

Jesuit Devotions

Defining characteristics of that part of Catholic devotion known as Jesuit devotion derive from Jesuit spirituality, understood as those means used to draw a person closer to God that are particular to the insights of St. Ignatius Loyola and amplified by later Jesuits. Any consideration of Jesuit devotion must be rooted in Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, the foundational spiritual document of the Society of Jesus. In the *Exercises*, Ignatius employed what has been described as a "theology of visibility" to guide the exercitant to a knowledge of self and union with God.

The Jesuits considered the visual arts to be key to the affirmation of Catholic faith. From the very beginning, they promoted devotional art and the use of imagery, whether real (paintings and illustrated books), or imagined (visionary devotional practices) and their attitude was soon reflected in the decoration of their churches.

More specifically, Ignatius directed the exercitant to use all one's capabilities to "make present" the mysteries of salvation recorded in the Gospels by imaginative mental reconstruction—what he calls "composition of place." This process entailed making mental pictures using the imagination and familiar visual prototypes from the exercitant's personal experience of sacred images. In other words, Ignatius knew that a "picture is worth a thousand words."

—M. Maher, S.J., *Devotion, the Society of Jesus, and the Idea of St. Joseph* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2000)



Relics of Christ and the Saints

The Jesuits were active agents in promoting the cult of relics in their missions throughout the world. On the Feast of All Saints in 1578, the Jesuits organized a festive reception of 214 relics of European saints that Pope Gregory XIII (reigned 1572-1585) had sent them to be distributed in the churches of Mexico City. In order to guard them, eighteen sumptuous reliquaries of gold, silver and precious stones were crafted, which were taken in procession from the cathedral to the College of the Society of Jesus. For the occasion, the streets were decorated with arches and banners and a theatrical presentation, *El triunfo de los santos*, was performed. This celebration gave the Jesuits great prestige just six years after their arrival in Mexico. For the inhabitants of New Spain (Mexico), those relics converted their land into a sacred and sanctified space.

—Martin Austin Nesvig, *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*, University of New Mexico Press, 2006

One of four large reliquaries at Old St. Joseph's Church, Philadelphia, PA. The one shown contains relics of Jesuit Saints Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Francis Borja, Francis Regis, Francis Jerome, Peter Claver, Aloysius Gonzaga, John Berchmans, Stanislaus Kostka, Alphonsus Rodríguez, Edmund Campion, Andreas Bobola, Peter Canisius, Stephen Pongrácz, Bernardino Realino, Bl. Antonio Baldinucci, and Bl. Rudolph Acquaviva.



The Sacred Heart of Jesus

In 1765, the same year in which he published the constitution in support of the *Jesuits*, Pope Clement XIII (reigned 1758-69) ratified the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a devotion closely associated with the Jesuits since the second half of the 17th century.

Sacred Heart images showing Jesus holding the heart, which is encircled by a crown of thorns, topped with a small cross and radiating light, appeared everywhere in Europe and the colonies. The archetypal image, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus*, a painting by Pompeo Batoni for the Church of the Gesù in Rome soon became widely disseminated. The devotion focused on the physical heart of Jesus as a symbol of divine love. Significantly, Sacred Heart images were removed from churches in countries where the Jesuits were suppressed almost as soon as those places were occupied by the secular authorities. Such was the power of images.

—Edgar Peters Rowson, Joseph I. Rishel, et al., *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century* (The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2000)

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, Pompeo Batoni, c. 1765-67, oil on copper, Il Gesù, Rome.

Jesuit Saints

Jesuit iconography changed dramatically after 1622, with the canonization of the first Jesuit saints, Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier. From that point on, those and later Jesuit saints, (including Francis Borja, Aloysius Gonzaga, and Stanislaus Kostka), occupied a dominant place in Jesuit imagery and devotion.

While the iconography of the Society is varied, more and more of it came to be dominated by images of the saints, the blessed, and the martyrs of the order. This phenomenon marked the Jesuit enterprise throughout the world. Whenever Jesuit saints were depicted together, Ignatius invariably stood at their head, with Francis Xavier almost as invariably at his side.



The Consolation of St. Ignatius Loyola, Mexican, 18th century, oil on copper

St. Ignatius is shown in rapture staring toward the heavens and the monogram of the Society of Jesus (IHS). He sheds tears at both the busyness of Earth and the consolation of Heaven.



St. Aloysius Gonzaga, Mexican, 19th century, oil on copper

While nursing the sick in a plague hospital in Rome in 1591, Gonzaga contracted the plague himself and died. His cult was approved in 1621—for those days, remarkably soon after his death—and he quickly assumed an important place in Jesuit iconography as the patron saint of youth.



The Holy Family

Devotion to the Holy Family was vigorously promoted by the Society of Jesus as a model for evangelization and spiritual renewal from Europe to Latin America, from New France to Baja California. For Jesuit writers and missionaries, the Holy Family was the cradle of Christianity, returning believers to the dawn of the Christian era and the Church. In other words, Mary and Joseph were the first human beings who "renew and adored Christ incarnate, the first Christians who model what it means to be companions and disciples of Jesus."

—Joseph F. Chozening, O.S.F.S.

The Heavenly and Earthly Trinity, c. 1690-1710, oil on canvas, Circle of Diego Quirpe Tito, School of Cuzco, Peru. Saint Joseph's University Collection. Gift of Katherine A. Hillman '74 and Joseph H. Schneider '74



The Christmas Crèche

The origin of the crèche is traced to St. Francis of Assisi's creation of a living crèche in tableau at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in Greccio (Italy), in 1223. However, the first Christmas crèche known to have been erected in a church stood, not in a Franciscan church, but in a Jesuit church in Prague in 1562. In fact, the Jesuits adopted the crèche as a special Christmas devotion, taking it with them on their worldwide missionary journeys. In 1642, a Jesuit missionary in Canada wrote that the Christmas crèche made a deep impression on Native Americans.

Few devotional objects brought to North America by European Jesuits in the 19th century were received as enthusiastically as was the crèche, or Christmas crib. Wherever the Jesuits went, they introduced the elaborate nativity scenes for which their churches in Italy were renowned. "The most beautiful crib" in the United States, claimed a San Francisco newspaper, was fashioned in Rome for the Church of St. Ignatius (University of San Francisco.)

Image: Nicario Jimenez
Quirpe, Peru, 1992. Collection of James and Emilla Govan
Loyola University Museums of Art
820 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611

The Cult of the Guardian Angels



While other religious orders had lengthy and salient traditions of devotion to the angels, in the early modern era the Jesuits constituted a vanguard in the vigor and manner of their propagation of the cult of the Guardian Angels through their example and devotional practices, writings, and preaching.

For the Jesuits, the cult of the Guardian Angels went back to their founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), who considered the nature of angelic influences in the sections of the *Spiritual Exercises* on the discernment of spirits. They believed, along with many of their contemporaries, that each person was accompanied through life and cared for by a special angel. Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1601) was also an enthusiastic supporter of the cult, the impact of which reverberated in Jesuit painting cycles all over Europe.

The Seven Archangels, Antonio Catalano, called Il Vecchio, oil on canvas, c. 1598. Siracusa, church of the Jesuit college.

The apocryphal cult of the Seven Archangels enjoyed a special popularity in Sicily, where the cult originated. This painting brings to mind Zaccaro's version in the Angels' Chapel of the Roman Gesù, and is one of the earliest known versions of the theme in Sicily.

The Circumcision of Jesus and The Holy Name of Jesus

The Circumcision was important for the Jesuits, of course, because it was at that event that Jesus received His name. As Luke tells us (2:21), "After eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb." The feast of the Circumcision, January 3, is the official "titular feast" of the Society of Jesus, celebrated with great solemnity in Jesuit churches everywhere.

The Circumcision was chosen by the Jesuits to decorate the high altar of the Gesù, though its theme was unusual as the principal theme of a church, it represents the moment Christ was named and was therefore a symbol not only of the dedication of the church itself but of the Society of Jesus. The almost reproachful look the child gives His mother as he sheds his blood also reminds the viewer of the coming Passion.

In later paintings, the adoration of the name of Jesus became separated from the scene of the Circumcision. In the ceiling of the Gesù, the three letters "IHS" in heaven appear as a great monstrance of light. Angels and saints worship this name, demons fall down to earth, since they are unable to withstand its luster.

The name of Jesus was shortened to IHS in many Latin manuscripts of the gospels beginning in the fourth century. It was the Jesuits, however, who effectively claimed it and gave it international diffusion.

—John W. O'Malley, S.J., and Gavin Alexander Bailey, *The Jesuits and the Arts: 1540-1773* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005)

St. Joseph

It was on the Feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1539, that the first assignment by Pope Paul III was given to St. Ignatius and his companions. That circumstance was thought to augur well for acceptance by the papacy of the Society of Jesus as a new religious community of men. Indeed, that approval came the following year. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius Loyola often introduced St. Joseph into the gospel meditations on the earthly life of our Lord; he also held St. Joseph up to his spiritual sons as an exemplar of paternal authority and filial obedience.

After the Council of Trent, the Jesuits played a major role in promoting devotion to St. Joseph. Distinguished Jesuit theologians St. Peter Canisius, Cornelius à Lapide, and Francisco Suárez diligently encouraged veneration of St. Joseph. The Jesuit hagiographer, Johannes Bollandus (1596-1665), reported that in Spain, France, and the Netherlands, all churches belonging to colleges of the Society of Jesus were dedicated to St. Joseph. The Jesuits in Lyons were the first to build a church in St. Joseph's honor in France.

The Jesuits carried their deep affection for St. Joseph with them to their missions throughout the Americas beginning with the naming of first mission among the Hurons in 1638 (St. Joseph in Sillery,

Quebec City) to the naming of the early reductions of Paraguay. And, of course, the first Catholic church in Philadelphia was Old St. Joseph's, founded in 1733 by Joseph Greaton, S.J.



St. Joseph and the Christ Child, Italian School, 19th century, oil on copper. Saint Joseph's University Collection

In the 19th century, a number of Jesuit colleges in America were consecrated to St. Joseph though they were named for other saints or cities, among these were Georgetown University and Santa Clara University. In 1872, when an epidemic of measles raged throughout the District of Columbia, special devotions were held at Georgetown to invoke the protection of St. Joseph. The next year, when the more serious epidemic of smallpox threatened, St. Joseph was again invoked. Not a single case of the dread diseases occurred at Georgetown.

In gratitude, the students commissioned a statue of St. Joseph for the Infirmary garden and John McElroy, S.J. (1782-1877), founder of Boston College, officiated at the ceremony that consecrated Georgetown College to St. Joseph. The next year, the senior class inaugurated a St. Joseph Association to keep an oil lamp constantly burning before the statue of St. Joseph to protect all those connected with the university from serious illness.

—Joseph F. Chozening, O.S.F.S., *Patron Saint of the New World* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 1992)
—T. Johnson, in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. P. Marshall and A. Walsham (Cambridge University Press, 2006)