



**Learn About Our Parish Family's
New Reliquary, located in
St. Bridget Church;
St. Aloysius Gonzaga**

(Feast Day: June 21st)

Aloysius Gonzaga (Luigi Gonzaga, 1568-1591) gave up a privileged life and a princely inheritance to live the vows of religious life even to the point of contacting the plague because of his selfless care for people already sick with it. He was the eldest son of the Marquis of Castiglione, and heir to the family title. The Gonzagas were known as patrons of Renaissance artists, and they ruled what amounted to a kingdom.

As a young man Gonzaga wore a suit of armour and walked at his father's side when he reviewed troops. His life began to change after he contracted malaria and suffered frequent bouts of fever. As early as age seven, he became attracted to prayer and turned away from the courtly life around him. When he was nine, he and his brother were sent to Florence to learn the customs of princes at the court of their father's friend the Grand Duke Francesco de' Medici. The Medici court was one of the grandest, most opulent in Europe, but also one full of intrigue, deceit, sex and violence. The young Gonzaga withdrew from this world and became firm in his desire to never offend God by sinning. In November 1579 he moved to Mantua to stay with the duke, a relative; in that residence he discovered a book with brief lives of the saints. He also began to pray the Psalms daily and later started meditating after he discovered a prayer book written by the Jesuit Peter Canisius. His piety included daily Mass, weekly communion and fasting three days a week.

The young heir traveled with Maria of Austria, the daughter of Charles V, on her way to Madrid in 1582. He became a page attending the duke of Asturias, the heir apparent, and was later made a knight of the Order of St. James. The higher he rose in royal society, however, the more his thoughts turned to becoming a Jesuit like his confessor in Madrid. On Aug. 15, 1583 he had an experience in prayer that confirmed his decision. When he told his confessor, that man said he would have to get his father's permission.

The marquis was enraged by the news that his heir wanted to renounce all that had been so carefully prepared for him. The whole family returned to Castiglione and then the marquis sent his two sons on a tour of the courts of Italy, hoping that the experience of such refined living would change his son's mind and relieve the tension that had developed between two strong-willed individuals. The son's determination proved to be stronger, and the father finally granted his assent. In November 1585 Aloysius renounced his inheritance in favor of his brother Rudolph and set out for Rome where he presented himself to the Superior General, Claudio Acquaviva, who admitted him to the novitiate of Sant'Andrea.

Although the new novice was not yet 18, his background made him mature beyond his years, and he found the novitiate less rigorous than the life he had been living by his own decision. He nevertheless obediently followed the novitiate rules and the guidance of his novice master. He enrolled in the Roman College to finish philosophy studies before taking first vows, and then went immediately into theology right after. He returned to Castiglione in 1589 to negotiate peace between his brother and the duke of Mantua, and then returned to Rome in May 1590.

Plague and famine struck Italy the following year and Gonzaga threw himself into caring for the victims of the plague. He begged alms for the sick and physically carried those he found in the streets to a hospital where he washed and fed them and prepared them for the sacraments. He told his spiritual director, Robert Bellarmine (who would later be recognized as a saint), that he had a premonition he would die soon.

So many young Jesuits were becoming sick that the superior forbade Gonzaga to return to the hospital. Gonzaga did get permission to work at Our Lady of Consolation hospital which did not treat anyone with contagious diseases. Gonzaga went there but contacted the plague when he cared for a man who had the plague. The young Jesuit put himself to bed on March 3, 1591; his condition worsened and then improved somewhat, but he could not recover full health. Fever and a cough set in and he slowly lingered on. He knew he was dying and asked to receive communion. Two Jesuits watched with him through the night and saw his face change as he held onto a cross and called the name of Jesus. He was only 23 when he died. His body is now kept in the church of St. Ignatius in Rome.

Originally Collected and edited by: Tom Rochford, SJ/www.jesuits.global

St. Aloysius' touching letter to his mom on his deathbed

It is a beautiful letter and reminds us that while death can be sad, it is also a source of great joy that lasts for eternity.

May the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit be yours for ever, most honored lady. Your letter found me lingering still in this region of the dead, but now I must rouse myself to make my way on to heaven at last and to praise God for ever in the land of the living; indeed I had hoped that before this time my journey there would have been over. If charity, as Saint Paul says, means to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who are glad, then, dearest mother, you shall rejoice exceedingly that God in his grace and his love for you is showing me the path to true happiness, and assuring me that I shall never lose him.

God is calling me to eternal rest; his voice from heaven invites me to the infinite bliss I have sought so languidly, and promises me this reward for the tears I have so seldom shed.

And our parting will not be for long; we shall see each other again in heaven; we shall be united with our Savior; there we shall praise him with heart and soul, sing of his mercies for ever, and enjoy eternal happiness. When he takes away what he once lent

us, his purpose is to store our treasure elsewhere more safely and bestow on us those very blessings that we ourselves would most choose to have.

I write all this with the one desire that you and all my family may consider my departure a joy and favor and that you especially may speed with a mother's blessing my passage across the waters till I reach the shore to which all hopes belong. I write the more willingly because I have no clearer way of expressing the love and respect I owe you as your son.

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