

Lives
of
Saints

St Ignatius of Loyola

1491 - 1556

Feastday: 31st July



"Teach us to
give and not to
count the cost."

St Ignatius of Loyola

S. J. D. C.
S O C I E T A S
D O C T R I N
C H R I S T I A N Æ

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I was born in the Basque region of Spain in 1491. In later life I was often called "Master Ignatius", in recognition of my final academic credential, but my real name was Iñigo. I was the youngest of 13 children, and was only seven years old when my mother died. In 1506, I became a page in the service of a relative, who was then treasurer of the kingdom of Castile. In 1517, I took service in the army, defending the small town of Pamplona. I was returned to our castle with one leg wounded, and the other leg broken by a cannonball.

During the time I was recovering, I read a number of religious texts on the life of Jesus and the saints and I became fired with an ambition to lead a life of self-denying labour and to imitate the heroic deeds of the great saints. I decided that I would devote myself to the conversion of non-Christians in the Holy Land. Upon recovery, in 1522, I visited the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, where I had a deep spiritual experience. After that, I spent several months in a cave near the town of Manresa, where I practiced the most rigorous asceticism. I then lived and studied in Paris for several years. By 1534 I had six companions, all of whom I had met as students at the University of Paris. These became the first members of the Society of Jesus, of which I was the principal founder and first Superior General. All of us professed direct service to the Pope in terms of mission, and were called Jesuits.

I was a gifted spiritual director, and during the 1520's, I compiled the Spiritual Exercises, a guide for a month of prayer. My obsession was to always give God the best. I was very active in fighting the Protestant Reformation and promoting the subsequent Catholic Reformation.

I died to the world in 1556 and was canonized in 1622.