

# Discourse of the Holy Father Francis to the members of the 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus

In the Aula of the General Congregation – General Curia of the Society of Jesus

24<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Dear Brothers and Friends in the Lord:

While praying and thinking about what I would say to you, I remembered with particular affection the final words of Blessed Paul VI to us as he was setting out the purpose of the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation: “This is the way; this is the way, brothers and Sons. Forward, *in Nomine Domini*. Let us walk together, free, obedient, united to each other in the love of Christ, for the greater glory of God.”<sup>1</sup>

St John Paul II and Benedict XVI too have encouraged us to “**lead a life worthy** of the vocation to which we have been called” [Eph 4:1],<sup>2</sup> and to “**continue along the path** of mission in full fidelity to your original charism, in the ecclesial and social context that characterises this beginning of the millennium. As my predecessors have often told you, the Church needs you, counts on you, and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly with a view to reaching the places, both in the geographical and spiritual sense, where others do not reach, or find it difficult to reach.”<sup>3</sup> On the road together – free and obedient – going to the peripheries where others do not reach, “under Jesus’ gaze and looking to the horizon which is the ever greater glory of God, who ceaselessly surprises us.”<sup>4</sup> The Jesuit is called, “to travel” – as Ignatius says – and make our life in whatever part of the world there is hope of greater service to God and of help of souls” [Const. 304]. It is as Nadal was saying: “for the Society the whole world is our home.”<sup>5</sup>

Ignatius wrote to Borgia about the so-called “angelic Jesuits” (Oviedo and Onfroy), because these were saying that the Society had not been well instituted and that it had to be instituted more according to the Spirit. The spirit which is guiding these critics – Ignatius was saying – “is simply ignorant of how the Society’s affairs stand – they are *in fieri*, still coming to be, beyond the necessary and substantial.”<sup>6</sup> I like so much this way Ignatius has of looking at things: things becoming, getting established, moving beyond the necessary and substantial foundation. For this way of thinking gets the Society out of any kind of paralysis, and delivers it from so many flights of fancy.

It’s the Formula of the Institute that is the “necessary and substantial” – it’s this we should keep before our eyes every day, after having first looked towards God our Lord. “The way of being of this Institute,

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<sup>1</sup> PAUL VI, Address to the Members of the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation: *Così, così, fratelli e figli. Avanti, in Nomine Domini. Camminiamo insieme, liberi, obbedienti, uniti nell'amore di Cristo, per la maggior gloria di Dio.*

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Homily of the Holy Father to the Members of the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Congregation in the Chapel of the General Curia, 2 September 1983.

<sup>3</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Address to the 35<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, 21 February 2008.

<sup>4</sup> FRANCIS, Homily at the Church of the Gesù, 3 January 2014.

<sup>5</sup> MHSJ, *Monumenta Nadal V*, 364-365.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of Ignatius to Francis Borgia, July 1549 (MHSJ *Epistolae Ignatii*, XII, 632-52), n. 17. Cf. M. A. FIORITO y A. SWINNEN, “La Fórmula del Instituto de la Compañía de Jesús (introducción y versión castellana)”, *Stromata*, July-December 1977-nº 3/4, 259-260.

which is a pathway towards Him.” That was how it was for the first companions; that was how they envisaged it would be “for those who might follow us **along this pathway.**” So, poverty, obedience, not being obliged to sing the office in choir – these are not demands or privileges, but helps – helps that promote the mobility of the Society, its members’ availability to “run in the path of Christ our Lord” [Const. 582], given that they have, thanks to the vow of obedience to the Pope, a “surer direction from the Holy Spirit” [Formula of the Institute 3]. It’s in the Formula that we have Ignatius’s basic intuition. Because that’s there as the substance, the *Constitutions* can stress that we always keep in mind “places, times and persons”, and that all the rules should be just helps – *tantum quantum* – for engaging particular concrete realities.

Being on the road, for Ignatius, is more than just setting off and moving along. It indicates a kind of state of being. It’s all about drawing profit, progress, moving forward, doing things for others’ benefit. That is how the two Formulas of the Institute, approved by Paul III [1540] and Julius III [1550] express it, when they focus the work of the Society on the faith – its defence and propagation – and on people’s life and Christian formation (*doctrina*). Here Ignatius and the first companions use the word ‘*aprovechamiento*’ -- ‘progress’ -- *ad profectum*,<sup>7</sup> see Phil 1:12 and 25], which gives the practical criterion of discernment proper to our spirituality.

This “progress” is not individualistic; it is for the common good. “The end of this Society is to devote itself with God’s grace not only to the salvation and perfection of the members’ own souls, but also, likewise with grace, to labour strenuously in giving aid toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their neighbours” [*Examen*, 1:2]. If the balance in Ignatius’s heart was ever tilted, it was towards the help of our neighbours. So much so that he used to get angry if somebody was to tell him that the reason that someone remained in the Society was “in order to save his own soul. Ignatius did not want men, who although being good, were not zealous for the service of their neighbour” (Aicardo I punto 10 p. 41).

This “progress” is “in all things”. Ignatius’s Formula expresses a tension: “not only... but also ...” And this mental structure of holding tensions – the salvation and perfection of one’s own soul, and the salvation and perfection of one’s neighbour’s – holding them together within a higher perspective of grace – this is proper to the Society. The harmonization of that and all the other tensions (contemplation and action, faith and justice, charism and institution, community and mission...) is not given to us in abstract formulations. Rather it is attained over the course of time, through what Favre used to call “our way of moving forward”.<sup>8</sup> Journeying and “progressing” in the following of the Lord, the Society moves forward, harmonizing the tensions contained and brought about by the different kinds of people it brings together, and by the missions it receives.

This “progress” is not something elitist. In the Formula, Ignatius proceeds by describing means for drawing more universal profit that are distinctively priestly. But we should note that the works of mercy are being taken as read. The Formula says, “without this being an obstacle” to mercy!!! Works of mercy – caring for the sick in hospitals, begging for alms, sharing, teaching catechism to children, the patient suffering of hardships – this is the life-giving milieu in which Ignatius and his first companions were living and moving and having their being. This was their daily bread. Their concern was that the *other* things not become obstacles!

This “progress”, finally, is about “what benefits more”. They are talking about the *Magis*, that extra, which drew Ignatius to start processes off, to stay with them, and to evaluate their real effect on people’s lives,

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<sup>7</sup>Formula of the Institute, n.3: ... *ad profectum animarum in vita et doctrina christiana* ...

<sup>8</sup>Cf. MHSJ, *Monumenta Fabri*, 50, 69, 111, 114, etc.

whether it was about faith, of justice, or mercy and charity. The *magis* is the fire, the fervour in action, which shakes up the roosts. Our saints have always embodied this fervour. They said of St Alberto Hurtado that he was “a sharp spur prodding the Church’s sleeping bodies”. And this against that temptation which Paul VI called *spiritus vertiginis* (“the spirit of confusion”) and de Lubac called “spiritual worldliness.” This temptation is not primarily moral, but spiritual. It distracts us from the essential: that we be people from whom others can draw for their progress, that we leave a footprint, make our mark on history, especially in the lives of the very least. “The Society is fervour”,<sup>9</sup> Nadal used to say. And it’s in order to rekindle fervour in the mission of being of profit for people in their life and Christian formation that I’d like to focus these reflections around three points. If we can take for granted that the Society is in the places of mission that it needs to be, these three points can improve our way of moving forward. The points are about joy, about the Cross, and about the Church, our Mother. Their aim is to point us a step further forward, by removing the impediments the enemy of human nature puts before us when we are moving forward in God’s service, rising from good to better.

### 1. To ask insistently for consolation

One step forward we can always take is to ask insistently for consolation. In the two Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii gaudium* and *Amoris laetitia* and in *Laudato si’*, I wanted to stress the importance of joy. Ignatius in the Exercises invites us to contemplate “the office of consolation” to his friends which is proper to the Risen Christ [Exx 224]. This is the work proper to the Society: to console the *pueblo fiel*, the faithful people of God; and to help with discernment, so that the enemy of human nature does not rob us of our joy: the joy of evangelising, the joy of the family, the joy of the Church, the joy of the creation.... Don’t let him take it from us. Don’t let him make us despair in face of the scale of the world’s evils, and the misunderstandings between those who want to do good. And don’t let him replace it for us with the vain joys that are always to hand in any human intercourse.

This service of joy and spiritual consolation is rooted in prayer. It consists in encouraging ourselves and encouraging everyone “to ask insistently for God’s consolation.” Ignatius formulated this in a negative way in the sixth rule of the first week when he said “It is very profitable intensely to change ourselves against the same desolation” insisting more on prayer [Exx 319]. It is profitable because “in desolation we are of very little worth (*muuy para poco*)” [Exx 324]. To practise and teach this prayer of asking and begging for consolation is the most important thing we can do to promote joy. If somebody does not consider himself worthy of it (in practice this is very common), they should still insist on praying for this consolation, if only for love of the message. For joy is constitutive of the Gospel message. And love for others, for their family, for the world – these too should make them pray for joy. You can’t pass on good news with a sad face. Joy is not just a decorative extra; it’s a clear indication of grace, it shows that love is active, at work, present. That’s why the quest for joy must not get mixed up with the quest for “a spiritual effect” of the kind our time is quite capable of fabricating for consumer gratification. Joy needs to be sought for what it can tell us about our whole way of life, for its quality of lastingness. Ignatius opens his eyes and wakes up to the discernment of spirits when he discovers this distinct significance at work in the interplay between joys that last a long time and joys that pass. (Autobiography 8) It’s time that will give him the key for recognising the Spirit’s action.

In the Exercises, “progress” in the spiritual life is given in consolation. It’s the “rising from good to better” [Exx 315]. Again, “every *increase* in hope, faith and charity and every interior joy” [Exx 316]. This service of joy was what led the first companions to decide not to break up, but to make a formal institute of the shared life (*instituir la compaña*) that they were providing for each other and sharing spontaneously. What marked it out was the joy that led them to pray together, to go on missions together and then to

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Monumenta Nadal V, 310

come back together again, in imitation of the life led by the Lord and his apostles. This joy of the explicit announcing of the Gospel – through preaching, faith and the practice of justice and mercy – is what leads the Society to go to the peripheries. The Jesuit is a servant of the joy of the Gospel. This is the case when he is working on a small scale, conversing and giving the Spiritual Exercises to a single person, and helping them to encounter “this interior place from where the power of the Spirit comes, guiding them, liberating them, renewing them.”<sup>10</sup> It is equally the case when he is working structurally, organising projects of training, of mercy, or reflection – institutional extensions of that delicate place where one’s own will breaks down, and the Spirit enters in order to act. Michel de Certeau was right to say that the Exercises are “the apostolic method *par excellence*”, since they enable “a return to the heart, the principle of a docility to the Spirit who awakens and impels the one making the exercitant into a personal fidelity to God.”<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Letting ourselves be moved by our Lord placed on the cross

Another step forward we can always take is to let ourselves be moved by the Lord placed on the cross, by Him in person, by Him present in so many of our suffering brothers and sisters – the great majority of humanity! Father Arrupe used to say that wherever there is pain, the Society is there.

The jubilee of mercy is an appropriate time to reflect on the works of mercy. I am using the plural because mercy is not an abstract word, but rather a lifestyle that lays the stress less on words, and more on specific deeds that touch the flesh of our neighbours, and take structural form in institutions of mercy. For those of us who do the Exercises, the grace by which Jesus commands us to resemble the Father (cf. Lk 6:36) begins with the colloquy of mercy, itself the expansion of the colloquy with the Lord placed on the cross for my sins. The entire second exercise is a colloquy full of sentiments of shame, confusion, pain and grateful tears, seeing who I am – making myself less – and who God is – making Him more – “who has given me life till now” – who Jesus is, hanging on the cross for me (Exx. 61 and preceding).

The way Ignatius lives and formulates his experience of mercy is of great personal and apostolic benefit and requires an acute and sustained experience of discernment. Our father said to Borgia: “I am personally convinced regarding myself that both before and after I am totally an obstacle. Because of this I feel increased spiritual happiness and joy in the Lord in as much as I cannot attribute to myself anything which might seem good.”<sup>12</sup> Ignatius lives, then, from the pure mercy of God right down to the smallest details of his life and of his person. And he felt that the greater the obstacles he posed, the more the Lord treated him with goodness: “So great was the Lord’s mercy, and so great was the abundance of the tenderness and sweetness of His grace with him, that the more he was lacking and wishing thus to be punished, the kinder God was, and the more abundantly He was lavishing on him the treasures of His infinite generosity. And thus he used to say that he thought there was no person in the world in whom these two things coincided as much as in him: the first, how much he had failed God; the second, how much he was receiving so many graces, continuously, from His hand.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> MICHEL DE CERTEAU, Introduction to his translation of Favre’s *Spiritual Diary* (Paris: Desclée, 1959), 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> Letter of Ignatius to Francis Borgia, late 1545 (No 101: MHSJ *Epistolae Ignatii*, I, 339-343).

<sup>13</sup> P. RIBADENEIRA, *Vida di S. Ignazio di Loiola*, Roma, La Civiltà Cattolica, 1863, 336. [Tanta era la misericordia del Signore, e tanta la copia della soavità e dolcezza della grazia sua con esso lui, che quante egli più desiderava d’essere in questo modo castigato, tanto più benigno era Iddio e con abbondanza maggiore spargeva sopra di lui i tesori della sua infinita liberalità. Laonde diceva, che egli credeva non vi essere nel mondo uomo, i cui queste due cose insieme, tanto come in lui, concorressero; la prima mancare tanto a Dio e l’altra il ricevere tante e così continue grazie dalla sua mano. (Quoted in Italian at the original Spanish version N. of the T.)]

As Ignatius describes his experience of mercy in these comparative terms – the more he failed the Lord, the more He reached out in giving him His grace – he is releasing the life-giving power of mercy – which we often dilute with our abstract formulations and legalistic conditions. The Lord who looks on us with mercy and chooses us, sends us out to bring that same mercy, with all its power, to the poorest, to sinners, to the discarded and crucified people in the present world, who are suffering injustice and violence. Only if we experience this healing power first-hand in our own wounds, as individual persons and as a body, will we lose the fear of letting ourselves be moved by the immensity of our brothers’ and sisters’ suffering. Only thus will we set ourselves to walk patiently with our peoples, learning from them the best way of helping and serving them. (cf. GC 32, d.4 n.50)

### **3. Doing good led by the good spirit, thinking with the Church**

It is always a step forward when we try to do the good with a good spirit, “sensing (*sintiendo*) with the Church” as Ignatius puts it. The service of discerning *how* we do things is another feature characteristic of the Society. Favre expressed the point by asking for the grace that “all the good that could be realised, thought or organised be done through the good spirit and not through the bad.”<sup>14</sup> This grace of discernment—it’s not enough to think, do and organise the good; you also have to do it in the good spirit – is what roots us in the Church, in which the Spirit makes active and distributes His variety of charisms for the common good. Favre used to say that on many points those who wanted to reform the Church were right, but that God did not want to correct it through their means.

It is proper to the Society to do things thinking with the Church. To do this without losing peace and with joy, in the context of the sins we see in ourselves as well as in others, and in the structures that we have created, involves carrying the cross and experiencing poverty and humiliations. In this context, Ignatius encourages a person to make choices about bearing them patiently or desiring them.<sup>15</sup> Where the contradiction got more heated, Ignatius set us an example of recollecting himself before talking or acting, in order to act from the good spirit. The rules for thinking with the Church are not to be read as precise instructions on points of controversy – as such, some may well be outdated. Rather, they are examples of Ignatius in his time encouraging an *agere contra* against the anti-ecclesial spirit, and placing himself totally and decisively on the side of our Mother, the Church. It was not about justifying a debatable position, but about opening up a space for the Spirit to act in His own time.

Service of the good spirit and of discernment makes us men of the Church – not clericalists but in the real sense ecclesiastics – men “for others,” with nothing of our own cutting us off from others, but rather with everything that is our own placed in communion and service.

We do not walk alone, or taking things easily. We walk with “a heart that does not rest, that does not close in on itself, but beats to the rhythm of a journey undertaken together with all the faithful people of God”<sup>16</sup> We walk becoming all things to all people, so that we might by any means save someone.

This self-emptying means that the Society has—and can always be taking on even more—the face, the accent and the lifestyle of all peoples, of every culture, placing itself in all of them, in what is proper to the heart of each people. And this in order to make the Church there, with each one of them, at once inculturating the gospel and evangelizing every culture (*inculturando el evangelio y evangelizando cada cultura*).

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<sup>14</sup> PIERRE FAVRE, *Mémorial*, n.51.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. IGNATIUS, *Autograph Directory*, n. 23.

<sup>16</sup> FRANCIS, Homily at the Church of the Gesù, 3 January 2014.

We ask Our Lady of the Way, in a colloquy like that of a son, or of a servant to his Lady, to intercede for us before the “Father of mercies and God of all consolation” (2 Cor 1:3), so that He may place us ever anew with His Son, with Jesus, who is carrying, and inviting us to carry with him, the cross of the world. We entrust to Her our “way of moving forward”, that it may be of the Church, inculturated, poor, marked by service, free from all worldly ambition. We ask Our Mother to direct and accompany every Jesuit, together with that part of the *pueblo fiel* to whom he has been sent, **along these paths of consolation, compassion and discernment.**