

The Ignatian Principle of Indifference

"We must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed... Consequently...we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things. Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we were created." (#23 of The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola)

Ignatius' First Principle and Foundation

The principle of indifference is introduced in the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises within a text called The First Principle and Foundation.

Literal Translation:

"God created human beings to praise, reverence, and serve God, and by doing this, to save their souls. God created all other things on the face of the earth to help fulfill this purpose. From this it follows that we are to use the things of this world only to the extent that they help us to this end, and we ought to rid ourselves of the things of this world to the extent that they get in the way of this end.

For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things as much as we are able, so that we do not necessarily want health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long rather than a short life, and so in all the rest, so that we ultimately desire and choose only what is most conducive for us to the end for which God created us."

Contemporary Translation: Fr Fleming SJ

"The goal of our life is to live with God forever. God, who loves us, gave us life. Our own response of love allows God's life to flow into us without limit. All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily. As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us develop as loving persons. But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice and are not bound by some obligation. We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a deeper response to our life in God. Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening his life in me."

Prayerful Response by Sister Marie Schwan, CSJ: (Congregation of the Sisters of Joseph)

"Lord my God, when your love spilled over into creation You thought of me.

I am from love, of love, for love.

Let my heart, O God, always recognize, cherish,

and enjoy Your goodness in all of creation.

Direct all that is me toward Your praise.

Teach me reverence for every person, all things. Energize me in your service.

Lord God may nothing ever distract me from your love...neither health nor sickness, wealth nor poverty, honor nor dishonor, long life nor short life.

May I never seek nor choose to be other than You intend or wish. Amen."

Important ideas to keep in mind...

1. The centrality of God's love in the mind and thinking of St. Ignatius,
2. That this is the focus of the exercises, the goal of the examen and every other exercise within the Spiritual Exercises,
3. The desire to move toward God as a grounding for life, and
4. That detachment and indifference are choices made more **toward** something than **away** from something, with purpose and intention.

Suspice: St. Ignatius (suspice is the Latin word for receive)

"Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me: I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more."

Prayer for Generosity: Also attributed to Ignatius

*"Lord, teach me to be generous,
to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to look for any reward,
save that of knowing that I do your holy will."*



The Apostle Paul to the Philippians:

*4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 **Do not worry about anything**, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*8 Finally, beloved, **whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.***

9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. 11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.

12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

14 In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

For Paul, God's peace is sandwiched between a **choice** of gratitude over anxiety and a **choice** of orientation toward the things which will build us up in our journey to be as God has made us to be. In his own life then he expresses this as a **contentment** not dependent on present circumstances but growing out of his relationship with God.