

Pyrrhus of Epirus (**pee**-ruhs of uh-**pai**-ruhs) was a Greek king who fought the Romans in the third century BCE. Before he invaded Italy, he sent for his friend and philosopher Cineas. Cineas asked him what his purpose was in invading Italy. He said, to conquer it.

And what will you do when you conquer it? Go into France and conquer that. And what will you do when you have conquered France? Conquer Germany. And what then? Conquer Spain.

I perceive, said Cineas, you mean to conquer all the world. What will you do when you have conquered all? Why then said the king, we will return and enjoy ourselves at quiet in our own land. So you may now, said the philosopher, without all this ado. Yet Cineas could not dissuade Pyrrhus until he was ruined by the Romans.

Thomas Traherne (17th century English poet, clergyman, theologian and religious writer) said we chase a hundred pounds a year that we may get another hundred, and having two covet eight, and there is no end to our labor, because the desire of the soul is insatiable.

Like Alexander the Great, we must have it all. When we get it all, we tell ourselves, then we will be quiet and rest in peace. We could have done so before working ourselves to death, but so insatiable are we that millions will not please us.

You might expect the 17th century clergyman to chide us for our insatiable desires, but he was no 20th century fundamentalist. He believed it is of the nobility of our souls that they are insatiable. Why? In rather surprising language he answers *God did infinitely for us, when He made us to want like Gods, that like Gods we might be satisfied.*

Desire is God given and the key to all human spirituality. Desire is the energy powering our spiritualities. At the same time, spirituality is about which desires are worthy of pursuit. Our desire is insatiable so that we will not settle for anything less than communion with the God who gave us such desire.

The most fundamental human desire, writes Philip Sheldrake, is for transcendence. How can we transcend ourselves in relationships—with the world, with other people, with God?

Listen closely to Paul's invitation to the Philippians: *Thus, my beloved ones . . . work out your own salvation in reverence and trembling, for it is God who is making active in you both the willing and the working of that which is dearly desirable* (Hart's translation).

Learning to desire what is dearly desirable is the work of the soul. Lazy souls settle for easy answers to unanswerable questions. Complacent souls take the path of least resistance. Repressed souls seek satisfactions in commodities, in artificial stimulation.

Romantic souls, daydream believers, suffer from what Christian tradition calls velleity (veh-**lee**-uh-tee): wishes or inclinations too weak to act.

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) was a Basque noble destined for a military and courtly career whose life was unexpectedly and radically changed. A severe wound at the battle of Pamplona in 1521 ended his military career. During his painful convalescence at Loyola, he struggled to discover if he really wanted to fulfill the expectations into which he was born or pursue his heart's desire, if only he knew what it was.

This soul work took him for a period of time to Manresa to be a hermit, to university studies, to creation of his famous work *The Spiritual Exercises*, to the founding of the Jesuit Order, all this a gradual process in learning how to desire what is dearly desirable.

Running through Ignatius' spirituality of desire is the quest for spiritual freedom, freedom from desiring lesser things that imprison the human spirit (what he called "disordered attachments") and an ever greater freedom for the good, the true, the beautiful.

*Work out your own salvation in reverence and trembling, for it is God making active in you both the **willing** and the **working** of that which is dearly desirable. God makes active both our willing and working through the gift on an insatiable desire. Our work, the work of the soul, is to learn the difference between disordered attachments leading nowhere and holy desires leading to God.*