

# Reflections and Prayers on the Diary of Mother Mary Ignatius of Jesus

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## **LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT**

### *Reflection:*

Beloved Mother, through the action of God's grace you came to know and experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. It was the Holy Spirit who brought you to the fullness of faith, who led you in all your journeyings over land and sea, in peace and in war, in poverty and failure. The Holy Spirit was the one who directed all your choices: from Guernsey to Oxford, to Wantage, to London, to Glasgow, to Jamaica, to Rome, to France, to Germany, to St. Thomas, to New York, to Minnesota.

Beloved Mother, how blessed you were that the Spirit found in you a vessel open to being formed and filled and poured out as you followed in the footprints of Jesus. We rejoice to know the secret of your strength and we rejoice to be among those called to follow you.

### *Prayer:*

O Holy Spirit of power, of light, you formed the heart of Mother Mary Ignatius. You led her in the footprints of Jesus and Francis. Through her openness to you she became a deep channel of new life within our Church. You cleansed, purified, and strengthened her through suffering and the cross of failures. Only then was the wheat ready to fall and die so that new fresh bread could be broken in your church for a world in need. Beloved Foundress, pray for us who are called by God to follow your way. Obtain for us from Jesus the grace to listen ever more attentively to God's Holy Spirit. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit will we be ready to be broken for the needs of the world. Amen.

## **KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD**

### *Reflection:*

All great souls who are sensitive to the Father's will suffer in their search. Beloved Mother Mary Ignatius, you were no exception. In your prayer for God's guidance you were one with Francis as you prayed, "Lord, what will you have me do?" In your search for God's will we see a prolonged and difficult period of struggle. Like Jesus in the garden, you were utterly alone and in darkness, hearing only the echo of your own voice. But the Spirit was in your depths, and sustained by faith, you waited in silence until the answer came. You sowed the seed. However, like Jesus, the harvest would only be glimpsed by you from afar. In this life, dear Mother, you would never know the hundredfold. With total faith and unbounded confidence, you reflected on what seemed like a near absolute failure even as the Lord was calling you home. You had followed the Father's will to the bittersweet end. You died in peace, desiring only your God.

### *Prayer:*

Loving Father, lead us in the sure way of your will. Lead us in spite of ourselves, since we place our lives in your hands. Darkness often surrounds us and the desert is a barren wasteland. When we cry out to you, touch us with your gentle hand and lead us along the path you have chosen for us.

Beloved Foundress, our Mother and guide, pray for us. Like you, we are often surrounded by darkness and we stumble. Obtain for us the grace to continue on His Way in spite of suffering and failure. Help us to know deeply from within that our suffering and failure are our guarantee to fruitfulness. Mother Mary Ignatius, walk with us as we follow Jesus through death to the glory of resurrection, where together we will sing our alleluia for having completed our way of the cross. Amen.

## **FINDING THE WAY**

### *Reflection:*

As we reflect on your life, Mother Mary Ignatius, we are amazed at your journeying. How very many paths you trod in your search. In that search we view with wonder your deep Franciscan sense of *let us begin*: Wantage, let me begin; Bayswater, let me begin; Glasgow, begin again; Paris, begin again; Sevres, begin again; St. Thomas, begin again; Belle Prairie, begin again; Rome, begin again! What depth of faith, what confidence, what courage! The cross of failure drew from you the cry: "Faith never changes, confidence in God never changes." Jesus chose the way of darkness, suffering, and the cross for you. You accepted his way and entered into it wholeheartedly so as to share in the sowing of the seed. God gave himself to you in answer to your plea: "Give me one to lead me to you or give me yourself." You had found your way. Jesus was your way. He is the only way.

### *Prayer:*

Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for the wonder of grace and holiness in your servant, Mother Mary Ignatius. She was a pilgrim in search of your will. Her journeying was her desert purification. In her life, we see the way of your son, Jesus. From the morning of youth to the scorching noonday sun and even to the evening shades of death, she followed the footprints of Jesus in spite of the many spectres that rose up in the desert before her to deter her, delay her, or turn her back. Loving Father, in her we witness the triumph of your grace and the glorious victory of the cross in the midst of failures.

Beloved Mother, in you is found acceptance of failure, a willingness to struggle, and a love of the cross. Obtain for us the grace to claim you and the charism with which you gift the church. You go before us, showing us the way. Because it is a painful way, only the Holy Spirit can open our eyes to its glory. Obtain for us a faith that never changes, a confidence in God that never changes. Amen.

## **UNION WITH GOD**

### *Reflection:*

Beloved Foundress, it is a real source of strength and consolation for us when we study your diary and see you struggle through the traditional stages of spiritual growth and purification. You came to union with your God when and only when he had purified your heart through suffering, darkness, pain, and failure. You set out upon your way in a generous and joyful manner. You wanted to be a religious and a missionary. How easy it all seemed at the beginning. But the shadow of the cross was soon to cross your path. Your long-desired foreign mission turned out to be a barren effort. You were called instead to walk in the darkness of suffering and purification, and that without anyone to assist you. Your spiritual life, your apostolic labours, and your community living nailed you to the cross of aridity and meaninglessness. Your health and strength were sapped. But what to you seemed barren desert sands was the fertile soil in which to sow the seed of complete and utter surrender to

God's will. You were the clay in the potter's hands, and he was fashioning you into the image of himself. You would be one with him. You reflected this experience when you wrote: "Nothing but union with God can make one happy," and again: "What have I in heaven, and besides thee what do I desire upon earth? Oh my God, thee only will I know. Thee only will I seek. Thee only will I hope for. Thee only will I love. Thee only will I listen to. Thee only will I study. Thee only will I imitate. Thee only will I find. Thee only will I possess. 'nee only will I keep. Thee only will I contemplate now and throughout eternity. Amen. God alone! God alone!"

*Prayer:*

Father of boundless and unconditional love, you lead each of us in the ways of purification here or hereafter, so that you can take us to yourself in a union of love. Abba, Father, very few of us, your creatures of clay, accept to be purified. We simply move away from you and walk at a distance. Your love reaches out to draw us but our fear of surrender overpowers us. Hence, we never taste the living water of fulfillment, which alone comes in a life surrendered to your love and united to you. The human price of your love is too costly for us, Father. Forgive us, and call us again and wait for us as we struggle to let ourselves fall into the arms of your love!

Dear Mother Ignatius, we see you now more clearly as we reflect on your union with God. You freely accepted each call even when it meant real stretching, struggling, paining. Yours was utter generosity in responding to the call of the Beloved to come and be purified. Pray for us, dear Mother, that we may heed the call to conversion. We who follow from afar cannot understand your "God alone, God alone." Obtain for us the grace of surrender. With that grace the seed will fall and die and produce a hundredfold. Amen.

## **LIFE FOR MISSION**

*Reflection:*

"I offered my life for these missions.... I felt inspired to offer myself in life or death, to give up all, keep nothing for myself, throw myself into God's providence. Accept me, O Lord, and all that I am and have. . . ." As we listen to these words coming directly from the struggle in your heart, dear Mother M. Ignatius, can we ever deny the force of your missionary call? You were drawn so powerfully that you felt impelled to seal your response by a vow to spend yourself in the foreign missions. With childlike simplicity you tell us: ". . . simply God calls me to leave my home and country and to join a foreign mission-and if the time were to come again I would do just the same."

The remainder of your life revolved around your call to the missions. No suffering or hardship was too great for you. You were prepared to sacrifice yourself without reserve in order to give yourself as you had vowed. We who follow you can only bow our heads humbly and gaze at you, our founding Mother, and say, "truly a valiant woman." May we find ourselves committed to our missionary vocation.

*Prayer:*

God, our gracious Father, how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those whom you have called to bring the Good News. We give you thanks for all of them, and we give you thanks in a special way for Mother Mary Ignatius. We contemplate her on the mountain and we recognize her as our guide in building your kingdom on earth. We humbly pray you, Father, to stretch and challenge us as you did her, to move out, let go, give all, that the Good News may reach the ends of the earth.

Beloved Mother, you struggled, you agonized to fulfill your vow. We rejoice in you because you were faithful to the end. We share in your mission. Dear Mother Mary Ignatius, pray for us, your spiritual daughters, that as we seek to be faithful in following a missionary call, we may be strengthened to persevere to the end, sowing the seed of the Gospel. We ask your special intercession on all your daughters everywhere. May we know your loving care from your home in heaven, where you now reap the reward of your total self-giving. Amen.

## **THE CROSS OF DAILY SUFFERING**

### *Reflection:*

To be a Foundress in the Catholic Church has always meant being prepared to carry the cross of the Lord. To found, means to be charismatic, prophetic. The prophet is called to be faithful and to be willing to die, if need be, for the message. For you, Mother Mary Ignatius, the call to be Foundress was a call to the Way of the Cross. You had to carry the cross of poor health, the cross of poverty and misunderstanding, the cross of failure. You had the courage and selfpossession to offer your life as an oblation to God for your mission and call. You accepted the failure in Jamaica and the many difficulties and incredible challenges that continued to purify your soul as you heroically held to your vision. Even at the end, the cross was very present to you. In the cross was your strength. The example of your life powerfully calls us to embrace the cross of daily suffering with courage and in peace.

### *Prayer:*

Father in heaven, we give you glory for the cross of Jesus. We give you glory for the many prophets, martyrs, and saints who found life through the cross. It was their passage to glory and sanctity. To our weak human frailty, the cross is a contradiction, a stumbling block, utter folly! But to those who are moved by the spirit of God, the cross is the surest and shortest way to our crucified King. We thank you, Father, that the cross is our anchor in the storms of life. We thank you for giving us the cross to be our power and strength when we falter. Father, give us the eyes of faith to see the glory of the cross of Jesus.

Dear Mother Mary Ignatius, our beloved Foundress, you witnessed to the power of the cross by your life. Obtain for us the light to recognize the treasure of the cross and the willingness to walk beneath its shadow as you did. Pray for us for the wisdom and courage to take up our cross and walk in faith and courage following you, knowing that we are on the sure and only road to eternal life, the road that brought you to the eternal harbour. You recognized the glory of the cross of Jesus. May you lead us to glimpse that glory as we struggle to be faithful to the mission you have given us: to bring the redeeming power of the cross and the gospel of love, peace, and justice to our broken, torn, and hungry world. Amen.

## **KNOWING OURSELVES**

### *Reflection:*

Reading and reflecting on your diary, Mother Mary Ignatius, we are struck by your struggle for and with self-knowledge. Self-knowledge, obviously, was very important to you. St. Augustine prayed, "O Lord, teach me to know myself that I may know thee." As we grow step by step by step in self-knowledge, we become aware of our need for repentance until we can finally open ourselves totally to the challenge of the Gospel.

Beloved Mother Foundress, we know exactly what you mean when you reflect on being "so weak bodily, so sensitive mentally ...," not able to bear up against the least cross. You are reminding us that our weaknesses and, yes, even our sinfulness can become the means for spiritual growth.

Holiness is a total gift which God gives those who seek him in daily conversion of heart. You could pray: "God alone, God alone" and "I desire my God" because you had struggled and fought the good fight for self-knowledge, and God had taken over in your heart. Because your own heart was totally turned to the Lord, you were impelled to carry the message of the Gospel abroad.

*Prayer:*

God, our Father, we come before you seeking you. "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Abba, Father, we are much in need of repentance before you can take over in our lives and make a home in us. Abba, give us grace and courage to examine our lives against the values of the Gospel of your Son, Jesus, so that we may be cleansed and purified. Only then will you be our all.

Dear Mother Foundress, we contemplate with admiration your struggle for self-knowledge and conversion, and we desire and seek to follow you by struggling to know ourselves that we may come to know Jesus. We thank God for you and for your deep humility, which is evident in your daily struggle to question your inner motivation, to look on Jesus, and then to choose. Pray for us that we may have the great humility and courage it takes to face ourselves, to come before the God of love and allow him to claim us as his own. Only then are we free and vulnerable enough to proclaim the Gospel. Only then are we "clay pots" carrying living water for all to drink. Only then can we pray your prayer, dear Mother, "God alone, God alone."

## **LOVED IN OUR BECOMING**

*Reflection:*

God alone waits and waits and waits for us to respond to his love and to give ourselves freely to him. We learn this truth only after years of rebelling and struggling with him like Jacob. ". . . God alone is patient and merciful loving our souls for what they will be. .." In these words of yours, Mother Mary Ignatius, we recognize that you had come to the realization of the patient love of our God as he awaits our surrender. The wondrous love of our God is a love that waits. God comes to us, begs our love, and then stands waiting. You, our beloved Foundress, came to understand that special way of love, and it was your desire to respond to and treat others with that same patient waiting. You would lead and guide your Sisters, allowing them the time to grow, providing the space for them to mature and mellow under the action of the Holy Spirit. Yes, God alone waits patiently for us, looking to the end results and not to the sins and imperfections of the now. He is a God who loves us unconditionally, and he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

*Prayer:*

God, our loving Father, we thank you for being such a compassionate, gentle, and unconditional lover. Your love gently nudges us to grow. You mould the vulnerable, wounded, and weak clay of our lives, bringing healing and surrender. You love us for what we will be, and never tire of waiting. How can we express our praise and gratitude to you, who knows us and our weakness through and through. Empower us, Lord, to return thanks by our love and waiting for one another. May our patient gentleness with each other hurry us along the road to you ever more quickly. Amen.

Dear Mother Foundress, we recognize in you our spiritual guide. Obtain for us the grace to allow the Spirit time and space to grow in the heart of each Sister. You would have us love our Sisters in community, even in difficult situations, with patience, kindness, and sensitivity. Pray for us, beloved Mother Foundress, for the great gift of a gentle, patient, compassionate love that will enable us to love others for "what they will be." Amen.