

St. Ignatius of Loyola



1491-1556

Feast Day:
July 31

Ignatius was the youngest of 13 children of a wealthy Spanish family. He served as a courtier (a helper to the King) and a soldier. He hoped to win fame and popularity. When he was 30, a cannonball injured his legs. He was carried to the hospital in Loyola. During his recovery, Ignatius read books about the life of Jesus. He read about prayer and the lives of the Saints. He was very inspired by the simplicity of the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

When Ignatius recovered, he spent time in a monastery devoted to prayer. He left his sword and armor in a chapel dedicated to Mary. He gave all his clothes to the poor and wore a sackcloth robe.

While a university student in Paris, Ignatius and 6 other students founded the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuit religious order. These 7 men took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the pope, and hoped to go evangelize the Holy Land. Ignatius and his companions were ordained priests. Ignatius wrote a Rule of Life for his community to live by and went to Rome to offer the services of the Society of Jesus to the Pope. The Pope welcomed them and wanted to send them out as missionaries. Ignatius's companions were sent to around the world to Portugal, India, Japan, Ireland, Germany, and many other places to evangelize. Ignatius remained in Rome and directed all these men by writing letters to them. The missionaries founded schools, colleges, and seminaries as well as gathered more men into their order.

Inspired by his earlier readings about Jesus and prayer, Ignatius wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*. These exercises help people to pray. The missionaries had founded 100 religious houses, and the order had 1,000 members when Ignatius died.