

Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



Week Thirty Seven Encouragements & Wisdom

E & W reflections are additional helps for your Sacred Story prayer journey. Reflect on them ahead of your prayer exercises for the week or outside of your fifteen-minute prayer windows during the week.

Understanding Temptations as Spiritual and Psychological Events

Ignatius overcame much in his life with the help of God's grace. He did not have the benefit we do today of all the medical and psychological insights into the human person. Yet he was a wise and compassionate judge of human nature. In his own way, especially in his discernment rules, he anticipated modern human psychology and its interplay with the spiritual dimension of human nature. This was God's gift to him and to the Church through him.

With his military background, he described the enemy of human nature as a commander of an opposing force who examines the defenses of his opponent. After he has taken inventory, the enemy commander throws all his force at the weakest point in the defense system of his opponent. This was Ignatius' experience of how the enemy of our human nature attacks us. Those attacks will take advantage of elements in our life history where we are weakened spiritually, morally, psychologically and physically. The attacks are designed to keep our broken hearts—the true effect of all sin and evil—in the dark.

The pain of Original Sin, early life trauma and lost innocence fuel your narcissism. The narcissistic ego is closed to the Spirit. It rationalizes, self-empowers, defends, and legitimizes whatever it needs to fill its painful void—to find security. The defenses that silence your conscience from recognizing your narcissism match the intensity of the hidden pain and suffering at the center of your heart. You defend your use of these illegitimate vices and addictions. Why? They protect you from feeling the pain in your heart. When you accept the Divine Physician's graces to break through your defenses and heal the pain in your heart, your *Sacred Story* begins. This is the true path to mystical awakening. There are no shortcuts. There is no other way home.

Those committed to the uprooting of sin, addictions, and vices from body and soul will be assaulted by attacks directed at the spiritual and psychological wounds that make them most

vulnerable. Ignatius' commitment to the ascetic practices of his newfound faith ultimately brought him to the greatest crisis of his conversion journey. How could he be deceived by the enemy? What was his background? Ignatius was a person with a history just like us. Here are some elements of his life story that likely wounded him in mind, spirit and body. The enemy of human nature had a lot to work with in Ignatius' history, as he does for all of us.

Doña Marina Sánchez de Licona, Ignatius' mother, died shortly after giving birth to him. Ignatius was removed from the Loyola manor house and nursed by María de Garín, the wife of a blacksmith living about half a mile from his home. The Jesuit psychiatrist William Meissner states "research in this area tends to confirm the association of early maternal deprivation through death, divorce, or separation with relatively severe forms of life-long psychopathology."ⁱ José Ignacio Idígoras, a modern biographer of Ignatius, complements this analysis:

This primordial bonding between Íñigo and his mother, or rather the nonexistence of such a bonding, suggests the absence of the protective, liberating, fostering maternal presence that would have given him early direction, basic confidence, and would have opened up new objectives for him. This absence of affective nurturing during his early years could have even resulted in retarded physical growth. Íñigo was a runt, hardly a representative of the Basques, who are considered the tallest of the Spanish people. The lack of nurturing by a mother engenders habits of depression later in life; it affects that way one reacts to and relates with others; it incites vague feelings of guilt. Again we cite Rof Carballo, who has written extensively on the relationship between psychoanalysis and religion, on this particular point: "Deep within the recesses of his affectivity, every wandering adventurer is responding to the hidden and irresolvable need to compensate for the lack of that maternal nurturing, whose function is to provide the child with affective perimeters."ⁱⁱ

Idígoras and Meissner's insights complement the research of Karen Horney. Psychological disturbances are the source of neurotic patterns or "trends" that, having unconscious roots, indicate efforts to cope with early traumatic childhood experiences.ⁱⁱⁱ About these trends, Horney writes:

They represent a way of life enforced by unfavorable conditions. The child must develop them in order to survive his insecurity, his fears, and his loneliness. But they give him an unconscious feeling that he must stick to the established path at all odds, lest he succumb to the dangers threatening him...When this initial development has once occurred is it necessarily lasting? The answer is that although he will not inevitably retain his defensive techniques there is grave danger that he will...in the absence of strong counteracting factors there is considerable danger that the trends acquired not only will persist but in time will

obtain a stronger hold on the personality.^{iv}

Rudolf Allers and Gabor Maté provide more evidence of the personality challenges caused by early-life trauma. Their theories expand upon and complement those of Meissner, Idígoras and Horney. Allers (considered Freud's last brilliant pupil) views early childhood trauma and deprivation as key to characterological problems later in life.^v Gabor Maté likewise, points to maternal deprivation and early life stress as a root cause of serious maladaptive behaviors and psychological problems.^{vi} Maté's study on stressors in childhood development discloses the source of a narcissistic personality and his or her addictive tendencies:

Addiction is primarily about the self, about the unconscious, insecure self that at every moment considers only its own immediate desires—and believes that it must behave that way. In all cases the process arises from the unmet needs of the helpless young child for whom this constant self-obsession appears, to begin with, as a matter of survival. That he cannot rely on the nurturing environment becomes his core myth. No such environment even exists—or so he has come to believe in his bones and in his heart, which were parched by early loss...[T]he addict hasn't grown out of the stage of infancy that has been called the narcissistic phase, the period when the fledgling human being believes that everything happens because of her, to her, and for her.^{vii}

Evidence of the type and intensity of stress (and/or trauma) that Ignatius encountered in childhood can be deduced from his behaviors. According to Karen Horney's theories, with added insights from Meissner, Idígoras, Allers and Maté, stresses from Ignatius' early development are probable contributing factors to his addictions and sinful narcissism. Indeed half of Horney's *trends* fit Ignatius' personality perfectly.^{viii}

If precursors for Ignatius' sinful narcissism and addictive habits can be inferred from lack of maternal influences, what about paternal influences? The Loyolas had a sense of their own nobility and a willful sense of entitlement that emboldened them to fight against their own king. Ignatius, the youngest of the Loyolas, was insignificant in size and family rank but displayed traits of this willful entitlement.

Ignatius' oldest brother will by right inherit the entire Loyola estate. Ignatius had to fend for himself to make his mark in the world. Subject to the "patriarchal and arbitrary manner" of his father, Ignatius was given the tonsure and enlisted in a clerical militia.^{ix} This is a career that he would rebel against in "stubborn opposition to this plan of his father."^x He saw his future career as something greater than living his years out as a country pastor on the family estate now owned by his brother. The example of his father (the strong Beltrán Loyola, a feudal lord of Guipúzcoa) and the Loyola tradition of entitlement would be "far-reaching."^{xi}

Pride, wealth, family status, military prowess, valor in battle, and a reflexive faith are understood to be part of Ignatius' noble breeding. He will identify it later as "riches, honor, and

pride.”^{xii} At the age of sixteen, Ignatius’ father Beltrán died. All the family wealth, prestige and properties passed to Ignatius’ oldest brother. Ignatius, now alone in the world must fight for a place of honor befitting the Loyola name and temperament. He had no intention of serving the Church. Instead he will seek to make his mark by serving the king and achieving military glories.^{xiii}

The commanding sixteen year-old coming of age at his father’s death has no ready platform to distinguish himself in the world. This insecurity is suffused with his sufferings, emotional deprivations, addictive traits, sinful habits and narcissistic pride. The world he entered was the princely court of the Loyola’s relative Don Juan Velasquez de Cuellar at Aravalo. It was fifteen years before Ignatius began to source, confront and name the sins and addictions at the root of his disordered dreams and extreme passions. When enlightenment struck, it is extraordinary that scrupulosity initiated his harrowing passage toward integrated spiritual growth and mystical wisdom.

Explore your own history once again. Go back and look over the materials leading up to your whole-life confessions. Can you discern with more clarity the elements of your own history—your own story? What can the enemy of human nature use against you? Do you know how your heart has been broken in the past? Are you aware of the ways you try to seek security for that broken heart? Do you know which are legitimate and which are not? Are you aware of your narcissism (passive or aggressive)? Do you know your defenses? Do you know what makes you defiant? What entitlements do you protect? What are your crusades, big or small? What things trigger your angers? What kind of things make you feel indignant?

Ignatius teaches us how the enemy of human nature seeks to destroy our spiritual growth by using weakness and wounds in our history. But God’s grace can heal those wounds and help us grow. From the Church’s Liturgy for saints, we find this consoling prayer: “For in the saints who consecrated themselves to Christ for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, it is right to celebrate the wonders of your providence, by which you call human nature back to its original holiness...”^{xiv} By your attention to Ignatius’ discernment rules, you will uncover the tactics of the enemy. By God’s grace, your human nature can begin its path back to original holiness.



ⁱ William W. Meissner, SJ, MD, *Ignatius of Loyola: Psychology of a Saint*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 9.

ⁱⁱ José Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Pilgrim Saint*, trans. Cornelius Michael Buckley, SJ (Chicago: Loyola

University Press, 1994), 42.

ⁱⁱⁱ Karen Horney, MD, *Self Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1994), 38. Cited hereafter as: “Horney.” Horney’s theory differs from Meissner. His Freudian model posits external psychological forces and disturbances that frustrate instinctual drives.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, 42-43. A critical scholar of history may view this overlay of psychological theory on Ignatius’ history as problematic. Yet, while ideas such as *deprivation* might be viewed as constructs or symptoms of Industrial society, the true human impact of such deprivation transcends historical epochs and intellectual constructs.

^v Rudolf Allers, *Practical Psychology in Character Development* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1934; repr., Fort Collins, CO: RC Books, 2002). For a discussion of childhood stresses that can damage the personality and lead to habitual and sinful psychological complexes, see, 4-101 (page references are to the reprint edition). [Allers broke early with Freud and became a close collaborator of both Victor Frankel and Alfred Adler. Allers, a mentor to both the young Hans Urs von Balthasar and Edith Stein, was armed with doctoral degrees in medicine, psychiatry and philosophy and published works in psychiatry, philosophy, theology, linguistics and physiology. He was uniquely attuned to the interplay between the spiritual, intellectual, and psychological components of the personality. As such, he developed a psychology sensitive to the best in the Christian tradition. His last teaching posts were at The Catholic University of America and Georgetown University. Most of Allers’ works, and a large collection of his personal papers and conference notes, are available at Georgetown University’s Lauinger Library].

^{vi} Such deprivation leads to stress and biochemical deficiencies that make forming intimate relationships difficult. All of which increase propensities to addictive substances and behaviors. Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 197-210.

^{vii} Maté, 390. See also these sections: “How the Addictive Brain Develops” and “The Addiction Process and the Addictive Personality” (Maté’s methods to deactivate maladaptive habits and addictions in order to establish emotional balance are significant, along with the awareness exercises of Michael Brown’s *Presence Process*. Insights from both authors are used in Sacred Story to highlight inherent aspects of Ignatius’ methods in order to create a holistic updating of Ignatius’ vital *Examen* consciousness techniques and discernment principles).

^{viii} “(4). The neurotic need for power: Domination over others craved for its own sake; Devotion to a cause, duty, responsibility, though playing some part, not the driving force; Essential disrespect for others, their individuality, their dignity, their feelings, the only concern being their subordination; Great differences as to degree of destructive elements involved; Indiscriminate adoration of strength and contempt for weakness; Dread of uncontrollable situations; Dread of helplessness. (6). The neurotic need for social recognition or prestige: All things—inanimate objects, money, persons, one’s own qualities, activities, and feelings—evaluated only according to their prestige value; Self-evaluation entirely dependent on nature of public acceptance; Differences as to use of traditional or rebellious ways of inciting envy or admiration; Dread of losing caste (“humiliation”), whether through external

circumstances or through factors from within. **(7)**. The neurotic need for personal admiration: Inflated image of self (narcissism); Need to be admired not for what one possesses or presents in public eye but for the imagined self; Self-evaluation dependent on living up to this image and on admiration of it by others; Dread of losing admiration (“humiliation”). **(8)**. The neurotic ambition for personal achievement: Need to surpass others not through what one presents or is but through one’s activities; Self-evaluation dependent on being the very best—lover, sportsman, writer, worker—particularly in one’s own mind, recognition by others being vital too, however, and its absence resented; Admixture of destructive tendencies (toward the defeat of others) never lacking but varying in intensity; Relentless driving of self to greater achievements, though with pervasive anxiety; Dread of failure (“humiliation”). Trends 6, 7 and 8 have in common a more or less open competitive drive toward absolute superiority over others. But though these trends overlap and may be combined, they may lead a separate existence. The need for personal admiration, for instance, may go with a disregard of social prestige. **(10)**. The neurotic need for perfection and unassailability: relentless driving for perfection; Ruminations and self-recriminations regarding possible flaws; Feelings of superiority over others because of being perfect; Dread of finding flaws within self or of making mistakes; Dread of criticism or reproaches.” Horney, 53-56.

^{ix} The tonsure was a form of hair cut common for those who were clerics or who had committed to an ascetical way of life.

^x Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola: An Account of its Historical Development*. (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1953). 5-7.

^{xi} Meissner, 16.

^{xii} Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, ed. Louis J. Puhl, SJ (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), 61.

^{xiii} Ignatius’ spirituality is focused to lead individuals to serve the “magis.” This magis is the “*greater good*.” Ignatius’ sense of the *magis* is at this point is purely ego-driven. His elder priestly brother had already brought “disgrace” upon the “princely line of Loyola” by fathering four children. Ignatius wanted much more, especially as his ambitions increased in his contacts with the royal court. Hugo Rahner, 7.

^{xiv} From the; “Preface of Holy Virgins and Religious.” Rev. James Socias, ed., “Daily Roman Missal: According to the Roman Missal, Third Edition” (Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum Inc, 1998-2012), 758.