

# What Does Fr. Jim Martin Know?

*(Almost) Everything!*

Jesuit's latest book makes Ignatian spirituality more accessible

by Karen Crandal

**H**E'S A JESUIT'S JESUIT. He can walk you through the thirty days of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius even if you're not sure there is a God.

He can teach you a useful, reflective way to pray each day in just 15 easy minutes.

He can help you spot consolation and desolation in your life, even when you don't know how to describe your own feelings.

He can recite nearly every significant event and date in the life of St. Ignatius.

He can help you see God in all things.

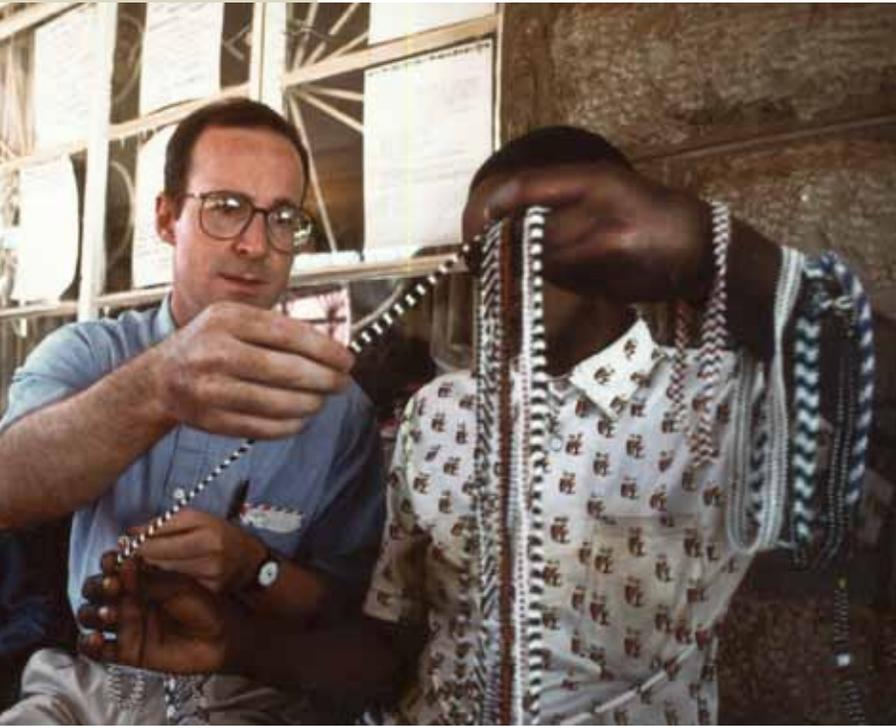
Fr. James Martin, SJ, is also a Catholic's Catholic. He recalls his attendance at the first visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States as "one of the most wonderful days of my life." Major national news organizations call on him when they need the Catholic church explained to their viewers. He knows almost every Catholic saint like a treasured friend. Even Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert promoted him from "friend of the show" to the elevated honor of "the chaplain of 'The Colbert Report.'"

While Martin has written many books that are well received in the Catholic community, he had a strong desire to write a book on Ignatian spirituality for a broader audience. Enter his new book, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*.

"I wanted to start from square one for the general reader," explains Martin. "I wanted to reach out to people who may have never heard of a Jesuit, who may not be Catholic, and who may not even believe in God."

As a cradle Catholic, Martin acknowledges that his Catholic education stopped at age nine, after his confirmation. After attending public high school in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, he graduated from

The progression of Fr. Jim Martin, SJ: (bottom) Martin's first holy communion in 1969 at age 8, (middle) Martin as a business executive at General Electric in 1987, and (top) Martin today.



Martin with Ceacent Saire Mukamwiza, a Rwandan refugee, in front of the Jesuit Refugee Service's Mikono Centre, which Martin cofounded in 1993 in Nairobi, Kenya. The Mikono Centre provided microfinance loans to East African refugees.



the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business in 1982.

He then worked in corporate finance at General Electric for six years before he "saw the light," as he once punned with comedian Stephen Colbert. He joined the Jesuits as a novice in 1988.

"After 20 years as a Jesuit, I wanted to pour all I knew about Ignatian spirituality into one book," he said of this newest publishing venture.

Martin knew that a great many people viewed Ignatian spirituality, particularly the *Spiritual Exercises*, as either too daunting or too far removed from everyday life. It was in part due to that attitude that Martin was so looking forward to sharing the practical wisdom of St. Ignatius with a wider audience than the Jesuit, or even the Catholic, world.

"St. Ignatius was a master psychologist," said Martin. "He had a deep insight into the human condition."

Martin's new book, released in March 2010 by HarperCollins, is already showing great success: in its first month it made *The New York Times'* bestseller list. Since it is a back-to-basics book—Ignatian Spirituality 101—it may not be something that his fellow Jesuits would likely pick up for spiritual guidance, unless as a refresher course. Jesuit priests and brothers spend many years studying the way of St. Ignatius and are solidly familiar with his teachings.

However, Martin humbly reports how touched he has been by how many Jesuits have read it and have also bought it as gifts for students, friends, parishioners, and benefactors. All proceeds from the book are given to *America* magazine, the national Catholic publication where Martin has worked as an editor since 1998.

Martin saw this kind of success a few years ago with his bestselling memoir *My Life with the Saints*, a tribute to holy men and women of the Catholic church, with detailed stories about their lives.

"I believe people are naturally attracted to the holiness in other people and that this attraction is one

Martin, a Jesuit with the New England Province of the Society of Jesus, was ordained a priest 11 years ago.

Fr. Martin's bestselling spiritual guidebook based on the life and teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola shows us how to manage relationships, money, work, prayer, and decision-making, while keeping a sense of humor about it all.

way that God has of drawing us to himself," he said.

Martin notes there are numerous excellent books already written about Ignatian spirituality for the Catholic market. Still, he felt that what both Catholics and people of other faith traditions (or none) are looking for is someone who can speak to them about God in a personal way that is inviting, accessible, practical, and down to earth.

"Theology does not need to be written in impenetrable language. Stories, for example, are compelling. And people like to hear about personal experiences. After all, Jesus *is* the parable of God," said Martin. "God didn't become a theological manual. He became a human with a personal story."

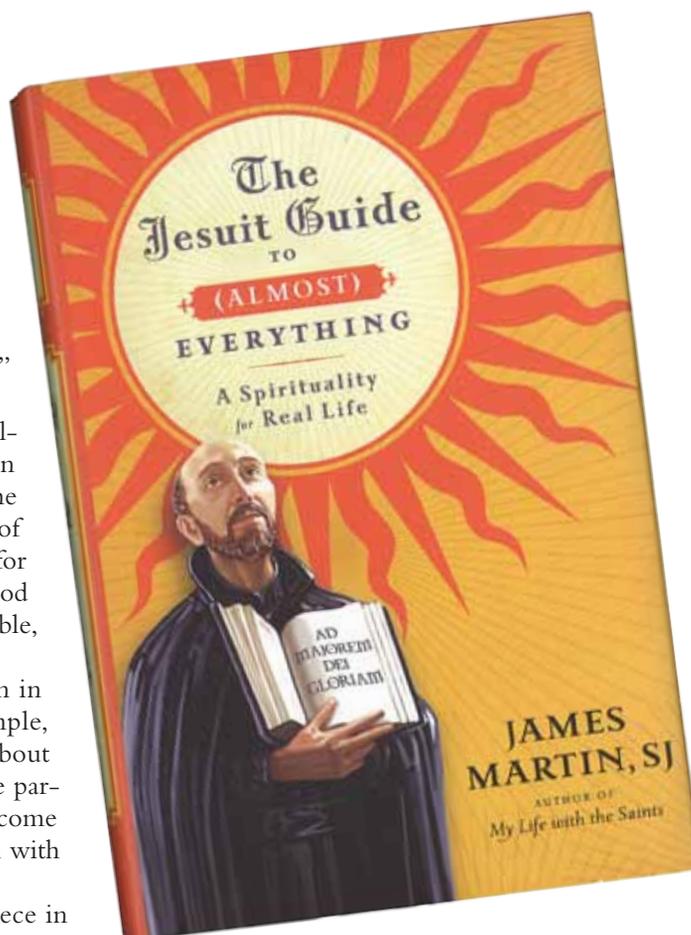
In 2007, Martin published an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* about Mother Teresa's letters, which revealed she felt "the absence of God" for the last 50 years of her life. Stephen Colbert of "The Colbert Report" (who teaches religious education in his own parish) found the topic irresistibly curious and asked Martin to comment about it on his satirical, comedic "news" show.

Colbert opened his interview with his typically hard-hitting "news" style: "Did it shock you to find out that Mother Teresa is probably in hell?" While Martin didn't see it quite that way, their chemistry made for good TV. Martin has gone on to appear as a guest on the show four more times in the last three years.

"Fr. Jim is funny and serious at the same time, and that is a rare combination," said Colbert of his favorite chaplain.

**M**artin says living such a public life as an author and media commentator has some downsides; everything he says or writes publicly is under a microscope by everyone in the church. "On the upside, having the media as my medium gives me a chance to evangelize to a much broader audience than I could ever do in a year of homilies."

As a duo, Martin and Colbert have run the gamut of topics from the serious to the absurd, from Pope Benedict's first visit to the United States, to conservative commentator Glen Beck's recent warning to



Catholics to run from the building if they ever hear the words "social justice" uttered in their parish as it is code for communism and Nazism. On a recent visit to *The Colbert Report*, the host touted Martin's new book as chock full of nearly everything you'd want to know, including, he joked, barbecue recipes and how to hot-wire a car.

While Colbert purposely tends toward exaggeration, he wasn't far off with how complete Martin's book is on touching many areas of human existence. The book addresses challenging topics from the viewpoint that people are naturally spiritual. Martin believes people long for the fulfillment of all their desires, which ultimately will be realized in a relationship with God.

His approach is simple, practical, and believable, stating that God travels to meet you where you are—not just in the peak moments of life, but in the common events of every day.

Martin says the path to finding God is in simply noticing, savoring, and relishing daily events—a hallmark of spiritual direction in the tradition of St. Ignatius. For example, noticing that feeling when you are with a friend and you are suddenly aware of a great sense of contentment. Or recognizing the feeling of gratitude and awe when you hold an infant. That's God's presence you're feeling, he says.

Martin says that there are as many ways to reach God as there are people. But for clarity's sake, he

# Ten Things You Didn't Know

## (About the Jesuits)

**1 They invented** the trap door. Without the Jesuits, the Wicked Witch of the West wouldn't have been able to disappear so suddenly in *The Wizard of Oz*. With a history in theater and the arts, Jesuits also perfected the "scrim," the sheer curtain still used in theaters today.

**2 They discovered** quinine (called "Jesuit bark" in the 16th century) that is used today for anti-malarial drugs and also in tonic water. Without the Jesuits, you wouldn't be able to enjoy your gin and tonic.

**3 Their founder**, St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the Spanish-soldier-turned-mystic may be the only saint with a notarized police record: for nighttime brawling with intent to cause bodily harm (needless to say, this came before his conversion).

**4 Their dictionaries** and lexicons of the native languages in North America in the 17th century were the first resources Europeans used to understand these ancient tongues, and they still provide modern scholars with the earliest transcriptions of the languages.

**5 They located** the source of the Blue Nile and charted large stretches of the Amazon and Mississippi Rivers.

**6 They educated** Descartes, Voltaire, Moliere, James Joyce, Peter Paul Rubens, Arthur Conan Doyle, Fidel Castro, Alfred Hitchcock, and Bill Clinton—not to mention Bing Crosby, Vince Lombardi, Robert Altman, Chris Farley, Salma Hayek, and Denzel Washington.

**7 They founded** the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

**8 There are** 35 craters on the moon named for Jesuit scientists. And Athanasius Kircher, a 17th-century Jesuit scientist, called "master of a hundred arts" and "the last man to know everything", was a geologist, biologist, linguist, decipherer of hieroglyphics, and inventor of the megaphone.

**9 They inspired** the film *On the Waterfront*, based on the groundbreaking labor-relations work of Jesuit John Corridan, who worked in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s. His part was played by Karl Malden, who, last year, died 50 years to the day after Fr. Corridan.

**10 They count** 40 saints and dozens of blessed among their members, including the globe-trotting missionary St. Francis Xavier. Their famous "former" members include Garry Wills, John McLaughlin, and Jerry Brown.

describes six broad "paths" to God by way of belief, independence, disbelief, return, exploration, and confusion.

Other "(Almost) Everything" topics include how insights from a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience can help you live in a world of money, sex, and freedom. He brings up guilt as an invitation from God to improve your life and suffering as a way of opening us up to new ways of experiencing God.

The book is filled with jokes and personal stories, giving Martin's voice an approachable, personal feel, as if you're chatting with a good friend over coffee. There's even a bit of bawdiness at times. Martin quotes an older Jesuit giving sage advice for a new novice about what to remember when you're living in community: "First, you're not God. Second, this isn't heaven. Third, don't be an ass."

The author also approaches plenty of weighty subjects. In one chapter, Martin teaches a method for making difficult decisions by noting what consoles you and what makes you feel sad and alone. He constantly calls the reader to pay attention to what is going on in his or her own life. Martin even gives career advice by saying, "God knows that our deepest desires are those that will bring joy to us and to the world."

Overall, the *Jesuit Guide* gives thanks to the founder of the Jesuits for giving us so many tools to become closer to God. In a memorable moment from one of the Colbert interviews, Martin proposes that when people feel more vulnerable, as in times of recession and poverty, their defenses are lowered—making it easier for God to break through.

Colbert responds by saying, "You make God sound like an opportunistic virus!" Without skipping a beat, Martin returned the banter with "That's a beautiful image," and offered to consider using it in one of his future sermons. **C**



Karen Crandal is marketing and communications director for the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon Foundation and Valley Catholic School in Beaverton, Oregon. Her previous work included eight years with Jesuit institutions in Portland, Oregon.