

FAITH SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Why indifference is so important to Jesuit spirituality

J.D. Long-García

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A Reflection for the Memorial of St. Francis Xavier

You can find today's readings [here](#).

"Blessed are all who wait for the Lord." (Isaiah 30:18)

In a way, the Jesuits began influencing my life even before I was born. My father, for example, studied philosophy with the Jesuits at Xavier University in Cincinnati. As I grew up, my mother displayed a small image of San Ignacio de Loyola painted on an ornate wooden tablet near her desk.

But it wasn't until I was an adult—and a parent myself—that I began a much more intentional study of St. Ignatius and his followers. (I'm a work in progress, no doubt, but my colleagues have helped me a lot.) One of the concepts that captures my imagination in particular is Ignatian indifference.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius explains that we are created to "praise, reverence and serve God." To fulfill our purpose, we must "make ourselves indifferent to all created things as much as we are able." Ignatius challenges us to not desire health over illness, wealth over poverty, honor over dishonor or a long life over a short one. The goal is to lead a life that fulfills the purpose for which God created us.

Well, I'm still working on that. I definitely prefer health over illness, for example. And more money would be nice, and I'd like to at least avoid dishonor if I can. While I'm at it, I wouldn't mind living a long life and getting to know my grandkids, if God sends those to us. I get what Ignatius is saying, though. If I become too fixated on any of that, it could stand in the way of fulfilling what God has placed me on this earth to do.

Today the universal church commemorates St. Francis Xavier, a great Jesuit missionary. I see him as, among other things, an exemplification of Ignatian indifference. Born into a noble family, he nevertheless took vows of celibacy and poverty alongside St. Ignatius and the other five first companions. In 1540, the same year Pope Paul III formally recognized the Society of Jesus, Francis Xavier parted from the founding companions and began his missionary journey to Asia.

In India, with the help of interpreters, he translated his small catechism into the native language and lived among the poor. He followed this model going forward, as he continued his evangelization efforts in southeast Asia, Indonesia and eventually Japan. In each place, he learned the local culture and tailored his preaching to the local communities. His approach was never about himself, but always about God. And he found a way to relay the message, not by imposing his own culture, but by learning the languages and the cultures of his audience. In this way, he led others to "praise, reverence and serve God."

Lord, help me to be more like St. Francis Xavier. Help let go of the things I place before you. Instill in me a spiritual indifference to created things and give me the grace to fulfill the purpose for which you created me. For the greater glory of God.

Get to know J.D. Long-García, Senior Editor

Favorite Advent or Christmas themed art? Not sure if [La Virgen de Altagracia](#) counts, but I'm going to pick that. Depicts the Holy Family.

Favorite Christmas tradition? Midnight Mass. I can think of no better way to realize the incarnation than praising God in community.

What article are you most proud to have worked on this year at America?

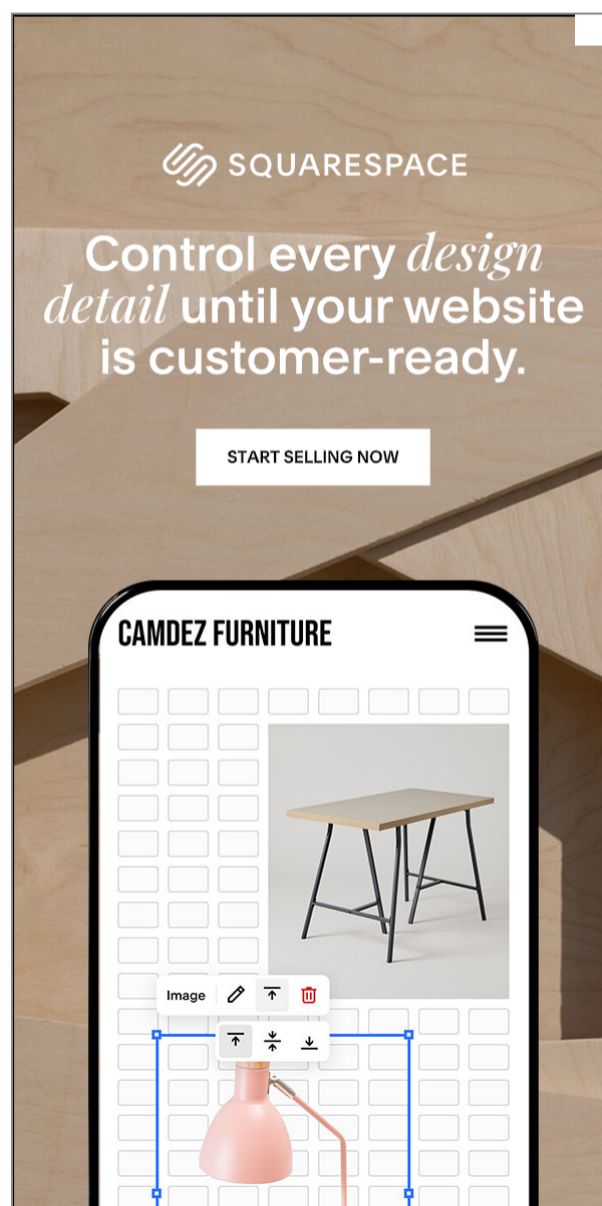
We had a lovely Afghan family move in next door about a year ago, and we've become friends. While I don't refer to them specifically, their story inspired a [feature](#) and [podcast](#) (produced by talented colleague Maggi Van Dorn) about Afghan refugees. They have been a life-giving presence in our lives. I hope some fraction of that is communicated in the work.

Favorite Christmas recipe? My wife's coquito (Puerto Rican eggnog).



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