

The Life of Saint Ignatius Loyola (Part 2)



In a time when doctors were as likely to do you harm as to cure you, Ignatius was fairly lucky. Although the care of his broken leg had been badly handled, he was still on the mend at home. Unfortunately for this formerly active young man, life with mom and dad was not the same as life at the Court or in the army. Ignatius was becoming bored. As a result, he asked if he could have some books to read, preferably the romances of chivalry that he was fond of. Books being expensive and rare at the time, the family library only held books about the life of Christ and the Saints. Ignatius, by this time ready to read anything, took up reading about the Lord and those who followed Him in their own lives to become models of perfection for the whole church.

For a time, Ignatius continued to dream about worldly things and the life that he had lived before. But, as he read more deeply about spiritual things, he experienced a change of heart, mind and soul. He began to daydream less about acts of military honor and glory, less about acts of chivalry toward beautiful girls, and more about the challenge of living out a life of virtue, dedicated to Christ.

One night, as he lay in bed thinking of the spiritual things he was reading about, he tells us in his autobiography that he had a vision, a very clear vision, an image of the Blessed Virgin holding the child Jesus in her arms. This vision was the final point of his total conversion. He says that this experience left him with such a loathing of his past life and his past sins that he was never again to give in to temptations that would take him away from God.

When Ignatius had recovered his health, he decided to go to the famous Spanish sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin at Montserrat where, after three days of self-examination, he made a good confession of all his past sins. He gave the poor the clothes that he had travelled in and put on a long robe of sackcloth. He hung his sword and dagger at the altar of the Blessed Virgin and spent the night in vigil there. The next day, the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1522, Ignatius left the sanctuary and after being shown an isolated spot, he took up residence in a cave near the town of Manresa. It was at this time that he was consumed with temptations and doubts. His faith in God, however, carried him through this difficult time and the spiritual insights he gained during this time of testing found their way into his great spiritual classic *The Spiritual Exercises*.

He emerged from his spiritual desert healed and totally committed to the will of God for his life. He decided that he would go to the Holy Land where he hoped to conform himself more closely to Christ. His journey was long and painful. He experienced hunger, sickness, poverty, fatigue and many other trials as he travelled. When he at last reached the Holy Land, he was ordered back to Europe by the Franciscans, who had been given the authority to do so by the Pope since many Christians who made it to the Holy Land had been captured by the Muslims and held for great amounts of ransom.

As a result of this turn of events, Ignatius had no choice but to return to Spain. He arrived back in Barcelona around March, 1524. The question now was: where was he to go and what was he to do with the spiritual gifts he had already gained?