

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga

- Feastday: June 21
- Patron Saint of: youth and students
- Birth: March 9, 1568
- Death: June 21, 1591



"He who truly desires to love God loves only with an ardent and constant desire to suffer for His sake."

"It is better to be a child of God than king of the whole world!"



As a son of a princely family, Aloysius Gonzaga grew up in royal courts and army camps. His father wanted him to be a military hero. At age 7 Aloysius experienced a profound spiritual quickening. His prayers included the Office of Mary, the Psalms, and other devotions. At age 9 he came from his hometown of Castiglione to Florence to be educated; by age 11 he was teaching catechism to poor children, fasting three days a week, and practicing great austerities. When he was 13 years old, he traveled with his parents and the Empress of Austria to Spain and acted as a page in the court of Philip II. The more Aloysius saw of court life, the more disillusioned he became, seeking relief in learning about the lives of saints.

A book about Jesuit missionaries in India suggested to him the idea of entering the Society of Jesus. Now began a four-year contest with his father. Eminent churchmen and laypeople were pressed into service to persuade Aloysius to remain in his "normal" vocation. Finally, he prevailed, was allowed to renounce his right to succession, and was received into the Jesuit novitiate.

Like other seminarians, Aloysius was faced with a new kind of penance—that of accepting different ideas about the exact nature of penance. He was obliged to eat more and to take recreation with the

other students. He was forbidden to pray except at stated times. He spent four years in the study of philosophy and had Saint Robert Bellarmine as his spiritual adviser.

In 1591, a plague struck Rome. The Jesuits opened a hospital of their own. The superior general himself and many other Jesuits rendered personal service. Because he nursed patients, washed them, and made their beds, Aloysius caught the disease. A fever persisted after his recovery and he was so weak he could scarcely rise from bed. Yet he maintained his great discipline of prayer, knowing that he would die three months later within the octave of Corpus Christi, at the age of 23.