

In sixteenth century Spain there lived a knight called Ignatius of Loyola. One source described him as 'a fancy dresser, an expert dancer, a womanizer, sensitive to insult, and a rough punkish swordsman who used his privileged status to escape prosecution for violent crimes committed at carnival time.'

Evidently quite the lad.

All this came to a halt when Ignatius's right leg was shattered by a ricocheting cannon ball at the Siege of Pamplona in 1521. He was laid up for months as attempts were made to put his fractured limb back together.

Lying in pain, Ignatius spent much of his time daydreaming. A lot of this was about him being a knight; serving the king, gaining the favours of a royal lady, renown for his valour, all that kind of thing. Ignatius had also been given books about the lives of the saints and when he wasn't daydreaming about doing the whole knight thing, he imagined himself

following in their footsteps - serving the poor, acting with charity and mercy, living a life devoted to others.

As he daydreamed, Ignatius started to notice something. When he gave his mind over to dreams about himself – his own fame and fortune, success and glory, he always found himself feeling flat, deflated afterwards. In contrast, when he turned his thoughts to serving others, the opposite was true. He was left feeling peaceful, serene, his heart filled with joy.

You may not often daydream about success as a knight. But whether that's the case or not, I think Ignatius has important things to say to us in the days in which we live. What he says is this. What we think about, fill our heads with, attend to matters.

Right now, what's likely to take up much of our head space is the news that surrounds us every hour of every day as we face the

coronavirus outbreak. Messages that speak to us constantly about limits and restrictions, of dangers and problems. Relentless communication that tells us that we're all going to hell in a hand cart. The result is fear and anxiety, bad tempers and concern, joy driven far away.

Do we have an alternative? I think we do. We can't ignore the news, no more than Ignatius was able to ignore the pain of a fractured limb. But might our challenge be, as he did, to hold alongside it a very different imagination? One that imagines not how we might give into fear during this time, but how we might serve each other within it. One that thinks not constantly about the mess we're in but of what the world could be like when once the pandemic is brought under control. One that imagines not the world as it's presented to us by the 24 hour media but of what the world

could be if we were to live out God's life within it.

Ignatius would have called such imagining prayer. He'd have pointed us towards it as the surest route towards peace, serenity and joy just as they were for him when he lay in a bed in sixteenth century Spain, facing the prospect of orthopaedic surgery without the benefit of anaesthesia.

And as Ignatius's story goes on to show, when we enter into prayer, something even more wonderful happens than the joy we experience. When we pray, God answers our prayers in us. If we ask God to enable us to serve others – we'll end up doing so. If our prayer sets alight a fire within us to change the world – we'll set about transforming it. If we ask God's life to fill ours – God will fill it and with a joy that knows no end.

So let's reset our thinking, our imagination during this extraordinarily difficult time. Let's

imagine the world from a different perspective – God’s view. A view that will bring light in our darkness, joy in our sorrow. Amen.