



St. Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591)

The Patron Saint of caregivers and people with AIDS

As the eldest son and heir of a wealthy family in 16th century Spain, Aloysius was expected to marry well, raise a family, expand the Gonzagas' wealth and influence, and, if the opportunity arose, slaughter their enemies. Yet secretly he was planning to renounce his title and become a Jesuit priest. At age fifteen, he revealed his intentions to his parents. He gave up his inheritance and set off to become a Jesuit novitiate in Rome.

Aloysius was aggressive and unyielding, with a pronounced antagonistic streak. He brought the same ferocious energy to religious life that his ancestors had carried onto the battlefield.

Suspecting that the young nobleman needed to learn the virtues of obedience and humility, the Jesuit superior sent Aloysius to work in one of the city's hospitals. Aloysius did as he was told, but he loathed every minute of it. It took all his Gonzaga willpower to get through each day.

Aloysius had a change of heart, however. In January 1591 a terrible epidemic struck Rome. Soon the city's hospitals were overwhelmed with patients, so convents and monasteries threw open their doors. Aloysius went out every day to collect the sick and dying. He found beds for them, washed them, fed them, comforted them, and prayed with them. Sadly, his heroic service lasted only a few weeks; he himself fell victim to the epidemic and died.

In recent years, AIDS patients and their caregivers have adopted as their patron St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the man who overcame his fear of the sick and the dying and became their most kindhearted nurse.

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<http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/prayer/2008/09/seven-saints-for-healing-and-comfort.aspx?p=6#0qbUEOU9wQXkKR81.99>