

## We can all do more for God, humanity

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

It should come as no surprise that many of history's great saints were controversial figures in their day. Individuals who attempt new ventures often provoke defensive and even hostile reactions from those with a vested interest in the status quo.

St. Ignatius of Loyola (feast day, July 31) is one of those great, innovating saints whose own life as well as the lives of his followers were marked by controversy.

Born in 1491 in the Basque region of Spain, he initially pursued a career at court and in the military. It was while recovering from battle wounds that he experienced a radical religious conversion. Soon thereafter he began to write his famous Spiritual Exercises, which have been used ever since as the basis of 30-day retreats and various forms of spiritual direction.

But his fresh way of looking at the faith seemed suspiciously heretical to those with a narrower range of vision. While at the University of Alcalá, he incurred the wrath of the Inquisition of Toledo, and was imprisoned for 42 days before being eventually exonerated.

Ignatius's strong personality and obvious gift for spiritual discernment attracted an original nucleus of nine fellow students at the University of Paris. Together with him, they took vows of chastity and poverty, and made a promise to work in the Holy Land.



### ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

That promise proved impossible to keep when the outbreak of war between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire prevented their eastward passage.

They decided instead to place themselves at the service of the pope, who in 1540 approved them as a new religious order, the Society of Jesus, popularly known as the Jesuits. Over his objections, Ignatius was elected the order's first general.

Upon his death in 1556 there were about one thousand members. By 1615 there were about 16,000, administering 450 high schools and universities and 55 seminaries. By 1773, there were about 22,600 members, with about 670 schools and 175 seminaries.

Over the course of his life, Ignatius had produced not only the Spiritual

Exercises but also the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, an autobiography, and almost 6,000 letters. His writings conveyed an extraordinary capacity for spiritual discernment and a remarkable sense of balance, particularly between contemplation and action, feeling and reasoning, prayer and service to others.

His advice to his companions and to those who sought him out for spiritual direction sounded a constant refrain: "find God in all things." It is a distinctively Catholic insight because it is so explicitly sacramental: the invisible, spiritual God is accessible to everyone in the visible material world of humanity and nature. We have only to look, and then to respond.

Ignatius's vision, at once expansive and integrated, shaped his rapidly growing Society of Jesus. Jesuits quickly established themselves among the ranks of the church's leading theologians (and they remain there today). In the 17th century, for example, the Society was in the forefront of the fight against Jansenism, a largely French religious movement that stressed moral austerity in contrast with the Jesuits' more pastorally realistic approach.

Their prominent success not only in theological controversy but also in missionary work created many enemies as well as admirers. Their innovating work in China, where they adapted Christian practices to Chinese culture and religious customs under Father Matteo Ricci's pioneering leadership, elicited strenuous opposition from the newly arrived Spanish Dominicans and

Franciscans.

In South America, the Jesuits stood firmly on the side of the poor and the powerless against those who would enslave and exploit them. The film "The Mission" is a compelling portrayal of their brave work among the Guarani Indians in Paraguay. The Jesuits' behavior infuriated the Portuguese slave traders and Spanish entrepreneurs and led eventually to the Society's suppression by Pope Clement XIV, a Franciscan, in 1773. (Pope Pius VII, a Benedictine, reinstated them in 1814.)

Jesuit spirituality, as reflected in the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions, is both thoroughly traditional and modern. Like the Gospels, it places Christ always at the center.

Like Catholic social teaching, it views service to others as a form of collaboration with God for the well-being of the human family and of the world itself.

It assumes, with Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, that we can truly discern God's presence and activity in the "signs of the times," that is, in history's ordinary events. It is a matter again of "finding God in all things."

In the spirit of the Christ who bids us "be perfect as (our) heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48), Jesuit spirituality invites us always to do "more" (the Ignatian "magis") for God and humanity.

In the end, a truly Christian faith is a "faith that does justice" — a theme that is at the heart of the Society of Jesus today.

## End of worship marks beginning of service

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 10:38-42; (R1) Genesis 18:1-10; (R2) Colossians 1:24-28.

In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus told a lawyer what loving neighbor meant by the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells us what loving God means. We love our neighbor by doing for them; we love God by letting God do for us — that was why Jesus rebuked Martha and championed Mary.

Sunday's readings offer two beautiful domestic scenes: one in a tent (R1) and one in a house (R3).

The first domestic scene is about Abraham and Sarah, who are visited by three strangers. It was the hottest time of day — probably siesta time. I remember once in Rome tramping the streets in the afternoon. No one was around; no stores, no shops were opened. It was siesta time. Italians have a saying that the only two things on the street at siesta time are *cani e Americani* — dogs and Americans.

Abraham would have been perfectly within the time's custom to let the visitors go on their way. He did not, how-



### A WORD FOR SUNDAY

ever, for hospitality was Abraham's badge. He insisted that the strangers rest and dine with him. When they agreed, Abraham rushed to Sarah and excitedly asked her to bake bread. And what happened after he prepared a banquet for the strangers? One of the visitors turned out to be God.

God doesn't need a temple to visit us, nor a lofty mountain. All He needs is kindness, hospitality, and love on our part toward others. He found these in

Abraham and Sarah's tent so He blessed them with what their hearts had so long desired: a child. But more, this child was to be the ancestor of the Messiah Himself. So often God blesses God-fearing parents with vocations.

The second domestic scene is a picture of Mary and Martha's home. To this home, God again came, not as a stranger, but as a dear friend. He came not to work any miracle, but to teach a wonderful lesson — namely, that women are equal to men.

Martha's complaint about her sister not helping her had thousands of years of tradition in it. In the ancient world, a woman's place was not only in the home, but in the background in the home. Only men could sit as disciples at the feet of great masters, like Jesus. Never in ancient history did women do that with the exception of some, like Sappho, Aspasia (mistress of Pericles), Portia (wife of Brutus). That was man's place. So Martha complained to Jesus when Mary sat at His feet.

But Jesus liberated women by remarking to Martha, "Leave her alone! Mary has as much right to sit at my feet and listen to me as any man."

In today's homes we often find two temperaments that often cause misun-

derstanding: the active and the contemplative; as well as the Marthas who want to do and the Marys who want to listen, to think and to pray. Both are needed in homes and in the church: those whose work is prayer and those who work at prayer. Both serve Christ.

This reminder appeared after the listing of Masses in a church bulletin: "The end of worship, the beginning of service." At worship we meet Christ. In service to others we wait on Christ. Church services are meant to end in service. Thus Mass concludes with the command: "The Mass is ended, go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

To serve is to love Christ in others: in strangers, as Abraham and Sarah did, and in friends, as Mary and Martha did. And this service can so often be done within the home.

Lord of all pots and pans and things,  
Since I've no time to be  
A saint by doing lovely things,  
Or watching late with Thee,  
Or dreaming in the  
dawnlight,  
Or storming heaven's gates,  
Make me a saint by getting  
meals  
And washing up the plates.

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