

DAY 48: Conference**MARY, MASTER OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES****I. Saint Ignatius and the Most Holy Virgin**

Saint Ignatius was most devoted to the Mother of God, and our Mother; and he responded in the most generous way to that Sovereign Lady herself, who took the initiative and chose Ignatius to live under her protection, favoring him with singularly extraordinary graces from the very beginning of his conversion.

Ignatius corresponded to this extraordinary proof by which the Virgin Mary showed her predilection for him and received him under her protection; and he responded with his noble, generous, and magnanimous spirit, giving himself completely to devotion and service to Mary, whom he used to call “Our Lady,” because she was truly the Lady of his thoughts, of his heart, and of his entire life.

Fr. Antonio Astrain notes that it is a constant fact of capital importance that the Virgin Mary played a role in the sanctification of Ignatius, and that there was a mutual correspondence of love and devotion established from his conversion onward.

From his conversion to Manresa

While convalescing in Loyola from his wound at Pamplona, and desiring to imitate the Saints and the Saint of Saints, Jesus Christ, the Virgin appeared to him and encouraged and confirmed him in his great desires for Christian holiness, especially in his resolution of perpetual chastity.

His first biographer, Fr. Ribadeneira, recounts an episode, traces of which tradition still claims to find in the house of Loyola:

One night he rose from bed, as he often did, to pray and offer himself to the Lord in a gentle and perpetual sacrifice, after the struggles and anguished doubts of his heart had ended. Kneeling before an image of Our Lady, and offering himself with humility and fervent confidence, through the glorious Mother to the loving Son, as a soldier and faithful servant, promising to follow His royal standard and trample the world underfoot, there was heard throughout the house a great crash, and the room where he was shook. Witnesses in the canonization processes affirm that from this shock a windowpane in the room cracked and was never repaired in memory of the event, attributed to the devil enraged at not being able to conquer him (cf. Casanovas, *San Ignacio de Loyola*, pp. 67–68).

Fr. Casanovas comments that this may have been the occasion of a consoling visit from the Blessed Virgin, which Ignatius himself recounts in his autobiography:

While he was in this state, the King and Lord who was calling him wished to open the treasures of His mercy to him and strengthen and encourage him with a new light and heavenly visitation. One night while he was awake, the sovereign Queen appeared to him holding her

most precious Son in her arms; with the brightness of her splendor she illuminated him, and with the sweetness of her presence she refreshed and strengthened him. This vision lasted for a considerable time and produced in him such a hatred of his past life, especially of all impure and disordered pleasures, that it seemed as though all the ugly images were wiped away from his soul. It was clearly not a dream but a true and fruitful divine visitation, for from that moment until the end of his life he preserved purity and chastity without stain (cf. Ribadeneira, *Vida de San Ignacio*, BAC, pp. 49).

Fr. Casanovas continues that this is a decisive event in Ignatius' interior life. In all the many vicissitudes of his life, he would show a freedom from material things and a purity that seemed more angelic than human.

Later, referring to an incident in Loyola, Ignatius once said: "I knew that I could do it," referring to an act that could have been dangerous for purity. Then he quickly corrected himself: "May God forgive you; you have made me say what I did not wish to say."

He truly possessed a supernatural and extraordinary gift of purity. He also began to write a book, carefully copying essential passages from the life of Christ and the Saints, writing Christ's words in red ink and those of Our Lady in blue (Autobiography, n. 11).

Tradition also preserves a tender Marian devotion: during his convalescent walks, Ignatius would go as far as the view of the hermitage of Olaz and there recite a Salve to the Mother of God. The Virgin occupies an essential place in his conversion and holiness.

Aránzazu – He adorns an image of the Virgin

While traveling, he encouraged his brother to keep vigil at Our Lady of Aránzazu. Later, after collecting some money owed to him, he distributed part to the poor and used part to repair and beautify an image of Our Lady that was in poor condition (Autobiography, n. 13).

Thus, when Ignatius speaks of his desire "to please God" and "to do great things for the love of God," we may also extend this to "pleasing and doing great things for Our Lady."

Vigil at Montserrat

At Montserrat, filled with thoughts of heroic deeds for God, he resolved to keep vigil all night before the altar of Our Lady. He confessed over three days, left his sword and dagger at the altar, and on the eve of Our Lady in March (1522), he gave his clothes to a poor man and clothed himself in sackcloth. He spent the entire night kneeling before the altar (Autobiography, nn. 17–18).

In Manresa

Before entering the town, tradition holds that the Virgin appeared to him near a stone cross, consoling and encouraging him to persevere in his penance (cf. Calveras, p. 106).

Vision of the Trinity

While praying the Office of Our Lady, his understanding was elevated and he perceived the Most Holy Trinity (Autobiography, n. 28).

Prayer of the Ave Maria

A witness recounts that while praying at the sound of the Ave Maria bell, Ignatius remained kneeling for a long time in deep consolation. He would say that one should think on the Passion of Christ, for that is true consolation (cf. Calveras, pp. 192–193).

2. Inspiration of the Exercises

Mediatrice of all grace

During his time in Manresa, Ignatius received the graces that enabled him to compose the Spiritual Exercises. Ribadeneira states that, despite his limited education, he wrote the book of the Exercises during this time.

Fr. Quera affirms that the companions of Ignatius unanimously held that the Exercises are the work of God. Fr. Polanco testified that Ignatius received them from God, and Fr. Nadal said they were inspired by God when Ignatius was in Manresa (cf. Quera, *Manresa*, 1943, pp. 69–71).

Fr. Maffei summarizes that the book was composed partly from heavenly teaching and partly from experience (ibid., p. 67). According to the doctrine of Mary's universal mediation, this extraordinary grace must also be attributed to her intercession (ibid., p. 71).

Apparitions of Jesus and Mary

In the Autobiography, Ignatius notes that he also saw Our Lady in a similar way as he saw Christ (Autobiography, n. 29). Fr. Quera notes that, "It is reasonable to conclude that the Virgin intervened not only by intercession but also more directly, since both Christ and Mary appeared to him during this time.

Fr. Casanovas writes that artistic tradition often depicts Ignatius writing the Exercises under the inspiration of Jesus and Mary, reflecting what Ignatius himself said: that God instructed him like a schoolteacher instructs a child, granting him great illuminations of the Trinity and frequent visions of Christ and the Virgin during prayer (cf. Casanovas, p. 135).

Oral tradition

The Amigant family preserved the tradition that the Virgin taught Ignatius the Exercises. A 1606 account reports that the Virgin dictated the Exercises to Ignatius after a mystical experience (cf. Quera, p. 165).

Another manuscript states: "Saint Ignatius gave the Spiritual Exercises to Angela de Amigant after the Virgin had dictated them to him" (ibid., p. 168).

Other testimonies affirm that in Manresa it was widely held that Ignatius wrote the Exercises with the help of the Mother of God (ibid., p. 169).

Fr. Andrés Lucas (1633) states that the Virgin was the teacher, founder, and patroness of the Exercises, and that Christ and His Mother assisted Ignatius in composing them.

This tradition is ancient, firm, and certain, deriving from the lifetime of the saint.

Confirmation of the pious tradition

Fr. Luis de la Puente recounts a revelation received by Marina de Escobar, in which the Archangel Gabriel declared that the Virgin was the patron, founder, and helper of the Spiritual Exercises and had instructed Ignatius (cf. Quera, pp. 172–173). He affirms moral certainty of this revelation and presents it as encouragement for those who practice the Exercises.

Although not officially approved, the testimony carries weight due to his authority. This tradition has persisted without contradiction and has even received support from Jesuit authorities and the Pope. Pius XI referred to the Exercises as having been received from the hands of the Virgin in Manresa.

3. Our Lady in the Spiritual Exercises

There are two fundamental ways in which the Virgin is present in the Exercises.

1. As intercessor

She is invoked, especially in the colloquies, to obtain grace from her Son. She is called “the Mother” or “Our Lady,” particularly in the First Week and throughout the Exercises.

2. As model

From the Second Week onward, she appears in the Gospel contemplations as a model to be imitated and as someone to whom we may entrust our prayers.

Saint Ambrose writes: “Mary’s life is itself a lesson and a perfect example of holiness. In her, as in a mirror, shine perfect purity and the form of every virtue. From her one learns what must be corrected, what must be avoided, and above all what must be embraced and put into practice. And who could be a more excellent teacher than the Mother of God?” (*De virginitate*, I).

In general, Mary accompanies the one making the Exercises throughout the entire experience of the month, gradually forming in him the filial affection of a son and helping him give Mary the place that the faith of the Church assigns to her.

Through the colloquy of the First Week (n. 63), we enter into salvation history through the intercession of “Our Lady,” Mother of our Redeemer and Lord. The role of Mary’s mediation in that history appears from the very beginning of the Second Week, in the contemplation of the Trinity’s decision concerning the Incarnation, and in the contemplation of the response of “Our Lady, humbling herself and giving thanks to the divine Majesty.”

She continues to accompany the retreatant throughout the Exercises, especially whenever he is asked to make a triple colloquy: to Our Lady, to the Son, and to the Father.

A connection can be drawn between the Lordship of Mary and our personal assimilation of the mystery of Christ—specifically through her mediation and intercession. In the Third Week, Mary’s presence as the Sorrowful Mother becomes especially intense at the foot of the Cross. It continues afterward in the consideration of her solitude once Christ is no longer visibly present, “with so much sorrow and weariness” (n. 208), in relation to the solitude of the disciples.

The title “the Virgin Mary” is reserved in a special way for the mystery of the appearance of the risen Christ, as though to indicate in her virginity both Christ’s special love for her and one of the precious fruits of His redemption.

Precisely in speaking of Christ’s first appearance after the Resurrection, Ignatius writes of this appearance to Mary: although Scripture does not say it explicitly, it may be understood from the fact that Christ appeared to so many others (cf. 1 Cor 15:4–6).

Taken as a whole, we can see that Mary is present in a constant, decisive, and yet discreet way, fulfilling the role that faith and Christian devotion attribute to her. This presence effectively helps the retreatant to integrate her role deeply into his spiritual life. In a similar way to what we see in the Gospels, the number of times Our Lady is mentioned does not reflect the exceptional importance that the Virgin Mary holds in the Gospel message.

And so, let us evermore entrust ourselves to Our Lady who will never steer us away from Her Son, but all the contrary, She in haste brings us to Him.