



## St. Ignatius of Loyola

Feast Day: July 31<sup>st</sup>

Today, we celebrate St. Ignatius of Loyola. A missionary disciple, a soldier, a charismatic leader. St. Ignatius founded the Society of Jesus – commonly known as the Jesuits – in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Born in 1491, Ignatius of Loyola was born in northern Spain as the youngest of thirteen children; his family was one of minor nobility and wealthy. Since childhood, he wanted to become a knight; he became a soldier for the Spanish army. He was wounded in 1521 battling the French. As he recovered, he sought out books about chivalry and knights, but received stories about the saints. He began to make notes of spiritual experiences and these moments of spiritual growth, which became called *The Spiritual Exercises*, composed between 1522 – 1524. Although he recovered from his battle wounds, he was afflicted by sickness soon after. His time in the hospital was spent teaching others about prayer and spiritual exercises.

He experienced a grave socioeconomic poverty alongside this spiritual enlightenment. Ignatius who left his sword near a statue of our Blessed Mother and left his hometown, struggled to find and discern where God was calling him. Around 1523, Ignatius took a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, intending

to settle there but ultimately, did not stay due to tension with the resident Franciscans. In his autobiography, he wrote: “After the pilgrim had learned that it was God’s will that he should not stay in Jerusalem, he pondered in his heart what he should do and finally decided to study for a time in order to be able to help souls;” referring to himself as the “pilgrim.” (*Autobiography*, 50)

Then, he dedicated himself to being educated. This led him to study in Barcelona (approx. 2 years) and Paris. His return to France is remarkable for a multitude of reasons. He studied in Paris for about seven years, from February 1528 until early 1535. During his extended stay in Paris, he met and befriended [St. Francis Xavier](#), who joined Ignatius and his companions in forming the Jesuits.

On August 15, 1534, Ignatius and Francis along with five others pledged themselves to vows of celibacy and poverty. He was ordained on June 24, 1537. Due to the Turkish wars, they went to Rome to meet the pope and request permission to form a new religious order. In September 1540, Pope Paul III approved Ignatius’ outline of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits, a Roman Catholic missionary organization, played a leading role in the Counter-Reformation and converted hundreds of thousands to Catholicism. The order grew and extended its influence through its roles in education, scholarship, and missionary activities.

When Ignatius de Loyola died in July 1556, there were more than 1,000 Jesuit priests. Now, there is an estimated 16,000 Jesuits worldwide. To be Jesuit is to “find God in all things” as Ignatius continually tried to do throughout his life since his spiritual awakening. Ignatian spirituality is common way that modern Catholics – Jesuit or not – do spiritual exercises to highlight or find God’s presence. An Ignatian practice largely adopted by the Church is to pray the Examen, a five-step process of going through one’s day reflecting on where and how God was present. *Ad Majorem Del Gloriam* is the motto of Jesuits meaning for the greater glory of God.

It was during his recover from a war wound that Ignatius found himself moved by the lives of the saints. Learning about the saints before him inspired him to repent for his sins by imitating them. Now, he’s a renown saint himself. Ignatius was canonized on Mary 12, 1622, along with St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Philip Neri.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, pray for us.