

Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius, their charismatic leader, was confined to two small rooms as the Jesuit Superior. He wrote thousands of letters to all corners of the world, with the help of Polanco, his secretary. Ignatius treated each person as a unique individual. Luis Goncalves de Camara, one of his closest associates, wrote, “He was always rather inclined toward love; moreover, he seemed all love, and because of that he was universally loved by all. There was no one in the Society who did not have great love for him and did not consider himself much loved by him.”

Ignatius sometimes cried so much at Mass that he couldn’t go on, or even talk, and he was afraid that his gift of tears might cause him to lose his eyesight! A friend said, “When he did not weep three times during Mass, he considered himself deprived of consolation.”

In summer 1556, his health worsened. His physician thought he would survive the summer, but Ignatius knew that his end was near. He asked Polanco to seek the Pope’s blessing for him. Trusting the physician’s estimation, however, Polanco said he would leave the next day. Shortly after midnight Ignatius took a turn for the worse. Polanco rushed off to the Vatican to get the papal blessing, but it was too late.

Some Prayers Written by Ignatius:

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Thy wounds hide me.
Separated from Thee let me never be.
From the malignant enemy, defend me.
At the hour of death, call me.
And close to Thee bid me.
That with Thy saints I may be
Praising Thee for all eternity. Amen.

Dedication to Jesus

Lord Jesus Christ,
Take all my freedom, my
memory, my understanding,
and my will. All that I have
and cherish you have given
me. I surrender it all to be
guided by your will. Your
grace and your love and
wealth are enough for me.
Give me these, Lord Jesus,
and I ask for nothing more.
Amen.

Born: 1491, in northern Spain
Died: 1556, in Rome
Feast Day: 31 July
Canonized: 12 March 1622
Patron of: soldiers, retreats, Jesuits,
Spiritual Exercises

Iñigo Lopez de Loyola was born in a castle at Loyola, the youngest of a local landowner’s thirteen children. He was raised in a cottage with his wetnurse, the wife of the blacksmith. When he was 15, Iñigo was chosen among his brothers to live in the castle of Arevalo, under the High Chancellor (Treasurer) of the Kingdom of Castile: Juan Velásquez de Cuéllar. Iñigo became a page at court.



Courtly life was filled with temptation, and Iñigo was knee-deep in it all. He was addicted to gambling, became a ‘playboy’, and developed a highly contentious personality. In fact, he and other relatives ambushed some clerics one night, because the clerics were members of a rival family. Due to the Loyolas’ influence, the civil case against Iñigo was dropped – but only after long disputes in court.

On May 30, 1521, as an officer defending Pamplona’s fortress against the French in a territorial dispute, Iñigo convinced his commander not to surrender – despite the fact that they were completely outnumbered. During the battle, a cannon ball struck Iñigo, breaking one leg and wounding the other. The French soldiers, admiring his bravery, did not carry him to prison, but rather to his home – the castle at Loyola.

The leg was set, but didn’t heal. Doctors broke and reset it again (without anesthesia). Iñigo grew worse, and was told he should prepare for death. But on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, he unexpectedly grew better. His broken leg eventually healed, but the bone protruded below the knee and he had one leg shorter than the other. To Iñigo, this was unacceptable; he demanded the doctors saw off the protruding bone piece and lengthen the short leg by systematically stretching it. His vanity was not rewarded; all his life, he walked with a limp.

Sources: Jesuits of the New Orleans Province, and the Jesuits in Britain

Socials with the Saints

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During his long recuperation, Iñigo grew utterly bored, and asked for romance novels to pass the time. But the only two books in the house were a life of Christ and another on the saints. Desperate, he read them. Like any patient, Iñigo also daydreamed – often of himself in glorious adventures, winning the hand of a particular noble lady. However, he also began to daydream about Christ and the saints. While he grew bored and unsatisfied with the daydreams of fame, fortune, and romance, he found himself curiously satisfied and at peace when reflecting on the saints and their Lord. His conversion had begun.

After regaining health, Iñigo decided to journey on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where Christ himself had lived. On the way, he stopped at Montserrat, near Barcelona, home to a miraculous image called Our Lady of Montserrat. At the Benedictine shrine, he made a general confession and knelt in prayer all night before the image of Mary, following the rites of chivalry. Come morning, he renounced his former life, left his sword and knife at the altar, and gave his clothes to a poor beggar. He dressed himself in a rough garment, sandals, and a staff.

He descended down the peaks of Montserrat to a cave outside a nearby town, Manresa, intending to stay a few days. He stayed ten months. First, he adopted severe penances, attempting to outdo the saints about which he'd read. His extreme fasting probably ruined his stomach, which troubled him for the rest of his life. He learned moderation. He was also tormented by scruples, but learned that the Lord's forgiveness is free. Ignatius experienced a profound vision, which he later described as having taught him more than he learned over the rest of life. Ignatius' experience at Manresa served as the foundation for his *Spiritual Exercises*, which have since guided countless souls and retreats.

From Manresa, Ignatius made his way to the Holy Land, which was controlled by the Turks. The Franciscans, who have custody over the Holy Land, ordered Ignatius to leave; the local situation was too dangerous. Initially, he refused, but when threatened with excommunication, he returned home to Spain.

Ignatius was 33 years old, and determined to study for priesthood. But, having lived a life of privilege, he lacked basic knowledge of Latin required for university study. So, he returned to grammar school with young boys, begging for his food and shelter. He then entered Alcalá University to study philosophy, taking with him his practice of guiding fellow students in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Unfortunately, the hyper-

paranoid Spanish Inquisition learned that Ignatius was teaching religion before completing required training. He was imprisoned in 1527, for 42 days. Upon release, he was told to avoid teaching others. He went to the University of Salamanca and, within two weeks, was again imprisoned. He was told: only teach simple truths to children! So, he moved to Paris.

Ignatius spent his summers begging for the money to pay for his studies. While in Paris, he shared a room with Francis Xavier and Peter Faber. Ignatius directed fellow students in the *Spiritual Exercises*, and many were strongly influenced by him. Eventually, six decided to join him in taking vows of chastity and poverty. They determined to go to the Holy Land – and if not the Holy Land, then to the pope in Rome, to place themselves at his disposal. Their intention wasn't to start a new religious order, but to follow Christ as individual priests.

In July of 1537 the little group arrived outside the city of Vicenza. The Masters of Theology from the most prestigious university in the world threw their caps in the air to attract attention. Then, in a hilarious mixture of languages, these men from Spain and France preached in 'Italian.' But they also tended the sick and helped the poor, while they themselves lived in destitution. Each of them was sick, all were cold, hungry, yet ecstatically happy. For a year they waited to travel to the Holy Land, but because of the conflict there, no ship could take them.

During Lent 1539, Ignatius asked his companions to gather in Rome, to discuss their future. They decided to become a community, calling themselves the "Company of Jesus." They would place themselves at the disposal of the Holy Father to serve the Church however he wished. (They added this vow to the ordinary vows they had taken.) In 1540, Pope Paul III approved their new order. Known in Latin as *Societatis Jesu* (translated to English as the "Society of Jesus") they unanimously elected their new superior, Ignatius, whom they vowed to obey. He insisted that they vote again. After a second unanimous vote, Ignatius consulted his spiritual director, who urged him to accept the will of God. He devoted the final fifteen years of his life to the Society.

This new religious order would be persecuted – even by a Pope – because they broke with tradition, not wearing a distinctive habit or praying the Liturgy of the Hours in community. Monastic practices did not fit this new order; its members were spread throughout the world. Each Jesuit was to respond to the needs of those around him.