

Jesuit Urban Mission

Bernard loved the hills, Benedict the valleys, Francis the towns, Ignatius great cities.

This brief couplet of unknown origin captures in a few words the distinct charisms of four saints and founders of religious communities in the Church—the Cistercians, the Benedictines, the Franciscans and the Jesuits.

Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), placed much focus on the plight of the poor in the great cities of his time. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius imagined God gazing upon the teeming masses of our cities, on men and women sick and dying, the old and young, the rich and the poor, the happy and sad, some being born and some being laid to rest. Surrounded by that mass of human need, Ignatius was moved by a God who joyfully opted to step into the pain of human suffering and became flesh, sharing fully all our human joys and sorrows.

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Jesuit Refugee Service



Sacramentorum piarum, concionum s[u]i Romae renouat, ac rationem pueris tradendi doctrinae christiana rudimenta Romanis in templis, ac plateis inducit.

60
In Rome, he renews the practice of frequenting the sacraments and of giving devout sermons and introduces ways of passing on the rudiments of Christian doctrine to youth in the churches and squares of Rome.

Plates 60, 63. *Vita beati patris Ignatii Loyolae*. The Illustrated Life of Ignatius of Loyola, published in Rome in 1609 to celebrate Ignatius' beatification that year by Pope Paul V.



Publica Romae pietatis opera instituit: coenobia miserum male nuptiarum, virginum s. Catherinae ad funus rursuspuellarum SS. quatuor coronatorum, puerorum item qui orbi parentibus per urbem vagi mendicant, catechizantur aliorumq[ue] collegia magna omnium admiratione, fructus.

63
At Rome he founds public works of piety: hospices for women in bad marriages; for virgins at [the church of] Santa Caterina dei Funari, for [orphan] girls at [the church of] Santi Quattro Coronati, also for orphan boys wandering through the city as beggars, a residence for [Jewish] catechumens, as well as other residences and colleges, to the profit and with the admiration of everybody.

In Ignatius Loyola, the Church in the city found a champion and a conceptual genius, a man who was fully attuned to his urban culture, a man able to adapt—and even abandon—parts of the Catholic tradition in order to shape an instrument uniquely suited for the existential needs of his time and place. Where he chose to be—where he located his churches, schools, and residences—clearly incarnates how he chose to be and to minister in the Church. That how is a conceptual program of great diversity.

From his profound yet practical experience of “finding God in all things” and from his carefully

reflected-upon experience of living with and for the citizens of his urban world, Ignatius was able to create a way of life and a pattern of apostolic commitment appropriate to the demands of his historical moment. That way of life and that pattern, lived out by the early Jesuit community in downtown Rome, provided the Church and the Christian urban world with a corps of well-prepared, ready, and eminently flexible religious who could preach, teach, and minister to the various constituencies of the metropolis. It is a pattern that has withstood four centuries of urban trials and undergone infinite variations.

Ignatius was the first founder of a major religious order in the history of the Church to locate his headquarters in Rome and the first to opt deliberately for complete insertion of a religious order's works and residences in the center of the urban fabric. Those decisions, both politically and religiously motivated, were not casual but definitive: they placed the emerging Society of Jesus intentionally in the psychological center of Catholic Christendom, within the sacred circle at the heart of the human city. There, at the crossroads within the circle, Ignatius Loyola staked his claim. There he erected his landmark.

