

Ignatius of Loyola

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, SJ (Basque: Ignazio Loiolakoa, Spanish: Ignacio de Loyola; c. October 23, 1491 - July 31, 1556) was a Spanish knight from a local Basque noble family, hermit, priest since 1537, and theologian, who founded the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and, on 19 April 1541, became its first Superior General.² Ignatius emerged as a religious leader during the Counter-Reformation. Loyola's devotion to the Catholic Church was characterized by absolute obedience to the Pope.

After being seriously wounded in the Battle of Pamplona in 1521, he underwent a spiritual conversion while in recovery. *De Vita Christi* by Ludolph of Saxony purportedly inspired Loyola to abandon his previous military life and devote himself to labor for God, following the example of spiritual leaders such as Francis of Assisi. After experiencing a vision of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus at the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat in March 1522, he went to Manresa, where he began praying for seven hours a day, often in a nearby cave, and formulating the fundamentals of the Spiritual Exercises. In September 1523, Loyola reached the Holy Land to settle there, but was sent back to Europe by the Franciscans.

Between 1524 and 1537, Ignatius studied theology and Latin in the University of Alcalá and then in Paris. In 1534, he arrived in the latter city during a period of anti-Protestant turmoil which forced John Calvin to flee France. Ignatius and a few followers bound themselves by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In 1539, with St. Peter Faber and St. Francis Xavier he formed the Society of Jesus, approved in 1540 by Pope Paul III, as well as his Spiritual Exercises approved in 1548. Loyola also composed the Constitutions of the Society. He died in July 1556, was beatified by Pope Paul V in 1609, canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, and declared patron of all spiritual retreats by Pope Pius XI in 1922. Ignatius' feast day is celebrated on July 31. Ignatius is a foremost patron saint of soldiers, the Society of Jesus, the Basque Country, and the provinces of Gipuzkoa and Biscay.

Early life: Inigo Lopez de Loyola (sometimes erroneously called Inigo Lopez de Recalde) was born in the municipality of Azpeitia at the castle of Loyola in today's Gipuzkoa, Basque Country, Spain. He was baptized Inigo, after St. Innicus Abbot of Oha, a medieval Basque name arguably meaning "My little one". It is unclear when he started using Ignatius instead of his baptismal name "Inigo". Ignatius did not intend to change his name but rather adopted for France and Italy a name which he believed was a simple variant of his own, and which was more acceptable among foreigners.

The youngest of thirteen children, Inigo Lopez was brought up by Maria de Garin, the local blacksmith's wife, after his own mother died soon after his birth. Inigo adopted the last name "de Loyola" in reference to the Basque village of Loyola where he was born. He later became a page in the service of a relative, Juan Velazquez de Cuellar, treasurer (contador mayor) of the kingdom of Castile. As a young aristocrat Ignatius had a "love of martial exercises and a vainglorious desire for fame".¹⁰ At this period he framed his life around the stories of the birthplace and adventures of El Cid, the knights of Camelot, and The Song of Roland (the tale has Roland slain by Muslims, when historically his death was at the hands of Basques like Ignatius). Joining the army at seventeen, he strutted about "with his cape slinging open to reveal his tight-fitting hose and boots; a sword and dagger at his waist". Upon encountering a Moor who denied the divinity of Jesus, he challenged him to a duel to the death and ran him through.¹⁰ He duelled others until the events of 1521.

In 1509, Inigo took up arms for Antonio Manrique de Lara, Duke of Najera. According to Thomas Rochford, S.J., his diplomacy and leadership qualities made him a "Gentilhombre" (Spanish for "Gentleman", but should be understood as "servant of the court". By contrast, the English term Gentleman denotes a man of good family. In that sense, the word equates with the French "Gentilhomme", meaning "nobleman", which in Great Britain was long confined to the peer age.) This made him very useful to the Duke. Under the Duke's leadership, he participated in many battles without injury. But when a French-Navarrese army supporting the Navarrese monarchy, expelled in 1512, stormed Pamplona's fortress on May 20, 1521, a cannonball wounded one of his legs and broke the other.¹¹ Heavily injured, Inigo was returned to the castle of his father. He was very concerned about the injuries and had several surgical operations, which must have been very painful in the days before anaesthetics.

During this time he read the De Vita Christi, by Ludolph of Saxony, in a Catalan edition. This work influenced his whole life. De Vita Christi is the result of forty years of work by Ludolph. It is a commentary on the life of Jesus Christ, a commentary on the Gospels, borrowing extracts from the works of over sixty of the Fathers of the Church and particularly quoting St Gregory the Great, St Basil, St Augustine and the Venerable Bede. Ludolph proposes to the reader that he place himself at the scene of the Gospel story; that he visualise the crib at the Nativity, etc. A type of prayer known as Simple Contemplation, it is the basis of the method that St. Ignatius sets out in his Spiritual Exercises.

Religious conversion and religious life: During his period of convalescence in 1521, Ignatius read a series of religious texts on the life of Jesus and on the lives of the saints; he became fired with an ambition to lead a life of self-denying labor and to emulate the heroic deeds of Francis of Assisi and other great monastics. He resolved to devote himself to the conversion of non-Christians in the Holy Land. Upon his recovery, he visited the Benedictine monastery, Santa Maria de Montserrat (March 25, 1522), where he hung his military garments before an image of the Virgin. He then traveled on foot to the town of Manresa (Catalonia) and spent several months in a cave nearby where he practiced rigorous asceticism. Ignatius also began experiencing a series of visions in full daylight while in hospital. These repetitive visions appeared as "a form in the air near him and this form gave him much consolation because it was exceedingly beautiful... it somehow seemed to have the shape of a serpent and had many things that shone like eyes, but were not eyes. He received much delight and consolation from gazing upon this object... but when the object vanished he became disconsolate". In 1523, he instituted a pilgrimage to the Holy Land on a path of self-denial and sacrifice. He remained there from September 3 to 23 but was not permitted to stay. Twelve years later, standing before the Pope with his companions, he again proposed sending his companions as emissaries to Jerusalem.

Returning to Spain, he and his companions were occupied in the University of Alcala (the present-day Complutense University of Madrid, not the newer University of Alcala established in 1977) with the task of making disciples of women called as witnesses by the Inquisition under the direction of magistrate Alonso Mejias. Although the alumbrados [Illuminated; Illuminati; Enlightened Ones] of Spain were linked in their zeal and spirituality to the Franciscan reforms of which Cardinal de Cisneros was a promoter, the administrators of the Inquisition had mounting suspicions. These female disciples, Doha Leo, Doha Maria, and Doha Beatriz, were so zealous that "one fell senseless, another sometimes rolled about on the ground, another had been seen in the grip of convulsions or shuddering and sweating in anguish." This suspicious activity had taken place while Ignatius and his companions were regularly preaching in public. Because of his "street-corner perorations" being identified "with the activities of the alumbrados, Ignatius was naturally singled out for inspection as one of these visionaries; however, he was later released. After these adventurous activities, he studied at the ascetic College de Montaigu of the University of Paris, where he remained for over seven years. In later life, he was often called "Master Ignatius", due to his having obtained a master's degree from that university at the age of forty-three.

By 1534 he had gathered six key companions, all of whom he had met as fellow students at the University of Paris - Francis Xavier, Alfonso Salmeron, Diego Laynez, and Nicholas Bobadilla, all Spanish; Peter Faber, a Frenchman; and Simao Rodrigues of Portugal. Later, he was joined by Saint Francis Borgia, a member of the House of Borgia, who was the main aide of Emperor Charles V, and other nobles. "On the morning of the 15th of August, 1534, in the chapel of church of Saint Peter, at Montmartre, Loyola and his six companions, of whom only one was a priest, met and took upon themselves the solemn vows of their lifelong work." Ignatius of Loyola was the main creator and first Superior General of the Society of Jesus, a religious organization of the Catholic Church whose members, known as Jesuits, served the Pope as missionaries. He is remembered as a talented spiritual director. He was vigorous in opposing the Protestant Reformation and promoting the following Counter-Reformation. He was beatified and then canonized and received the title of Saint on March 12, 1622. He is the patron saint of the provinces of Gipuzkoa and Biscay as well as the Society of Jesus. Ignatius Loyola wrote *Spiritual Exercises*, a simple 200-page set of meditations, prayers, and various other mental exercises, from 1522 to 1524. The exercises in the book were designed to be carried out over a period of 28-30 days.

Father General of the Jesuits: Ignatius was chosen as the first Superior General of his religious order and invested with the title of Father General by the Jesuits. He sent his companions as missionaries around Europe to create schools, colleges, and seminaries. Juan de Vega, the ambassador of Charles V at Rome, met Ignatius there. Esteeming Ignatius and the Jesuits, when Vega was appointed Viceroy of Sicily, he brought Jesuits with him. A Jesuit college was opened at Messina, which proved a success, and its rules and methods were afterwards copied in other colleges. In 1548 *Spiritual Exercises* was finally printed, and he was briefly brought before the Roman Inquisition but was released.

Ignatius wrote the Jesuit Constitutions, adopted in 1554, which created a monarchical organization and stressed absolute self-abnegation and obedience to pope and superiors (well-disciplined] like a corpse", as Ignatius put it). His main principle became the Jesuit motto: *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* "for the greater glory of God"). The Jesuits were a major factor in the Counter-Reformation. During the years 1553-1555, Ignatius dictated his life's story to his secretary, Father Ignatius as Superior General Gonpalves da Camara. This autobiography is a valuable key for the understanding of his *Spiritual Exercises*. It was kept in the archives for about 150 years, until the Bollandists published the text in *Acta Sanctorum*. He died in Rome on July 31, 1556, as a result of the Roman Fever, a severe case of malaria that recurred in Rome, Italy, at different points in history. At

this time he was placed in a wooden shrine, his body was then covered with his priestly garments. On August 1 the shrine was then buried in the small Maria della Strada Church. In 1568 that church was pulled down and replaced with the Church of the Gesu'. Saint Ignatius was put into a new coffin and reinterred in the Church of the Gesu' in Rome Italy.