St. Ignatius’ Vision at La Storta

On his way to Rome, Ignatius had a vision of God the Father placing him, Ignatius, at the service of Christ and his cross.
Father James Bradley, SJ
50 Years a Priest

One beautiful morning in the spring of 2009 while at prayer preparing for my annual conference with the provincial, I had, what I have come to call an intuitive flash. With this flash came a powerful, enduring realization of how God has blessed, inspired, and supported me in every significant turn in my life, beginning with my birth into a wonderful family, and through my early schooling at St. Mary’s Grammar and High School in Albuquerque, and Regis College in Denver. At Regis I experienced a growing desire to serve Jesus Christ and his Church, and in the spring of 1954, I had an intuitive flash that I should do this as a Jesuit priest.

As I look back over my past 63 years as a Jesuit and 50 years as a priest I have come to realize that, like recurring thunderstorms, these flashes have dotted my life. They frequently light up my prayer life and give me insight, substance and direction. But they also come from family, friends, and teachers.

Three Jesuits were especially inspiring. Father C.J. McNaspy was certainly the greatest and most inspiring teacher I ever had. Father Bob North, a world-class Scripture scholar, who gave me an appreciation of Scripture and Biblical scholarship that still helps me find and understand God’s message to us. Father Jimmy Yamauchi, my Tertian master, who significantly inspired and shaped my spiritual life. Life with them was like walking through a severe thunderstorm with lightning bolts striking all around – such were the intuitive flashes they inspired.

Four years after my ordination I became the principal of Jesuit High School in Shreveport and have been in some form of administration to this day. Each job has filled me with blessings from the Lord and from the people I have served. For all this I am forever grateful.
Father J. Daniel Daly, SJ  
25 Years a Priest

The chapel at Regis University has a towering north window looking out over a magnificent panorama of mountains, trees, and Colorado sky. It is little wonder that the presider’s chair that faces the window is described as the best seat in the house. Of course, presiders always get a great view from where they sit, because we look out on the faith-filled people gathered to pray.

Being a priest has provided me a wonderful and inspiring view of God’s holy people. I have stood next to a young couple as they pledge a lifetime of love to each other. I have chatted with an usher who has been coming to the same church and happily serving in the same capacity for 20 years. I have listened to the quiet confession of a man who loves his wife and children so much that it breaks his heart when he has failed them in some way. I have seen college students give beautiful talks about their lives and their faith to peers gathered in a mountain lodge on a snowy Saturday night. I have gathered around a baptismal font with an extended family as they welcome their newest member into the faith and pray in confidence in God’s care and protection.

Serving as a priest for 25 years has been an honor and a privilege. I am grateful to God and to his holy people for the opportunity.

Father Ronald Gonzales, SJ  
25 Years a Jesuit

Twenty-five years have passed since I entered the gates of Grand Coteau, Louisiana, delivered by the vocation director of the De La Salle Christian Brothers, who met me at the Lafayette airport. Vocations are meant to fit each one regardless of those initial orders that touched our lives in the beginning. I am most grateful to all those individuals, from my family, to my teachers, to my many friends and parishioners who have helped mold me into the priest I am today. Were it not for their patience and love throughout the years I could not have lasted. God has been so good to me through them, “better than I deserve” as a good friend often comments about himself.

I hope that in my short time in the Society of Jesus (with God’s help) I have been able to lift the burdens of many who are burdened by many things. I pray that whatever time he gives me on this earth can be used for His Glory and Honor. When my time comes I pray that I could leave this world just a little better than when I found it. AMDG
Father Rodney Kissinger, SJ  
75 Years a Jesuit

In 1955 I made my tertianship at Xavier hall in Pass Christian. It was just a short distance from the beach so each afternoon I would walk along the beach. I was always amazed at the variety of flotsam and jetsam that had been washed up along the shore during the night. Here are some of the flotsam and jetsam that have washed upon the shores of my life of 102 years.

“I think therefore I am. I am, therefore God is. I am the greatest proof for the existence of God. I experience God before I have a concept of God.”

“Belief in God is an instinct, natural as breathing.” ~ St. John Chrysostom

“There are two, and only two, luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator.” ~ Blessed John Cardinal Newman

Sacred and secular is a false dichotomy! Every thing is sacred.

Life is a journey of faith. Our Lord has not only gone on before us to show us the way. He also goes along in us as our guide and companion. More flotsam and jetsam can be found on my website.

Brother Lawrence Lundin, SJ  
50 Years a Jesuit

St. Ignatius was a pilgrim, moving from Loyola in the Basque Country to Pamplona, Salamanca, Paris, the Holy Land, Venice, Rome, and other places as he discerned the Lord’s call and followed. He brought together companions and worked to promote the greater glory of God through the Society of Jesus. His vision was rooted in the Spiritual Exercises which impelled him to generous service.

As Jesuits we are called to be ready to respond to the needs of the Church and Society in tasks that might call us to move often or to be stable. In my 50 years, the call has taken me to places as varied as Grand Coteau, Washington, Tampa, Asunción, Paraguay and New Orleans.

In all these places the Lord has blessed my work and provided good supportive companions on the journey. It has been a great privilege to serve the internal ministries of the Society in finance, management, and accounting, and for the past four years to work for religious institutes across North America through the Resource Center for Religious Institutes.

Along the way there have been friends in the Lord who have been supportive and inspirational in their love and service. Looking back on people and places gives me a great sense of gratitude to God for the blessings each has been. Jesuits are called to follow Christ’s words “Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations.” Let us continue to fulfill this mission, full of hope and enthusiasm.
Father Thomas Madden, SJ
60 Years a Priest

According to the Psalmist, “Seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty if we are strong” (Ps 90:10). If that is so, then I have already lived an extra ten years on borrowed time. Popular wisdom would have us believe that the best years of one’s life, the most productive, are when he or she is at the peak of his/her physical strength and mental acumen. I recently stumbled on the contrary belief that set me to wondering. “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter.”

I have lived sixty of my ninety years as a priest of the Society of Jesus, which have surprisingly, maybe better said “providentially,” fallen into three twenty year segments: in the academic apostolate of our schools, in pastoral ministry on campus and in parishes, both rural and inner city, and in the typical Jesuit work of directing retreats, not preached to a group but one on one. If I were to be asked which of these, in retrospect, were the most beneficial to me personally, and in my judgment the most profitable for those whom I served, I would say my ministry of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. I say so because I think that they have been the time of my own most significant growth in the Spirit and that the Lord has used me to facilitate the spiritual growth of others entrusted to my care in a directed retreat. He has saved the best third of my life to the last, the ministry of what matter most.

Some years ago a retreatant wrote me a note after she returned home in which she said: “Your work at the Spirituality Center is so very important, for you are enabling people to enter into silence long enough to hear the divine Voice. There is nothing more necessary or more valuable.” I am long past my prime, but I try to keep on going because I have not yet been forced to grow silent over the “things that matter most.”
Father Jerome Neyrey, SJ
60 Years a Jesuit

Yes, a Jesuit for 60 years, but the last ten have been the best – by far.
I retired from serving the Word by teaching and began to preach the Word at Our Lady of the Oaks Retreat House in Grand Coteau, La. in 2007. The transition from print to speech was like a new birth: I kept urging the retreatants to imagine Jesus as “just like us.” Just like us in all things!
And, all of a sudden, I was preaching to myself, and I began to love talking about this Jesus to others. So much so, I came into a period of warm sunshine which has been with me for the past ten years.
I want this added to my gravestone: Floruit 2007. And I found wonderful prayers by Sts. Peter Claver and Peter Canisius and Teilhard de Chardin which fertilized my garden. And St. Teresa of Avila prayed for me the best of prayers: “Enjoy me.”
And I have.

Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila

Just these two words He spoke
changed my life.
“Enjoy Me.”

What a burden I thought I was to carry –
a crucifix, as did He.

Love once said to me, “I know a song,
would you like to hear it?”

And laughter came from every brick in the street
and from every pore in the sky.

After a night of prayer,
He changed my life when
He sang,

“Enjoy Me.”

~ St. Teresa of Avila
Father Norman O’Neal, SJ
70 Years a Jesuit

I don’t think being a Jesuit for 70 years was anything I imagined it’d be, and spending my whole priestly life in one work, one institution, was so different than the usual Jesuit life, I never considered it.

Most Jesuits during their lifetime will be in parish work, retreat work, missionary work or education. But because of my life work I have been blessed by so many good friends that it would be hard to name them all. Along with my relatives in New Orleans and Louisiana I have been so blessed that I never was at a lack of having someone to offer Mass for and pray for. The more active life of officiating at weddings, baptisms, and funerals are over, but I can still do the formal religious acts of Mass and prayers, thanking God for all the things I have been blessed with.

I particularly want to thank all who have been so good, thoughtful, and generous with me in so many ways and to let you know I am still remembering you at the altar and in my prayers. Finally, I ask that you will remember me in the same way, as I spend the rest of my life in a different way than I have spent the past 70 years.

Father Robert O’Toole, SJ
50 Years a Priest

One’s reason for entering religious life and studies for the priesthood differ considerably by the time of his Golden Sacerdotal Anniversary. There is now the mystery, best lived in union with Christ and the Trinity, with Mary’s assistance.

My family was definitely religious and always a tremendous and caring support. I liked studies and was impressed by the lives of my parish priests and the Jesuits, both scholastics and priests, at St. Louis University High School, but without Mary, I would not have been spiritually ready to enter the Society of Jesus.

A wise master of novices once pointed me in the right direction; and over the years I specialized in Classical Languages and was then to be in philosophy. However, with a somewhat independent spirit I just kept preparing myself for the Sacred Scriptures. Regency in Belize was great; theology, my interest, ordination, my real goal, then studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. For a quarter of my life, I taught theology at St. Louis University, then eleven years at the Biblicum, as teacher, superior, and rector, ten years as fundraising for the Jesuit Institutions of higher education in Rome and back to SLU as an adjunct professor. Challenges were there; but Christ, the Father, and Mary, too. Yes, I worked at being diligent and a caring, loving priest, a personalist. But the real achiever was God and the personal satisfaction, happiness and hundredfold I experienced, gifts.
Father John Payne, SJ
60 Years a Jesuit

Sixty years ago I could never have imagined that in 2017 I would have the enormous joy of seeing a charismatic and saintly Jesuit brother serve as Pope and the most amazing and influential spiritual leader on the globe. Neither could I anticipate that in the same year, we, as Jesuits, would contritely host a public liturgy expressing our shame and guilt that other Jesuits in the United States had once been slaveholders. All this simply confirms what our delegates at a General Congregation stated about our identity in 1975. Then, they put and answered the question: “What is it to be a Jesuit?” and “It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was” (GC 32).

My life bears out this keen sense of being unworthy of that grace and yet blessed beyond measure in having received this call. There is an incomparable gift of the spirituality and brotherhood that invites an ever-deepening intimacy with Jesus and the ceaseless challenge to serve always more faithfully in His and our Father’s kingdom. That shaped my prayer, personal relationships, the efforts to teach and minister as well as “to engage, under the standard of the cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and that struggle for justice which it includes” (GC 32).

I am now and will always be grateful, humbled, and joyful for these 60 years.

Father Eugene Renard, SJ
70 Years a Jesuit

I was hoping to teach high school students, but was assigned to help the Master of Novices and the novices for two years at Florissant, Missouri. Then I was assigned to teach Latin to high school students at Regis High School in Denver, Colorado. My third assignment was more satisfying: taking care of sick and dying Jesuits at the retirement community in St. Louis. Seeing their acceptance of suffering, pain, and dying was very inspiring. After five years, I was given a sabbatical to visit the Holy Lands in Jerusalem and the Pope in Rome and studies in Berkeley, California.

While in Berkeley, I was discerning what God wanted me to do next. After a while, it was clear that parish life was where God was leading me. For the next 27 years, I worked in parishes and really enjoyed it. I spent eight years at Sacred Heart Parish in Denver, one year at St. Joseph Parish in Pueblo, Colorado, and 17 years at Most Holy Trinity Parish in Trinidad, Colorado.

Then I spent nine very happy years at the White House Jesuit Retreat Center in St. Louis. I enjoyed counseling retreatants, hearing confessions, and many other jobs. God’s graces are at work with retreatants. On July 1, 2015, I arrived at Jesuit Hall in St. Louis to retire because of my health and infirmities.
Father Nicholas Schiro, SJ
60 Years a Priest

Reflecting on my sixty years as a priest, I asked myself: where did it all begin? Why did I as a young boy of sixteen want to be a Jesuit priest?

It is what every person wants in the depths of his or her heart. I wanted my life to be meaningful, that I made a difference because I was here. I felt that following Christ and bringing others to Christ as a priest in the Society of Jesus was the best way for me to fulfill that desire. Now looking back on my 60 years as a priest, I know I made the right decision.

Little of my priesthood has been spent in parish ministry or retreat ministry. Fifty of those 60 years have been spent in the ministry of teaching. For me, the classroom was my chapel and more than 6,500 young men were my congregation. My mission was to bring them to know, love, and serve the Lord and one another. Only God knows how well I succeeded. But I know my desire to serve Him through the ministry of teaching has been fulfilled. One of the great rewards of growing old as a priest and teacher is seeing many of the boys I taught many years ago grow into fine, loving Catholic husbands and fathers. I feel I have received my “hundredfold” in this life.

Father Frank J. Schmitt, SJ
60 Years a Jesuit

As a Jesuit brother for twenty-one and a half years, I really enjoyed working with the maintenance crews. Serving on these crews we built schools, churches, a Parish Hall in Belize, and homes on the Indian Missions in Wyoming and South Dakota. I got to know and appreciate these men very much.

Then as a priest, it was great to marry, baptize, hear confessions, give Communion, confirm, and give the last rites to people and their families. One got to see God working in others, and how they gave their lives back to God. It was also wonderful to say Mass and preach to the people hoping that they would lead a good life, turn away from sin, give themselves back to God, grow in the awareness of God dwelling within them, thank God for saving them, and bless God for all that He had done and was doing for them.

And so I can say that I have truly enjoyed my 60 years in the Jesuits. God has certainly blessed me in my vocation in so many ways. Therefore if you decide to become a religious brother, sister, or priest you will be living a life that is enjoyable and blessed by God in so many ways. Try it.
Father Michael N. Smith, SJ
50 Years a Priest

My mother began my Jesuit journey when she informed me as I was nearing grade school graduation that I would be taking the entrance exam for St. Louis University High School.

Upon becoming a student at SLUH, I was greeted by many “men for others,” mostly Jesuits and some laymen. These men became my good shepherds, my much needed father figures. They taught me what it meant to be a man for others by believing that everyone in the “race” counts no matter where you finish. (My love for running cross country really emphasized this.)

As a senior I took another entrance exam which admitted me to the Jesuits, to become myself a man for others. It was 1954; I was 18.

I was ordained at St. Francis Xavier College Church in St. Louis 13 years later, in 1967. I was 31.

I was appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Fruita, Colorado and pastor of nearby Holy Family School in Grand Junction, Colorado. It was 2001 and I was 65.

These parishioners and school children taught me how to be a good pastor and a man for others for 14 years: for me, heaven had met earth.

I retired in 2015. I was 79.
Father Robert Sullivan, SJ
50 Years a Priest

The superiors of the Society of Jesus have a memory. In 1954, the year I entered the Society, our Provincial came to visit us. He asked me what I would like to do when finishing the formation years. I said I would like to go to our missions in Honduras. During my scholastic years, however, I had given up the hope of going to Central America since my language skills were poor. Our God, however, is a God of surprises. My first assignment after ordination was pastoral work in Yoro, Honduras.

There I spent twelve gifted years of lights and some darkness. The lights were: getting to know and love the Hondurans, sharing with my fellow men and women companions in the service and promotion of a faith doing justice.

The darknesses were: it was revolutionary times, especially in our neighboring countries of Nicaragua and El Salvador. Honduras, thank God, escaped the terrible effects of civil war. The church, however, in its service to the poor was often held in suspicion by many of the political elite and military. During the social tension of the seventies, natural disasters of hurricanes and heavy rains all seemed to leave the country in a messy state of being. Sadly, at this time many of my companion Jesuits left the Society of Jesus.

I don’t do well when the reality of life outside of me and within me become messy. So after 12 years in Honduras, I made a retreat under the direction of Fr. Vince Hovley. Reflecting on a text of John’s Gospel, the thought of these words came to me: “We have had good times together.” Recalling these words of some 30 years ago, I still tend to tear up.

With God’s help I can say: yes, “we have had good times together” in the past, and now in the present, and will have even in the future. So, thank you, Lord, thank you all with whom we have shared good times.
Father Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ
70 Years a Jesuit

A jubilee for years of disparate works doing the same ministry!
Helping students as dean at Loyola in New Orleans, preaching retreats at Montserrat in Lake Dallas, lecturing at Saint Louis University, guiding tertians in Austin, writing with the staff of America in New York, reporting on the extended council of the Father General in Rome.

Widely differing venues and functions but the same ministry: companion with other companions of Jesus – with us every step, all the way – sent to find things that help people somehow and to do them in Jesus’ Name.

So we all have done – the wild mélange of things that make up God’s gift of a Jesuit life. We were joyful even in troublous passages because we were each aware that our little life is much like one little life in Judea. Like the rest of us, I have hoped that the Father is doing His work through me in the power of the Holy Spirit. Now I write and give retreats at Grand Coteau. And that’s all there is to say about me.

Father J. Timothy Thompson, SJ
60 Years a Jesuit

The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways. I never attended a Jesuit school, and the first Jesuit I met I had gone looking for to inquire about how to enter the Society. Neither did I volunteer to come to Belize where I have happily spent all my active ministry – about 45 years in all. I have enjoyed working with wonderful colleagues here and enjoyed the diversity of the cultures. I have done a variety of things over the years which would not have been possible elsewhere.

Then there has been a great recovery. I left Belize for about a year and a half ago believing that I would not be able to return because of what doctors said was a very aggressive case of skin cancer. However a new form of immunotherapy has made it possible for me to come back in less than ten months and resume some of my previous activities and take up new ones.

None of this would have been possible without God’s grace, and I owe a great debt of gratitude for their prayers and support to my Jesuit brothers, to my entire family and to my good friends.
Father Christopher Viscardi, SJ  
50 Years a Jesuit

“My Father is at work until now, so I am at work.” (Jn 5:17)

When I prayed over these words from the Gospel for Wednesday of the 4th Week of Lent, I thought of the image suggested by Ignatius in the Contemplation for Attaining Divine Love: “consider how God works and labors for me in all creatures upon the face of the earth, giving being and life.”

A 20th century Jesuit, Teilhard de Chardin, gives a further twist to this image, when he reflects on the “slow work of God” and invites us to “give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in the suspense and incomplete.”

A contemporary Jesuit, Pope Francis, reminds us of the profound “Joy of the Gospel” of this God who works and labors for me in all creatures and at every moment.

When I entered the Society of Jesus in 1967, I had never heard of the Spiritual Exercises and never made any kind of silent retreat. The many graces of being formed by the spirituality of the Exercises have continued to shape and renew my life for these fifty years, allowing me to share in some small way in that spirit of joy, in that desire to give our Lord the benefit of believing in the slow work of God.

Father John “Jack” Zupez, SJ  
50 Years a Priest

During my years at St. Louis University High School, I felt that our Jesuit teachers had the world by the tail. I was impressed by the diverse opportunities for service Jesuit life offered. Sixteen classmates entered the “Jebs.”

When I entered the Jesuits I thought I’d had enough of travel, but I was to experience open-hearted Jesuit hospitality in all nine U.S. provinces and in 16 foreign countries. I am grateful for the close, worldwide brotherhood in the Lord which is the Society of Jesus.

My most valued experience was Tertianship studies in spirituality in Northern India. My most fun time: playing father to over 50 toddlers at an AIDS orphanage in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. My most gratifying memory: the rector of a new seminary in Nigeria saying that when he asked the seven seminarians, each of them named me as their role model.

Conclusion: we’ve got good genes in this “least Society of Jesus”: Pope Francis, Pedro Arrupe, Father Ignatius, all beckoning us to become ever closer companions of Jesus.