



Mendocino South Coast Catholic Churches  
St. Aloysius Parish - Point Arena, CA 95468  
Mary Star of the Sea Mission - Gualala, CA 95445



## The Life of Saint Aloysius

Saint Aloysius de Gonzaga was born on March 9, 1568 in his family's castle in Castiglione delle Stiviere, Italy to an aristocratic family of the illustrious House of Gonzaga. As the eldest of seven children and son of the aristocrat Marquis Ferrante de Gonzaga, Aloysius was destined to inherit the title and military standing of his father. His mother was Marta Tana di Santena, a lady-in-waiting to Isabel, the wife of King Phillip II of Spain. (Note that the name "Aloysius" is the Latin form of his given Italian name, "Luigi".)



It was when Aloysius first spoke, that he prophesied of his future life of devotion to God, for the first words he uttered were the Holy Names of *Jesus* and *Mary*.

He grew up in royal courts and army camps with his father, the Marquis in

service to King Phillip II of the Holy Roman Empire. Aloysius' father wanted his son to become a military hero and gave him a miniature set of guns at the age of 4 so that he would be adept in the art of arms. When he was 5, Aloysius was sent to a military camp to begin his training to become a soldier in service to the King. He would accompany his father on training expeditions, pleasing him when Aloysius marched at the head of a platoon of soldiers.

God interceded and at the very young age of seven, Aloysius experienced a spiritual awakening. His daily prayers included the Office of Mary, psalms and many devotionals.

<http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/LittleOffice.htm>



In 1576 when he was 8 he was sent with his younger brother, Rodolfo, to Florence to be formally educated, serving in the court of the Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici. It was there that Aloysius became extremely ill with a kidney disease. During his recovery, he spent most of his time in prayer and study of the lives of the saints which further stimulated him to pursue a religious vocation and follow examples of the Saints.

Though he partially recovered, he was afflicted with the pain of kidney problems for the rest of his life as his personal cross to bear.

In November, 1579 he and his brothers were sent to the Duke of Mantua. This was during the Renaissance which produced great arts and scientific advances, but was also a period of fraud,

poisonings, court intrigues and lust. Aloysius witnessed and was shocked by the violence, brutality and frivolous of Renaissance Italy, witnessing the murders of two of his brothers. He decided that his calling would be to a religious life and he took a private vow of perpetual chastity when he was nine. To avoid temptation and maintain his purity, he always kept his eyes downcast in the presence of women throughout this life.

He returned to Castiglione where he received the sacrament of first communion on July 22, 1580 from Cardinal Charles Borromeo, later declared the patron Saint of spiritual leaders. The future Saint Borromeo became Aloysius' role model for the role of properly teaching lay and spiritual leaders of the Church.

By age eleven Aloysius was teaching catechism to poor children in Castiglione. He fasted three days a week and practiced a simple ascetic lifestyle quiet in contrast to his aristocratic stature.

At age thirteen he traveled with his parents to Spain in the company of the Holy Roman Empress Maria of Austria and served as a page to the young Infante Diego in the court of King Philip II of Spain in Madrid. It was during this time that he became further disillusioned with the court life and its intrigues and decadence and he began studying the lives of the Saints in sharp contrast to the worldly pleasures of the European "nobility". Aloysius lived an austere life, fasting and refusing to look at the faces of women, fearing he would succumb to carnal desires.



Aloysius read a book about the experiences of the Jesuit missionaries in India which motivated him to desire to join the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, as a missionary. When he announced his intentions, his father became furious as it would require that Aloysius, the eldest son, would need to renounce all rights to inheritance and status in society. This initiated a difficult four-year struggle with his father who stubbornly ordered him to pursue a career in the military and court following in the tradition of Aloysius' noble heritage. His father recruited many religious and lay people to dissuade Aloysius from his religious calling including offers of arranging a bishopric for him. It was not unusual in that decadent, corrupt period that sufficient money could purchase the title of Bishop or a secular priest position.

But Aloysius remained steadfast in his desire to join the Jesuits. Finally, when he was eighteen his father relented and Aloysius was allowed to renounce his right of succession. This was approved by the Emperor in November, 1585 and Aloysius was received into the Jesuit novitiate.

It was at the seminary that Aloysius discovered a new form of penance in contrast to his earlier adherence to an ascetic life. In sharp contrast, Aloysius was mandated to eat more, take recreation with the other students and could only pray at prescribed times! He spent his four years studying philosophy with Saint Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (who would later become the patron saint of catechists) as his spiritual advisor and confessor.



Aloysius took his three religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience on November 25, 1587 and receiving his minor orders in Spring 1588 and began studying theology at the Roman College in preparation for his ordination. In 1590 he is said to have received a vision of the Angel Gabriel telling him he would die within the year.

In the year 1591, the bubonic plague struck Rome and the Jesuits opened a hospital to care for those suffering this terrible disease. The Jesuit superior general and many of the Jesuits attended to the sick, washing, feeding and caring for those dying of this terrible pestilence.



Aloysius began working with the sick, begging alms and carrying the dying to the hospital. He confessed to his spiritual director, Father Robert Bellarmine, that he was revolted by the sights and smells of his work but that he was duty and spiritually bound to overcome his revulsion and continue his work.

Aloysius volunteered his service to the hospital, but was forbade by his superiors as so many young Jesuits had become infected and died. But Aloysius stubbornly persisted, much as he had previously fought with his father, to be allowed to care for the afflicted.

Finally, his superiors relented and granted his request but only at the Our Lady of Consolation hospital which did not admit those with contagious diseases. It was there that Aloysius lifted a man from his sickbed, tended to him and brought him back to bed, but this man was infected with the plague. Aloysius contracted this terrible, unforgiving disease and was bedridden by March 3, 1591 only six days prior to his twenty-third birthday.



Aloysius partly recovered but a fever and cough persisted making him so weak he was scarcely able to rise from his bed. Yet his great faith persisted and Aloysius maintained his prayerful discipline, having a vision that he would die on the Octave of the feast of Corpus Christi.

On June 21, 1591 Aloysius seemed well in the morning, but he knew he would die before the end of the day. Just before midnight with his eyes fixed on the crucifix held in his hands he died trying to utter as his final word, the Holy Name of *Jesus*.

He was buried in the Church of the Most Holy Annunciation in Rome (which would later become the church of Saint Ignatius of Loyola). His remains were later moved to the Sant'Ignazio church where they rest in an urn made of lapis lazuli in the Lancellotti Chapel. His skull was transferred to the basilica San



Luigi (Aloysius) in Castiglione delle Stiviere.

Purity was Aloysius' notable virtue and the Carmelite mystic Saint Maria Magdalena de Pazzi had a vision of him on April 4, 1600, describing him as radiant in glory because of his "interior works", a hidden martyr for this great love of God.



Saint Aloysius was beatified on October 19, 1605 by Pope Paul V. He was canonized on December 31, 1726 with another Jesuit novice, Polish born Saint Stanislaus Kostka, by Pope Benedict XIII. In 1729 Pope Benedict XIII declared him the patron saint of young students. In 1926 Pope Pius XI named him the patron saint of all Christian youth.

Because of his death from the plague he is considered the patron saint of plague victims and for his compassion and courage in facing this terrible disease he has become the patron saint of both AIDS victims and their caregivers.

In art, Saint Aloysius is depicted as a young man wearing a black cassock and surplice. His attributes are a lily, referring to his innocence; a cross referring to his piety and sacrifice; a skull, referring to his early death; and a rosary referring to his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

