

St. Ignatius of Loyola

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1491–1556 • Spain

A Spanish knight, Ignatius of Loyola dreamed of winning fame through great deeds. But during a fearful battle, an enemy cannonball ripped through his leg, and he was carried to a nearby castle. There, he was ordered to stay in bed so his leg could heal. To pass the time, he asked for books about knights and their brave adventures to win their ladies fair. But the castle did not have books about knights; instead, it had books about the holy adventures of the saints.

Ignatius read page after page on the saints and realized that the saints were brave and performed great deeds for God. Now he wanted to perform great deeds like those of the saints, winning fame for God instead of himself.

After his leg healed, Ignatius spent three days going to confession. In the chapel, he hung his sword and dagger over an image of Our Lady and kept watch through the night, which was a custom among knights. In this way, Ignatius dedicated his new life to God.

Afterward, Ignatius withdrew to a cave, where he spent a year in prayer. Here, he began to write about the experiences of his soul. His writings would later become a famous book, the *Spiritual Exercises*. Then, Ignatius set off for the Holy Land, braving the sea, pirates, and shipwreck so he could walk the land where Jesus had lived. But right when he arrived, the Franciscans in charge sent him straight back home, since war and persecution had made it too dangerous to visit the Holy Land.

Ignatius returned to Spain and became a humble student so that he could be a priest. Ignatius was older than most students in the university, but he won over many friends—including the future saint Francis Xavier—to join him in his mission to perform great deeds for God. Ignatius and his men decided to go to Rome and offer their service to the pope.

Just before entering the city, Ignatius received a mystical vision of Jesus and God the Father, who told him that they would favor Ignatius in Rome. Soon after, Ignatius said his first Mass in Rome and founded the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, who took a special vow of obedience to the pope. The Jesuits would become great missionaries, performing many deeds in the service of God and of the Church. Ignatius of Loyola watched over the Society of Jesus until he died a holy death.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, help me perform great deeds for God!