

St Ignatius Loyola

St. Ignatius of Loyola was born in 1491, the youngest son of a Basque nobleman. He served as a page and then as a courtier at the courts of leading Spanish noblemen. But, in 1521 a French army invaded Spain and attacked Pamplona near Castle Loyola. Ignatius led the defense until he was hit by a canon ball which smashed his legs. The French took him to Castle Loyola where he spent nine months in convalescence reading devotional books that changed his outlook on life. He determined to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but on the way spent many months in prayer at Manresa, Spain. As his prayer deepened, he kept notes. After returning from Jerusalem, he realized he needed more education if he was to carry out his new dream – a life of serving God and helping souls. He studied Latin at Barcelona. Then, after a short time at Spain's two leading universities, he studied at the University of Paris from 1528 to 1535. Ignatius died in 1556, was canonized in 1622.



The Miracles of Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), painted by the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), is depicted standing with his arms outstretched and clad in a gleaming gold garment known as a chasuble. A hazy halo of golden rays encircles his head while, directly above, a little cherub with golden curls (a *putto*, in Italian) looks down on him – thereby connecting Ignatius with the heavenly realm. There are three miracles depicted here. On the left side, a possessed woman violently throws back her head, pulling at her long-loose hair as she is held by the central figure of a man with his back to the viewer. His bare, dirty foot is closest to the viewer, a stark reminder of the shared earthly realm contrasting with the hint of celestial light at the top of the painting. The second miracle, to the right, involves the old washer woman whose withered arm has been restored after she washed the saint's linen. She holds up the cloth in testament and gratitude. Thirdly, in the figures of the women, children, and babies, is a reference to the saint's role as intercessor in difficult births, and in the foreground on the right Rubens depicts a young mother seemingly amazed at the coming to life of her infant lying on the ground before her. All are shown in receipt of the healing power emanating from the saint's hands, while the rest of those assembled plead with clasped hands for him to intercede with their various petitions. The group of darkly clothed figures, standing behind Saint Ignatius on the stone altar, appear to be church officials paying witness to the proceedings.



In the foreground, an exorcised man, nearly nude and wearing only a loincloth, has fallen to the ground. His face is horribly contorted, with the globes of his eyes turned upward and mouth open. His lips are blue, and he is foaming at the mouth. He has broken his restraints. A half-nude man is lifting his head. Another man, facing the priest, kneels in prayer.

Ignatius was finally made a saint by Pope Gregory XV on 12 March 1622, and images of him performing his miracles were necessary as records to legitimise his canonisation as a new saint to the worshippers. Saint Ignatius, originally from Spain, was the founder of the Jesuit Order or Society of Jesus created by the Roman Catholic Church as a new dynamic force.