

# Francis and Ignatius

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*Summary: Admires new pictorial lives of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius giving a brief biography of each saint noting their work and radical conversions. (DDLW #709).*

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI. Photographs by Leonard von Matt, Text by Walter Hauser. Henry Regnery Company, 21 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago 4, Ill. \$6.50.

ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA. Photographs by Leonard von Matt, Text by Hugo Rahner. \$6.50. Reviewed by Dorothy Day.

These are the most beautiful books, it seems to us, that have come to us for review. These pictorial lives, with magnificent photographs by Leonard von Matt, are moving as was that collection in **The Story of Man** which appeared last year, and are more attractively published, though of course more expensive. But they are worth the money. These books will go into the Peter Maurin Farm library for us to pore over during the long evenings when we sit around the library table and talk, and engage ourselves in one or another of the handicrafts.

The St. Francis book shows us Assisi, its streets St. Francis trod, its churches, some of which he rebuilt. Strange that a merchant prince's son, a troubadour, a warrior, should also have known stone work. Yet all the citizens evidently were called upon to build walls, churches, roads, as well as monasteries and homes. One wonders, seeing these pictures, how all this got done, without modern machinery, for hoisting, for instance. There are reproductions of paintings, crucifixes, statues before which St. Francis prayed; of the script even of his rule, two autographs of St. Francis, the early shelter of cave and thatched hut. It is a precious book, unutterably beautiful, and the text fits the pictures. "Assisi has but one song to sing, and that song of Francis. The world cannot have enough of it, and the name of Francis is the only echo that the traveler brings away. Since the dying saint from the plain turned his eyes, now so dim, towards the holy city and blessed it, Franciscan song has never ceased to raise its voice to bless that holy place."

## Jesuit Founder

The origins of the Basques are shrouded in mystery, and Ignatius belonged to the family of Loyola, "one of the most disastrous families our country had to endure," a Basque historian writes, "one of those Basque families that bore a coat of arms over its main doorway, the better to justify the misdeeds that were the tissue and pattern of its life." Ignatius was like his family at first, a wild soldier. "Those who were afterwards his close friends said tactfully but with complete truth, he was"reckless at games, in adventure with women, in brawls and deeds of arms. He was assailed and overcome by temptations of the flesh." But he also "cultivated a romantic affection for a high born lady, just as his hero, Amadis of Gaul, had done for the lady Oriana... the infanta Catherine... who had passed her gloomy youth at Tordesillas in the place where her mad mother was imprisoned."

Ignatius' life was changed, as was St. Francis, after he was wounded in war. Shot through the leg, in an engagement with the French at Pamplona in 1521, treated with "courtesy and kindness by his French captors", his wounds were cared for and he was transported by litter, a fortnight's journey, home to the castle of Anzuola, where his sister-in-law Magdalena and her two daughters cared for him. There he all but died, and there he went through painful operations to restore him to the health he craved to get back to the world and the battlefield. It was when he was beginning to convalesce and his health was assured, that he began to pass the time away waiting for strength, by reading. There were no romances around the castle, so he settled for the four books his sister-in-law brought him, the lives of the saints, and the story of the life of Jesus by a Carthusian. These were the books that changed his whole life and brought about his transformation of soul. "My heart is aflame and my spirit leaps upwards when I leave the pleasures of the world and give myself with all my strength to God." Now he began to long for poverty, and to walk unknown like a pilgrim through the world.

At Manresa he went to a hospice for the poor and the few days of repose, became ten months of "consolation of spiritual anguish and mystical transformation." Inspired by Franciscans, instructed by Benedictines, and now given hospitality by Dominicans, he called himself a Pilgrim and begged his food from door to door, doing penance for the elegance of his former life. Over and over again he climbed up into the clefts of Montserrat over Manresa and spent hours in prayer. The monks called him the pilgrim who had become a fool for Christ. It was at this time that he discovered what through his life became his favorite book, **The Imitation of Christ**. He made friends with the sick in the hospital and the children in the streets and became known through the town as the holy man. It was during this year spent wandering from shrine to shrine, spending days of meditation and reading in his cave, and nights at the hospice that he went through agonies of temptation and doubts and suffering of body as well as of soul. But it was as the result of this year that we have the famous Exercises of St. Ignatius.

It is impossible to tell all the story here, but the text is as good as the pictures, and that is saying a lot. It is a fresh and moving account of the making of a saint, and it is fitting that it should be published this year, the five hundredth anniversary of his birth.