



## Episode 6: Montserrat

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We're so glad you're joining us for the next stop on our Dallas Road Trip. Episode 6 brings us up to the Northwest. A hair outside of our diocesan bounds can be found the spiritual gem of the Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House.

Just several years after Lewisville Lake was created, Montserrat was founded on its shores in 1959. The Retreat House is run by members of the Jesuit order, those who belong to the Society of Jesus. The Society of Jesus was founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola in 1540, when Pope Paul III approved its mission.<sup>1</sup> We have a very famous Jesuit in Pope Francis!

St. Ignatius was a Spanish aristocratic soldier who had a significant conversion to the faith while recovering from war wounds. "The spirituality he developed places great emphasis on the affective life: the use of imagination in prayer, discernment and interpretation of feelings, cultivation of great desires, and generous service. Ignatian spiritual renewal focuses more on the heart than the intellect... Its goal is an eager, generous, wholehearted offer of oneself to God and to his work."<sup>2</sup> The naming of the Retreat House is significant to St. Ignatius' story. After St. Ignatius' conversion, he decided to travel to the Holy Land, stopping along the way at the Benedictan Monastery at Montserrat, near Barcelona, Spain. It was here that St. Ignatius left his

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/jesuit-order-established>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/what-is-ignatian-spirituality/10-elements-of-ignatian-spirituality/>

sword and knife from his days of being a knight, and decided to adopt poverty and devote himself to the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Famous to Ignatian Spirituality are the Spiritual Exercises. “The Spiritual Exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by St. Ignatius Loyola to help people deepen their relationship with God.”<sup>4</sup> Historically, individuals would participate in these exercises over a month-long, silent (yes, silent!) retreats. However, the average lay person with a job and a family would not have the time to participate in such a retreat, so there has been an interest in making the Spiritual Exercises more accessible through shorter week-long or even weekend-long silent retreats.

That is the ministry offered by Montserrat, who serves not just Catholics, but also Christians who have found the Spiritual Exercises to be beneficial in their relationship with God. Montserrat generously opens their doors- providing housing, a beautiful property for reflection, instruction in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, and spiritual direction throughout the course of the weekend. Father Derek Vo, one of the priests at the Retreat House, shared that many individuals that participate in retreats have made it a tradition to do so every single year, around the same time. Some repeat retreatants have even become good friends, though they only see each other once a year and are only able to talk before and after the retreat!<sup>5</sup>

The location of the Montserrat Retreat House is one of the major attractions. Its property is set back on 38 acres with beautiful landscaping; areas of prayer featuring a massive Crucifix, statue of Mary and Jesus, and Stations of the Cross; and of course, the lake, over which the property looks. You can walk right down to the waters of Lewisville Lake or out on the long dock that protrudes from the shore. Spotted across the grounds are various hammocks, swings, chairs, and benches from which to take in the scenery of the many different species of wildlife, particularly birds, that have found a home on the property.

The environment is perfectly conducive to the work of the silent retreats. Men, women, and couples can go on the Montserrat website to find a retreat that works for their schedule, offered either in English or Spanish. If you decide to make your way to Montserrat, you will find it to be one of the most peaceful stops on our Dallas Road Trip.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://ignatiancamino.com/ignatius-of-loyola/a-life-of-ignatius-of-loyola/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/>

<sup>5</sup> Interview, Father Derek Vo with Katie Aguilar & Josh Salinas, April 2021