

---

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach

---

# CELEBRATION OF THE JUBILEE YEAR. SAINT IGNATIUS LOYOLA, SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER AND BLESSED PETER FAVRE

## Introduction

**A**t the beginning of this year of our Lord, 2005, I offer you and all the Jesuits of your province or region my best wishes and prayers. One of our tasks for this new year will be to prepare together the jubilee year which begins the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2005. The birth on this earth of Francisco de Jassu y Javier on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1506 at Javier in Navarre, and of Pierre Favre on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April in the same year in Villaret in Savoie, and also of the birth in heaven of Ignatius at Rome on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1556, invite us to examine and intensify our fidelity to the call of the Lord that they were the first to discern and that they followed in such a creative fashion that it continues to challenge us, their companions of the third millennium. Some provinces and regions have already begun preparations for the celebration of these historic events. In order to encourage the whole Society to do the same, I wish in this letter to outline some aspects of the original spirituality that moved these three companions of Jesus and that continue to challenge the apostolic body of the Society today.

1

## Saint Ignatius

“Deo militare”: “To fight for God.”  
*Regimini militantis ecclesiae*, 27 September 1540.

This *raison d'être* of Ignatius and his first companions is summed up in all the foundational documents. However, even if the battle for God is omnipresent in the Constitutions, the expression “Deo militare” no longer appears. Ignatius has moved on from the language of military adventure, employed in the Spiritual Exercises, to that of the patient laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. Instead of a conquest, Ignatius hopes “to bear fruit.” But this change in language in no way changes his passion to serve God alone in contemplation and action, in bringing together a body for God’s “greater service, praise and glory” (C. 693). In order that in all—even in the passion to serve—God alone is to be served first, Ignatius desires “that the Divine and Supreme Majesty” deign to make use of “this least Society” (C.190).

In this apostolic vision it is not sufficient to fight for God, to do some work for God, it is necessary—in order that God truly be the first served—to return this combat to the hands of God who alone “must preserve, direct, and carry forward in his divine service this least Society of Jesus, just as (He alone) deigned to begin it” (C. 134). Considering how God struggles and labors for us “in the manner of someone who works” (SpEx 236), Ignatius wishes to insert himself into the work of God, renouncing every undertaking, choice or preference which in the Society is not clearly an initiative of his God who wishes to make use of the Society.

Today more than ever during its long history, the Society cannot live this mystical vision of Ignatius unless it forms a prayerful apostolic body (C. 812)—a prayer in full active life: “the function of the rector will be first of all to sustain the whole college by his prayer and holy desires” (C. 424). God is served first if in our apostolic lives we consecrate time and space to Him, because in these precise moments of prayer we recognize that it is He who allows us to bear fruit and that it is from Him that we await the apostolic initiatives in the service of His vineyard. He is also the first served when the apostolic body of the Society in prayerful discernment wishes to be touched to the heart in order that its union with God and its plans of action might be a loving and voluntary synergy. Ignatius reminds us that “to go forward in greater service to God” (C. 281) we must admit that “the Society was not instituted by human means; and it is not through them that it can be preserved and increased, but through the grace of the omnipotent hand of Christ our God and Lord” (C. 812).

**Saint Francis Xavier**

“Christi Domini nostri lucem illaturi”  
“To bring the light of Christ our Lord”  
Cochin, 20 January 1545

A man of intense missionary action, he stops at nothing to proclaim the good news at the top of his voice, Francis has not ceased to challenge us. His spirituality is profoundly Ignatian, to the point where we can read in all his correspondence a commentary on the Spiritual Exercises. Here the meditation on the two standards above all comes to life, because Francis numbers himself among the apostles sent by Christ into the whole world to aid “all men” (SpEx 145-146) in spreading “his holy doctrine”. “Ayudar a las almas” in view of the glory of God (C. 765), is indeed the end which the Society pursues. On the earth, Francis bears the good news to help those who no longer reflect the image of God and are deprived of their proper humanity and are plunged into misery (18.3.1541). One must help other men even in their ignorance, “for what can he know who has no knowledge of God or of Jesus Christ?” (22.6.1549).

In order to explain this assistance which offers the good news without wishing to impose it, Francis often refers to the image of fruit. To evangelize is to bring forth fruit in souls (cf. e.g. the instructions for Fr. Gaspar, 6-14.4.1552). He finds his companions engaged in “digging into souls in order to free them from their sins and to enable them to serve God” in ‘producing’ “great fruit” (20.6.1549). The language of fruit expresses the complete gratuity of evangelization and the role of God and his love in its growth. As in the life of the Lord himself this help is not limited to the word, but extends to education and to the social, to the pastoral and to the community. Above all, Francis knows that to be of help involves friends and protectors, benefactors and partners, especially where Jesuit companions are still rare.

But what interests us most, in the evangelization achieved by Francis, is the urgency to announce the good news that haunts him, although it leaves us too placid. The fact that our evangelization should involve respect for consciences and cultures, the demands of dialogue and development, the challenges of religious pluralism and of religious indifference, ought to impel us to share Xavier’s innate urgency rather than our resignation before what appears to be a fait accompli. “We hope in God our Lord that we shall produce much fruit” (28.10.1542). This is the best service that we might offer in order to contribute to the future of our world. Because to be on a mission means to desire and act in such a way that the good news that is the Lord may reach and mold all of humanity which is waiting for Him who is His Truth and His Life.

**Blessed Peter Favre**

“To beseech the Holy Spirit to be so kind  
as to control all the spirits who inhabit us”  
Memorial, 13 May 1543

It is Favre who, in the midst of the first generation of the Society, characterized himself as follows: “I was very sad and afflicted to realize that of all my contemporaries I was by far the one who succeeded the least” (Memorial, 3.4.1545). In fact, not at all gifted for governance as was Ignatius, or impelled toward great exploits as was Francis, Favre devoted himself to the spiritual companionship of a great number of people who were searching for God, at least in this trilogy of ministries: confession, conversation and the Exercises. He knew the great danger involved in “doing great things poorly”, in the situation where “one who is impassioned for the glory of God” does not pay attention to the grace of the Holy Spirit in “the least concerns of God” (cf. Memorial, 26.10.1542), for example when it is a question of accompanying another personally along the road that leads to God. But from the ministry which Favre favored, he was able to say that the consoling Spirit occasionally likes to add something of himself to the smallest realities and actions. “The more one is united with him, the more abundant is the benediction which descends on these humble works -- he from whom they come and to whom they conform” (Memorial, 3.4.1545).

The ministries of “cura personalis” remain a challenge in the Society, a necessity, at the interior of the inevitable and growing institutionalization of education and of formation. For even the indispensable social changes pass through the conversion of hearts, which could put an end to the abject poverty in the world but do not really wish to. Favre can serve as our guide, he whom the Holy Spirit impelled to desire and even to hope to accomplish the ministry of the consoling Christ. He wished to be the one “who helps, delivers, heals, frees, enriches and strengthens” in order to bring to others “not only in spiritual matters, but also – if such daring and hope are permitted in God – in a material fashion, with all that charity can do for the soul and body of any of our brothers” (Memorial, 26.10.1542).

**Conclusion**

The above are some aspects of the spirituality of the first companions of Jesus which even today offer so many challenges for the apostolic body of the Society of Jesus: that God be truly and existentially the first served

in our every manner of living our vocation; that in following our Lord, the Society remain conscious of the urgency of its mission, for “behold the fields: the grain is ripe and ready for the harvest” (Jn 4:35); that seized by the Spirit, we may live personally the ministry of consoler who comes to represent the risen Lord in such a way that friends habitually comfort one another (SpEx 224).

On these different points, we should truly profit from the jubilee year to examine our way of life and taking the means to live more profoundly the charisms received from our Founders. That is to say, in our apostolic prayer, nourished by the Eucharist, in our missionary ardor, in our ministry of spiritual aid to others. May the provinces and regions not hesitate to accentuate other aspects which are more pertinent in their apostolic contexts, but may all participate in this verification and intensification of our fidelity to the call accepted by Ignatius, Francis and Peter. I will be most grateful if you would let me know of your projects and initiatives for the celebration of these three companions of Jesus, so that I may share them with other provinces and regions that may find in them some sources of inspiration.

With best wishes and prayers for a holy and fruitful New Year, I assure you of my devotion in the Lord.

Rome, 6 January 2005.

On the solemnity of the Epiphany.

Rev. Gen. Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach