future.