

The Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Richmond Catholic Parish

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Early Beginnings

St Ignatius of Loyola is the Patron Saint of St Ignatius' Church and the founder of the [Society of Jesus](#) to which this parish was entrusted in 1866.

St Ignatius was born Iñigo López de Oñaz y Loyola on 24 December 1491, the year before Columbus discovered the New World. His birthplace was the great castle of Loyola in Guipuzcoa, in the Basque country of northwest Spain. There were three daughters and eight sons in the family and he was the youngest.

Iñigo led a very worldly life during the first thirty years of his life as a nobleman, fired with dreams of romanticism and chivalry. When he was 25 he enlisted in the army and saw service in border warfare against the French.



St Ignatius of Loyola.

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A Changed Life

In 1521 when defending the Spanish fortress of Pamplona, Iñigo's right leg was shattered by a cannonball. His French captors, impressed by his courage, carried him across Spain to his family home, where he began a long period of recovery during which he read the only two books available in the castle - *Life of Christ* and *The Golden Legend*, a book on the lives of the saints.

During his convalescence, he experienced the gift of God's consolation in such a way that his life changed forever and after a long, serious reflection, he decided to devote the rest of his life to outstanding service of God.



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The Spiritual Exercises

When Iñigo got well, he left Loyola and went to Montserrat, where he spent a night of vigil before a statue of our Blessed Mother. It was here that he offered up his sword as a symbol of his new life. He proceeded to Manresa, where he spent ten months of intense asceticism and prayer. He also spent time working in hospitals and teaching catechism to children. He begged for his food during all this time.

Iñigo began writing down his thoughts and insights about the different spiritual experiences he was undergoing. This later became the famous Spiritual Exercises, a school of spirituality and prayer which has produced countless conversions and many saints through the centuries.



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Learning to Serve God

Iñigo decided to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where he wanted to serve God for the rest of his life. He eventually realized this was not possible, so he returned to Spain in 1524, when he was 33 years old. By this time, Iñigo realized that in order to give outstanding service to God he had to get an education. He studied Latin with little schoolchildren in Barcelona from 1524 to 1526. Then he went to Alcalá for his studies in arts from 1526 to 1527. In June 1527 he left for Salamanca to study humanities and philosophy.

Harassed by church authorities, he left for Paris in 1528. He finished his studies in theology and received his Master of Arts in April 1534, when he was already 43 years old.

In August 1537, Iñigo stopped using his old name and began using Ignatius, because of his devotion to the martyred bishop, St Ignatius of Antioch.

Society of Jesus: Then and Now

During his studies in Paris, Ignatius was able to attract six university students, all guided by him through the Spiritual Exercises. They became the first members of the Society of Jesus. One of them was another Spanish nobleman, Francisco Javier (Francis Xavier) who became the greatest missionary of the Church.

Finishing their studies, the companions decided on two alternatives - to go to the Holy Land and serve there, or to place themselves at the disposal of the Pope. The first plan never materialized.

In March 1539 they began deliberations to form a new and apostolic religious order. The *Compañía de Jesús* was formally approved by Pope Paul III on 27 September 1540 and Ignatius elected its first Superior General.

Ignatius and his companions vowed to procure the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Ignatius spent the last fifteen years of his life in Rome, governing and administering the fast growing Society, training future Jesuits, perfecting the Spiritual Exercises, and writing the Constitutions of the Order.

He died on 31 July 1556.

He is the patron of soldiers and spiritual retreats.

His Feast Day is 31 July.

Today Jesuits are in over 100 countries, working in ministries of spirituality, pastoral care, education, communications and social action.

Many lay people and other religious also have been inspired by Ignatius' vision.

Source: *St Ignatius of Loyola*, Salvador Wee SJ



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