

Philippine Province Celebration of the Feast of St Ignatius Loyola  
Sunday, 31 July 2010

Homily by Mark Raper SJ

*Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
Psalm 1  
1 Timothy 1:12-17  
Luke 9:18-26*



‘...I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him...’ Dt. 30

‘...For whoever would save their life, will lose it; and whoever loses their life for my sake, will save it...’ Luke 9

Our readings on this feast of our founder Ignatius Loyola, a person of contemplation, courage and creativity, are about decision and about mission. The decision concerns saying ‘no’ to the self that is focused on itself: the surface self, the small self, that fearful, insecure self. Yet by contrast there is the sacred, unique, individual self, the person created and sustained in life by God, loved as a son and daughter, whom Jesus wants to be saved. Ignatius’ gift to the Church was about this choice: how to know the will of God in our lives: how to make the decision that God wants, the best decision in our lives. Freed from the small, insecure self, one is ready for mission. The will of God, is that we choose life. How can we do that in the small decisions and in the large decisions of our lives? How can we become free for mission?

This is not just a Jesuit feast. Ignatius is a saint of the Church, a gift to all. He is as much ‘owned’ by congregations of Ignatian spirit, by the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, by the Christian Life Communities, by the alumni/ae of Ignatian schools, by members of Jesuit parishes. When he wrote the Spiritual Exercises, the guidebook on how to make a decision for life, Ignatius was a layperson. This feast of the Church is for all who share the Ignatian vision and his universal mission. ‘We must be global Christians, with a global mission, because our God is a global God.’

We Jesuits do not join a province, we join the universal Society. Our mission is beyond frontiers. Our God who calls us is beyond frontiers. Our entrance hymn revealed our international character with verses sung in Korean and Cambodian. Here today you may meet Jesuits from at least 20 countries. Our last General Congregation 35 asked us to consider our mission in a new context, a call to new frontiers:

Serving Christ’s mission today means paying special attention to its *global* context. This context requires us to act as a universal body with a universal mission, realising, at the same time, the radical diversity of our situations. It is as a worldwide community – and,

simultaneously, as a network of local communities – that we seek to serve others across the world. GC35 D2 #20

Thirty years ago exactly, 1981, Pedro Arrupe, then General of the Society, was here on campus to celebrate a Mass just like this, in thanksgiving for the first arrival of Jesuits in the Philippines 400 years before. Arrupe looked and acted remarkably like his passionate and energetic Basque predecessor, Ignatius. This was to be his last visit outside Rome. After Manila, he had one more stop. On August 6, the Feast of the Transfiguration, he celebrated in Thailand with Jesuits serving the refugees. August 6 is also Hiroshima Day. Don Pedro had been right there in Hiroshima in 1945 when the bomb exploded. For him, the refugee crisis was like Hiroshima, not only because of the hundreds of thousands of victims, but because each explodes on the imagination of the world. You feel the same with the Japanese tsunami, Cyclone Ondoy, and now with the current famine in the Horn of Africa. These gigantic tragedies touch our hearts and set before us a choice. How can we possibly express the compassion we feel in our hearts? Don Pedro gave an example of reading the 'signs of the times'. He responded to the refugee crisis of his time, he claimed, 'as Ignatius would'.

Many Jesuits from other parts of Asia Pacific were here then. I was present and I met Don Pedro at Fr Bill McGarry's office in Santa Ana. There and then he assigned me to work with the Jesuit Refugee Service which he had set up just a few months earlier. So for the next 20 years, refugees were my life. First I was based here in Asia Pacific and then during the 1990s in Rome. JRS became engaged directly in almost every situation of forced displacement of people over those years, Cambodia, Myanmar, Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia, Mozambique, El Salvador, and Colombia... The Society's missions in Cambodia, Myanmar, Rwanda, Timor Leste, grew because of the foundations laid by the Jesuits who lived for years with the ones suffering the ravages of conflict.

May I tell you about one refugee I met in Pulau Galang, Indonesia, which I visited soon after Fr Arrupe gave me this mission. Nguyen Thi Lan (not her real name) and her husband had resolved to flee Vietnam, but when the boat they had prepared was due to sail, she realized she was pregnant. They decided that the husband should go ahead with one son. When he arrived safely in Malaysia after a few days journey, he sent word for her to follow after her delivery. She took a passage with (what today we call) a 'people smuggler', together with her sister, a daughter of 18 months and her baby. But this boat was poorly prepared. It broke down and drifted for many days under a torrid sun. Lan had not brought provisions and the boat captain would not share his. One by one her daughter, her sister and others on the boat died. Finally her baby succumbed. When they touched shore only Nguyen Thi Lan and the captain survived.

In the refugee camp, her only thought was to take revenge on the boat captain by killing him, whether by hiring louts to bash him, by stabbing him herself at night, or by poison. She spoke frequently to the camp's Jesuit chaplain, Fr Gildo, an Italian former missionary in Vietnam, about this. After some weeks' absence, he saw her coming to him with a changed face. 'I am ready to forgive him,' she told Fr Gildo. 'Very well, I give you absolution, and then God forgives you.' 'No,' she insisted, 'Everyone knows I blame him for the death of my sister and two children so I want everyone to know that I forgive him.'

Many people, whether Christian or Buddhist came to the Sunday Mass. The two stood in front of all. 'I forgive you,' she said, in all simplicity. Try to imagine the mixture of emotions. Imagine the liberation for him. Imagine how she felt. She was rid of a weight, not yet the sorrow of loss, but at least of the obsession of blame. Imagine too the impact on the community of 20,000 refugees, all of

whom have done something of which they are ashamed during their flight, leaving their parents or their children, leaving their country, the future they had dreamed of, the graves and spirits of their ancestors.

This encounter with Nguyen Thi Lan and many like her inspired me through those 20 years with JRS and indeed to the present. These encounters compel us to contemplation; the experiences of such people undergird our courage; the extremity of their needs inspires our creativity. (By the way she was reunited with her husband and son, they had more children, and they are settled in Sydney.) Thirty years later, JRS, whose motto and method is to ‘accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees’, is at work in some 60 countries, directly serving over half a million refugees and displaced people. It is one of the supra-national Jesuit works to which every province contributes, joined by people and institutions from around the world inspired by the same Ignatian mission.

In face of the enormity of the challenge, and so many prior commitments, how do we choose? Whom shall we serve? Pedro Arrupe faced this question – the question posed by our readings today – with the criteria given us by Ignatius. Where is the greater need? What will give the greater fruit? What is more urgent? Where do others not go? What will benefit the greater number? Prefer spiritual benefits over material. (Const. 623) Answering these questions we chisel out a shape for our decisions. They are the yardstick we know as the *magis*.

Jesuit Refugee Service is another example of the Ignatian mission, a mission of the head, the heart and the hands. It expresses our traditional inspiration in a modality appropriate to our times. Pedro Arrupe spoke for us all when he said, in connection with JRS, ‘The plight of the world so deeply wounds our sensibilities as Jesuits that it sets the inmost fibres of our apostolic zeal a-tingling.’ One Jesuit commentator wrote, ‘Everything that injects the poison of the present into such a tradition is what saves it from inertia and ossification.’

There are three guiding principles for JRS. First, there is *accompaniment* – being with and sharing the lives of those people on the edge of humanity; simply listening ‘to the unheard, to the softly spoken’. Secondly, there is *service* offered without discrimination: responding to human need without regard to creed, culture or colour. A third element is *advocacy* – enabling refugees and displaced persons to find their voice before the governments and institutions that control their lives. For who else will speak, plead their cause, or keep their hope alive?

In today’s gospel, Jesus reaches a turning point. He has been preaching the good news by word and deed. The time has come to confront the temple hierarchy in Jerusalem and to face the consequences. Is he to journey alone, or are his disciples ready to take this path with him? He invites them to choose. Once Peter chooses in the name of all he is given a mission. The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola put into relief this same choice that is already before us in our lives. Can we see him in the people we meet along the way, such as the displaced and the outcast, and can we accompany him in them? Can we be their servant like him? Can we join them in seeking justice?

Ignatian education is a formation for decision and for mission: education of the head, the heart and the hands. Of course, education’s core business is the mind: education in competence and critical thinking. But in Ignatian pedagogy reflection is central. That is, pausing and digging deeper, allowing meaning to surface from human experience. That makes the difference. That kind of critical thinking should often have you testing the strength of public opinion, asking: What is behind a ‘*wang-wang*’

culture? What are the root causes of mis-spending and corruption? Why am I so fortunate when others go without?

Second, Ignatian education is education of the heart. We want our students first of all to know where their heart is, to become *large-hearted, whole-hearted*, and to *speak from the heart* in truth and with integrity; to own that their *heart's desire* is to love and serve their God, a God discovered most immediately in our brothers and sisters – especially in those who are the least, the lost or the last.

Third, education of the hands: this surely includes those psychomotor skills used in art, music and sport. Beyond these, Ignatian education prizes *generous hands* that put gifts and talents at the service of others; *strong hands* that will take up the fight to uphold justice when delayed or denied; *compassionate hands* that will welcome and tend those who, in their need, have the greatest claim on us.

For all these reasons, our Ignatian and our Jesuit mission is a universal mission that looks both to those who are near and those beyond our shores: ‘a worldwide community – and, simultaneously, as a network of local communities – that ...seek(s) to serve others across the world’

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