

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

15 February 2013: Christopher Simon-Evans, St Laurence's Catholic Church

Walking with Ignatius

What does the word "Venice" conjure up for you? Gondolas? Ice cream!?

My wife and I recently spent a fascinating three days exploring this unique city. I had been before many years ago as part of my post A-level backpacking trip around Europe. Rediscovering this amazing water-filled world after such a long time was a truly uplifting experience.

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 ordained as priests in Venice in 1537 - Ignatius in a chapel attached to a Bishop's palace on the Fondamenta San Sebastiano, but I found to my disappointment that the chapel and the palace no longer exist. However, I had walked in Ignatius's steps for a while... and perhaps he was walking with me.

So why this fascination with Ignatius?

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 simply need to open our eyes and our hearts and pay attention to that gentle guiding presence.

I feel I have much to learn from Ignatius and I'm in my second year of a three year course to become a spiritual director and accompany others through his "Spiritual Exercises".

In this first week of Lent, which saint would you like to get to know better?