The Ignatian Anniversary: a Vision, a Mission, a Prayer

A Presentation at Creighton University (March 21, 2006)

Thank you for the invitation to be part of your Ignatian Anniversary celebration here at Creighton University. I have known Father Andy Alexander and Maureen Waldron for some years already and long admired Creighton's high-tech on-line contributions to Ignatian mission and ministry. They have made Creighton the Silicon Valley of Ignatian Spirituality in the U.S. and have touched countless people all over the globe with your on-line ministries. I have assigned my first year students to read your daily reflections on the scriptures to get a taste of Ignatian spirituality. I feel I am coming here to visit members of the family I haven't met yet. There is a bond between our two Jesuit universities, Creighton and Saint Louis University We are members of the same Ignatian family.

The origins of that family go back to September, 1525, when two nineteen-year-olds found themselves assigned to the same room in Sainte-Barbe College at the University of Paris. Pierre Favre came from a family of sheep-herders in southern France. He was studious, introverted, often anxious, what today kids would call a nerd. Francis Xavier came from aristocracy in northern Spain. He was a hail-fellow-well-met, a good athlete with an outgoing personality who made friends easily, bright enough but not especially studious, a cross between Joe-Cool and a jock. Despite their different personalities and backgrounds, the two roommates liked each other and became good friends, helped no doubt by the fact that Favre coached Xavier for his exams.

Their lives were typical for university students of that day, reading, lectures, drills, all in Latin, the monotony punctuated by the occasional feast day or sporting event. But all that changed four years later, when Favre and Xavier had another room-mate assigned to them, a thirty-something Spanish nobleman with a limp and a reputation for being very serious about religion. Just think of it. History was made by a decision made by someone in residence life. .

Ignatius Loyola was a man with a vision, but he knew he could not bring it to life alone. For years he had been trying to get colleagues to join him in his enterprise. He found and then lost collaborators first in Spain, then in Paris. In Pierre Favre and Francis Xavier he finally found two companions who stayed with him. Four others also joined them. They called themselves "friends in the Lord" and became the first Jesuits.

Next month marks the 500th anniversary of the births of those two room-mates, Francis Xavier and Pierre Favre, and this July is the 450th anniversary of the death of Ignatius. Here at Creighton and at Jesuit institutions around the world, presentations like this one are being organized to mark these anniversaries with an Ignatian Jubilee Year.

Now that's worth pausing to think about. Even a few years ago such anniversaries would have meant all the Jesuits on campus getting together and celebrating with a nicer than usual dinner, at which they would uncork a few bottles of better than usual wine. Maybe

faculty, staff, and students would be invited to a Mass on the anniversary days themselves. And that would be it.

But the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, sees this year as a teaching opportunity. He wants Jesuits to mark these anniversaries by including all their collaborators, students, friends, and supporters, in short, all the members of the Ignatian family. That also is worth pausing to think about. What prompted him to do that? I would argue that his visit here in Omaha back in October, 2004, had a lot to do with it..

The job description of a Jesuit Superior General calls for him to travel to the various provinces of the Society of Jesus to meet with and encourage his Jesuit brothers. So coming here to Omaha was nothing new. But meeting with and talking to all of you faculty, staff, and students at Creighton, meeting with the collaborators and benefactors of this university and other Jesuit enterprises -- that was new. And I suspect that the fact 1,700 of you turned out to hear him speak of Jesuit-lay partnership led him to realize a little more clearly that he had not only 20,000 Jesuits worldwide looking to him for leadership but hundreds of thousands of lay men and women who work in a whole host of ministries side by side with Jesuits as part of the Ignatian Family.

The point has been made that the Society of Jesus was founded not by one man, but by a group of seven companions. Ignatius would not be remembered today were it not for Pierre Favre, Francis Xavier, and the other companions who joined him. And their early enterprises from housing the homeless to opening schools would never have gotten off the ground without non-Jesuits supporting and working with them. Jesuit enterprises have always been and still are dependent upon a shared vision and a shared companionship.

Back in the 1990s I was at a meeting at Loyola University, Chicago. A SLU colleague was also there, the late Father Bill Stauder. I remember his pointing out the window at the rocky shoreline of Lake Michigan, saying something like "we could change the shoreline to sand, but the local city fathers won't give us the permission. It was the "we" and the "us" that struck me. Bill Stauder was a Missouri province Jesuit who had spent his entire academic career at Saint Louis University. As far as I was concerned, Loyola, Chicago was competition. But here he was talking about it in terms of the first person plural. It was just a brief exchange, but that conversation with Bill Stauder got me thinking and changed my perspective. If he was part of something bigger than Saint Louis University, then so was I.

Jesuits have a sense of being part of something really big. They put out an annual that gives a taste of what the Society is doing around the world. It makes them feel connected. But, when you think about it, as members of the Ignatian Family we are no less connected.

Jesuits no longer own our universities and colleges; lay boards of trustees do. You faculty, staff, you don't just work at a company store; you are the store. And the future of Creighton depends on you no less than it does Father Schlegel and the other Jesuits who

work side by side with you. In other words, the Ignatian Family is not just Jesuits. And it's not just Catholics. Father Kolvenbach made that quite clear in his talk here. There are Christians of other churches, Jews, Muslims, members of eastern religions and of no particular religious tradition who have espoused the Ignatian vision and values as faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees and benefactors.

Our public relations office at Saint Louis University likes to boast that we go back to 1818, making us the first institution of higher learning west of the Mississippi. Your origins here at Creighton go back 60 years later, to 1878, but that makes no difference. We both can boast of an educational tradition that goes back over 450 years, to 1548. That gives both of us a pedigree 88 years older than Harvard's, 153 years older than Yale's. Our Jesuit heritage reaches back to the Renaissance. What that means for our institutions can be described by looking at the three men whose anniversaries we are celebrating this Ignatian Year. They are in many ways emblematic of the vision and values that make Creighton and Jesuit education what it is. Ignatius, Xavier, and Favre were creatures of their culture, a Renaissance humanist culture.

Renaissance humanism

When we hear the word Renaissance, we tend to think of art and architecture -- Michelangelo's David, Raphael's Madonna's, the magnificent domed cathedral of Florence. All of them were inspired by the artistic monuments and heritage of ancient Rome. But the Renaissance (literally "re-birth") got its name not because of a rebirth of art, but a rebirth of appreciation for the literature of ancient Rome and an attempt to imitate its elegance.

The word humanist today tends to be identified with atheism and secularity, the rejection of religion. But the word first arose in 15th century Italy, where the *umanisti* were the teachers and writers of classical Latin literature. In contradistinction to theology, the study of divinity, the professors and students borrowed a phrase from Cicero and called their discipline the *studia humanitatis*, what today we call the humanities or liberal arts.

Most Renaissance humanists were school teachers or speech and letter writers for civil authorities. Learning to speak and write well, they believed, required studying and imitating the elegance of authors like Cicero and Seneca. The humanists were not critics of religion but of medieval education, of the so-called scholasticism that dominated the universities. The humanists despised the wooden Latin of the summas in favor of the literary classics of Roman antiquity. They were aficionados of the classics.

Besides the Latin, the Renaissance humanists criticized medieval education for being too cerebral. Petrarch, the father of humanism, faulted Aristotle for informing the mind without inflaming the heart. A proper education should enable students to love virtue and not just define it. The humanists believed that good literature produces good persons. Here you have the roots of the Jesuit partiality for the liberal arts and the ideal of educating the whole person, insisting that information and skills be tied to values and the integrating vision that is part of Creighton's mission.

Studying classical authors like Cicero and Seneca, who were orators and statesmen, the humanists embraced the idea of cultivating a life of civic virtue, a sense of responsibility for church and society. The ideal end-product of a Renaissance education was someone skilled in eloquence, who could move an audience to reform their lives, who could shape public opinion for the common good. You can see here too why Jesuits have always located their institutions in the heart of cities. Jesuit schools have never been ivory-towers. From the very beginning their aim was to provide value-driven leadership skills.

Soon enough their high regard for the literary style of the Latin classics extended to their contents as well. Along with the Bible, the Renaissance humanists began to quote Cicero, Seneca, and the other classical authors for the value of their ideas, all of whom, of course, were what we used to call pagans. The humanists believed in the universality of truth, that wisdom exists beyond any particular doctrine or philosophy, beyond any religion or culture. The humanists cited and valued truth wherever they found it

One final characteristic of Renaissance humanism deserves mention here. I mentioned already that the ideal product of a humanist education was the skilled orator, someone who could move an audience with eloquence as well as argument. In those days as much as today, rhetorical skill required the ability to think on one's feet and if necessary improvise in order to accommodate to one's audience. The need to accommodate to an audience led naturally enough to appreciation of the need to accommodate to changing circumstances in any situation, including a different culture. Here you have the Renaissance roots of another of Creighton's values, the "wisdom to innovate." What an apparently incongruous conjunction -- wisdom, a virtue associated with old age, and innovation, a talent associated with youth.

But what does any of this have to do with Ignatius Loyola or the Jubilee Year we are marking this evening? I mentioned earlier that Favre, Xavier, and Ignatius were enrolled in the College of Ste. Barbe at the University of Paris. The University at the time was going through a clash between proponents of the older, medieval style of education and the humanists, who favored the newer curriculum based on classical literature, the liberal arts. The College of Ste.-Barbe was committed to the newer humanist education. Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, and Pierre Favre were all products and eventually purveyors of a Renaissance humanist education and the cultural ethos it created. Creighton's dual commitment to wisdom and innovation is precisely the kind of expansive ethos the Renaissance humanists appreciated.

Ignatius Loyola: emblematic of a vision

You all know the main outline of Ignatius' early life -- a scandalous youth, a shattered leg, a long convalescence that culminates with a conversion experience that changes his life. I have always been impressed by his passion and determination. After his shattered leg was reset a second time, some of the bone protruded. Ignatius insisted that the surgeons cut away the flesh and excess bone -- without anesthesia. He was one very tough and determined hombre.

I teach a course based on my book, *Ignatian Humanism*, in which we study several prominent Jesuits who exemplify Ignatian spirituality. Last year toward the end of the course, I asked the students if they identified with any of the Jesuits we studied. I was amazed at how many chose Ignatius Loyola. I was puzzled. Why would these twenty-somethings identify with Ignatius? Until I thought about their situation. Many, if not most of them are at a cross-roads, unlike me but much like him. They are doing a lot of thinking about what to do with the rest of their lives.

First convalescing at Loyola and then for ten months in the little town of Manresa, Ignatius thought and day-dreamed a lot about what to do with the rest of his life. In the course of that time he had a series of profound religious experiences in which he came to believe that God was teaching him like a school-master. He began jotting the lessons down in what would become the *Spiritual Exercises*, a book about various ways to pray.

One day sitting on the banks of a river and watching the water below, he realized that everything we are and have is a gift, all creation like that water below comes from God and returns to God and that God is busily at work in all of it. God is present and at work in all our lives and in all our labors. You can find God in all things and in the flurry of everyday life. Nothing human is merely human. No common labor is merely common. We live in a "universe of grace." In the words of Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

Ignatius continued doing at Manresa what he had begun doing during his convalescence. He prayed and daydreamed and listened. And in the deep stillness of his inner being he became convinced that God was speaking to him and that, if God would speak to a scoundrel like him, God would speak to anyone. We just have to take time, significant time, like he had, to quiet ourselves and daydream and think and listen. By quieting ourselves and listening carefully, we can find God's will in our deepest desires. This was one of the main purposes of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, to help people discern and decide what to do with the rest of their lives.

Ignatius convinced Pierre Favre and the others to take thirty days off to quiet themselves, pray, daydream, and look into their deepest desires. He directed them in his spiritual exercises. What they found in their deepest desires, what they decided to do with the rest of their lives was to work "ad majorem Dei gloriam," for the greater glory of God. But that, they also decided, was to be found in "helping souls," a quaint way of saying, helping people. Helping people meant helping them get in touch with the God present in their lives. But it also meant looking at the world as it is, seeing what needs to be done, and then doing it. Looking to do the greater glory of God meant looking to discern and serve the greater good of humankind.

There is an old joke about a Franciscan, a Dominican, and a Jesuit all saying their breviary, their prayer-book, when the light bulb burns out. The Franciscan takes out his rosary and begins saying his beads. The Dominican closes his eyes and begins to meditate. And the Jesuit gets up and changes the light bulb.

The early Jesuits worked in hospitals and prisons, and they gave people the spiritual exercises. But obviously not everyone could afford to take off thirty-days from their responsibilities to family and profession. And here is where Ignatius' humanist education came in handy. Accommodate. In the early pages of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius lists a number of notations or instructions. One of them, the 18th, states that the exercises should be accommodated to the person making them, their education, their age, their state of life. The 19th states that, persons who cannot take thirty days off from family and work can make the exercises over the course of several months, doing them for an hour or so a day.

I am sure many if not most of you here have made weekend or eight-day retreats. I would like to give an unsolicited testimonial and make a pitch here for anyone who has not done so to make the entire spiritual exercises, the so-called 19th annotation retreat, often called the spiritual exercises in everyday day life. Ignatian spirituality is not something you read or learn about so much as experience. You can inquire from Father Andy Alexander or Maureen Waldron about the program here on campus. As conceived by Ignatius Loyola, it is the proto-ministry of the Society of Jesus.

In their early years, Jesuits changed light bulbs. They housed and fed the homeless in the course of a difficult winter. They started half-way houses to help exploited women to escape the net of prostitution. They helped to reconcile feuding Italian tribes. And when Ignatius was invited to send some Jesuits to Messina, Italy, to open a school of boys, he readily agreed and sent some of his very best men. As the product of a humanist education, he believed that schools were a splendid way to make a difference in the lives of the students, their families, and ultimately society.

The Jesuits soon found themselves invited to open schools elsewhere. By the time Ignatius died in 1556, they were operating schools from Portugal to Poland. The point to be made here is that the kind of education they offered was the same they had received from their own humanist teachers, one centered on the classics, one that imparted information but also values and ideals. There were attempts to change the curriculum, but the Jesuits resisted it. It's been said that their motto was -- better to read first-rate pagans than second-rate Christians.

Now what does this mean for Jesuit education particularly as it is practiced here at Creighton? Obviously helping students to think about the rest of their lives. But in our terribly individualist culture, it also means, in the phrase made famous by Father Pedro Arrupe, educating "men and women for others." As found in your own mission statement, that slogan has been expanded to avoid any hint of condescension, to emphasize a need for human solidarity, "men and women for and with others." If hurricane Katrina has taught us anything, it is that there is no survival without solidarity. It was under the leadership of Father Arrupe that the Society of Jesus re-articulated its mission in terms of "the service of faith and the promotion of justice." All of its enterprises were to be characterized by this hallmark, including higher education.

Ignatius Loyola is emblematic of a vision to serve God by making a difference, changing light bulbs, discerning what most needs to be done, and then doing it. In this light a Jesuit education is, in the words of Creighton's mission statement, one which "pursues truth" but also fosters values of competence, conscience and compassion," forming students who will be "willing to lead."

Francis Xavier: emblematic of a global mission

If Ignatius Loyola is emblematic of a vision, Francis Xavier exemplifies the global outreach of that vision. Xavier was the first Jesuit missionary. And like other Catholic missionaries of that time, he thought he was doing a good thing bringing not only Christian faith but also a superior western culture to the poor benighted natives first in India and then Indonesia. But then Xavier traveled to Japan, where he was impressed by a high culture entirely different from his own. Now, contrary to legend, he was not a great linguist. But he had this outgoing personality that people found attractive, even with his broken Japanese. After a year, he and a Japanese convert set out on foot for Kyoto, to seek an audience with the emperor, whom he hoped to charm and convert and with him all Japan. He was dressed in his shabby black priest's cassock, symbolic of his vow of poverty. When he got to Kyoto, he learned that the emperor had no power. It was the local barons or daimyo who really ran the country.

On his way to Kyoto, he had been received kindly by one such local baron, the daimyo of Yamaguchi. Xavier asked for a second audience, and this time he appeared dressed not in his shabby black habit but fine silk. He presented the daimyo with gifts and letters of recommendation written on illuminated parchment. In return, the daimyo gave his permission to Xavier to preach about Christian faith in his territory.

Xavier did not realize it, but in exchanging his shabby priest's cassock for fine silk, he was pioneering the way for future Jesuits, like Matteo Ricci, who exchanged his habit for the silk garb of a Confucian scholar. Jesuit missionaries in Japan went on to build mission houses with pagodas outfitted with a special room near the entrance for the traditional tea ceremony. They believed that Japanese Christians should be able to feel at home in their new faith, which meant translating that faith into their own language and culture.

The story of Jesuit missionaries learning foreign languages and accommodating to foreign cultures is another talk for another time. But it arose from an Ignatian spirituality that insists on profound respect for the individual person and accommodating the spiritual exercises to the state and needs of the individual. And if one accommodates to a person, then one must learn to accommodate to that person's culture.

Now what does all this mean for Jesuit education? The term global village is a cliché but captures the world we live in and the tomorrow for which we are preparing our students. Creighton is well positioned to do it because it belongs to a global network -- not only 28 colleges and universities in the U.S. but 168 faculties of higher learning world wide. The

Ignatian family reaches back to the Renaissance but also around the globe. We are part of the world's first multinational corporation. But unlike Wal-mart, we are not for profit.

Obviously, the focus of Jesuit education is no longer Cicero and Seneca. We have accommodated. Our liberal arts curriculum exposes our students not just to Latin classics but world classics, to the broad range of human learning and of the achievements of human ingenuity. In the best Renaissance tradition, Jesuit liberal education believes that truth is where you find it, and so too the good and the beautiful, to be valued and celebrated no matter where they come from.

When Ignatius determined that we could find God present and at work in all creation, later Jesuits unpacked that statement to realize -- we can find God in all human hearts, including those of people who are not Christian. God labors in people's lives without their necessarily knowing it. Jesuit missionaries realized that they were not bringing God to people; they were simply making them aware of the God who was already there with them. That's why Jesuit colleges and universities are not known for trying to make Catholics out of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists. We try to make them better Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, in short, better human beings. That is why your mission statement says that Creighton "celebrates diversity," not just tolerates but celebrates it.

Pierre Favre: emblematic of Ignatian prayer

Pierre Favre is the least known of our three honorees. Yet he was the first companion to persevere with Ignatius. He had a lot to do with Xavier overcoming his initial reluctance to get too close to Ignatius. Favre suffered from serious bouts of anxiety and depression. He had an obsessive-compulsive neurosis about sin and guilt. . Ignatius had suffered the same malady for a period of time while at Manresa; and he was able to recognize it in Favre and help him deal with it. Under Ignatius' direction Favre made the spiritual exercises and achieved some peace of mind.

Favre was not an administrator like Ignatius or a missionary to exotic lands like Xavier. But he was an expert at giving the spiritual exercises. Toward the end of his life, Favre wrote the story of his life and thanks God that Ignatius entered into it. Time and again he uses the words consolation and conversation. Consolation because that's what he experienced through the spiritual exercises. And conversation because that's what he did most when directing the spiritual exercises.

One of the signature trademarks of the Jesuit "way of doing things" is conversation. And the difference between conversation and debate is listening, a word which means to lean over so as to hear better, to hear better so as to understand and appreciate better. Ignatian spirituality is a spirituality of listening. The spiritual director listens to the retreatant, so that the retreatant can better listen to God in the deepest desires of his or her heart. So too Ignatian pedagogy is one of listening. Again, your mission statement says that students at Creighton "learn through dialogue" and "from reflection on experience." That's along way from the long, often boring lectures I was exposed to as a college student. I didn't have the advantage of a Jesuit education. I had to learn Ignatian

pedagogy on the job. But that's a whole other conversation that we faculty at Jesuits colleges and universities need to engage in.

If Ignatius symbolizes a vision and Xavier of the global outreach of that vision, Pierre Favre represents the spiritual dimension of that vision. Visit any bookstore and you will discover that spirituality is a hot topic these days. It's because spirituality in its broadest sense has to do with -- what fills your sails and drives you? What lifts your heart and animates you? What gets you up in the morning? What holds you together? And if you properly note that spirituality should have something to do with the Holy Spirit, with God, then let me cite my favorite quote from Martin Luther, that your god is what you hang your heart on. So what do you hang your heart on? These are questions our students ask unconsciously if not explicitly. And at Jesuit colleges and universities, we are not embarrassed to address them. And not only with courses in theology or with programs offered by campus ministry. In Jesuit colleges and universities like Creighton, students learn about the Bible in theology classes but also about evolution in science classes. They meet theologians who embrace evolution and scientists who believe in God. They meet students of other faiths and no apparent faith. And if we do our job right, they learn that grace and faith and God's presence have more to do with what is in your heart than with the ideas in your head.

There is something else that Pierre Favre symbolizes for me -- the fact that even shy people can make a difference as part of a community; and the fact that there is no end to the amount of good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit. Favre doesn't have churches named after him, but I wonder if we would remember Ignatius Loyola if it were not for that nerdy quiet college kid who was the first to share his vision, to persevere, and to bring his roommate along with him. But Favre would never have accomplished anything memorable alone, as an individual. He was able to make a difference, only because he was part of an enterprise bigger than himself, because he was part of the Ignatian family. His example should encourage us. There is not much that we can do as individuals. But as part of institutions like Creighton, as faculty, staff, friends, and supporters, there is a tremendous difference we can make not only in our students' lives but in our society.

As members of the Ignatian Family, this Ignatian Year is a good time to realize how singularly blessed we are to belong to an enterprise and a heritage that is -- as old as the Renaissance and as global as Wal-mart, one that allows even ordinary people like us make an extraordinary difference. It's a heritage worth celebrating, and I'm pleased to be with you here to celebrate it.

Thank you.

Ronald Modras
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