

Ignatian Spirituality – Part 2

Ignacio Ellacuría – biography taken from excerpts from “A Mysticism of Open Eyes” by Michael O’Sullivan, SJ, published in *Jesuit Lives Through the Ages*, ed. Patrick Carberry, 2019.

It was dangerous to be a Jesuit in Latin America after 1968. That was the year the Latin American Catholic Bishops Conference met at Medellín, Colombia, and declared that the historical direction of salvation in Jesus Christ embraced the continent’s struggle for liberation from political and economic oppression.

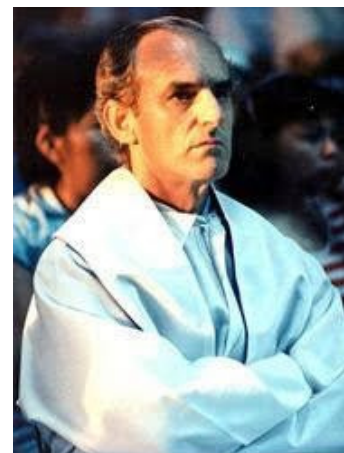
Just over twenty years later, on 16 November 1989, six Jesuits made the ultimate sacrifice, when soldiers of the Atlacatl battalion, who had been trained in the United States, broke into the home of the community of the Jesuit University in San Salvador. They proceeded to murder Ignacio Ellacuría and his five Jesuit companions and, in order to leave no witnesses, they also murdered their housekeeper and her teenage daughter.

Ellacuría had been Rector for almost ten years by the time of his murder. During those years he had transformed the university so that it would effectively promote ‘liberation from servitude’. “A Christian university must take into account the gospel preference for the poor. This does not mean that only the poor study at the university; it does not mean that the university should abdicate its mission of academic excellence, excellence needed in order to solve complex problems ... It does mean that the university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to promote and legitimate their rights.”

Ellacuría used to speak of the need to take the crucified people of El Salvador down from their cross. This mysticism of open eyes – which was linked intimately with his Jesuit spirituality while also embedded in contemporary social reality – can be seen in a speech Ellacuría gave at the Jesuit-run University of Santa Clara, California, in 1982. He urged those present in Santa Clara to put to themselves the three questions St Ignatius asks in the First Week of his *Spiritual Exercises*, and to do so in front of a crucified world: what have I done for Christ? What am I doing now? And above all, what should I do? The answers, he said, ‘lie both in your academic responsibility and in your personal responsibility’.

On another occasion, speaking in his native Spain about the situation in Latin America, he said, ‘Turn your eyes and hearts toward these people who are suffering so much – some from misery and hunger and others from oppression and repression – and then ask yourself, what have I done to crucify them? What can I do to take them down from the Cross? What can I do to resurrect them?’ Contemplating the poor of El Salvador on their cross while engaged in contemplation of the crucified Christ, Ellacuría was led to see the Salvadoran reality with the eyes and the feelings evoked by Christ on Golgotha. This opened his capacity to love on to unexpected depths and unexpected dimensions of meaning and sensibility.

Despite the horror and tragedy of that November dawn in 1989, the martyred Ellacuría and companions remain defiant; their deaths are a tribute to their lives. They remind us of their lives and make them even more inspiring. The deaths of these martyrs serve the lives of others by fostering vocations to the love they died for – the liberating love of a historically mediated salvation in diverse contexts.



Prayer Activity: Praying the Examen

Goal: to develop an inner disposition to discern God's presence in your daily life – to develop a contemplative attitude even in the midst of daily activity.



One of the few directions for prayer that St. Ignatius gave the Jesuit order was the requirement that they practice the Examen twice daily—at noon and at the end of the day. It's a habit that Jesuits, and many other Christians, practice to this day.

Step 1: Thank God for blessings received during your life and during this day's activities.

Step 2: Ask the Holy Spirit to be present during your prayer (as He was throughout your day) and to guide you as you search your memory for traces of God's presence in your experience since your last Examen.

Step 3: Review the experiences of the day along with the Holy Spirit. Pay attention to heartfelt, inner, affective movements. Recall the consolations of the day. What was happening in your heart? How was God working in your life during the day? What was the Holy Spirit asking of you? Discern God's call during the day. What was opposed to a deeper union with God?

Step 4: Feel sorrow and contrition for your failings to follow God's lead but also feel God's forgiveness and mercy.

Step 5: Resolve to amend any shortcomings and to respond to the Spirit in the future with greater faith and love.

An advantage to making a habit of the Daily Examen is that you will never run out of things to pray about. Sometimes prayer gets dry. Sometimes we wonder what to say to God. The Examen eliminates this problem. As long as we have twenty-four hours to look back on, we will have hundreds of things to talk to God about—and to thank God for.

Ignatius found God in all things. He was able to do so because he was a contemplative even in the midst of his daily life. He had a continuously discerning heart, a heart formed by his practice of the consciousness Examen. You too can contemplate God's presence in your life and can learn to respond generously.

Examen summary provided by Mike Higgins. Thank you!

Reading Assignment: Chapters 16 and 39