



Unidentified artist

Saint Ignatius of Loyola Embracing Christ on the Cross

Viceroyalty of Peru

18th century

Oil on canvas, 16 x 13 ½ inches

Inscriptions: *Ita dico vobis gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore penitentiam agente/Amice, ascende superius/super uno peccatore penitentiam agente/doctrina*

Ignatius of Loyola, with six companions, founded the Society of Jesus. He was named a saint in 1622. Saint Ignatius authored the *Spiritual Exercises* (1548), which became foundational to many Catholic spiritual lives. The Jesuits, following the mandate of their founders, were extremely active in missionary work throughout the Spanish Americas. The Society of Jesus established churches and schools in most Spanish American cities and *doctrinas* dedicated to spreading the Catholic faith in the most distant of Spanish territories. Victim of its successes, the order was expelled from Spain and its realms in 1767, which suggests that this painting was created earlier than that date.

Íñigo López de Oñaz y Loyala was born in 1491 to a noble family in the province of Guipúzcoa, Spain. During his youth, he was dedicated to courtly ideals of chivalry, but a battle injury in 1521 led to a long convalescence and conversion. He visited the Benedictine monastery of Our Lady of Montserrat near Barcelona in 1522, where he confessed his sins, hung his dagger and sword at the altar of Our Lady, and gave his fine clothes to the poor. A year spent in a cave in nearby Manresa, reading and praying, clinched his determination to live a life dedicated to God.

Ignatius, as he became known, is pictured as a gentleman delivering his weapons to the Virgin Mary who holds the Christ Child on her lap. In a charming vignette, the Christ Child is shown sawing at the hilltops, creating the “serrated mountain” that is Montserrat near Barcelona. The inscription issuing from the Virgin and Child welcome Ignatius’s conversion with words from Luke 14:10: “But when thou art invited, go, sit down in the lowest place; that when he who invited thee, cometh, he may say to thee: *Friend, go up higher*. Then shalt thou have glory before them that sit at table with thee.”

In the center of the composition, Ignatius, now wearing the black habit of the Society of Jesus, embraces Christ Crucified. The steps leading upward are inscribed with the promises of novitiates of the order: charity, obedience, chastity, poverty, humility, affliction (suffering). At upper right and left are putti accompanied by additional legends. At upper right from Luke 15:10: "...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner repenting." At upper left from Luke 15:7-9: "...joy in heaven *upon one sinner that doth penance*, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."

A crowd of witnesses, from various periods to judge by the changes in costume, are gathered by a rope labeled "doctrine" to witness Ignatius's embrace of his faith. The style of the painting is competent, but naïve. It was likely commissioned by an individual supportive of the Jesuit order, though probably not by a member of the order. The inscriptions are focused on the blessing of forgiveness of sins through penitence. It is possible that close study of Ignatius's published works would reveal a connection between the selected references from the book of Luke and the theologian himself.

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