Shared Vision I

Beginnings

Introduction:
In his Autobiography Ignatius consistently referred to himself as a pilgrim. In this he was deeply convinced that the Lord was leading him to where he could do the will of God, serve the greatest needs. This calls for prayerful discernment of God’s will. Furthermore Ignatius would gather a group of first companions around him, “friends in the Lord”, men of hugely diverse gifts from a wide range of cultures. The Spirit, he trusted, would reveal God’s will through this wide variety of gifts.

Ignatius’ lived out a process of discernment over many years, which later generations have analyzed and formulated in what we now call Ignatian Pedagogy. It involves five aspects: Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, and Evaluation. These form an iterative process of lifelong discernment and learning. This outline attempts to describe the video as an expression of this pedagogy in Ignatius’ life.

(Watch for these themes in this series of videos. The Society of Jesus today, and by extension its “apostolic works” such as Gonzaga, are asked to make these characteristics their own as discerned for the contemporary world. For example, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, one of our recent Fathers General, used to say “we make our paths by walking them” – pilgrims discerning our way under God’s Spirit.)

The Person of Ignatius:

The Context: Ignatius was born in 1491, the year before Columbus sailed, a time of social upheaval between the middle ages and the renaissance. He grew up in the family of minor nobles, at first attached to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella, and later, after the end of their reign, to another noble family of Spain. As a noble and soldier, Ignatius was a man of great vanity with huge ideas and inspiring dreams of personal service and glory in the courts of the day.

The Experience: A cannon ball severely fractured his leg during a battle with the French in Pamplona. He was admired by his enemies for his courage and they had him carried back to Loyola to recover from his wound. This period of recuperation was extended because of a poor setting of the bone.
**His Reflections:** During these long months he asked for something to read and the only two books in the castle were the Life of Christ and the Lives of the Saints. In reading these books he was drawn to reflect on these lives in comparison with the courtly life to which he had aspired. When he dreamed of the courtly life it did not give him as much sense of satisfaction as did his dreams of serving the heavenly court. He thought he could do what the saints had done.

**Action:** Ignatius decided that after his leg was healed he would steal away quietly to Jerusalem to spend the rest of his life as a pilgrim in the Holy Land. He left Loyola and headed to the monastery of Montserrat where in an all-night vigil he laid down his sword and swore to follow Our Lady. Leaving Montserrat he next went to the town of Manresa on the Cardoner River where he spent a year in prayerful discernment and spiritual dialogue with the local people.

**Evaluation and More Reflection:** During this year at Manresa he probed his deepest desires to see where the Lord was leading him. He said of this time that “The Lord led me as he would a school boy.” Through experiences of consolation and desolation — and a period of rather strange behavior — he gradually discerned his way. He had a profound experience of grace along the River Cardoner one day, in which he received an insight of how God is fully present in Creation. Creation comes forth from God and returns to God. (God is in all things, present and working there.)

**The Pilgrim:**

**Action:** The desire to become a pilgrim in the Holy Land returned and he set out to spend the rest of his life there.

**Experience and Evaluation:** The Franciscans, who were in charge of Catholic doings in the Holy Land, sent him packing after a short time because his ministry to the Muslims was a threat to what they were doing there. He had to return to Spain. He had come to realize that he needed more education if he was to be successful in his vocation of service.

**More Reflection and Action:** Running afoul of the Inquisition in Spain, he headed north to pursue his education the University of Paris, where he became deeply imbued with the humanism of the times and learned the Parisian method of integrated studies. This method would later form the basis of the *Ratio Studiorum*.

**Experience:** At the UoP he met a number of men to whom he gave the Spiritual Exercises. Some seven of these would become his first companions in founding the Society.
Deliberation: These companions took simple religious vows together at a chapel on Mont Martre and then, deliberating about their future, decided to go to Venice where they would catch the next annual ship to the Holy Land. They also decided that if they were not able to book passage within a year they would journey to Rome and offer their services to the Pope. Their deliberations were motivated by the desire to serve the greatest need, seek the greatest possibility of service (The Magis).

Action: While in Venice they ministered to the people on the streets, something very dear to Ignatius, who, despite his and their Parisian degrees, always wanted his men to be in contact with the poor and needy.

Rome:

Experience, Reflection, Evaluation, and Action: No boat from Venice to the Holy Land that year because of tensions with the Turks on the Mediterranean. They decided to follow their earlier plan and set off to Rome.

Profound Experience: At a small chapel at La Storta just north of Rome, Ignatius, who had been praying to God to place him with his Son, received a vision of God the Father and Christ carrying his Cross. God said to Ignatius, “I do will it,” and placed Ignatius with Jesus and his cross. God also said to Ignatius, “I will be propitious to you in Rome.” This greatly confirmed the companions in their discerned decision to offer their services to the Pope.

Action: The early companions arrived in a Rome that was a mess. It was a tough winter and there were lots of poor people on the streets, all needing food and shelter. Ignatius got food from the well to do and distributed it among the poor; he started a home for prostitutes to get them off the street; and Ignatius and his companions carried on theological and spiritual conversations with the people they met.

Experience: The Pope had heard about these Paris theologians and invited them to discuss theological questions with him over breakfast. This they did to his great edification and pleasure.

Action: Ignatius appealed to the Pope to confirm this group of companions as a religious order, which the Pope did on Sept. 27, 1540. To his chagrin, Ignatius was elected the first Fr. General of the Jesuits, and spent the rest of his life in Rome, continuing to serve the people on the streets, but also involved in governance of the rapidly growing Society and in writing the Constitutions of the Society.