



History 101

Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – July 31, 1556) was a Spanish knight from a Basque noble family, hermit, priest since 1537, and theologian, who founded the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and was its first Superior General. Ignatius emerged as a religious leader during the Counter-Reformation. Loyola's devotion to the Catholic Church was characterized by unquestioning obedience to the Catholic

Church's authority and hierarchy.

After being seriously wounded at the Battle of Pamplona in 1521, he underwent a spiritual conversion while in recovery. De Vita Christi by Ludolph of Saxony 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. He experienced a vision of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus while at the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat in March 1522. Thereafter, he went to Manresa, where he began praying for seven hours a day, often in a nearby cave, while 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 Spain 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, they 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's 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 Guipúzcoa and Biscay. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignatius_of_Loyola]

The Jesuits later went on to spread Christianity to China, Japan, India and America, and raised the standards of Catholic ed.

