



Digital Dialogue: Pursuing the Magis Online

As members of a community at a Catholic, Jesuit school, we continually turn to the wisdom of St. Ignatius of Loyola for guidance. A central motivating factor for Ignatius was the “Magis.” Drawn from the Latin word for “more,” Ignatius’ pursuit of the Magis led him to seek always that which is greater, of wider value, better, or more conducive to bringing glory to God and the help of souls. As aspiring ministers and theologians rooted in the Ignatian tradition, we, too, are called to pursue the Magis in all aspects of our lives – academic, spiritual, professional, and social. This pursuit of the Magis includes our interactions with each other on social media, and the following five practices are ways that we may pursue the Magis online:

1) Discernment and Freedom

Our interactions on social media call for a sense of self-reflection in processing what we post and how we engage with the other. In the Ignatian tradition, discernment and freedom enable us to find God in all things and lead us to desire the deepening of God’s life in ourselves and all those whom we meet. When we cultivate a spirit of freedom in our discernment, we become better able to choose the good that will give the most glory to God. When we freely further the good of another online, we remind ourselves of the goodness of our creation in God’s image and how God acts with the same generosity and loving freedom.

- ❖ *Am I aware of my own biases and ideological predilections?*
- ❖ *Am I posting, sharing, or commenting to share information or to be inflammatory, provoking a particular reaction from someone?*
- ❖ *Am I free to log off and engage in a personal interaction?*

2) Presuming Good Will

In his introduction to the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius included a note that has come to be known as the Presupposition. The Presupposition essentially instructs the spiritual director and directee to interpret every statement of the other as charitably as possible. In the event that one cannot find a charitable interpretation of the other’s statement, that person is to ask the other for clarification in order to help his or her interpretation. Practicing the Presupposition should not be limited to the context of spiritual direction. One need not spend much time on social media to recognize how countercultural the Presupposition remains. Generously and sincerely offering the most charitable interpretation of another’s statement and, if needed, humbly asking for clarification may go a long way in practicing Christian charity online.

- ❖ *Do I try to interpret another’s statements in a positive light?*
- ❖ *If I seek to offer constructive feedback, do I do so humbly and charitably, while still presuming good will?*
- ❖ *What are my own barriers to presuming good will?*

3) Learned Ministry

The task of learned ministry requires our asking big questions as well as a willingness to wrestle critically with the many facets of our faith and realities of the world – even, or especially, when we disagree. This pursuit of excellence allows us to minister more effectively in response. Given the realities of our time, social media is an outlet for the exchange of ideas and opinions. Employing social media for this exchange, however, means that we must always be rooted in our desire to know and understand better the work of God in our lives, as well as a steadfast commitment to the dignity of all members of our community and the larger world. We are called to dialogue in a way that honors both of these foundational obligations as students of the School of Theology and Ministry. We must also seek, when possible, to have these conversations in the classroom or in person. Not doing so segments our engagement with one another and our quest for meaning and truth.

- ❖ *Are my contributions to social media, particularly around important theological and human questions, of above-average quality?*
- ❖ *When sharing content, am I including my own thoughtful reflections in response?*
- ❖ *Is there a better medium for having this conversation?*

4) Contemplative Imagination

Contemplative imagination is the quiet art of interior reflection with the Spirit, the learned posture of reverence before the mystery, which involves listening, gazing, smelling, tasting, and touching before we speak. Just as we steep ourselves in the landscapes of Scripture and encounter Jesus, contemplative imagination teaches us to practice sensory attunement and immerse ourselves in the lives and stories of others, inviting us to view the world through more than one “filter.” Our online presence, therefore, must break through the depersonalized logic of the newsfeed, which compels us to be swayed by the forces of reactionary and polarizing ideologies. Instead of quickly responding to another’s post, the practice of contemplative imagination empowers us to pause and appreciate the life experiences behind the text and images that glow upon our screens. The more we take “a long, loving look at the real,” the more readily we can pause to reverence the sacred moment that gave rise to particular persons sharing their particular stories online, engage in respectful dialogue, and move toward communion.

- ❖ *Do my online interactions begin by recognizing God in the other?*
- ❖ *Are the things I share edifying for others or do they narrow the vision of God’s reign?*

5) Union of Minds and Hearts

From the foundation of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola formed a community of companions in service to God. This community was united in mind and heart as they were sent around the world – physically separate but still part of one body – emphasizing companionship in the midst of dispersion and difference. In our own context, the School of Theology and Ministry seeks to offer all members a rich and life-giving community, working together for the greater glory of God. For the promise of this community to be realized for all its members, we must commit ourselves to building meaningful relationships and seeking to understand experiences and backgrounds outside of our own. We must be willing to engage respectfully with diverse viewpoints – even when that means challenging them – all while demonstrating an openness to stretch ourselves and explore new ideas. This extends to all areas of our school life – in and out of Simboli Hall.

- ❖ *Can I disagree in a way that remembers the other and I are part of the same body?*
- ❖ *How am I entering better into shared understanding through engagements online?*