

Ignatius of Loyola

Saint Ignatius was born in 1491 at Loyola in Spain. He spent his early years at court and as a soldier. Later he was converted to God and undertook theological studies at Paris where he attracted his first followers. Afterward at Rome he joined them together as the first members of the Society of Jesus. He exercised a most fruitful apostolate both by his written works and in the training of his disciples who won great praise for their renewal of the Church. He died at Rome in 1556.

Introduction: Several years ago a very unusual music CD swept through the United States as well as the rest of world. Millions of copies of the CD, *Chant*, by the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos in Spain literally caught people, the world over off guard with their hauntingly beautiful Gregorian Chants. The world was reminded of that which is beautiful, healing and peaceful. It was also a reminder of the jewel of Catholicism that was once Spain. Her magnificent churches and deeply rich spirituality resonates the influence that the church had over the country as well as Spain's influence within the church. The true triumph of the church in Spain is found in the heroic lives of her saints; Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, Saint John of Avila and Saint Dominic, just to name a few. Another glistening jewel in the crown of Catholic Spain was a priest, spiritual writer, founder and first superior general of the "Company of Jesus," Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It is here that we begin our story.

It all started... Inigo, as he was baptized was born on December 24, 1491, the year before Columbus would discover the "New World" for King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Inigo, the youngest of eleven children was born in the castle of Loyola in the Basque country of northwestern Spain. He was a high spirited, proud Spaniard whose classical education ultimately instilled in him a love and passion for the military and for glory. Little did anyone know how the young Ignatius would one day impact the world with that same passion and desire of glory. His passions would ultimately be turned toward God and His glory. Yet before any of this was to take place, God had to get Ignatius' attention.

The end of a very short military career: Upon the completion of his formal education, Ignatius entered the military as he initially thought this would be the way to glory. Being already trained in the use of arms, specifically and the workings of the military in general, Ignatius saw some action early on in his life in northern Castile against the French. On May 20, 1521 at the battle of Pamplona, Ignatius' entire life would change as his service in the military would come to an immediate and definite end.

Sickness and deformity: Ignatius' right shin had been shattered by a cannon ball at the battle of Pamplona. It was this same canon ball that tore open his left calf.

Although now a prisoner of the French, he was actually sent home to the castle of Loyola. Not only was the leg shattered for the twenty-nine year old Ignatius, his heart was torn open as well, knowing full well that he would not taste the glory of victory militarily that he had his initial sites on. Ignatius had other more immediate concerns at hand, i.e., a long road to recovery from his injuries, ones that would not heal easily or normally. After his broken leg had been set badly the first time, doctors had to break it a second time and reset it. After a severe fever, which caused his doctors to wonder if he would even survive the night, Ignatius began to settle into what would be a very long and complicated convalescence. The results of Ignatius' leg being set for a second time rendered a very strange deformity in that the end of a bone stuck out under his knee, which he demanded be sawed off. Because of this peculiar occurrence, Ignatius would have a very distinct limp the rest of his life. It would also take a great deal of time for his calf to heal up, leaving an odorous stench for a very long time. God was indeed trying to get Ignatius' attention.

Of romance and sanctity: As Ignatius' recovery wore on, he became somewhat impatient and decided to pass the time reading books. Ignatius had always been a big fan of romances and asked that some books be brought to him. All that was available at the time was a book on the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. At first he read the books only to pass the time, yet he soon found himself totally engrossed in them as he would spend entire days reading about the life of Jesus and the saints. Ignatius came to realize that the saints were the same as he was in their humanity. He questioned why he couldn't become like them in holiness; *"What if I should do what Saint Francis of Assisi or Saint Dominic did?"* In response to his reading of the lives of the saints, he decided that he wanted to first travel to the Holy Land and then enter a monastery serving God as a Carthusian brother. These desires would come and go as he also yearned for the company of a woman of high stature. When he would return to the lives of the saints, he would be convinced once again of the emptiness of the world and worldly endeavors. Ignatius became convinced that only God could bring peace to his soul. He became convinced of this during times of meditation of the things of God. He would always feel a sense of peace, joy and consolation when he focused his attention and affections upon God. When he would consider the things of the world, they would at times bring a temporary delight of the senses, but soon came to realize that his soul was only at rest in the loving arms of God. Making final resolve to imitate the lives of the saints in their loving service of God, Ignatius was determined to orient his life accordingly. Penance became Ignatius' constant companion, starting at midnight when he would rise from sleep and spend many hours in prayer and weeping over past sins committed. It is not known how serious his sins may have been, yet as a

young soldier Ignatius may have joined in the morally loose life that would have surrounded him. Upon the death of his father, Ignatius' eldest brother had complete control of the castle of Loyola. Upon his return from the war, Ignatius' brother tried his best to keep Ignatius of a worldly mind. This was done in order to seek Ignatius' help in running the affairs of the estate.

Vision of the Blessed Mother: Ignatius would soon be rewarded for his decision to follow Christ as did the saints, when one evening the Blessed Mother, holding the child Jesus in her arms appeared to him. Although this was the first heavenly encounter Ignatius had, it certainly would not be the last. During the vision, his soul was filled with light and his body was cured of its wounds, save the limp in his leg, which for Ignatius would always be a reminder of the need for humility. After having this most glorious experience, Ignatius made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat where he began to live a life of penance, which would culminate in his living in a cave on alms for nearly the entire year of 1522.

The call from God to heal other men's consciences: As often happens after the exhilaration of a spiritual encounter of the heavenly kind, Ignatius also experienced the depths of doubt and fear. He would go through terrible bouts of sadness and depression, never seeming to find relief or comfort, no matter what he did. The temptations began to mount and get more serious. The most serious temptations that plagued Ignatius came in the form of suicide. He immediately began to keep a journal of all of these experiences, including his thoughts and prayers. It is this journal of suffering that would be the rudiments of what would become his most famous book, *The Spiritual Exercises*. It was also these experiences that convinced Ignatius that God was indeed calling him to bring healing to the consciences of other men, who experienced all sorts of difficulties and troubles of the soul.

Journey to the Holy Land: Early on during Ignatius' time of conversion, he continued to struggle with his past as a soldier. One such occasion occurred after hearing a Muslim man speak disparagingly of the Blessed Mother, after which as a soldier for Christ, he considered killing the man. He was determined to journey to the Holy Land in order to visit all of the holy shrines of Christ's life as well as convert those of the Islamic faith. In February of 1523, Ignatius journeyed to the Holy Land, relying on the Providence of God, as he begged alms from others along the way. Taking a donkey from Jaffa to Jerusalem, Ignatius fully intended to spend the rest of his life with the express intention of converting the Muslims. Upon visiting all of the holy shrines, Ignatius became so excited and enthusiastic about converting Muslims that he was eventually asked by the Franciscan guardian of the Holy Land to leave, lest he be kidnapped and held as a ransom or even killed.

Ignatius eventually worked his way back to Spain by 1524, where he would eventually come to grips with his need for further education.

Back to school, for the love of God: Ignatius had to go back to school and start from scratch, as his interests in his younger years were always spent dreaming of the glory he would achieve in the military. He had to work hard on his studies, as he knew this would be the means by which he would be able to help souls. He was thirty three years of age when his second go around with education would begin, starting with Latin grammar. Ignatius would complete his formal education at the age of forty three after having earned a master of arts at Paris. It was during this ten year period of schooling that he would eventually come to meet six divinity students, who together with Ignatius would make up the "Company of Jesus," now known as the Society of Jesus or Jesuits.

Ignatius' Vocation; the founding of the "Company of Jesus" The six divinity students (the most famous, Saint Francis Xavier) moved by the teachings and vision of Ignatius were determined to return to Palestine in order to preach the Gospel, or if they could not do that, then they were determined to present themselves to the Holy Father, Pope Paul III to be used as he saw fit. The new band of brothers, led by Ignatius, professed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as well a fourth vow of going wherever the Holy Father would send them for the salvation of souls. These vows were made on the Feast of the Assumption in the 1534. Ignatius and his followers were eventually ordained to the priesthood in 1537. Pope Paul III, pleased with the fervor of Ignatius and his companions, gave official approval of the order in 1540. Ignatius was elected the first Superior General of "The Company of Jesus" in 1541. Before going to Rome to meet with the Holy Father, Ignatius had yet another heavenly encounter. Jesus himself appeared to him, shining with an unspeakable light, yet bearing the weight of a heavy cross, stated to Ignatius; "*I will be favorable to you at Rome.*" Ignatius would spend the rest of his life in Rome administering the new religious order that he founded. For the original members of the Jesuits as well as new recruits, they would go throughout the world as missionaries, ministering in countries such as the East Indies, Morocco, the Congo, Ethiopia and South America.

Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

In 1548, with the approval of Pope Paul III, Ignatius was able to publish his most famous work, *The Spiritual Exercises*. The holiness of the lives of the saints is the main emphasis of "*The Exercises*." The objective of this spiritual work is to encourage those engaged in "*The Exercises*" to enter into a state of calm reflection, interiorly in order to be better disposed to the will of God. In the words of Pope Pius XI who reigned from 1922 - 39, the Ignatian method of prayer "lead a man by the

safe paths of self-abnegation and the removal of bad habits up to the supreme heights of prayer and divine love."

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam (A.M.D.G) "**For the Greater Glory of God**" "For the Greater Glory of God" was the motto by which Ignatius and the early Jesuits patterned their lives. Although Ignatius loved his brothers he was particularly tough on those who became puffed up by their academic learning. Ignatius would often pray, "*Lord, what do I desire, or what can I desire, besides thee?*" The love and example of the life of Ignatius won over his religious brothers' hearts. Along with showing the most ardent love and affection for members of his order, Ignatius never forgot his time of sickness when wounded in battle and had a most tender love for the sick. In the fifteen years that he guided his order, Saint Ignatius saw it grow from ten members to over a thousand, in nine countries and provinces of Europe, India and in Brazil.

The Death and legacy of Saint Ignatius: It is said that Saint Ignatius had been ill fifteen times over the fifteen years that he served as Superior General of the Order. Initially when he got sick for the sixteenth time, there seemed to be no real alarm. He was feeble and usually needed to be assisted by three fathers of the order. Suddenly and most unexpectedly, Ignatius died. His was such a sudden death he did not even receive the last sacraments. He died on the morning of July 31, 1556 at the age of sixty four. Saint Ignatius was canonized in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV and would be named the patron saint of spiritual exercises and retreats by Pope Pius XI.