



Discover Ignatian Spirituality

Week 3

Images of God

Ignatius experienced God as an intensely personal, active, generous God, a God as Love loving. God creates, and by so doing God is actively showering us with gifts. God acts, and all his actions show his wisdom and love. God's love is unconditional. It is not something we earn, or buy, or bargain for.

Fr David Fleming SJ

As Christians, we believe in a God of love who wishes to be in relationship with us.

At the beginning of the Bible, the Book of Genesis describes how we were created in the image of God, and God breathed Spirit into us.

However, although this may be what we want to believe, and to believe wholeheartedly all of the time, we often have other images of God which are co-existing alongside this one at different times and at different levels of our being

It's very common for us to have less positive, false or distorted images of God which are subsisting at an unconscious or subconscious level.

And although we may not be completely aware of them, these distorted images of God can have a hidden yet powerful and persistent effect on our relationship with God, and our attitudes to ourselves, our prayer and our lives

So our invitation this week is for you to explore the various images of God that you may be carrying around with you

Both conscious and subconscious images, which may contradict and conflict with each other

Sometimes our conscious positive image of God can be being quietly undermined by a distorted image of God that we've picked up somewhere in the course of our lives, perhaps when we were quite young and susceptible to some misguided teaching

For Ignatius, God is a God of love. Who is active, present, and creatively involved in the intimate details of our lives. God is a creator who is continuing to create and a

giver, who continues to give. God is moved both by the love, joy and life in the world, and also by the hate, suffering, despair and violence. Indeed, in the imagination of Ignatius, it is because of seeing and being moved by these things, that God chooses to incarnate through Jesus Christ into the rich tapestry of material life and labour within it for our good. Ignatius has various key images of a God who acts in the world which we will explore over these next weeks: a God who is always labouring, desiring, gifting, communicating, and consoling.

Questions for reflection

- 1) Sit quietly for a moment. What comes into your mind or heart as you hear the word 'God'? Thoughts, feelings, experiences?
- 2) What do you imagine God to be like? What's your favourite image or metaphor at this time in your life?
- 3) How do you know about God? Who or what has formed your understanding of who God is?
- 4) Has your image of God changed over the years? And, if so, when did it change? How has it changed? And what caused it to change?
- 5) Right now, at this very moment, does God feel near to you, or far away?
- 6) Is God for you now, a friend or foe?
- 7) Do you believe that God truly loves you just as you are, without you needing to change anything at all? Do you believe that God loves you and *likes* you too?
- 8) Could your image of God be any larger, more spacious, more expansive, more loving, more freeing, more surprising? And how might you encourage this to happen?
- 9) Take some time to sit quietly, reading the passage from Isaiah at the end of the Gerry Hughes article. Read it two or three times, slowly, meditatively – like sucking a boiled sweet. Read the scripture with your heart rather than with your mind. See what words and phrases resonant with you. Stay with them. Let them sink slowly into the depths of your being. Carry them into prayer. Who is the God that is being revealed to you in this piece of scripture? What do you want to say to him? What does he want to say to you?

43 But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
³ For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
⁴ Because you are precious in my sight,
and honoured, and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you.

(NRSV translation)

Benedictine sister Joan Chittister

It is the kind of God in which we choose to believe that in the end makes all the difference. Some believe in a God of wrath and become wrathful with others as a result. Some believe in a God who is indifferent to the world and, when they find themselves alone, as all of us do at some time or another, shrivel up and die inside from the indifference they feel in the world around them. Some believe in a God who makes traffic lights turn green and so become the children of magical coincidence Some believe in a God of laws and crumble in spirit and psyche when they themselves break them or else become even more stern in demanding from others standards they themselves cannot keep. They conceive of God as the manipulator of the universe, rather than its blessing-Maker. . . .

Until I discover the God in which I believe, I will never understand another thing about my own life. If my God is harsh judge, I will live in unquenchable guilt. If my God is Holy Nothingness, I will live a life of cosmic loneliness. If my God is taunt and bully, I will live my life impaled on the pin of a grinning giant. If my God is life and hope, I will live my life in fullness overflowing forever.