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ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA FOUNDER OF THE JESUITS

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Ignatius Loyola
(1491-1556)

I. THE SPANISH KNIGHT

Iñigo López de Loyola y Oñaz, the thirteenth and last child in the family of Don Beltrán and Doña Marina, was born in 1491 at the small castle of Loyola located in the Iraugí valley of the Basque province of Guipúzcoa in northern Spain. The year was a momentous one for the Kingdom of Ferdinand and Isabella. Cristóbal Colón was haunting the corridors of the royal court seeking aid from the Queen for a daring trip to find the Indies by sailing west and the Gran Capitán, Gonzalvo de Córdoba, was gathering his army for the final assault on Grenada, the last Moorish city in Spain.

Iñigo's grandfather was a Basque edition of the gaunt Knight of La Mancha, so much did he make a habit of charging windmills and of challenging his peaceable neighbors. Thirty-five years before Iñigo's birth, King Enrique IV of Castile complained that the family was responsible "for violence and injuries, for robberies and assassinations, for insults and rebellions." To restrict these activities, the king demolished the stronghold of Oñaz and demilitarized the castle of Loyola.

Not much is known of Iñigo's childhood. It is known that his mother was quite ill (and died before the young boy could know her) and that he was fostered to a blacksmith's family at their farmhouse. This house is much the same today as it was in 1491, its lower floor used as a barn, the family living in the upper storeys. So Iñigo, in his early years, saw life from the viewpoint of both the ruled and the ruler. And the life of the ruler was typical of the time and place: high piety and lax morals. The wills of the Loyolas reveal lists of illegitimate children, the concubinage of his elder priest brother, and bitter family quarrels as well as pleas for God's forgiveness, the righting of committed injustices and "conscience monies" given to shrines and holy causes.

In 1507, at the age of 16, the eighth son of the Loyola family was offered a place at the court of Juan Velazquez de Cuéllar, Treasurer of Castile and Major-Domo of the constantly moving royal court. And so, in the year of his father's death, Iñigo, blue-eyed, short of stature, his blond-red hair to his shoulders, found himself removed from the country and a man "in the king's service."

The Court was a changed place since the 1504 death of reform-minded Queen Isabella of Castile. Within only a year of her death the unpopular Ferdinand (always considered an outsider) had married Germaine de Foix, a niece of the King of France. She, if anything, was less popular than the king and has been described as "saucy-tongued, fat, and not always sober." With Germaine as Queen, one had to walk warily in the Court of Castile from 1507-1516. It is against this court background of intrigue, dalliance and corruption that Iñigo stands and falls. Until he was 26, he was a typical courtier of the time: an observer of rigid ceremonial and manners, an avid reader of the chivalric romances of the day (so well parodied by Cervantes), a vain and fancy dresser, an expert dancer, a swordsman who acted like a brawler, a pursuer of women, a man obsessed with honor and sensitive to any insult, and a young gallant who used influence to escape trial for "grave crimes committed by night during carnival."

But during his time at Court the young Loyola also had examples of real nobility. In 1515, the *Gran Capitán*, Spain's greatest soldier, died, a man banished from Court by a jealous and suspicious Ferdinand. Juan Velazquez himself, known as a loyal, kind and virtuous man, also came to a sad end. At Ferdinand's death in 1516, Charles of Hapsburg, King of the Netherlands and Sardinia and soon to be Holy Roman Emperor, became King of Spain and all its new possessions. The new king demanded that Velazquez turn over Crown lands to Queen Germaine. Velazquez resisted. The new king besieged his estate and, in the end, the good man was ruined and banished. His friend, Cardinal Ximenes, took Velazquez in at Madrid where the man died a few months later. One of the few who stayed with him was Iñigo de Loyola. Doña Maria Velazquez gave the young courtier a little money and advised that he go visit the Duke of Nájera, Viceroy of Navarre, at Pamplona. Iñigo, imbued with the ideals of devotion and service from his readings of romances, from his life with Don Velazquez, and from his admiration of the *Gran Capitán*, knew that the fame and glory he sought would not, under the current circumstances, come his way as a courtier. The life of a soldier became his hope.

For four years Iñigo was a "soldier." He filled his days with jousts, the chase, the continued reading of romances, and the business of the Duke. These were interesting times. The French were at the door and Spain itself was in turmoil due to the new king's preference for placing Flemings in places of authority, a blow to Spanish sensitivities. It is known that he was involved in the siege of the rebellious town of Nájera and that he was part of a successful delegation to Guipúzcoa, strategically located between France, Spain, and Navarre. But, most of all, there was Pamplona.

In 1521 the Spanish Crown was trying to put down serious rebellions in Valencia and Castile; the problems in Navarre were not considered important even though the Duke had left the province to make personal appeals at Court. Indeed, unknown to the Duke, Francis I of France had sent an army of 12,000 across the mountains to retake Pamplona for the Navarrese Pretender. The local governor made a hasty retreat. The town immediately surrendered. However, a thirty year old Basque officer insisted that the demands of honor and loyalty mandated a defense and he convinced the small garrison (less than 200 men) in the town's citadel to resist. So the French rolled up their cannon (the best in Europe) and, after a six hour barrage, captured the citadel in less than half an hour. It was from this one short battle that the future St. Ignatius became known as the "soldier saint" and that the group he later founded became reviled as "soldiers of the Pope" who were organized in military fashion, marched unquestioning at their superior's orders, unscrupulous and even murderous in their methods. That is the myth that has followed Ignatius and the Jesuits

through the centuries.

Iñigo did not come through unscathed at that battle of May 20, 1521. He was hit by a cannon ball which seriously injured his left leg and smashed his right. Chivalry was not completely dead at this time, so French doctors repaired the injuries and, by a round about way, delivered him to his home at Loyola. Spanish doctors, of course, decided that the French did not do the job correctly, so they re-broke his leg and "did it right." Iñigo almost died of infection.

As the leg began to heal, Iñigo noticed that his right leg was shorter than the other and that there was an ugly protrusion of bone. So he had the doctors return, re-break the leg again, saw off the offending protrusion, and place his leg on a rack-like instrument to stretch it to the proper length -- all so he could still be a soldier and wear tight fitting hose as befitted a gentleman.

The species of rack attached to his leg in order to lengthen it forced Iñigo to remain in bed. He was in pain and he was bored. He asked his sister-in-law for some books, hoping to read more romances of gallant knights rescuing distressed and lovely ladies. There were no such books in the house.

II. THE DISCIPLE

The home of Don Martín García de Oñaz and Doña Madalena was not a seat of learning. The only books available were the *Life of Christ*, a medieval classic by Ludolph of Saxony, and the *Lives of the Saints* by Jacopo da Varazze. He read and reread them. He dreamed about imitating the deeds of St. Francis and St. Dominic. He also dreamed of knightly deeds in service of "a certain lady." He began to notice a difference in the way these competing daydreams affected him. He examined his feelings and found in these "movements of the spirits" God at work in his life.

In his short *Autobiography*, dictated in the last years of his life, he explains that *when he was thinking of things of the world, he took much delight in them, but afterwards, when he was tired and put them aside, he found himself dry and unsatisfied. But when he thought of practicing all the rigors that he saw in the saints, not only was he consoled when he had these thoughts, but even after putting them aside, he remained satisfied and joyful. Little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that were stirring. This was his first*



reasoning about the things of God.

Iñigo began to pray. "The greatest consolation he had was in looking at the heavens and the stars, which he did very often for a long time, because when so engaged he felt in himself a very great power to serve Our Lord."

His ideal of loyalty and service to the king was transformed into loyalty and service to Christ the King. He would, then, go to Jerusalem where Jesus had lived -- as a pilgrim. (In the *Autobiography*, he always refers to himself in the third person and as "the pilgrim.")

His ideal of performing knightly deeds was also transformed to that of imitating the lives of the saints. But Iñigo was still very much a raw recruit. He was full of goodwill, but had little understanding of Christian holiness.

"It seemed to him then that holiness was entirely measured by exterior austerity of life and that he who did the most severe penances would be held the most holy." Of any interior virtue of humility, of charity, of patience, he knew nothing. "All his purpose was to do those great outward works because the saints had done them for the glory of God." He was still Iñigo the *caballero*, dreaming of fame, glory, and noble deeds.

Iñigo began the journey to Jerusalem as soon as he was able to walk, setting off for the Benedictine abbey of Montserrat. He bought sackcloth which he had made into a garment, a pilgrim's staff, and one hemp sandal to help his still unhealed leg. The other foot was bare. At Montserrat he made a general confession in such detail that it took him three days to write it out. On March 24, 1522, he laid his sword and dagger before the altar of Our Lady of Montserrat and spent the night in vigil, in sackcloth, pilgrim's staff in hand. The next day he bestowed his blue mantle, yellow hose and feathered cap on an astonished tramp. He ended one way of life and began another in the only way he could, with a courtly act.

From Montserrat he journeyed to a town named Manresa, intending to remain only a few days. He stayed for over ten months. Iñigo remarked later that God treated him at this time just "like a boy at school." And a stern education it was. He lived by turns in a hospice for the poor and a monastic cell provided by the kindly Dominicans. Daily, the proud man begged his bread in the streets. He ate no meat; he scourged himself three times a day. Because of his former concern for appearances, he let his hair grow uncombed and did not pare his finger or toe nails. He spent a great deal of his time communing with God in a cave outside Manresa.

He received marvelous divine illuminations -- insights into the Trinity, Christ's humanity, and how the world was created. He also experienced months of deep depression and the agony of scruples, to the point of considering suicide. More and more his prayer awakened within him a personal love and a deep loyalty to Jesus Christ and an eagerness to bring others to this same knowledge and love. He talked of God constantly to anyone who would listen. He then ceased his severities as unimportant and began again to cut his hair and nails. His body had been burned out by his practices and he became severely ill. He was kept awake at night by spiritual consolations until he realized these were not from the "good spirit." He then ignored them as temptations.

One day, as he states in his *Autobiography*, seated at the side of the River Cardoner, *the eyes of his understanding were open; not that he saw any vision, but he understood and learned*

many things, both spiritual matters and matters of faith and scholarship, and this with so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him. He experienced a great clarity in his understanding. This was such that in the whole course of his life, even if he gathered up all the various helps he may have had from God and all the various things he has known, even adding them all together, he does not think he had got as much as at that one time.



Ignatius recorded his experiences, a practice he had begun during his convalescence at Loyola. He later saw these notes as helpful in guiding others through the process of discovery he had undergone. His writing was lean and straightforward. In fact, he wrote a set of directions rather than a spiritual treatise. Compared with the great mystical writers of his time, Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross, he seems, according to one commentator, like a "sparrow among nightingales." Yet he was of their company. Over the years, the notes took on a more structured form and became known as the *Spiritual Exercises*, one of the spiritual masterpieces of the Western world.

In February, 1523, Ignatius set out for Jerusalem by way of Barcelona and Rome. Begging all the way, he arrived six harrowing months later.

It was his intention to spend the rest of his life in the Holy Land, making Jesus more known and loved in his own land. But it was not to be. The Franciscans, guardians of the Holy Places since the Crusades, had had long and bitter experience of Turkish rule. After only three weeks, he was asked to leave (with a polite threat of excommunication). The Franciscans were wise, for on the very night before he was to leave, all prudence forgotten, Ignatius bribed two Turkish guards so that he could see, one more time, the place where Jesus had ascended into heaven on the Mount of Olives. It took him over three months to get home. He was tossed about at sea, almost froze for lack of clothes, was arrested twice as a spy, and barely escaped capture by the French while crossing over to Spain. Then he made one of the most momentous decisions of his life. As the *Autobiography* states, "It seemed best and grew more clear to him that he should spend some time in study as means of helping him to work for souls".

At Barcelona, aged thirty-three, Ignatius started two years of schooling, taking his place on the bench with children in order to learn Latin. He subsisted on bread and water. Whatever else came from his begging, he gave to the poor.

He had been a man of appearances, one who had found his highest inspirations in the romances of Amadís of Gaul. In ten short months he had become a mystic, one of the supreme masters of the spiritual life. He had gone to Jerusalem and returned. But, with the beginning of his studies, his pilgrimage had only just begun.

III. THE PILGRIM

Turned thirty-five, Ignatius took his stock of Latin, learned amidst the noise of young boys, to the great university at Alcalá, naively believing that he could take in all knowledge at once. Unattached and unadvised, he roamed from one lecture hall to another, attending courses in

dialectics, physics, and theology. It was an educational disaster.

But Iñigo was not all that bothered. His main happiness was talking to people about God. He gave the *Spiritual Exercises* to all who would listen. His preaching and teaching -- as a layperson -- attracted the Spanish Inquisition. Inquisitors from Toledo held an elaborate inquiry but could find nothing wrong other than that his clothes looked like a religious habit.

But later in 1526 he was arrested again and imprisoned for six weeks. Though pronounced innocent, he was forbidden to teach anything at all. So he left Alcalá for the university at Salamanca.

Within two weeks of his arrival he was in prison again, bound foot to foot with other prisoners and fastened to a stake in the middle of the cell. Again, the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* was examined. His credentials were more suspect than his doctrine. Finally, he was set free and told he could preach, but could not discuss the difference between mortal and venial sin. So, in the winter of 1528, he left Spain, walked through "great and fearful wars," and arrived at the University of Paris.

The college to which Iñigo attached himself was the Montaigu, from which John Calvin had recently retired and which was a place of terror (according to its most famous victim, Erasmus). Money he had begged was stolen. He was destitute in a foreign land. So he started the practice of spending his summer vacations begging in Spanish Flanders and even, once, in the England of Henry VIII.

In 1529, he joined the college of Sainte-Barbe and began to take his studies in an organized fashion, for Sainte-Barbe had what today are called "prerequisites." He shared a room with two other poor men, both younger yet much more advanced in their studies. They were Peter Faber (Pierre Favre) from Savoy and Francis Xavier from Navarre.

Peter Faber was a quiet soul. Later in his short life he wrote a memorial of his gratitude to God; it is considered one of the most tender and lyrical works in mystical literature. He had a genius for friendship and was considered an expert in the *Spiritual Exercises* by Iñigo himself. Francis was very different. The young Basque athlete possessed the same dreams of glory that the young Iñigo once had. It took years, but Francis was won over. The two became the closest of friends.

Two men, aged 21 and 18, also joined the company, Diego Laynez (of Jewish descent on his father's side) and Alfonso Salmerón; both had been students at Alcalá. Next into the band came Nicolás, a poor, wandering scholar with no last name. They called him Bobadilla after his native village. He was generous, brusque, and loved to be seen with highborn people. Finally came Simão Rodriguez, of noble Portuguese birth, who later worked at the royal court at Lisbon.

In 1534, the balding, 44 year old Iñigo, who had begun to call himself by the Latin "Ignatius," earned the degree of Master of Paris. Faber had just been ordained a priest and the others decided to do the same. This group of seven companions, on August 15, 1534, gathered together at a chapel on Montmartre and vowed that, after finishing their studies for the priesthood, they would try to go to the Holy Land. If, after a year, they could not get to Jerusalem, they promised to present themselves to the Pope to be sent anywhere he wished. They then took vows of poverty and chastity. None of them had an inkling of how historic

their actions that day on Montmartre would be. After the ceremony they had a picnic.

By 1537, augmented by the addition of Claude Jay, Paschase Broët, Jean Codure, and Diego Hoces, they arrived at Venice by various routes after traversing a continent rife with wars. They found a Venice at war with the Turks, so they were unable to go to Jerusalem. The companions then broke up into groups of three and worked in the towns of north Italy. Despite their clumsy Italian, they preached, worked in hospitals for the incurable, and gave the *Exercises*. On June 24, those who were not priests, including Ignatius, were ordained by the Bishop of Arbe.

As the year of waiting concluded, the group met and asked themselves what they should respond if anyone asked who they were. They had been called *Iñiguistas* or "pilgrim priests." They decided that they wished to be called companions of Jesus, *La Compañía de Jesús*, in Latin: *Societas Jesu*.

The "company" went to Rome. Pope Paul III took them at their word and assigned them duties in Rome, Spain, Portugal, and Germany. Ignatius worked in Rome, especially among the poor and the prostitutes.

The companions had decided that they wanted to take a vow of obedience to a superior, thus constituting a formal religious order. The process took time. Never before had a group desired to be a religious order while not wanting distinctive religious garb. Neither did they wish to chant the Divine Office in choir as all other orders did. And to call themselves "Jesus' society" was considered blasphemy by some. Their apostolate was almost too simple: to go where they were most needed. Formal approval of the Society of Jesus arrived September 27, 1540. Ignatius, at the age of fifty, was elected the first Superior General. By this time Xavier was already on his way to

India (and Japan).

Rome was preoccupied with art and the construction of the new St. Peter's. But there was also the more important challenge of the Protestant reform. Five of the new order, Peter Faber, Diego Laynez, Alfonso Salmerón, Claude Jay, and a young German and future saint, Peter Canisius (Pieter De Hondt) were assigned as theologians at the "counter-reform" Council of Trent, the Vatican II of its day.



This painting depicts Ignatius presenting the rules of the Society of Jesus to Pope Paul III. This image was executed in the seventeenth century and is in the sacristy of the Church of the Gesu in Rome. Paul III approved the Order on September 27, 1540 in the Bull *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae*.

Ignatius dedicated the last years sixteen of his life to the inevitable politics of dealing with popes and kings, the internal strains of the growing order, the writing of the Society's *Constitutions*, the composition of over 6,000 letters to his far-flung brotherhood, and the establishment of 40 schools, including the Roman College which, as the Gregorian University, became an intellectual center of the Catholic reform. He was an organizational genius.

Yet stories abound about his ecstasies and uncontrollable tears at Mass, his patience, his sense of humor, his dancing, and the stomach ailments which probably led to his death.

He died, at age 66, on July 31, 1556. Diego Laynez succeeded him as Superior General. Ignatius was proclaimed a saint on March 12, 1622, the same day as Francis Xavier and Teresa of Ávila. At the ceremony Pope Gregory XV summed up his life: Ignatius had "a heart large enough to hold the universe."

IV. AFTERWORD

What meaning does the life of Ignatius Loyola have for us today? Once we get beyond the

cultural and religious practices of sixteenth century Catholic Spain, what do we find?

In his youth, we find a person who wanted, above all, to make something of himself. Influenced by his culture (as we are by ours), he believed that ultimate success was attained by long blond hair, a "good leg" and a ready and aggressive sword. We find a person, torn between his questionable actions and his romantic ideals, who was finally hit by the actuality of life.



Yet, rather than becoming a cynic, he grew into a person of vision, a person who bent his considerable energies not toward himself but toward the service of others. He found a model in Jesus Christ, the inspiration of his life. He prayed, studied, and worked for many hard years so that he might lead others to live in a manner which was at once more fully human and more fully divine. He was a man in love with the whole universe and everything within it because he found God's loving action in every thing.

Just as Ignatius expressed his love not only in words but in deeds, so we, following his footsteps, can express our love of the world and our concern for others in words and in what we do -- in our time, in our place, and in our way.

Following the pattern of Ignatius' life, we who are associated with Jesuit education strive to free ourselves from the limitations which may be in our lives just as Ignatius was freed from his ignorance and his pride. We seek to empower our minds and hearts and to equip ourselves with developed talents and skills as Ignatius himself did. Our hope is that we, like Ignatius, may even become models ourselves and thereby challenge others to become leaders-in-service, persons of solid values who labor to make a better and a more just world.

This is our Ignatian heritage.



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