

Homily for the feast of St. Ignatius, July 31, 2008. Thursday night mass.
Father Joseph T. Nolan

Yes, it is a great day for the Jesuits! And they are celebrating with food and drink and prayer. Being a non-Jesuit I can speak and praise of them, or really, of their founder, Ignatius. So many books have been written about him. I will give you only a series of sentences that begin with “if.” It is an attempt to show you how much we have in common.

If you come from a small country that is fiercely proud of its Catholic faith and its own language, a place like Ireland, well so did he: not from Ireland but from the Basque country, intensely Catholic and with its own language.

If you were the youngest in your family (had to wear the hand-me-downs, look up to your older brothers and sisters, perhaps fight for food at the table) so did he. He was the youngest of thirteen!

If you had a “carefree youth,” or even a rather dissolute one, so did he—as the volunteer translator at Manresa, struggling with the Catalan language, put it: “he was a big man with the women!”

If you like to play soldier so did he—in fact, that’s how he began his young adult life.

If you ever had trouble with recovering from an operation, perhaps faulty surgery, so did he—trying to mend the leg damaged by a cannon ball left him with a permanent limp.

If you couldn’t find any escape reading for your convalescence, he had that difficulty too—all they had were lives of the saints. In fact, that’s what got him going.

If you had trouble getting into the college of your choice, so did he—they made it difficult for him to go to the University of Paris because he was older, and didn’t speak French well.

If you think you should pray more, do more for the glory of God—so did he, and taught others. Many others.

If you think you should do more than pray and long to go on a pilgrimage, this was his heart’s desire. It seems as if the whole object of the first group called the Company of Jesus was to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But the pope, Paul III, said to Ignatius, “Italy can be a good and excellent Jerusalem to reap a harvest for the church.” So he stayed, while others went—everywhere.

If you are weary with a desk job and long for more adventure, so did he—but he stayed at the desk in Rome for the final eighteen years of his life, directing the travels and the work of his companions.

So perhaps we should begin right where we are—this neighborhood, town, parish, home. Or nursing home you could visit, perhaps with your dog. Or at least yourself. Or with your automobile, to take someone out for a ride.

Let us find many ways to glorify God.