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**Walking with Ignatius**

What does the word "Venice" conjure up for you?

Gondolas and gondoliers? The Rialto Bridge? St Mark's Square with the Basilica and the Doge's palace? Ice cream!?

My wife and I have just spent a fascinating three days exploring this great and unique city. She had never been before and I had been once many years ago as part of my post A-level backpacking trip around Europe. Rediscovering this amazing watery world after such a long time was a marvellous and moving experience.

However the trip also held other interests for me. As a student of Ignatian Spirituality I recently discovered that St Ignatius of Loyola and his earliest companions in the fledgling Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) were in fact ordained as priests in Venice on 24th June 1537.

After a frustrating search on the web, I eventually found that Ignatius was ordained in a chapel attached to a Bishop's palace on the Fondamenta San Sebastiano. Having found this canal-side path however, I found to my disappointment that the chapel and the palace no longer exist. A private garden now seems to occupy this spot. But I had walked in Ignatius's steps for a while. And perhaps he was walking with me.

So why this fascination with Ignatius you ask?

For me this spirituality is highly "incarnational". That's to say that Ignatius wants us to find God in all things - in the small details of our everyday lives: a warm encounter with a stranger; a beautiful sunset; the love in the eyes of a partner or friend. He encourages us to build a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as a friend and companion. We just need to open our eyes and pay attention to that gentle guiding presence.

Personally I feel I have much to learn from Ignatius and I've started a three year course so that I can lead others in his "Spiritual Exercises".

Which saint would you like to get to know better?