

***Address of His Holiness Pope Francis  
to the 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation  
of the Society of Jesus***

General Curia of the Society of Jesus  
Monday, 24 October 2016

*Editor's note: The following is a transcript of the address as given by the Holy Father. Comments that were not in the prepared text but added extemporaneously in the Aula are shown in italics and set between brackets.*

My dear Brothers and Friends in the Lord, [*Good morning,*]

While I was praying about what to say to you today, a fond memory came to me of the last words Blessed Paul VI said to us at the opening of our 32nd General Congregation: “Così, così, fratelli e figli. Avanti, *in Nomine Domini. Camminiamo insieme*, liberi, obbedienti, uniti nell'amore di Cristo, per la maggior gloria di Dio”<sup>1</sup>.

Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI also encouraged us “to walk in a manner worthy of the vocation to which we are called”<sup>2</sup> (cf. Eph 4:1), and, “in the ecclesial and social context that marks the beginning of this millennium, ... to continue on the path of this mission in full fidelity to your original charism. As my Predecessors have said to you on various occasions, the Church needs you, relies on you and continues to turn to you with trust, particularly to reach those physical and spiritual places which others do not reach or have difficulty in reaching”<sup>3</sup>. To walk together — free and obedient — moving toward the margins of society where no one else reaches, “under the gaze of Jesus and looking to the horizon which is the ever greater glory of God, who ceaselessly surprises us”<sup>4</sup>. As Saint Ignatius reminds us, a Jesuit is called “to think and to live in any part of the world where there is hope for greater service of God and help of souls” [*Constitutions*, 304]. The fact is that “for the Society, the world must be our house”, as Nadal used to say<sup>5</sup>.

Saint Ignatius wrote to Francis Borgia about the criticism made by the Jesuits who were called “angelic” (Oviedo and Onfroy), [*a beautiful story,*] because they were saying that the Society was insufficiently founded and needed more grounding in the spirit: the spirit that guides them, Ignatius wrote, “ignores the state of things in the Society which are always *in fieri*,

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<sup>1</sup> PAUL VI, *Address to the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, 3 December 1974. [“This is the way, this is the way, brothers and sons. Forward, *in Nomine Domini!* Let us walk together, free, obedient, united in the love of Christ, for the greater glory of God”. (Editor’s note)]

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily, Mass at the opening of the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, 2 September 1983.

<sup>3</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the participants of the 35<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, 21 February 2008.

<sup>4</sup> FRANCIS, *Homily, Liturgical Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Jesus*, Church of the Gesù, 3 January 2014.

<sup>5</sup> MNadal V, 364-365.

except for what is absolutely necessary”<sup>6</sup>. I rather like Ignatius’ way of seeing everything - except for what is absolutely essential - as constantly developing (*in fieri*), because it frees the Society from all kinds of paralysis and wishful thinking.

What is necessary and essential is the *Formula of the Institute*, which we should keep constantly before our eyes after looking to God our Lord: “the nature of this Institute which is a pathway to God”. This is the way it was for the first companions, just as they foresaw it would be “for those who will follow us along this path”. In this way, whether it be poverty or obedience or the dispensation from certain obligations such as praying in choir: all these things are neither demands nor privileges, but rather aids to the mobility of the Society, so that its members may be available “to run in the path of Christ Our Lord” (*Constitutions.*, 582), having, thanks to their vow of obedience to the Pope, “more certain direction from the Holy Spirit” (*Formula of the Institute 1550*, 3). The *Formula* contains Ignatius’ insight, and its essence is what accounts for the *Constitutions*’ insistence on always keeping in mind the priority of “places, times, and persons”, and the fact that all the rules are intended - *tantum quantum* - to help us in concrete situations.

For Ignatius the journey is not an aimless wandering; rather, it translates into something qualitative: it is a “gain” or progress, a moving forward, a doing something for others. This is how it is expressed in the two *Formulas of the Institute* approved by Popes Paul III (1540) and Julius III (1550), centering on the Society’s solicitude for the faith — its defence and propagation — and on the lives and instruction of the people. Here Ignatius and the first companions use the word “*aprovechamiento*” or “benefit” (*ad profectum*<sup>7</sup>, cf. Phil 1:12, 25) to describe the practical criterion of discernment in Ignatian spirituality, [ *lo que más aprovecha, what is more helpful* ]

*Aprovechamiento*, drawing profit or bearing fruit, is not individualistic but communal. “The end of this Society is to devote itself with God’s grace not only to the salvation and perfection of the members’ own souls, but also with that same grace to labor strenuously in giving aid toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their neighbors ” (*General Examen* n.3). And if Ignatius’ heart was inclined in one direction or the other, it was toward helping the neighbours; so much so that he would get angry whenever he was told that someone wanted to join the Society “in order to save his soul. Ignatius did not want people who were good for their own sake if they were not apt for the service of their neighbours” (Aicardo I, point 10, p. 41).

*Aprovechamiento* pervades everything. Ignatius’ *Formula* expresses an inherent tension: “not only... but ...”; this mentality of holding tensions together — one’s own salvation and perfection with the salvation and perfection of others — beginning with the higher order of grace, is a distinctive characteristic of the Society. [*This pattern is always repeated, the mentality of uniting tensions.*] The harmonizing of this and all tensions (contemplation and action, faith and justice, charisma and institutions, community and mission ...) is not contained in abstract formulas but rather obtained over the course of time through that which Faber calls “our way of proceeding”<sup>8</sup>. By walking and “moving forward” in following the Lord, the Society harmonizes the tensions inevitably produced by the diversity of the people it brings together

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<sup>6</sup> *Letter 51, to Francis Borgia*, July 1549, 17 n. 9. Cf. M. A. Fiorito and A. Swinnen, *La Fórmula del Instituto de la Compañía de Jesús* (introducción y versión castellana), *Stromata*, July- December 1977 — n. 3/4, 259-260.

<sup>7</sup> “Ad profectum animarum in vita et doctrina Christiana” in *Monumenta Ignatiana*, *Constitutiones*, T. I (MHSI), Rome, 1934, 26 and 376; cf. *Constituzioni della Compagnia di Gesù annotate dalla CG 34 e Norme complementari*, Rome, ADP, 1995, 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. MF. 50, 69, 111, 114, etc.

and the missions it receives.

*Aprovechamiento* is not elitist. In the *Formula*, Ignatius describes the means to more universal fruit that are specifically priestly. But first let us note that works of mercy are taken for granted in the *Formula*. It says: “without these being an obstacle” to mercy! The works of mercy — the care of the sick in the hospital, alms and their distribution, the teaching of the young, bearing hardships patiently — these were the milieus of life in which Ignatius and his first companions moved and existed. These were their daily bread. They took great pains to prevent anything from getting in the way of these!

In the end, this kind of *aprovechamiento* is “whatever bears more fruit”. It is a *magis*, that *plus* that leads Ignatius to undertake initiatives, to follow them through, and to evaluate their real impact on peoples’ lives in matters of faith, justice, mercy, and charity. [*Initiating processes is different from occupying spaces. The Society initiates processes and leaves spaces. This is important. Other religious occupy spaces, the monasteries. The Society initiates processes.* ], The *magis* is the fire, the fervour of action that rouses us from slumber. Our saints have always been an incarnation of this. It was said of Saint Albert Hurtado that he was “a sharp dart stuck in the sleeping flesh of the Church”. This counters the temptation that Paul VI labeled *spiritus vertiginis* and what De Lubac called “spiritual worldliness”. A temptation that is not primarily moral but spiritual as it distracts us from what is essential: namely, to be useful, to leave an imprint or a mark in history, especially in the lives of the smallest. “The Society is fervour”, Nadal affirmed<sup>9</sup>. In order to reignite fervour in the mission of “benefiting” people in their concrete lives and through teaching, I would like to ground my reflections in three points which, given that the Society is in the places of mission in which it should be, especially enhance our way of proceeding. These three points are joy, the Cross, and the Church - our Mother - and they have the purpose of taking a step forward, taking away the impediments that the enemy of human nature places in front of us when, in the service of God, we rise from good to better.

### **1. Ask [ *intensely* ]for consolation**

We can always improve in praying persistently for consolation. The two Apostolic Exhortations, along with *Laudato Si'*, were meant to highlight the importance of joy. In the *Exercises*, Ignatius asks his companions to contemplate “the task of consolation” as something specific to the Resurrected Christ (*Spiritual Exercises*, 224). It is the specific task of the Society to console the Christian faithful and to help them in their discernment so that the enemy of human nature does not distract us from joy: the joy of evangelizing, the joy of the family, the joy of the Church, the joy of creation.... Let us never be robbed of that joy, neither through discouragement when faced with the great measure of evil in the world and misunderstandings among those who intend to do good, nor by letting it be replaced with vain joys that are easily bought and sold in any shop.

This “service of joy and spiritual consolation” is rooted in prayer. It consists in encouraging ourselves and others “to ask insistently for God’s consolation”. Ignatius expresses this in a negative formulation in the sixth rule of the first week when he affirms: “It is very helpful to intensify our activity against the same desolation” by persisting in prayer (*Spiritual Exercises*, 319). It is helpful because in desolation we realize how weak we are without grace and consolation (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 324). To practice and teach this prayer of asking and begging for consolation is our main service of joy. If one does not consider himself worthy

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. MNad V, 310.

(something that happens often in practice), he should at least persist in asking for this consolation out of a love for the message, since joy is constitutive of the Gospel, and he should ask it also out of a love for others, his family, and the world. One cannot deliver good news with a sullen face. Joy is not a decorative “add-on” but a clear indicator of grace: it indicates that love is active, operative, present. Therefore searching for it should not be confused with searching for some “special effect” easily produced today for the mere purpose of consumption, but rather it should be sought in its essential trait of “permanence”: Ignatius opens his eyes and awakes to this discernment of spirits by discovering the difference between the joys that endure and the joys that pass away (*Autobiography*, 8). Time becomes the element that offers him the key to recognizing the action of the Spirit. [*One of the expressions of deep joy is a sense of humor. I think it is a grace we have from God. To my way of thinking, the human attitude closest to divine grace is the sense of humor.*]

In the *Exercises*, progress in the spiritual life is made through consolation: it is “a moving from good to better” (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 315) as well as “every increase of hope, faith, and charity and all interior joy” (*Spiritual Exercises*, 316). This service of joy was what led Ignatius’ first companions to establish rather than disband the Society to which they offered themselves and shared spontaneously, and whose distinctive characteristic was the joy it gave them in praying together, being sent as missionaries together, and reuniting in imitation of the life that the Lord and His Apostles led. This joy of an explicit proclamation of the Gospel - by means of the preaching of the faith and the practice of justice and mercy - is what drives the Society out to the margins of society. The Jesuit is a servant of the joy of the Gospel, be it when he is working “in the workshop” of giving retreats - even if to one person, helping him or her to encounter that “interior place whence comes the strength of the Spirit that guides, frees, and renews”<sup>10</sup> - or when he is working in a structural way by organizing works of formation, mercy, and reflection, all of which are an institutional outgrowth of that point of “inflection” in which we allow our will to be overcome and the Holy Spirit comes into action. M[ichel de] Certeau said it well: the *Exercises* are “the apostolic method *par excellence*” insofar as they make possible “a return to the heart, to the principle of docility to the Spirit, who awakens and encourages whoever undertakes the exercises to personal fidelity to God”<sup>11</sup>.

## ***2. Allow ourselves to be moved by the Lord on the Cross***

We can always improve somewhat in allowing ourselves to be moved by the Lord on the cross, both in his person and as present in the sufferings of so many of our brothers and sisters - indeed, the majority of the human race! Just as Fr Arrupe said, wherever there is pain, the Society is there [*or better said has to be there*].

The Jubilee of Mercy is a privileged time to reflect on the “services” of mercy. I use the plural because mercy is not an abstraction but a lifestyle consisting in concrete gestures rather than mere words: reaching out and touching the flesh of the neighbor and institutionalizing the works of mercy. For those of us who make the Exercises, this grace by means of which Jesus commands us to become like the Father (cf. Lk 6:36) begins with a colloquy of mercy that is an extension of our colloquy with the Lord crucified because of my sins. The entire second Exercise is a conversation full of sentiments of shame, confusion, sorrow, and tears of gratitude, seeing precisely who I am - by making myself small - and who God is - by magnifying him - he who “preserved my life until now,”); and by seeing who Jesus is, hanging on the cross for me (*Spiritual Exercises*, 61 and previous numbers). The way in

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Favre, *Mémorial*, Paris, Desclée, 1959; cf. Introduction by M. de Certeau, p.74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.

which Ignatius lives and formulates his experience of mercy is of great personal and apostolic benefit and requires a sharp and sustained experience of discernment. Our spiritual father said to Saint Francis Borgia: “As for me, I persuade myself both before and after that I am nothing but an obstacle; and from this I derive great spiritual contentment and joy in our Lord insofar as I cannot take credit for anything that appears good”<sup>12</sup>. Ignatius therefore lives completely on God’s mercy even in the littlest things. He felt that the greater the obstacle he raised, the greater the goodness with which the Lord treated him: “Tanta era la misericordia del Signore, e tanta la copia della soavita e dolcezza della grazia sua con esso lui, che quante egli piu desiderava d’essere in questo modo gastigato, tanto piu benigno era Iddio e con abbondanza maggiore spargeva sopra di lui i tesori della sua infinita liberalita. Laonde diceva, che egli credeva no vi essere nel mondo uomo, i cui queste due cose insieme, tanto come in lui, concorressero; la prima mancare tanto a Dio e l’altra il ricevere tante e cosi continue grazie dalla sua mano”<sup>13</sup> [*I quoted this in Italian because I did not find the Spanish text*].

Ignatius, in formulating his experience of mercy in these comparative terms - the more he felt he was failing the Lord, the more the Lord showered him with His grace - liberated the dynamic strength of mercy that we so often dilute with abstract formulae and legalistic conditions. The Lord, who looks upon us with mercy and chooses us, sends us forth with the same powerful mercy to the poor, the sinners, the abandoned, the crucified and anyone who suffers from injustice and violence in today’s world. Only when we experience this healing force in our own lives and in our own wounds [*wounds with first and last names*] - as individuals and as a body - will we be able to lose our fear of allowing ourselves to be moved by the immense suffering of our brothers and sisters so as to go out and walk patiently with our peoples, learning from them the best way to help and serve them (cf. *General Congregation*, 32, D. 4, n. 50).

### **3. Do good with a good spirit by “thinking with the Church”**

We can also take a step forward in doing good with a good spirit: “thinking with the Church”, as Saint Ignatius says. It is also a distinctive service of the Society to facilitate the discernment of *how* we do things. Faber formulated it by asking for the grace that “all the good that can be realized, thought, and organized, be done with a good spirit, not a bad spirit”<sup>14</sup>. This grace of discerning, which is not limited to thinking, doing, and organizing the good, but also doing these things with a good spirit, is what roots us in the Church in which the Spirit works and distributes his various gifts for the common good. Faber used to say that in many cases those who wanted to reform the Church were right, but God did not wish to correct the Church using their methods, [*the methods they proposed*].

It is distinctive of the Society to do things by “thinking with the Church”. To do this peacefully and joyfully, given the sins we perceive within ourselves and in the structures we have created, entails carrying the cross and experiencing poverty and humiliation, the locus in

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<sup>12</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Letter 26 to Francis Borgia*, c. 1545.

<sup>13</sup> P. Ribadeneira, *The Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, Rome, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1863, 336. [(...) the Lord’s mercy was so great and the tenderness and sweetness of His grace so abundant within him, that the more he wished to be castigated in this way, the greater was God’s goodness toward him and the more generously He showered him with the treasures of His infinite generosity. And so he said he believed there was no other man in the world in whom these two things came together more strikingly: failing God so much on the one hand, and receiving so many graces from Him on the other. (Editor’s note)]

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Favre, *Mémorial* cit. n. 51.

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which Ignatius encourages us to choose between patiently enduring them and desiring them<sup>15</sup>. Whenever the contradiction was more pronounced, Ignatius set an example of reflecting before speaking or acting in order to work in a good spirit. The rules of “thinking with the Church” are not to be read as precise instructions on controversial points (some might be anachronistic), but rather as examples where Ignatius extended the invitation to “act against” the anti-ecclesial spirit of his time, inclining always and decisively on the side of our Mother, the Church; not to justify a controversial point, but rather to open up space in which the Spirit could work in his time.

The service of good-spiritedness and discernment makes us men of the Church - ecclesial men, not clerical men - men “for others”, having nothing of our own that isolates us but placing everything we have in common and at the service of others.

We walk neither by ourselves nor for our own comfort; we walk with “a heart that does not rest, that does not close in on itself but beats to the rhythm of a journey undertaken together with all the faithful people of God”<sup>16</sup>. We walk making ourselves all things to all people in order to help some.

This shedding of ourselves makes it possible for the Society to always have the face, the way of speaking, and the way of being of all peoples, all cultures, by inserting ourselves into all of them, into the specific heart of each people, to build up the Church with each of them, by inculturating the Gospel and evangelizing every culture.

Let us ask Our Lady of the Way, in a colloquy like that of a son with his mother or a servant with his Mistress, to intercede for us in the presence of the “Father of mercies and God of all consolation” (2 Cor 1:3), that he may place us once again with his Son, with Jesus, who takes up the cross of the world and asks us to take it up with him. Let us entrust her with our “way of proceeding”, that it may be ecclesial, inculturated, poor, ministerial, and free of worldly ambition. Let us ask our Mother to guide and accompany each Jesuit together with that portion of the faithful People of God to which he is sent, *on the ways of consolation, compassion, and discernment*.

*(Original: Spanish)*

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Directorio Autógrafo* 23.

<sup>16</sup> FRANCIS, *Homily, Liturgical Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Jesus*, Church of the Gesù, 3 January 2014.