

## A STUDY OF “THE SAINTS THROUGH THE CENTURIES”

By Richard Thornton

### SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA (1491-1556) - FIFTEENTH CENTURY

In keeping with his family tradition, St. Ignatius became a soldier, and in 1521 was wounded by a cannon ball. While bedridden and recuperating from his injury, he read a four volume set of books on the life of Christ and the biographies of the saints. These readings made Saint Ignatius very happy and created desires to do great things for God. He realized that these were clues to God’s direction for his life. He underwent a remarkable conversion by reading the life of Christ and assorted saints’ lives. Saint Ignatius became so immersed and so moved with these readings that he spent entire days reading and re-reading these books. By 1522, he was absolutely determined to become a saint.

Saint Ignatius soon met a holy man who became his lifelong friend. He retired to a cave to spend time in prayer and contemplation, living there throughout the year of 1522-23. He spent much of his time in prayer with God, praying as much as seven hours a day. He developed rapidly in the spiritual life. The journals he kept during this period would become the core of his “Spiritual Exercises,” a practical plan for the discernment of God’s will in a person’s life.

Deciding that he needed to be better educated in order to become more prepared for ministry, Saint Ignatius spent the next eleven years in study. In 1534 he received a Master’s Degree. The name on his diploma was not his real name of Inigo, but “Ignatius,” which he adopted and used for the rest of his life. (It is speculated that he named himself after a saint that he admired ~ Saint Ignatius of Antioch.)

During this time, Saint Ignatius gathered around him a group of followers who joined him in his spiritual quest. On August 15, 1534, in the Chapel of the Benedictine Monastery, the each took vows of poverty and chastity, with the special hope of missionary pilgrimages to the Holy Land, with particular obedience to the Holy See. What bonded them together was the fact that one after another, they were all led

through the “Spiritual Exercises.” Most were guided by Saint Ignatius himself. Their decision was to form themselves into a religious order. They called it the “Society of Jesus.” Outsiders nicknamed them the “Jesuits” but the name caught on, and eventually was commonly used.

Saint Ignatius was ordained in 1537. The Society of Jesus was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540, and became an official Catholic religious order. Saint Ignatius was elected their first leader. He whole-heartedly accepted the position and served until his death sixteen years later.

The Jesuits today have over 500 universities, 30,000 members, and teach over 200,000 students every year. Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s feast day is July 31<sup>st</sup>.

The fundamental philosophy of Saint Ignatius was that...“WE OUGHT TO DESIRE AND CHOOSE ONLY THAT WHICH IS MORE CONDUCIVE TO THE END FOR WHICH WE ARE CREATED ~ TO PRAISE, REVERENCE, AND SERVE GOD THROUGH SERVING OTHER HUMAN BEINGS.”

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