

## Ignatius, the Wiseman

*An ongoing series exploring how Ignatius the Pilgrim discerned the spirits in his quest for Christ.*

### Reflection #1: The Pilgrim

*When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.” (Matthew 2:1-2)*

When as an old man, Saint Ignatius finally began to dictate his autobiography, he referred to himself as “the pilgrim.” This seemed to be a favorite way of thinking of himself. He was a lifelong pilgrim on a journey toward Christ. Like our beloved Wisemen from Matthew’s Gospel, Ignatius loved to gaze at the stars and discern in them the road signs leading to the feet of Christ. Like the Wisemen, he had a courageous curiosity that led him into uncharted territory and to dangerous conversations with others who might be helpful along the way. But why was this moniker, “the pilgrim” so fitting for Ignatius? And how might we think of ourselves as pilgrims?

**Ignatius believed that Christ could be found.** No pilgrim would set out on a journey towards an impossible destination. Ignatius believed that Christ *wanted* to be found. Rather than relying solely on authority figures, Ignatius—as a layman—believed that God desired to communicate with every devout soul, whether lay person or clergy...

*...It is more suitable and much better that the Creator and Lord in person communicate Himself to the devout soul. (Spiritual Exercises, Annotation XV)*

This was a radical belief in Ignatius’s day. The common belief was that lay people did not have direct access to God but rather had to learn of his will from church authorities. But Ignatius believed that God wanted to connect with him “in person.”

**Ignatius believed in the novel idea of progress.** Today, we take the notion for granted that one can try out some idea, observe the results, and then make adjustments in order to improve upon one’s endeavor. But this idea had not become commonplace until the development of the scientific method in the Seventeenth Century—a hundred years after Ignatius! And yet, without having a vocabulary for it, Ignatius had a sort of “spiritual scientific method.” He believed that one could observe, test, adjust and progress down the spiritual path.

**Ignatius looked out for road signs.** Because he believed that Christ wanted to be found, Ignatius looked out for road signs that God might have placed in the world and in his soul that would give him clues as to the direction in which God was pointing.

**Ignatius's pilgrimage was long and winding with many twists and turns along the way.**

After converting at the age of twenty-six, Ignatius first believed that God was calling him to spend his life converting Muslims in the Holy Land. Over a number of years, he made several attempts to do just that. It took a long time for him to realize that God was calling him down another road—to become the founder and first leader of a new international religious order. Even in this, his first circle of recruits all abandoned him and he had to start over with a new bunch—beginning with Saints Francis Xavier and Peter Faber. These are only two examples of the twisting path of this lifelong pilgrim.

**Questions to ponder**

1. Spiritually speaking, how am I like a pilgrim?
2. Do I really believe that Christ wants to be found by me?
3. When did my spiritual pilgrimage begin? How has it progressed along the way? Where is it headed?
4. What have been the road signs that have led me down the right path? What are the road signs in my life now?
5. How has my own path been long and winding? What has been my own experience of wrong turns, dead-end roads and circuitous routes?