

July 31

ON SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

148.1 First Point

Once converted to God, Saint Ignatius first led a very secluded life in a hospital in Manresa where he practiced very great austerities. He accustomed himself to eat but once a day and only bread given him in alms. He drank nothing but water and took the discipline three times a day. He continually wept over his sins and spent seven hours a day on his knees. That is how this saint made his novitiate in the spiritual life. On one occasion he even spent seven days without eating, praying unceasingly and without interruption to be freed from certain spiritual afflictions.

Was it by the practice of austerities that you began to give yourself to God? That is the time above all when we should practice them, even though we need them all our life in order to preserve ourselves in piety. For this purpose do at least some small part of what this saint practiced so fervently.

148.2 Second Point

This saint's zeal for the salvation of souls was so ardent that to do this work with greater skill and success, he began to study at the age of 33. He was living in a hospital all this time, begging alms and teaching catechism to children and the poor. So generous was his zeal that once he travelled from Paris to Rouen to help one of his companions who had stolen from him and then had fallen ill.

On another occasion, after he had noticed the hour when a dissolute young man used to satisfy his passion, he threw himself into a freezing pond and cried out that he would not get out unless the young man gave up his evil plan.

Your work will be of little value if you do not have for your purpose the salvation of souls. Does your zeal for the poor lead you to seek ways as effective as those used by Saint Ignatius? The more ardently you apply yourselves to prayer for the good of the souls entrusted to you, the more God will help you find the skill to touch their hearts.

148.3 Third Point

After this saint had been working for the glory of God with so much piety, poverty, humility, and zeal, others joined him and under his guidance labored effectively for the good of the Church. They made great progress in virtue and vowed to give up all their property, to dedicate themselves solely to the conversion of souls and to their own spiritual advancement, and to submit themselves entirely to the pope to do whatever he would judge most timely for the spiritual good of their neighbor.

That is how Saint Ignatius began to establish his Company, which is of such great benefit to the Church, for it has spread to all the countries where the Christian religion is practiced, and it has brought about the establishment of the Church in several places where God was not known.

Since the end of your Institute is the same as that of the institute founded by Saint Ignatius, which is the salvation of souls, and since God has called you to educate children in piety just as he called the disciples of this saintly founder, live in as great a detachment and show as great a zeal to procure the glory of God as this saint did and as the members of his Company do. Then you will do great good for those whom you instruct.

Ignatius (1491 - 1556) was born at Loyola in Calabria, the Basque hill country of Spain. He spent his early years in court and as a soldier. While he was recovering from the fracture of his thigh inflicted in battle, he read the lives of the saints and was moved to dedicate his life to God. He made this dedication at the shrine of Our Lady at Montserrat and then took up hospital work in the nearby town of Manresa. It was here that he was inspired to compose the Spiritual Exercises, in which he describes the principles by which a Christian chooses to dedicate his life to the greater glory of God (*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*). After a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Ignatius at the age of 30 began his neglected education in Salamanca and seven years later went to Paris and the Sorbonne. Here he met the first companions with whom he began the Society of Jesus. Later he was ordained to the priesthood and in Rome drew up the rules for his Order, adding to the three customary vows of the religious life a vow of obedience to the pope. He died in Rome and was canonized in 1622. De La Salle obviously found much inspiration in the founder of an apostolic order dedicated to education and vowing the highest regard for the pope. Some elements of the Brothers' Rule were adapted from the rule written by Ignatius.