

# A SPIRITUALITY OF ENCOUNTER

## St Ignatius, Pope Francis and Lessons from the School of the Poor

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**A**N ENCOUNTER WITH the ‘least among us’ can be many things. It can reinforce our prejudices; it can lead to objectification of the ‘other’; or it can transform how we understand ourselves, our God and our social responsibilities to the world—including our spirituality. St Ignatius of Loyola offers us a foundation to explore the encounter between the poorest and those with opportunity and privilege. Pope Francis extends this Ignatian insight by arguing that not only do the poor need us, but we benefit from an encounter of mutuality with them. Encountering the poor allows us to listen to the will of God and discern our way in this world free of culturally reinforced (and rewarded) constraints. The root of this experience has been repeatedly emphasized by Pope Francis: ‘The text of Matthew 25: 35–36 is “not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ”’.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis, he demonstrated not only a commitment to the poor, but an interest in how they *evangelize* the non-poor.<sup>2</sup> In his first apostolic letter, *Evangelii gaudium*, he states:

This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 96, quoting John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 49.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘poor’ refers to human persons suffering under economic and sociological poverty in a variety of ways. The non-poor are not subject to the same limitations on human flourishing.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 198. Compare *Lumen gentium*, n. 8: ‘Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder’.

Francis introduces here a mutual evangelization between poor and non-poor which, if taken seriously, constitutes a fundamental change in Catholic spirituality. No longer are the poor simply the recipients of charity or justice. Now there is a voluntary mutuality by which the prosperous and rich also discover something about themselves and God that only *the poor* can teach. This possibility of the poor evangelizing the non-poor emerges from an understanding of the life of Ignatius of Loyola which is rarely emphasized or deeply explored outside intra-Jesuit conversations on the vow of poverty.

### ***Ignatius and the Poor***

It is true that Ignatius was inspired by versions of holiness dominant in his time. But to reduce his actions to only this excludes an authentic intentionality. Ignatius did more than mimic the 'saints' who inspired him. It is clear that many of the stories which make up his *Autobiography* were later crafted by editors with a specific purpose and audience in mind.<sup>4</sup> This does not mean the *Autobiography* is completely hagiographical, nor does it mean we should interpret everything in it as historical fact.

One theme in the *Autobiography* and in the *Spiritual Exercises* is the importance of encounters with the poor, as well as 'actual' and 'spiritual' poverty.<sup>5</sup> It would be reasonable to assert (if we believe that Ignatius made free and authentic choices) that the commitment to poverty inspired by the saints became integral for Ignatius through personal experiences with the poor of his time. If he was merely imitating expectations of holiness, the authenticity of 'poverty' (in all its forms) in the life of Ignatius would be put into question.

There are three elements to the leitmotif of actual and spiritual poverty which appear, both separately and together, throughout the various works of Ignatius. The first is his commitment to direct service of the poor, which he first demonstrated in Azpeitia during the latter part of his convalescence and which continued throughout his life. Second

<sup>4</sup> Barton T. Geger, 'Hidden Theology in the "Autobiography" of St Ignatius', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 46/3 (Autumn, 2014): 'Certainly we miss the forest for the trees when we focus on individual stories to the neglect of wider themes' (32).

<sup>5</sup> This theme is also present through early days of the first companions and later codified in the Jesuit *Constitutions*. See Horacio de la Costa and Edward D. Sheridan, 'On Becoming Poor: A Symposium on Evangelical Poverty', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 8/2-3 (March and May 1976) and Dean Brackley, 'Downward Mobility: Social Implications of St Ignatius's Two Standards', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 20/1 (January 1988).

is the deepening of his commitment to living out the beatitudes by addressing some of the root causes of sinful conditions—what we would call the work of social justice today. Finally, his institutional commitment to both actual and spiritual poverty is embodied by the ‘Deliberation on Poverty’, dated to the early 1540s.<sup>6</sup> This third element instantiates both the life of poverty (actual) and what one learns from it—total dependence on God (spiritual)—for what would become the Society of Jesus.

### **Direct Encounters**

At the time of Ignatius, the ‘poor’ were,

... those with no particular protection, who could in good times live by their labor, but without any margin of security. The poor also included the destitute, the beggars wandering from town to town, charitably moved on from hospice to hospice.<sup>7</sup>

Hospices were poorly maintained city refuges that usually accommodated a person for a night. In many cases they existed to keep those suffering from disease outside medieval towns. Occasionally cities would recognise the ‘privileged poor’, those who were well known in a town and ‘allowed to sleep in the porches of churches and in the streets’.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the poor were the sick, as well as common folk who fell on hard times and sometimes became wandering beggars.

When Ignatius began to follow his vocation, he adopted ‘the socially recognised status of a penitent’.<sup>9</sup> Part of this meant giving up his noble clothing in exchange for poor clothing. The story about this, later told in his *Autobiography*, reveals two important insights. After Ignatius approached a poor man to exchange clothes with him, the man was later accused of stealing his clothes and subsequently beaten. When Ignatius heard what happened to the poor man, ‘the tears poured from his eyes, tears of compassion for the poor man to whom he had given his clothes’.<sup>10</sup> This response of ‘compassion for the poor man’ is important. Why did Ignatius react this way and what did his tears mean? This

<sup>6</sup> See ‘The Deliberation on Poverty’, in *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, edited by George Ganss (New York: Paulist, 1991), 225–228.

<sup>7</sup> Adrian Demoustier, ‘The First Companions of the Poor’, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 21/2 (March 1989), 4–20, here 5.

<sup>8</sup> Demoustier, ‘First Companions of the Poor’, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Demoustier, ‘First Companions of the Poor’, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Autobiography*, n. 18.



*St Ignatius exchanges clothes with a poor man,  
by Peter Paul Rubens, 1609*

experience of tears of compassion is mentioned in the *Spiritual Exercises* as consolation.<sup>11</sup>

Consolation, for Ignatius, is an affective feeling that leads towards God.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this innocent poor person, unjustly accused and punished, brought him to a deeper understanding of the passion of Christ. The helplessness of this man inspired Ignatius' desire to 'depend only on God while pursuing his pilgrimage; so, he renounced the security of either companionship or financial resources'.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence he experienced destitution, maltreatment and other humiliations.

### **Root Causes**

While Ignatius served in hospices throughout his pilgrimage, he also considered the root causes of different social evils. When he returned home to Azpeitia, he sought to address social and moral issues such as gambling and 'priestly concubinage', and the need for a more dependable and constant provision for poor people.<sup>14</sup> His efforts to end incarceration for debt as well as trying to establish community assistance for the chronically poor were something more than individual ministry. The Martha House in Rome tried to address the causes of prostitution by giving women another skill set to make a living, reconciling them

<sup>11</sup> Demoustier states that the *Spiritual Exercises* names it explicitly in reference to 'spiritual consolation' ('First Companions of the Poor', 6) : 'Similarly, this consolation is experienced when the soul sheds tears which move it to love for its Lord—whether they are tears of grief for its own sins, or about the Passion of Christ our Lord, or about other matters directly ordered to his service and praise' (Exx 316).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Buckley, 'The Structures of the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits', *The Way Supplement*, 20 (1973), 19–37, here 28: 'The good spirit moves in conjunction with the developmental effort of the person; and the affect of his movement within affectivity is courage and strength, consolation, tears, inspiration and calmness'.

<sup>13</sup> Demoustier, 'First Companions of the Poor', 6.

<sup>14</sup> Demoustier, 'First Companions of the Poor', 10.

with estranged husbands or offering them the opportunity to embrace religious life. Finally, when the Society of Jesus committed itself to the ministry of education, the inclusion of the poor was essential. Ignatius refused to open a school until it was fully endowed because he desired to educate the poor and rich together for the common good.<sup>15</sup> According to Demoustier, the colleges were situated ‘between the service of the great, who had no need of them since their children were educated by private tutors, and the little people, who did not go to school at all’.<sup>16</sup> Because of its social location, this ministry embodied something between private charitable action and a social service.

The social effect was to facilitate access for the greatest possible number to the new culture of the book and of the written word, without adding new barriers on the basis of social class or class distinctions over and above those that already existed. It was the genius of Ignatius to have refused any such selectivity for entrance into the colleges and to have understood that it was necessary to begin with the lower age groups.<sup>17</sup>

Ignatius first served the poor, but this was later extended to addressing the social structures which marginalised those who were in debt, engaged in prostitution or unable to access an education. While language about structures is anachronistic, it is clear that Ignatius was committed to more than individual charity to the poor.

### ***Listening to God with the Poor***

The various elements of the leitmotif of encountering the poor, voluntary poverty and the benefits of spiritual poverty can be brought together through a letter Ignatius wrote to members of the Society of Jesus in Padua. Here the various threads we have seen throughout his life come together—the importance of encountering the poor, and the benefits received when actual and spiritual poverty intersect.<sup>18</sup> Becoming actually and spiritually poor gives us the interior freedom to listen to God.

<sup>15</sup> John O'Malley, *The Jesuits: A History from Ignatius to the Present* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Demoustier, ‘First Companions of the Poor’, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Demoustier, ‘First Companions of the Poor’, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ignatius of Loyola to the members of the Society in Padua, 7 August 1547, in *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, edited by Martin Palmer, John W. Padberg and John L. McCarthy (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 203–207.

According to the letter, the poor themselves are important to know. Those chosen by Jesus as friends were 'for the most part poor'. It was for the poor 'that Jesus Christ was sent on earth'. Furthermore, 'The friendship of the poor makes us friends of the Eternal King'. When voluntary poverty is assumed, a person receives similar benefits by extension through a preference for the 'precious treasure' of Christ and the Church as opposed to the treasures of the world. Friendship with the poor is both ministry to those who suffer and voluntary assumption of their (involuntary) dependence upon God. This understanding of the dual nature of 'poverty' (encountering the poor and depending on God) benefits the Society of Jesus. 'Poverty enables us in every circumstance to hear the voice (that is, the inspiration) of the Holy Spirit better, because it removes the obstructions that keep it out.'<sup>19</sup>

Demoustier reminds us that Ignatius learnt much through his encounters with those who could depend on no one but God.

In the school of the poor, Ignatius learnt how to renounce every project properly his own. It was thanks to this humility, which enabled him to recognise what his conversion and experience of the Lord had inscribed in the very depths of his being, that he discerned his true future in the desire to acquire some education and to enter fully into the dynamism of contemporary culture .... The poor person, according to the 'sacred teaching' of the Spiritual Exercises, is the one who is not protected or does not protect himself from humiliations, *and who thus achieves the humility which permits a genuinely free election*. This is the first guideline: the rejection of society's standard as a criterion of decision. Blessed are the poor.<sup>20</sup>

### **Poverty for the Early Companions**

While it is brief, the 'Deliberation on Poverty' gives insight into the discernment process used by Ignatius and his early companions. The first phase of the discernment is titled 'The Disadvantages of Having No Fixed Income Are Also the Advantages of Having Such Income Either in Part or in Whole'. The benefits of having a fixed income included: better maintenance of the Society, less annoying and unedifying begging, more order and peace, more time to do spiritual works, better maintained churches, and more time to study, offer spiritual help and care for their own health. The disadvantages included being less disposed to travel and

<sup>19</sup> Ignatius of Loyola to the members of the Society in Padua, 204–205.

<sup>20</sup> Demoustier, 'First Companions of the Poor', 7.

hardship, being less exemplary of true poverty and self-abnegation, and the possibility that a fixed income might create inequality within the Society itself.<sup>21</sup>

The 'Advantages and Reasons for Having No Fixed Income' included: greater spiritual strength, less worldly avarice, deeper unity, closeness to Christ, increased dependence on God, more humiliations and by this a more faithful imitation of Christ, life in more divine hope, greater edification, greater freedom of spirit to speak of spiritual things, daily encouragement to serve by receiving alms, better exemplification of 'true poverty', greater diligence and willingness to travel and endure. In addition, poverty with no fixed income is more perfect than half-measures and, finally, Jesus chose poverty.<sup>22</sup> Following this second list, the ten early companions chose this latter course and then requested and obtained the papal bull for the formation of the Society of Jesus.

The process used to discern this form of poverty appears to have been communal, and consistent with the First Principle and Foundation and the process for discernment outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It takes as its end the desire to serve God seriously in the world, and constantly refers to the Jesus of the Gospels in his actual poverty. It tries to evaluate material security by asking whether it glorifies, praises or honours God. The standard gospel opposition between love of God and neighbour, and love of wealth and security is operative throughout—as is the avoidance of avarice. Finally, the link between spiritual and material poverty and *dependence on God* is critical for Ignatius and the companions. It seems to be the way they understand the value of Christ's poverty within the historical life he lived.

***The link between spiritual and material poverty and dependence on God***

### ***Pope Francis: Evangelized by the Poor***

Pope Francis approaches the topic of encountering the poor, voluntary poverty and spiritual poverty in a way with many similarities to that of Ignatius, but with a different emphasis. He recognises and includes the main contributions of Ignatius but extends them in how the poor and voluntary poverty evangelize others—that is, how they explicitly teach us about God. In his first apostolic exhortation upon assuming the papacy he extends the importance of the poor and voluntary poverty to the Church

<sup>21</sup> 'Deliberation on Poverty', 225–226.

<sup>22</sup> 'Deliberation on Poverty', 226.

as a whole, not just vowed religious: ‘The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way’.<sup>23</sup> This new approach is inspired by Ignatius but extended to all believers in light of the signs of the times. It is possible to follow the categories used to understand the Ignatian leitmotif, with one addition—how the poor evangelize the non-poor—something already present, albeit only implicitly, for Ignatius.

### ***Encountering the Poor in Mutuality***

Pope Francis discusses how we can encounter the poor if we want to learn from them. He emphasizes that we should encounter the poor through the Ignatian dictum of seeking God in all things.

We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.<sup>24</sup>

The equality of friendship comes first, then the humility to listen and use our position to speak for the poor. If this is done carefully, we may discover something about God. This encounter recognises the inner goodness of the poor and does not stop at meeting their material needs. It engages in dialogue which assumes mutuality and is motivated by the ultimate goal of the human journey: to love others through sharing, commitment and service, and, in this, to love God.<sup>25</sup> What we have received first and freely (God’s grace and love) we share freely. The poor receive in this encounter a genuine hope from our freely given commitment that seeks no reward. They are lifted up, need our hearts, feel our affection, and overcome loneliness because they also need love.

There is also a challenging dimension to our encounter with the poor—one that creates discomfort, anxiety and frustration. Francis suggests that, if we allow them to do so, those who suffer through poverty and marginalisation can bring us face to face with our own deepest fears and insecurities—and this is a good thing. Our culture of wealth is afraid of insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety and the vulnerability

<sup>23</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 198.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 198.

<sup>25</sup> When using the term ‘love’ I mean the Thomistic definition as the ‘effective willing of the good of the other’. See Michael Himes, *Doing the Truth in Love: Conversations about God, Relationships and Service* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1995), chapter 1.



of depending on others for our basic needs. Contemporary consumerist materialism has enculturated this self-sufficiency deeply into our identity as human beings.<sup>26</sup>

Encountering those who suffer through poverty and discovering their and our own vulnerability militates against and liberates us from some of the most deeply held Western cultural ideals. Self-sufficiency, libertarian notions of freedom and a preference for self-interest over the common good all collapse if we are serious about the evangelizing possibilities of encountering the poor. Pope Francis mentions this specifically.

The Gospel invites us to peer into the depths of our heart, to see where we find our security in life. Usually, the rich feel secure in their wealth, and think that, if that wealth is threatened, the whole meaning of their earthly life can collapse. Jesus himself tells us this in the parable of the rich fool: he speaks of a man who was sure of himself, yet foolish, for it did not dawn on him that he might die that very day (cf. Luke 12:16–21).<sup>27</sup>

What would allow us to learn from those who suffer through poverty and marginalisation? What cultural, economic, social and spiritual defences or ‘buffers’ hinder us from learning from them? These defences are real, and the encounter can be frightening.<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis is correct when he states, ‘To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity’.<sup>29</sup> The question is sharpened. What hinders us from seeking voluntary dependence upon God?

Traditional academic theology, the kind taught at many Roman Catholic universities and seminaries, relies overwhelmingly on the intellect, reason—the mind. While this has been indispensable to the tradition we have inherited, it has never been the complete story. The danger in relying exclusively on the intellect is that Christianity becomes a set of ideas, *rather than a way of being and acting in the world*. St Ignatius was keenly aware of this and encouraged the use of all the

<sup>26</sup> See Robert Bellah and others, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: U. of California, 1985) chapter 6. One need only think of the media preoccupation with the ontologically impossible ‘self-made man’.

<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 67.

<sup>28</sup> I have taught immersion courses for fifteen years, as well as guided immersion for the Ignatian Colleagues Program of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. The barriers to such encounters usually take the form of analysis and problem-solving the situation of the poor rather than any real possibility of direct encounter.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 32.

senses to discern the will of God—one’s imagination, feelings, intuition, experience and wisdom. Pope Francis continues this emphasis by encouraging real encounters of mutuality with the poor—relationships which can be mutually transformative in their depth. These encounters are very different from short-term service work, for they assume such deep relationships. For Pope Francis, discerning the movements of one’s heart honestly by using all of the Ignatian contemplative ‘senses’ is one way to discover, nurture and allow such encounters to claim us.

Such contemplation extends Ignatius’ understanding and allows us to participate in divine compassion. Generosity is necessary for a fully human life and, in this encounter, the poor unlock our isolation from them and their situation. With the proper posture towards this relationship, we can grow in maturity and wisdom as we discern our own vocations. This is ultimately an imitation of Jesus. ‘Jesus’ whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life.<sup>30</sup>

And the concreteness of this encounter is crucial. He emphasizes,

... a poverty learned with the humble, the poor, the sick and all those who are on the existential peripheries of life. A theoretical poverty is of no use to us. Poverty is learned by touching the flesh of the poor Christ, in the humble, in the poor, in the sick, and in children.<sup>31</sup>

Pope Francis sees this encounter as a revelation of Christ when he says, ‘In this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate’.<sup>32</sup>

All of this encourages a new emphasis on traditional approaches to spirituality as well as the theology that flows from them. Spirituality can be understood as the intersection of three relationships—how we relate to ourselves, how we relate to the world and how we relate to God. These relationships define who we are and what we do. They are set out by Ignatius in the First Principle and Foundation and are critical to freedom understood as the capacity to choose God in a world that prefers the security of riches, honours and pride. Pope Francis suggests

<sup>30</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 265.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, address to the plenary assembly of the international union of superiors general, 8 May 2013, n. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 96.



that the poor teach us dimensions of our own spirituality that only come from a real, personal and dialogical encounter with them. There are two benefits to entering into relationship with people who suffer in actual poverty. The first is a deeper insight into our limits and the unearned privileges most of us enjoy.<sup>33</sup> The second is the invitation to suffer-with, which is a call to participate in the very life of God.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Dependence on God***

An example of an encounter with the poor can be found in the various ‘immersion trips’ offered between US educational institutions and places of poverty around the world. US participants on immersions to the US–Mexico border or other Latin American communities are amazed at how the poor and marginalised live when their limits and constraints are so clear to us. This is often framed as *they are poor but so happy*, or *I have never seen a people live in such a caring community*. What the participants mean, but lack the language to explain, is to ask how, apart from our material prosperity, it is possible to find joy.

Pope Francis reminds us that the poor ‘practice the special solidarity that exists among those who are poor and suffering, and which our

<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis, retreat for priests, 2 June 2016: ‘If we start by feeling compassion for the poor and the outcast, surely we will come to realize that we ourselves stand in need of mercy’.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Suffering with’ is the literal meaning of compassion. See Henri Nouwen, Donald McNeill and Douglas Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (New York: Image, 1983), chapter 1.

civilization seems to have forgotten or would prefer in fact to forget'.<sup>35</sup> Seeing and accepting our limits as human beings is the key to dependence on God. This is what the school of the poor has to teach us. This is made more difficult in societies that worship wealth, strive for honours and truly believe that anyone could somehow be 'self-made'.

Unless we can acknowledge our concrete and limited situation, we will not be able to see the real and possible steps that the Lord demands of us at every moment, once we are attracted and empowered by his gift.<sup>36</sup>

For the non-poor to experience this dependence on God in solidarity, we must allow the actual situation of real poverty to make a claim on us. Can we see and experience the desperation of the migrant fleeing violence? Can we see and experience the powerlessness of people trapped in poverty, victims of racism, marginalisation or oppression? To see and experience is to encounter, but the possibilities of that encounter only emerge when hearts are predisposed to 'suffer with'. To see with the eyes of compassion, and to live out its consequences, is to imitate Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

The 'acknowledgement of our limitations'—moral, emotional, spiritual, physical—can occur for wealthy Western people in a unique way through encounters with those who suffer in poverty and oppression.<sup>38</sup> *Listening* to them, *reflecting* on what they say, *integrating* it into a world view and *acting* upon it concretely are some of the ways to learn from this 'school of the poor'. Praying with our encounters (the reflecting moment) allows the Spirit to make claims upon us in ways that are personal and unique. When such encounters become normative for who we are becoming, the root causes of this suffering become something we must confront.

Ignatian discernment first requires freedom from sources of identity, power and stability that are not of God. Ignatius served the poor and lived in voluntary poverty to be available for what God wanted for him. This availability resulted in spiritual growth when the humility of which Ignatius spoke made it possible to discern with freedom. Ignatius left

<sup>35</sup> Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 116.

<sup>36</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 50.

<sup>37</sup> 'The cry of the poor and the excluded awakens us and helps us to understand the compassion Jesus felt for the people (Matthew 15:32)': Pope Francis, address to the general chapter of the Order of Preachers, 4 August 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 50.

his bodyguards behind after his first day on pilgrimage. He left his sword and dagger at the altar in Montserrat. He left his fine clothes with the beggar who was punished by those who treated him unjustly. Ignatius rid himself of these sources of identity because they signified his noble status—not God. This status was a barrier for Ignatius. Voluntary poverty was the means to free himself in order to depend upon God and listen to Christ.

Spiritual poverty can be glimpsed when the lives and vulnerability of those who suffer poverty and oppression begin to make a claim on our own. This is what solidarity means. ‘Solidarity’ is not an idea, feeling or theory but an action for the good of others. It is best summed up by Ignatius in his *Contemplation to Attain Love*—‘love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words’ (Exx 230). When an encounter with exploitative labour in factories in Latin America begins to change how we consume, we glimpse solidarity. When encounters with poor and marginalised people on our streets shift the way we use resources or vote, we glimpse solidarity. When the environmental cost of our lifestyles turns other people into climate refugees and prompts a change in our everyday living, we glimpse solidarity. Within these encounters we listen to God’s call as it becomes the foundation for considering everything else. For as we relate to those who suffer through poverty and marginalisation, we relate to Christ.

While St Ignatius and Pope Francis have different emphases in their interpretations of how the poor, voluntary poverty and spiritual poverty are essential to our evangelization, there is enough similarity to see connections. Both emphasize that discerning God’s will for us requires interior freedom. For Pope Francis, the poor and marginalised of the world are a unique source of this freedom, first for what they teach us (recalling Ignatius) and second, for what they elicit from us (a share in divine compassion). If we encounter the poor in ways that are mutual and life-giving, such encounters can be transformative.

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