

## **The Feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola**

On July 31<sup>st</sup>, the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It is a particularly noteworthy celebration for our parish this year because the Society of Jesus is marking the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conversion of Saint Ignatius. This "Ignatian Year" extends until the feast of Saint Ignatius in 2022. As part of commemorating this year, the Jesuits of New Orleans are hosting a mass and concert at Holy Name of Jesus this weekend.

The conversion of Saint Ignatius began with a bang. In May of 1521, Ignatius was a thirty-year-old officer in the Spanish army. He was part of a force that was defending Pamplona against the French who were laying claim to disputed territory. The French had an overwhelming force and the Spanish commanding officer considered surrendering, but Ignatius convinced him that it was worthwhile to fight for the sake of honor, even if defeat was certain. In the ensuing battle, Ignatius' legs were severely wounded by a strike from a cannonball. Supposedly the defense crumbled soon afterwards with the Spanish being soundly beaten. However, the French sent him home with an escort rather than imprisoning him, out of respect for his valor. That or perhaps they just wanted to avoid his continued taunts.

Once home, Ignatius spent his days rather bored in recovery, so he asked for books about chivalry and gallantry. Instead, he received the only books his family had available: *The Life of Christ* and *The Lives of the Saints*. Hours meditating upon these books, praying, and daydreaming about his life led to a gradual realization that up to this time he had lived for himself. As his gaze shifted to his future, he began to feel an increasingly strong desire to serve God in all things. The more he thought about committing himself to the service of God, rather than himself, the greater joy, strength, and peace he felt. By the end of his recovery, his life had been radically reoriented from himself towards God.

It is fitting that the Jesuits are marking the conversion of Saint Ignatius with a year-long celebration because even his own conversion took years to unfold. Ignatius had many moments where he realized he was again trying to accomplish things for himself rather than God, or where he was depending upon himself more than upon God. It takes time to grow in relationship with God after turning toward him. However, Ignatius learned in time to gently but insistently turn back toward God's mercy when he discovers that he has turned toward himself again. Ignatius would later write in *The Spiritual Exercises*, a month-long retreat handbook, that the first task of the retreat was the overcoming of the self. That is the result of conversion, but as Christians we do it by turning toward God. We do not lose ourselves in this process, but find ourselves in the light of God's mercy.

**Deacon Juan Ruiz, SJ**, has spent the summer working here at HNJ as part of his final training for the priesthood. He will be ordained a priest in June of next year.