

# Magis

by Fr. Fran Daly, SJ

*“We ought to choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created.”*

—Principle and Foundation, Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola

**M**agis is an Ignatian term that is frequently misunderstood both by Jesuits and non-Jesuits. In Latin it means *more* and is equated with generosity, magnanimity, and selflessness. Thus, some think the more tasks and deeds I undertake in the service of the Lord and others, the better or holier I am becoming. This understanding of the term Magis, however, is not Ignatian.

Our concept of the Magis is derived from the Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola in which he wrote: “Rather we ought to desire and choose only that which is *more conducive* to the end for which we are created” [emphasis added]. What is our end or purpose that we must remember? Again, Ignatius tells us in the first line of the Principle and Foundation: “Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God, our Lord, and by means of doing this to save our souls.” We give this praise, reverence, and service by becoming fully alive and fully human, which means we are filled with

zeal and love for God, self, and others.

Always at the heart of Ignatian spirituality is service. This desire to serve all and do everything is not, however, what the Ignatian Magis means. The Magis is concerned that we choose what will more contribute to our life of love and service. Thus, we each need to deliberate in prayer and choose well from among a variety of options that which leads “more” to the “original purpose” for which we were created.

A person needs to ask: “Given my responsibilities, my gifts and talents, my weaknesses and limitations, how can I best embrace this desire to be a man or woman for others?” Often, to arrive at a good decision, we may be required to engage in careful and sometimes long discernment and even converse with someone who knows us and whom we trust. Karl Rahner, SJ, a famous Jesuit theologian wrote, “Unless we operate on a principle of spiritual balance and the Magis, there is a danger in life of self-centeredness, a danger of going from one excess to another.”

There will be times after we have prayed and reflected on our life situation when we need to say, “No, I cannot add one more task to my present commitments,” and this is operating from the Ignatian Magis. The goal of the Spiritual Exercises is to help us put order into our lives and to achieve a spiritual balance, which then enables us to be free to choose what is more conducive to our praise, reverence, and service of God and service of our brothers and sisters. ■

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