

A Model Saint for Today's Teens

St. Aloysius Gonzaga

(1568-1591)

By Matt Orillion '98

For close to a decade the Pro-Life Club at Jesuit High School, during the group's annual "March for Life" pilgrimage in our nation's capital in January, has attended a special Mass celebrated at St. Aloysius Gonzaga Church. In this 155-year-old church hangs a painting depicting Aloysius when he was 12-years-old receiving his first Holy Communion from Charles Borromeo, who at the time was an archbishop and cardinal, and himself a future saint.

Whenever it is time to visit St. Gonzaga Church, we are often weary from the long walks around the capital, although we eagerly anticipate the trek to the Mall where we will join 100,000 other young people witnessing to the dignity of human life in its earliest stages. In the meantime, St. Gonzaga Church provides all of us a welcome respite. Year after year, I find myself gazing up at the painting, wondering and contemplating...

Who is this young man? How did he respond to the grace that was offered to him? What can he teach us about the vocation of sanctity to which all are called by God?

Luigi Gonzaga, one of the three so-called Jesuit "boy" saints (John Berchmans and Stanislaus Kostka being the other two), was born March 9, 1568 to a noble and powerful family in the Lombardy region of Italy. His father, the Marquis of Castiglione, desired that his eldest son follow his example and enter into courtly life as a soldier. On the command of his father, Aloysius (as he eventually was called), began at the tender age of four to learn the ways of princes. However, he was a sickly

child and suffered with kidney disease, which prohibited young Gonzaga from fully participating in this training. It was about this time that the future saint began an alternative training regimen of intense prayer and penance — one that would lead him to another, more heavenly, Royal Court.



Aloysius Gonzaga receiving Holy Communion from Archbishop Charles Borromeo.

The journey to sainthood is never an easy one, since the ones to whom God offers this grace (that is, all of us) must pass through the Way of the Cross in order to enter the Heavenly Kingdom. Aloysius Gonzaga was certainly no exception, and the route he navigated holds for us important lessons for our own journey.

His biggest obstacle was his father. Determined to see his eldest son inherit his title, along with land,

wealth, and power, the Marquis sent Aloysius and one of his brothers to the court of the powerful Medici family in Florence. Aloysius was quickly repelled by what he saw as a licentious lifestyle. He privately resolved never to offend God by sin.

When Aloysius was 12, the Gonzaga family was visited by Charles Borromeo, the Archbishop and Cardinal of Milan. Upon learning that the child had yet to receive Our Lord in the Eucharist, the distinguished cardinal set about instructing him. On July 22, 1580, Aloysius Gonzaga received his first Holy Communion. (In addition to the painting in St. Gonzaga's Church, the scene is commemorated in one of the many beautiful stained glass windows that adorn the Holy Name of Jesus Chapel on the second floor of the administration and residence building at Jesuit High School. An extensive renovation of the small chapel is underway and includes the restoration of all the stained glass windows.)

Fortified with the graces of the Sacrament, Aloysius spent his adolescent years exploring his vocation, much to the dismay of his father who, in an effort to create distractions that might dissuade his son from pursuing such an austere life, sent him to live in some of the most notable courts of Italy.

Aloysius was only strengthened in his resolve to spurn an easy lifestyle. On the Feast of the Assumption (August 15) in 1583, he made the decision to enter religious life as a Jesuit. However, his Jesuit confessor made him acquire his father's permission before being allowed to enter the novitiate. The Marquis, of course,



refused and the battle between two strong wills escalated in its intensity over the next year. Aloysius was relentless in pursuing his goal of becoming a Jesuit and his father finally surrendered. On November 25, 1585, the 17-year-old Aloysius renounced his inheritance and entered the Jesuit novitiate in Rome.

From an early age, Aloysius did penance and he was known for radical mortifications of the flesh, including extreme fasting and flagellation. In the novitiate, the Jesuit's required Aloysius to tone down his penance, to relax more, to eat appropriately, and obtain the proper amount of sleep. For a young man so zealous to resist the attractions of the world through the harsh practice of self-discipline, a directive to lessen his penances might have seemed offensive to Aloysius. Yet the practice of obedience to his superiors turned out to be the more satisfactory way to train himself in the virtues. Writing to his brother from the novitiate, Aloysius explained himself: "I am a piece of twisted iron; I entered religion to be untwisted straight."

In 1591, while Aloysius was still in training as a Jesuit, a plague broke out in Rome. Initially repelled by the sight of its victims, Aloysius overcame his fear and earnestly tended to their physical and spiritual needs. When several young Jesuits became infected with the disease, the superiors issued orders for Aloysius and other novices to stay away from the main hospital where the plague's contagious sick were brought.

Aloysius, perhaps encouraged by an

intuition that his earthly life would not last much longer, was persistent in seeking permission to continue his hospital work. The Jesuit superiors relented and allowed Aloysius to serve the sick in a different hospital where non-contagious patients were treated. Not long afterwards, Aloysius tended to one of his patients. Unbeknownst to everyone, the patient was infected and Aloysius soon contracted the plague.

Aloysius, bedridden since March 1591, was near death on several occasions, but each time, he would rally. On June 21, 1591, at the age of 23, Aloysius Gonzaga eyed the crucifix he clutched in his hands and tried to pronounce the name Jesus when he passed joyfully into eternal life. As a testament to his holiness, his Jesuit spiritual director, St. Robert Bellarmine, requested that upon his own death he be buried at the feet of Aloysius Gonzaga. His wish was honored.


Aloysius's short life was characterized by an ardent desire for purity, love for God in prayer, and the practice of charity. In a recent address to the school community, then-president Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J. '76 warned that we cannot be preoccupied with the long term, but must concern ourselves with "becoming the person God calls us to be today."

This, I think, rings true about the life of Aloysius Gonzaga. As the patron of Christian youth, he serves as a model for our students in learning to temper the rambunctiousness of adolescence in the cauldron of self-restraint and humility. Sin is no laughing matter. Aloysius knew this and prepared himself accordingly. However, he was not — for all his mortifications — a curmudgeon. He radiated joy in a heroic manner — the hallmark of the saints.

In fact, it seems fitting that each year the contingent of Jesuit high schools and universities prepare themselves spiritually for the "March for Life" in a church dedicated to the memory

of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. Here was a young Jesuit who took Jesus at his word that the greatest gift one can give is to lay down his life for his neighbor. Here was a young man who, in spite of the gift of purity, sought to tame his concupiscence before it tamed him. Here was a young noble who cast off the glories of the world and the flesh and, asking for a different crown, looked forward joyfully to serving in the Heavenly Court of Christ the King.

Aloysius Gonzaga provides a witness to us every January 22 that man was created for more than this life can offer and that the best way to give witness to that truth is to live one's life in the joy of the Gospel. The smiles on the faces and the joy in the hearts of the throngs witnessing to the dignity of every human person testify that Aloysius was right.

Aloysius Gonzaga was beatified in 1605, 14 years after his death. He was canonized some 120 years later in 1726. 

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and is the director of student activities at Jesuit High School. The focus of his responsibilities has been student life and spirituality.

Before becoming the director of student activities in 2013, Matt moderated the Student Council for eight years and the Pro-Life Club for seven years. In 2012, he founded the St. Francis Borgia Student Leadership Institute. Matt was a 2013 recipient of the Profile of a Jesuit Teacher Award for excellence as an Ignatian educator at Jesuit. He graduated from UNO with a bachelor of science degree in exercise physiology and education. He earned a master's in theology from Our Lady of Holy Cross College. Matt and his wife Anne have three children. His email is orillion@jesuitnola.org.



Miracle at Grand Coteau

by Scott Thompson '92

Three of the 26 stone medallions in the Traditions Courtyard bear the names of the three Jesuit “boy saints”: Aloysius Gonzaga, Stanislaus Kostka, and John Berchmans. Of particular interest to Catholics in south Louisiana is John Berchmans, whose sainthood was promoted by a miracle in Grand Coteau on December 14, 1866. In this Medallion Story, [Scott Thompson '92](#), principal of Berchmans Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau, relates the story of the saint’s brief life and the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the miracle.

“If I do not become a saint when I am young, I shall never become one.” —John Berchmans

These were prophetic words, spoken by a young man who well understood his mission in this life. John Berchmans was born in 1599 into a working class family in what is now modern day Belgium. The oldest of five children, he was named in honor of St. John the Baptist. Although raised in an atmosphere of political and religious strife, the child exhibited extraordinary piety even from an early age. Berchmans cared for his ill mother, tended to his own studies, worked as a household servant in town, and made regular pilgrimages to a nearby Marian Shrine. Although his father and other relatives did not support his decision to enter the Society of Jesus, he did so at the age of 17. His desire to become a martyr then led him to request to serve as an army chaplain upon ordination. Clearly, John Berchmans was no ordinary young man.

He was also no ordinary Jesuit novice. He was known for his faith-filled kindness and natural exuberance, God-given traits that endeared him to all. Berchmans’s ability to carry out ordinary actions with extraordinary perfection, along with his strict observance to rules of the Jesuit order, helped him attain the highest degrees of sanctity. Heavily influenced by St. Aloysius of Gonzaga as well as the English Jesuit martyrs, he had a special devotion to the Blessed Mother. Statues often depict

John Berchmans holding his crucifix, book of rules, and rosary.

In 1621, John Berchmans arrived in Rome to begin third-year philosophy studies. Soon after, his fortitude and sense of purpose now well-known, he was asked to take part in a spirited public debate in defense of the faith. Following this event, he developed an acute fever that never abated. John Berchmans left this world at the age of 22, even before his ordination as a priest of the Jesuit order. All manner of miracles had already been attributed to this young man; and more would follow, including favors on behalf of the Society of Jesus, relatives, countrymen, and every class of person. A large gathering came to see his body before its burial with many asking for his intercession. Following Berchmans’s death, his heart was returned to Belgium and kept in a silver reliquary in the Church at Leuven. In that same year, a petition was sent to Pope Gregory XV initiating the cause for John Berchmans’s sainthood.

The miracle which ultimately led to the canonization of John Berchmans occurred in Grand Coteau, LA. Steeped in tradition, the small town is home to both the Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ), who have operated schools there continually since 1821, and the Jesuits, whose buildings at St. Charles College have served as boarding schools, a novitiate, and retirement and retreat centers. In 1866, a young RSCJ novice named Mary Wilson was suffering a long, painful illness. As she lay dying in her room at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, Ms.

Wilson, unable to speak, stated in her heart “Lord, thou who seest how I suffer, if it be for your honor and glory and the salvation of my soul, I ask through the intercession of Blessed Berchmans a little relief and health; otherwise, give me patience to the end.” She went on to explain how Blessed Berchmans appeared to her, and she was healed.

Consider the shock that befell her community when Ms. Wilson walked down to breakfast the next morning, something which she had not been able to do in well over a month. The physician, quickly summoned for, had no explanation. The Vatican would eventually confirm the miracle, paving the way for the canonization of John Berchmans in 1888.

When the Board of Trustees of the Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau voted to open a boys’ division in 2006, there was little debate concerning the name of the new school. St. John Berchmans was the choice. The Berchmans Shrine is unique, located as it is at the exact site of a confirmed miracle of the Catholic Church. This miracle continues to unfold both in the formation of the students in Grand Coteau and also in strengthening the faith of all believers. Those believers had an extraordinary opportunity to physically witness the heart of Berchmans, as the reliquary was brought to Grand Coteau on December 14th, in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the miracle.

In modern society, many young people—and older ones as well—have adopted a self-centered, but often contradictory, meandering, and relative type of worldview. According to it there are no real truths or purposes, other than to drift along and wait for something to strike one’s fancy for a while before moving on. Berchmans’s life, then, resonates with particular power today, as he lived with a strict purpose: making his ordinary, everyday tasks most sacred. Indeed, Berchmans’s entire goal in this world was to die a saint. May we all learn from his example and attempt to follow his saintly path. 🐦

St. John Berchmans holds the rule book for the Society of Jesus in the stained glass window above the main altar of the recently renovated Holy Name of Jesus Chapel. The window also features the Blessed Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus and seated as the Queen of the Society of Jesus, with St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, and other Jesuit saints situated around the chair.



JEREMY REUTHER



Scott Thompson '92 has worked at Jesuit in two stretches, from 1997–2000 and from 2011–2016. During that time, he taught social studies and science and coached basketball, cross country, and track. Recently he was appointed head of the upper school and dean of students at St. John Berchmans Academy of the Sacred Heart, an independent Catholic school for boys in Grand Coteau, LA. Scott and his wife Sherri have three children: Nile (6), Keith (4), and Joseph (1).

Wanderer or Wonderer?

St. Stanislaus Kostka (1550-1568)

by Jeremy Reuther '01

St. Stanislaus Kostka is a worthy patron for the students of Jesuit High School.

First, he is one of the Jesuit “boy saints,” along with St. Aloysius Gonzaga and St. John Berchmans, so called because they died before ordination. Also appealing to high school students is the youthful portrayal of the saint as a pilgrim, wearing the pilgrim’s seashell on his journey across Europe to Rome to be admitted into the Jesuit order. Students thus might mistake Stanislaus for a modern-day drifter, backpacking across Europe in search of adventure and self-discovery, thinking that life is only about the journey.

What differentiates Stanislaus from these characterizations and ultimately makes him “St.” Stanislaus is that he was a man of concentrated purpose. He had a fundamental knowledge of the *summum bonum* – the greatest good – against which all other earthly goods are measured. From an early age Stanislaus was convinced that Christ’s love was that pearl of great price for which a man should sell all he has. Since communion with God and the satisfaction of doing His will gave him his richest happiness,



Above: Stanislaus Kostka the pilgrim presents himself to Peter Canisius in Germany seeking admission to the Society of Jesus. This window is set in the Jesuit Church of the Immaculate Conception on Baronne St.

Stanislaus became too swept up wondering at God to be concerned with a search merely for himself.

And yet, setting out in search of divine treasure forfeits nothing of the high romanticism of the drifter’s wandering. It requires the same courage in setting out into the unknown as the journey begins but armed with the confidence that the omnipotent God faithfully supplies His aid. Stanislaus incorporated this lesson into his life even as a young boy. After Stanislaus’ Jesuit college in Vienna was closed, arrangements were made for him and his brother Paul to be instructed by a tutor in the home of a Lutheran. So close to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Germany, tensions were high between Catholics and Lutherans. Paul used these circumstances as an opportunity to carry out acts of violence and cruelty against his pious younger brother. For example he rejected every request Stanislaus made to change their living arrangements in order to provide access to the sacraments. But in all these trials, Stanislaus remained firm in his trust of divine providence. Left without the sacraments in the face of serious illness, Stanislaus relied especially on prayer and the intercession of his patron, St. Barbara. While at the Jesuit college, he was a member

of the Confraternity of the Blessed Virgin (similar to the Sodality at Jesuit today), which recognized St. Barbara as a secondary patron. His prayers were answered as St. Barbara miraculously appeared to him in his room with angels who administered Viaticum to the sick boy.

His confidence in God's divine providence typified his saintliness as a pilgrim. His influential father, Polish Senator John Kostka, firmly opposed his entrance into the Society of Jesus, making it impossible for the Jesuits in Vienna to admit him. Resolved in God's will through this trial, he left home indifferent to the life of comfort and vain honors rightfully his under his father's care. Here again, the wanderer's flight apes the wonderer's. Even the prodigal son left his well-to-do father behind, albeit to pursue a life of dissipation. Thus the saint's virtue is demonstrated not only in what he rejects, but also in what he embraces when he renounces the bread that fails to satisfy.

His application to the Society having been denied in Vienna, Stanislaus donned the garb of a beggar and traveled on foot 450 miles to Augsburg to petition the provincial, St. Peter Canisius. After three weeks Stanislaus was sent to

Rome by Canisius, who – though saddened to part with the pious youth – knew that Rome would provide the necessary protection from the political influence of his father. St. Peter Canisius' letter endorsing Stanislaus to the Superior General, St. Francis Borgia, is a rare Catholic treasure for being a letter written *by* a saint *to* a saint *about* a saint.

Stanislaus entered the Society of Jesus in Rome on his 17th birthday in 1567. He died ten months later. His determination to enter the Jesuit order never superseded his determination to enter heaven. Both the wonderer and the wanderer must abandon personal aims in life, but only the wonderer renounces them for the splendor of a higher aim. Keeping life with God as the *summum bonum*, the purpose and end of every decision, never diminishes the adventure of life's journey, but actually reveals the fullness of each moment along the way. One can picture Stanislaus in the hills approaching Rome, filled with wonder at the sweeping vista of the eternal city because the beauty of each pilgrim step foreshadows that beauty which awaits all God's children in the communion of everlasting life. 🕊



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 ”

Jeremy Reuther Joins Advancement Team

Jeremy Reuther '01 becomes a member of Jesuit's advancement team for the 2016-2017 school year. Specifically, he will oversee the communications efforts and work with the school's young alumni. Reuther recently completed his 11th year at Jesuit. He has served in various roles – theology teacher, theology department chairman, creator and teacher of The Theology of C.S. Lewis

class, basketball coach, and director of campus ministry. He has been directly involved in various spiritual formation opportunities for Jesuit's students, often in a leadership role. In 2011, Reuther was recognized with the Profile of a Jesuit Teacher Award for excellence as an Ignatian educator. On June 11 Reuther married Kate Wyman. In addition to his advancement duties, Reuther will lead the Jesuit choir and continue to assist in student and alumni formation at Carrollton and Banks.

