

Ignatius, who was born Inigo Lopez de Loiola, was born in 1491 (or maybe 1492) in the Basque Country of northern Spain, is the founder of the **Jesuits (Society of Jesus, or “SJ”)** and the composer of the classic text, the **Spiritual Exercises**. A soldier and courtier, vain and worldly, he suffered a serious wound in battle and was forced to endure a long and tedious convalescence. During this time, he came to know something of God and, opening his heart & mind up to God’s promptings, he found himself undergoing an intense mystical experience, which was nothing less than a fundamental conversion and reorientation of his whole life’s direction. These experiences of deep prayer, at **Manresa** and elsewhere in his homeland, led in time to the compilation of his famous **“Spiritual Exercises”**.

So, the phrase **Ignatian Spirituality** derives from this time and these experiences; it is a particular way to God, or more accurately, to seek and find the will of God for one’s own life, and to identify what in our living keeps us from giving ourselves more generously to the fullness of life that God offers. For **Jesuits**, and members of other religious orders in the Ignatian tradition, the spirituality of the **Exercises** is the mainspring of their lives and vocations. But it’s wrong to call it **Jesuit Spirituality**, even though many Jesuits often guide people in Ignatian Retreats: it’s **Ignatian Spirituality**, and is properly understood as God’s gift to the whole Church, given through Ignatius and his spiritual heirs.

The text of the **Spiritual Exercises** is not meant to be prayerful, still less pious, reading but is a handbook for a trained Director or Retreat-Guide, used to help people along their own path of conversion and fulfilment. Many houses of prayer and **Ignatian Spirituality Centres** exist all over the world where people come to make the **Exercises**; perhaps for a few days, perhaps for the entire month making the whole **Spiritual Exercises**, in a process usually known as the **Thirty-Day Retreat**. But **Ignatius** and his first **Jesuit** companions were keen that his **Exercises** be adapted according to the needs of each individual person drawn to make them. Thus, in many places, the **Spiritual Exercises** are made in daily life, often over a period of a year or even more.

Very many people use the daily **Ignatian Spiritual Exercise** known as the **Examen**, (*or, Prayer of Daily Awareness, or Examination of Consciousness*); a practice that derives from the “First Week” (i.e., section) of the **Exercises** proper. See below for a version of the **Examen** compiled especially for busy young adults, also a quick introduction to the process of **Ignatian Discernment** (*by Dave Stewart SJ of FSPlus*). Use of the **Examen** is a way of praying in the Ignatian Way in everyday life, and its frequent use tends to help us to get things into perspective and to learn that God is closer to us in our busy lives than perhaps we realise. It is like a 15-minute retreat ... every day!

People often associate terms like **“Finding God in all things”**, **“Discernment of Spirits”** and **“Imaginative Contemplation”** with Ignatian Spirituality. Ignatius suggests a range of different prayer techniques and topics, including the prayer of the imagination, where, for example, one places oneself in the company of Jesus in the Gospel stories “as if present”, letting an intimate personal relationship build up with Him. The purpose is always to re-order one’s life, through reflection and discernment, in order to find God in all things but also to make an offering of oneself to God to continue to labour for the Kingdom ... of justice, truth, love and peace.

(JDSsj, July 2007)

For more information about making an Ignatian retreat, visit the website of a British Jesuit spirituality centre, www.beunos.com/ignatian.htm, and for fuller details of Ignatius's own story, see the **Loyola University Chicago** page about him, <http://www.luc.edu/jesuit/ignatius.bio.html> and www.ignatiushistory.info See also the **St.Beuno's** page about Ignatian Spirituality, <http://www.beunos.com/30days.htm>



See also a whole page of Ignatian Spirituality links on the international Jesuit Portal, [sjweb.info](http://www.sjweb.info)

For a quick introduction to other aspects of Ignatian Spirituality, visit our European partners on <http://www.ignatianisch.de> and look at their Ignatian Toolkit too.

Lots of other information is available on www.sjweb.info and the British Jesuits' website on www.jesuit.org.uk