

Lord Entombed
[20 Bar 3⁵]

Good morning again: and welcome to join in this start time for prayer and reflection. My theme today takes up again an approach to prayer that I talked with you about, a couple of weeks ago: in fact, something I find myself touching on quite often in these programmes, in connection with the Bible — prayer arising from the word of God as descriptive of God's action in the world, events that we live into, as we try to listen - pray. But today it's not directly the word of God in scripture that I'm directing you to, or starting from. Rather, the writing of a man trying to capture on paper the God-directed events of his own life — from a recognition of how God was there in the things that happened to him. But these weren't random events or occurrences: his life, he saw, had a very particular focus and purpose, forming him in the ways of God and incidentally showing him how to recognize the hand of God at work, and how to help others in their search for God and His purposes for them. It's an unusual kind of autobiography that he wrote — unusual in many ways, not least in its being written in the impersonal 3rd person when he's actually talking of himself. I don't think it was merely an excess of modesty, or self-effacement that made him write it that way: there was, I think, a deliberate purpose and attitude behind it — as if to give his own experiences a more universal character, not so completely tied to his own particular personality, and being of interest simply because it was his story, as autobiographies tend to be. And as if looking back on times and events that were graced and God-directed in a special way, different from his situation and feelings as he wrote about them. He

called his then-self "The Pilgrim", and described a pilgrim's journey. Now, that's a familiar and common metaphor for life itself. It shouldn't be surprising that a master of spiritual life should have learned his craft from life itself: or that the "Spiritual Exercises" for which St Ignatius Loyola is famous should have been so based on his own experiences and exercises as a Pilgrim finding his way to God and to God's purposes in his life. At today is the Festival-day of Ignatius, I thought to let you listen to Ignatius the pilgrim, and to invite you prayerfully to reflect on his experience under God's hand as a kind of headline or parallel or question-mark for your own finding God in your life and community with Him in your prayer. But before the reading // a song based on one of the best-known prayers of Ignatius, from his little book of "Exercises",

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Evel Ven. 2⁶
4:24

"Take, Lord, Receive"
3:48

MUSIC [Evel Ven. 2⁶]

PRAYERS (Ignatius) ^{Start for long 55}

From Ignatius of Loyola describing what happened during his long convalescence from a ^{bad} battle-wound: he'd been (he says) an avid reader of books of worldly fiction commonly called chivalrous romances, but all they could find for him ^{in the house} when he asked his hosts for some books to pass the time was a "Life of Christ" and a book ^{of} the lives of the saints in Spanish. The Pilgrim writes: "While reading the life of Our Lord and those of the saints, he used to pause & meditate, reasoning with himself: 'What if I were to do what St Francis did, or to do what St Dominic did?' Thus in his thoughts he dealt on many good deeds, always suggesting to himself great & difficult ones, but as soon as he considered

doing them they all appeared easy of performance. Throughout these thoughts he used to say to himself 'St Dominic did this, so I have to do it too. St Francis did this, so I have to do it too'. These thoughts lasted a long time, but after other thoughts had taken their place, the above-mentioned worldly ones returned to him and he dwelt on them for quite some length. This succession of such diverse thoughts (of worldly exploits that he desired to accomplish, or those of God that came to his imagination) stayed with him for a long time as he turned them over in his mind, and when he grew weary of them he set them aside to think of other matters. There was this difference, however. When he thought of worldly matters he found much delight, but after growing weary and dismissing them he found that he was dry and unhappy. But when he thought of going barefoot to Jerusalem and of eating nothing but vegetables and of imitating the saints in all the austerities they performed, he not only found consolation in these thoughts but even after they had left him he remained happy - joyful. He did not consider nor did he stop to examine this difference until one day his eyes were partially opened and he began to wonder at this difference and to reflect upon it. From experience he knew that some thoughts left him sad while others made him happy, and little by little he came to perceive the different spirits that were moving him: one coming from the devil, the other coming from God. He gained not a little light from this lesson and he began to think more seriously about his past life and how greatly he needed to do penance for it. It was at this time that the desire to imitate the saints came to him, and without giving any consideration to his present circumstances, he promised to do, with God's grace, what they had done. His greatest desire, after repairing his health, was to go to Jerusalem and to observe the fasts & to practice the discipline as any generous soul on fire with God is accustomed to do.