

Aloysius Gonzaga

Saint Name: St. Aloysius Gonzaga

Dates: March 9, 1568 – June 21, 1591

Location: Italy

Feast Day: June 21

Aloysius, aka Luigi, was the eldest of seven children born to Ferdinand Gonzaga, Marquis of Castiglione and Marta Tana di Santena at the family's castle in Castiglione delle Stiviere, Northern Italy. As the first born, Aloysius was first in line to inherit his father's title and status of Marquis. Tradition stated that sons of the aristocracy would become soldiers and were often involved in minor wars of the time. His military education started at an early age. As young as four, Aloysius was given a set of miniature guns and accompanied his father on training expeditions. At age five, he was sent to a military camp to get started on his training. Aloysius's father was pleased to see his son marching around camp at the head of a platoon; but Aloysius did not desire to follow in his father's footsteps. He was devoted heart and soul to the service of God. In 1576, at age 8, he was sent to Florence to serve at the court of the Grand Duke and further his education. While there, Aloysius fell ill with kidney disease which caused him trouble throughout his life. While he was bedridden he took the opportunity to read about the saints and spent much of his time in prayer. It is told that he took a private vow of chastity at age 9. Four years later, Aloysius returned to Castiglione where he met Cardinal Charles Borromeo and received his First Communion. Aloysius strongly desired to become a missionary, which he practiced by teaching catechism classes. In 1581, the family was called to Spain and while there, Aloysius started to seriously consider joining a religious order. He desired to join a Jesuit order in Madrid. His mother agreed to his request, but his father was furious and prevented him from doing so. A year and a half later, the family returned to Italy; Aloysius still desired to become a priest, but several members of his family worked hard to persuade him to change his mind. Finally in November 1585, Aloysius waived all of his rights of inheritance and traveled to Rome where he was accepted into the novitiate of the Society of Jesus. He was sent to Milan to study for a brief time but was forced to return because of his health. In addition to kidney disease, he also suffered from a skin disorder, chronic headaches, and insomnia. On November 25, 1587, he took the three religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. The following year he received minor orders and started studying theology to prepare for ordination. By 1591, a plague broke out in Rome. The Jesuits opened a hospital and Aloysius volunteered to work there carrying the dying from the streets to the hospital. He washed and fed the plague victims and prepared them as best as he could to receive the sacraments. Through his kindness toward the ill, he himself was exposed to the plague and those labors of love brought on the illness that ended life. He died June 21, 1591 at the age of 23.



St. Aloysius Gonzaga was Beatified October 19, 1605 by Pope Paul V and Canonized December 31, 1726 by Pope Benedict XIII. He is the patron saint of young students, Christian youths, the blind and AIDS patients. We celebrate his feast day on June 21.