

8th August 2020

Spirituality

**“Each day I bestowed too much time in the garden
and thereby was worse able to perform spiritual duties.”**

Margaret Hoby, Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, 6 April 1605

Saint Ignatius of Loyola was a Basque Catholic priest and theologian, born in 1491. He co-founded the religious order, *The Society of Jesus*, better known as The Jesuits, and is remembered as a talented spiritual director, recording his method of spiritual discipline in a celebrated treatise called “Spiritual Exercises”. These were a simple set of meditations, prayers and other mental exercises, published in 1548, to guide Christians to a deeper spiritual life. He died in Rome in 1556 and was made a Saint in 1622.

The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola from the 16th century have lost none of their effectiveness several centuries later in a society vastly different from his. They remain an important framework for spiritual direction, clarification of service and purpose and the discipline of a relationship with God for many people I know. But this should not come as a surprise. Our need for a closeness to God, having a better understanding of the meaning of service and a discipline of prayer are not, and cannot be, defined by time and circumstance.

There is much of our lives which gets in the way of our spiritual growth, from “too much time in the garden” for Lady Margaret Hoby in 1605, to all that deflects us from thinking about deeper things in 2020. Saint Ignatius of Loyola still has much to teach us. We could do well, therefore, to start by utilising the best known Ignatian prayer. For in these few lines we have all we need for our spiritual nurture and growth.

A prayer for today

Teach us, Good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deservest;

To give and not to count the cost;

To fight and not to heed the wounds;

To toil and not to seek for rest;

To labour and not to ask for any reward

Save that of knowing that we do Thy will.

(Ignatius of Loyola, ‘Prayer for Generosity’, 1548)

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