The Jesuits, 1506–2006

A Visual Celebration



WORCESTER ART MUSEUM



Domenico Antonio Vaccaro, *Virgin and Child with Saints,* about 1730, oil on canvas, 132.1 x 85.1 cm, Sarah C. Garver Fund, 1977.129

The year 2006 marks several anniversaries for the Catholic religious order called the Jesuits (more formally known as the Society of Jesus). It is the 450th anniversary of the death of the founder, Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), as well as the 500th anniversary of the birth of two of the other first Jesuits: Saint Francis Xavier (1506-52) and Blessed Peter Faber (1506-46).

A special installation of three paintings from the Worcester Art Museum celebrates these Jesuit anniversaries. This guide to the installation also acknowledges the continuing presence of Jesuits in the city of Worcester, especially at the College of the Holy Cross.

Saint Ignatius was a Basque Spaniard who lived at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern world. In his age, Spain was the world's superpower, with vast territories in Europe as well as a growing empire in the Americas and elsewhere. Around the age of thirty, Ignatius underwent a radical conversion from the life of a courtier and knight, to a life spent in the service of God and persons in need. Believing himself called to help people find God in their lives, Ignatius went to the University of Paris for an education in philosophy and theology. There he became friends with an international group of fellow students who would eventually found with him a new religious order called the Society of Jesus. Unlike monks, the Jesuits would not leave the world to find God in the solitude and silence of a monastery.

Jesuits believed that God was present everywhere in the world, and they would work where people were, largely in cities and towns, but also in far-flung missions around the world. They would labor as teachers, preachers, and in many other roles, wherever the needs of people were greatest.

Formally approved by Pope Paul III in 1540, the Society of Jesus made Rome its headquarters. Ignatius soon became the head of the new order, and devoted himself to its direction. He was the principal author of the Jesuit *Constitutions;* he responded to requests for Jesuits from bishops, princes, city governments, and others seeking their help. From the later 1540s, requests for Jesuit teachers and for the Jesuits to found or take over schools became more and more frequent. Soon there were many Jesuit educational institutions, ranging in level from what we call middle school, to universities with graduate and professional programs.



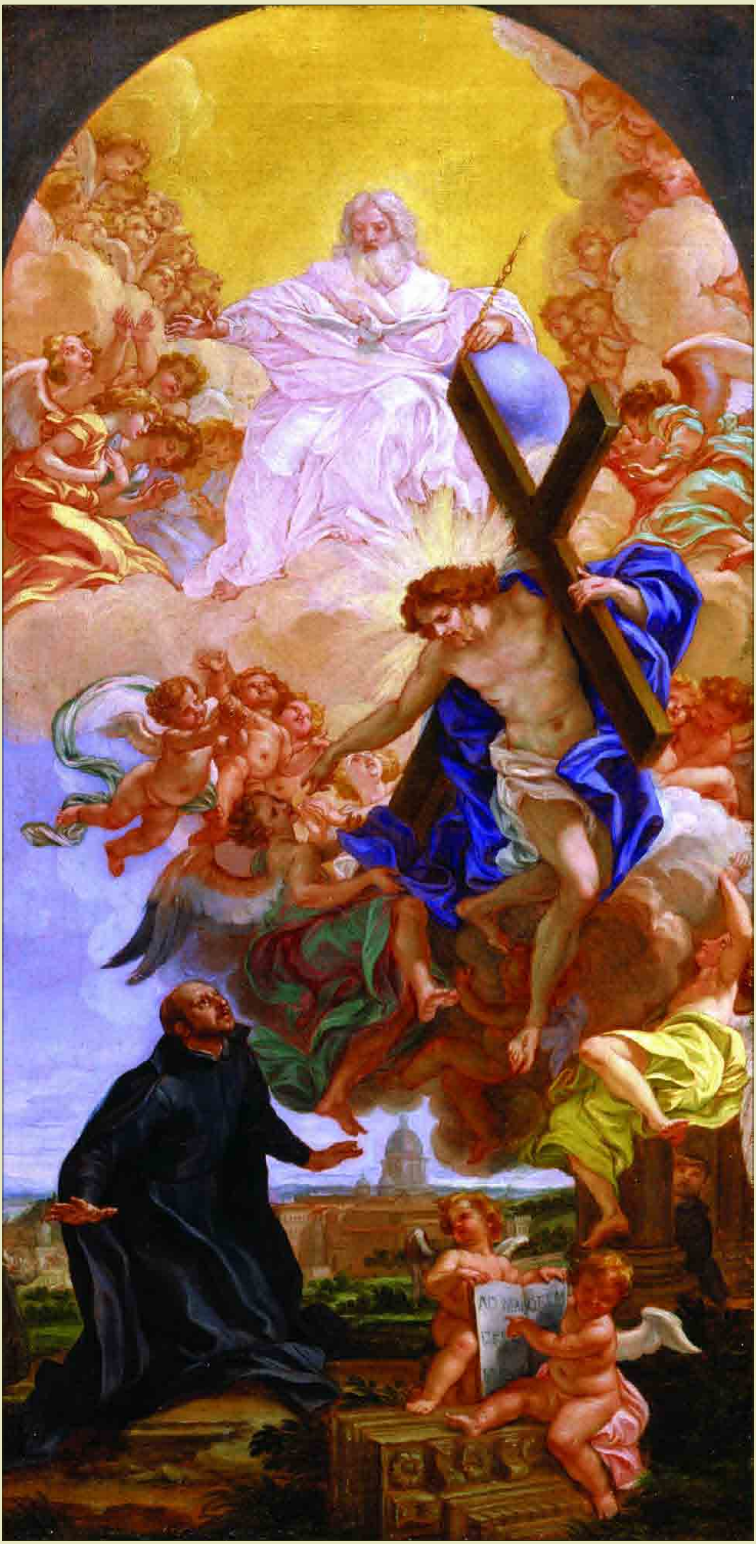
Detail: Saint Francis Xavier from *Virgin and Child with Saints*

One particular means Ignatius and his first companions used to help others in their relationship with God was what Ignatius called *Spiritual Exercises.* These exercises—even today central to Jesuit ministries—were designed to help people focus on the many gifts and graces they had received from God, and on how they could respond, in gratitude, by putting their talents to use for the greater glory of God and the good of other people. Ignatius understood the *Spiritual Exercises* to be especially useful in helping persons to make good decisions about the direction of their lives.

For Ignatius, prayer had a strong visual component. To help others to meditate on the meaning of the life of Jesus, Ignatius invited those doing the *Exercises* to imagine what a given gospel story looked like. By such "compositions of place" one could best enter into contemplation. As the Jesuit order grew, its churches also fully developed the place of the visual dimension of religious experience. Jesuit churches in Rome set a high standard for Jesuit churches throughout the world. Architecture, painting, and sculpture worked with preaching and liturgical services to draw people closer to God.

Peter Faber was born in 1506 in Savoy, then an independent duchy and then, as now, a French-speaking region nestled in the Alps between Italy and France. Like Loyola and Xavier, he went to Paris for an education. There, he shared a room with Francis Xavier, and these two were later joined by Ignatius of Loyola. Faber was a better student than Loyola, and the former tutored the latter. But Ignatius was far more mature in years and in his own spiritual journey; Faber was one of those Ignatius first led in the *Spiritual Exercises.* Peter Faber was ordained a priest on May 30, 1534 and on August 15th of that year joined Ignatius and five other fellow students in taking a vow of availability for ministry, wherever the need was greatest. Faber then traveled to Venice and eventually to Rome, where these first Jesuits sought papal approval of their society. Mobility characterized Faber's work: in Italy, Germany, Spain, and Portugal, as a teacher, preacher, and spiritual director. He taught theology at universities in Rome and in Mainz. Pope Paul III appointed Faber a theologian for the Council of Trent, but Faber died in Rome on August 1, 1546, before reaching Trent. He was beatified (declared Blessed) in 1872.

By the late seventeenth century, churches dedicated to Saint Ignatius were abundant. Giovanni Battista Gaulli (1639-1709), known as Baciccio, painted *The Vision of Saint Ignatius at La Storta* as a model for a large altarpiece intended for the church of Sant'Ignazio in Rome. He painted this version around 1684-85; by that time Baciccio was one of the leading painters in Rome. Though he never painted the full-scale altarpiece, a very similar painting on the same theme was created about fifteen years later for the high altar in Sant' Ignazio. This painting, and much of the interior decoration of Sant' Ignazio, was designed by Andrea Pozzo, a Jesuit artist.



Giovanni Battista Gaulli, *The Vision of Saint Ignatius at La Storta,* 1684–85, oil on canvas, 71.7 x 35.9 cm, Charlotte E.W. Buffington Fund, 1974.298

In his *Autobiography,* Ignatius mentions that, after his ordination as a priest, he prayed to the Virgin Mary, asking her to place him with her son, Jesus. Ignatius explains that he experienced this 'change' while praying in a small chapel not far from Rome. Ignatius also mentions that two companions were with him on his way to Rome (in 1537): Diego Laynez and Peter Faber. Laynez and Faber are included in the background of Baciccio's painting (one on the right and one on the left). And Rome looms in the background (though more the Rome of Baciccio's era than that of the first Jesuits). In addition to Ignatius' own account, Laynez also later wrote about this experience at La Storta. According to Laynez, Ignatius recounted at that time that he heard the words *Ego ero vobis Romae propitius* (I will be favorable to you in Rome), and that Ignatius later explained that he also saw Christ with the cross on his shoulder. In Baciccio's painting, in addition to Christ and the cross, God the Father and the Holy Spirit also appear; two angels present the motto Ignatius gave to the Society of Jesus: *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (For the greater glory of God).

Like Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier was born in the Basque region of northern Spain. In 1525 Francis went to Paris for a university education. From 1529 he shared a room with Peter Faber and Ignatius; under the direction of the latter, Francis did the *Spiritual Exercises* and became an enthusiastic participant in developing an idea for a new society devoted to service of God, wherever the need was greatest. He was ordained a priest in Venice, in 1537. Very shortly after papal approval of the Society of Jesus, Francis Xavier went from Rome to Lisbon to fulfill a request from John III, King of Portugal, who wanted missionaries to send to India. Thus Francis left Lisbon in April 1541, never to return to Europe. After more than a year's journey he arrived in the Indian city of Goa; by 1546 he was in present-day Indonesia; in 1549 he moved on to Japan; and on December 3, 1552, he died while on route to China.

Xavier had frequently sent letters to Ignatius and others. This correspondence, some of which was published, helped to create much interest in Francis, especially after his death. On March 12, 1622, he was canonized a saint, by Pope Gregory XV. (Four others were canonized at the same ceremony, including Ignatius, and Teresa of Avila, the great mystic and reformer of the Carmelite order.) More than Saint Ignatius, Saint Francis Xavier became the object of a popular cult, not only in places where Jesuits went, but also more broadly among Catholics throughout Europe and beyond. Many miracles were said to be due to the intercession of Francis Xavier; he became a favored intercessor in time of plague and other epidemic disease, and at the hour of death.

Jesuit missionaries traveled not only to lands distant from Europe; they also



Daniel Seghers' signature from *A Garland of Flowers with the Education of the Virgin*



Daniel Seghers and Erasmus Quellinus II, *A Garland of Flowers with the Education of the Virgin,* about 1645, oil on canvas, 112.5 x 94.0 cm, Eliza S. Paine Fund in memory of William F. and Frances T.C. Paine, 1966.37



Detail: Daniel Seghers and Erasmus Quellinus II, *A Garland of Flowers with the Education of the Virgin*

went to parts of Europe considered in need of evangelization. Though not far from Rome, southern Italy was one such place. Works of art depicting Xavier give evidence of the spread of devotion to him. Domenico Antonio Vaccaro (1678-1745), a Neapolitan painter, placed Saint Francis Xavier on a par with Saint Sebastian in his painting *Madonna delle Grazie* (Madonna of Graces), or *Virgin and Child with Saints.* Painted about 1730 as a study for a large altarpiece in the church of *Santa Maria delle Grazie* in Marigliano, a town near Naples, this painting shows Xavier as an intercessory saint, calling on Mary and Jesus to show mercy to the town, most likely in a time of plague. By the early eighteenth century, Francis Xavier had become a very popular saint in southern Italy; his pairing with Sebastian (easily identified by an arrow) associates him specifically with intercession in time of plague. Vaccaro not only completed the full-scale altarpiece—which is still in the church—but produced several other paintings as well for the same church, including a painting of Francis Xavier preaching.

By the 1600s, many parts of northern Europe were also well supplied with Jesuits. The Flemish city of Antwerp, in the Spanish Netherlands, was a wealthy port and trading center, as well as a vibrant center for printing and the arts. It was the home of many important artists including Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Erasmus Quellinus II (1607-78), a student and collaborator of Rubens, and Daniel Seghers, S.J.(1590-1661), a student of Jan Brueghel the Elder, were residents of Antwerp.

Seghers entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1614, and took his final vows as a Jesuit brother in 1625. Though he did not seek ordination as a priest, Seghers lived in Jesuit communities as a brother, and continued his work as a painter. He came to be known especially as a painter of flowers and still life. In the Worcester Art Museum's painting by Seghers and Quellinus, Quellinus painted the central portion as a grisaille (shades of gray to resemble sculpture) of the education of the Virgin Mary by her mother, Saint Anne. Close inspection reveals a *pentimento:* Quellinus had first painted an image of

the Madonna and Child, and then changed it to portray the education of the Virgin. Paintings of the Madonna and Child surrounded with a garland of flowers were a theme that had been developed by Jan Brueghel, Seghers' teacher.

It is Seghers, the Jesuit, not Quellinus, who painted what one might think of as the more secular part of the work. But was a floral garland seen as secular in circles influenced by the Society of Jesus?

Both the theme of Mary—whether as mother of Jesus or as a student—and the theme of a floral garland echoed the spirituality and pastoral priorities of the Society of Jesus. In the culminating meditation of his *Spiritual Exercises,* on God's love, Ignatius speaks of how God dwells in creation, including plants and animals. Ignatius invites those undertaking his *Spiritual Exercises* to pay attention to such created things, and to consider how God's love is manifested in and through them. Seghers' work as a flower painter would in no way have contradicted his vocation as a Jesuit; such loving attention to floral beauty was central to his was of living out Ignatian spirituality. Meanwhile, many of Seghers' fellow Jesuits devoted themselves to education. By the early seventeenth century, Jesuit schools were multiplying all across Catholic Europe, as well as on other continents, where Jesuit missionaries were active. Though Jesuit schools did not admit women students until the twentieth century, an image of the education of Mary—such as that by Quellinus—would have been seen as a visual promotion of the importance of education for all Christians. In the era of Quellinus and Seghers, Jesuits did encourage the foundation of schools for women, run by religious orders of women such as the Ursulines. One example was Quebec City where by 1640 there was a Jesuit school for boys and an Ursuline school for girls.

Jesuits in the seventeenth century imagined Mary as a model for all Catholics to follow. The Society of Jesus founded so-called Marian congregations in most places where Jesuits worked; these congregations were organizations of laypeople formed by the *Spiritual Exercises,* often students and graduates of Jesuit schools, along with other persons attracted to Jesuit spirituality. In these congregations, devotion to Mary was linked with works of charity such as visiting the sick and feeding the hungry.

Ignatius died in Rome in 1556; by then there were about one thousand Jesuits in the world. Ignatius was succeeded as superior general of the Society of Jesus by Diego Laynez. Under Laynez and his successors, Jesuits flourished in many parts of the world, founding schools, building churches, preaching, teaching, and giving the *Spiritual Exercises.*

Yet Jesuits never lacked for opponents, many of them motivated by envy of Jesuit success and influence. By the mid-eighteenth century, governments in many Catholic countries sought to bring church institutions under state control. Jesuits, with their international network of highly-respected schools, were a special target. In 1773, under intense pressure

from several kings and emperors, Pope Clement XIV formally "suppressed" the Society of Jesus. But the Jesuits nevertheless managed to survive in some places, such as the Russian empire of Catherine the Great.

The nineteenth century saw not only the restoration of the Jesuits—by Pope Pius VII, in 1814—but their growth in numbers and activity, including in parts of the world where they had previously had little or no presence. Massachusetts was one such place. Some two hundred years after the founding of a Jesuit college in Quebec, the College of the Holy Cross was founded in Worcester, in 1843, by Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick, S.J. (1782-1846). It was the first Jesuit school and first Catholic college in New England. Offering an education to the sons of Irish and other Catholic immigrants, Holy Cross was initially both a secondary school and a college. In the early twentieth century, all but the college was phased out, leaving the Jesuits in Worcester to focus their energies on undergraduate education. The Holy Cross curriculum was directly inspired by the *ratio studiorum* (or plan of studies), a curricular blueprint adopted by Jesuit schools from the 1590s on. It emphasized classical languages, rhetoric, and philosophy, but also made room for sciences and other disciplines.

But neither the Jesuits and Holy Cross nor the city of Worcester lived in an antiquarian bubble. The nineteenth century was an age of technological developments; photography, discovered in England and France, crossed the Atlantic. A camera club for Holy Cross students is but one example of interest in photography in nineteenth-century Worcester. As Jesuit spirituality had always had a strong visual dimension, it is no surprise to find that the camera was welcomed and appreciated on the Holy Cross campus.



The College of the Holy Cross Camera Club, about 1898



PHOTO BY PATRICK O'CONNOR

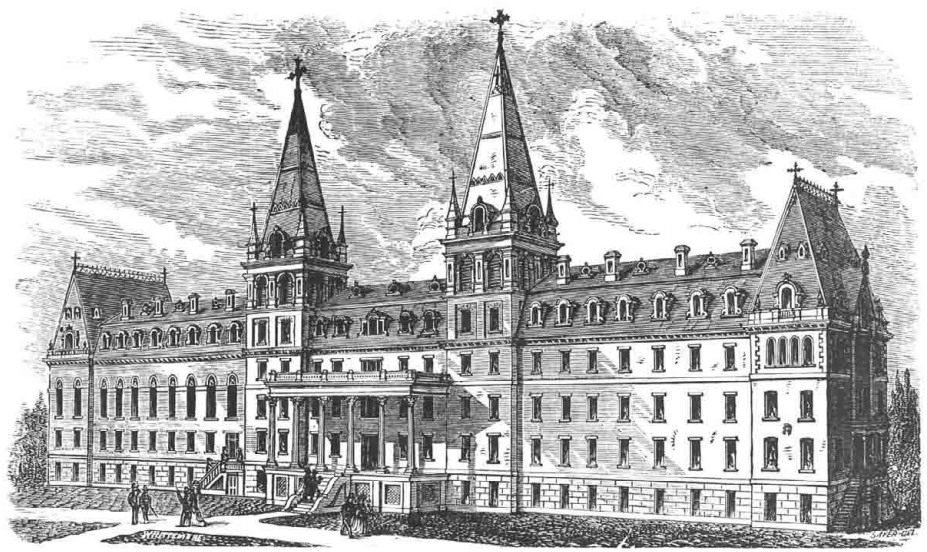
Holy Cross students tour the exhibition *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500–1800*

By the 1960s Holy Cross was moving to update itself to reflect the mainstream of American higher education, while at the same time preserving the best of the College's traditions. Jesuits on the faculty were joined by increasingly diverse colleagues, men and women. Since 1972 Holy Cross has admitted female students, making perhaps the biggest and most significant change in its history.

Visual culture has remained a strong component of a Holy Cross education. In 2005, the College of the Holy Cross collaborated with Clark University and the Worcester Art Museum in sponsoring a major exhibition, *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500–1800.* Curated by an interdisciplinary team of scholars, the exhibition stimulated reappraisal of the interaction of art, religion, illness and medicine, in past times, and in our own era.

In the seventeenth century, Daniel Seghers celebrated the education of Mary with a floral garland; much more recently, the Jesuits of Holy Cross have promoted the education of both women and men, giving them a first-rate liberal arts education, as well as opportunities to experience the spiritual heritage of Saint Ignatius and the Society of Jesus. Just as early Jesuits traveled to many parts of the world to put their talents to use, Holy Cross graduates may today be found across the globe, engaged in the widest array of professions.

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Fenwick Hall at the College of the Holy Cross, about 1870s–80s

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