

Saint Francis Xavier, 1506-1552

Born in the Castle of Xavier near Sanguesa, in Navarre, 7 April, 1506; died on the Island of Sancian near the coast of China, 2 December, 1552. In 1525, having completed a preliminary course of studies in his own country, Francis Xavier went to Paris, where he entered the Collège de Sainte-Barbe. Here he met the Savoyard, Pierre Favre, and a warm personal friendship sprang up between them. It was at this same college that St. Ignatius Loyola, who was already planning the foundation of the Society of Jesus, resided for a time as a guest in 1529. He soon won the confidence of the two young men; first Favre and later Xavier offered themselves with him in the formation of the Society. Four others, Lainez, Salmerón, Rodríguez, and Bobadilla, having joined them, the seven made the famous vow of Montmartre, 15 Aug., 1534.



After completing his studies in Paris and filling the post of teacher there for some time, Xavier left the city with his companions 15 November, 1536, and turned his steps to Venice, where he displayed zeal and charity in attending the sick in the hospitals. On 24 June, 1537, he received Holy orders with St. Ignatius. The following year he went to Rome, and after doing apostolic work there for some months, during the spring of 1539 he took part in the conferences which St. Ignatius held with his companions to prepare for the definitive foundation of the Society of Jesus. The order was approved verbally 3 September, and before the written approbation was secured, which was not until a year later, Xavier was appointed, at the earnest solicitation of John III, King of Portugal, to evangelize the people of the East Indies. He left Rome 16 March, 1540, and reached Lisbon about June. Here he remained nine months, giving many admirable examples of apostolic zeal.

On 7 April, 1541, he embarked in a sailing vessel for India, and after a tedious and dangerous voyage landed at Goa, 6 May, 1542. The first five months he spent in preaching and ministering to the sick in the hospitals. He would go through the streets ringing a little bell and inviting the children to hear the word of God. When he had gathered a number, he would take them to a certain church and would there explain the catechism to them. About October, 1542, he started for the pearl fisheries of the extreme southern

coast of the peninsula, desirous of restoring Christianity which, although introduced years before, had almost disappeared on account of the lack of priests. He devoted almost three years to the work of preaching to the people of Western India, converting many, and reaching in his journeys even the Island of Ceylon. Many were the difficulties and hardships which Xavier had to encounter at this time, sometimes on account of the cruel persecutions which some of the petty kings of the country carried on against the neophytes, and again because the Portuguese soldiers, far from seconding the work of the saint, retarded it by their bad example and vicious habits.

In the spring of 1545 Xavier started for Malacca. He laboured there for the last months of that year, and although he reaped an abundant spiritual harvest, he was not able to root out certain abuses, and was conscious that many sinners had resisted his efforts to bring them back to God. About January, 1546, Xavier left Malacca and went to Molucca Islands, where

By July, 1547, he was again in Malacca. Here he met a Japanese called Anger (Han-Sir), from whom he obtained much information about Japan. His zeal was at once aroused by the idea of introducing Christianity into Japan, but for the time being the affairs of the Society demanded his presence at Goa, whither he went, taking Anger with him. During the six years that Xavier had been working among the infidels, other Jesuit missionaries had arrived at Goa, sent from Europe by St. Ignatius; moreover some who had been born in the country had been received into the Society.

They landed at the city of Kagoshima in Japan, 15 Aug., 1549. The entire first year was devoted to learning the Japanese language and translating into Japanese, with the help of Pablo de Santa Fe, the principal articles of faith and short treatises which were to be employed in preaching and catechizing. When he was able to express himself, Xavier began preaching and made some converts, but these aroused the ill will of the bonzes, who had him banished from the city. Leaving Kagoshima about August, 1550, he penetrated to the centre of Japan, and preached the Gospel in some of the cities of southern Japan.

After working about two years and a half in Japan he left this mission in charge of Father Cosme de Torres and Brother Juan Fernández, and returned to Goa, arriving there at the beginning of 1552. Here domestic troubles

awaited him. Certain disagreements between the superior who had been left in charge of the missions, and the rector of the college, had to be adjusted. This, however, being arranged, Xavier turned his thoughts to China, and began to plan an expedition there. During his stay in Japan he had heard much of the Celestial Empire, and though he probably had not formed a proper estimate of its extent and greatness, he nevertheless understood how wide a field it afforded for the spread of the light of the Gospel. With the help of friends he arranged a commission or embassy to the Sovereign of China, obtained from the Viceroy of India the appointment of ambassador, and in April, 1552, he left Goa. At Malacca the party encountered difficulties because the influential Portuguese disapproved of the expedition, but Xavier knew how to overcome this opposition, and in the autumn he arrived in a Portuguese vessel at the small island of Sancian near the coast of China. While planning the best means for reaching the mainland, he was taken ill, and as the movement of the vessel seemed to aggravate his condition, he was removed to the land, where a rude hut had been built to shelter him. In these wretched surroundings he breathed his last.

He was canonized with St. Ignatius in 1622, although on account of the death of Gregory XV, the Bull of canonization was not published until the following year.

Miracle of Healing

Miracles of healing, however, occurred frequently in his ministry to poor villages. Once, while traveling through a pagan territory, Francis learned of a woman who had been in labor for three days and was probably near death. Midwives and sorcerers were treating her with superstitious incantations. Xavier went to the woman's home and called on the name of Christ to heal her. "I began with the Creed," he wrote to Ignatius, "which my companion translated into Tamil. By the mercy of God, the woman came to believe in the articles of faith. I asked whether she desired to become a Christian, and she replied that she would most willingly become one. Then I read excerpts from the Gospels in that house where, I think, they were never heard before. I then baptized the woman." As soon as Francis baptized the woman, she was healed and gave birth to a healthy baby.

The woman's family was so touched by this divine intervention that they invited Francis to instruct and baptize all of them, including the newborn. News then traveled quickly throughout the village. A representative of the raja, the overlord, gave the village elders clearance to allow Francis to

proclaim Christ there. "First, I baptized the chief men of the place and their families," he wrote, "and afterwards the rest of the people, young and old."

In another village, crowds besieged Francis, begging him to pray for ailing family members. Missionary and teaching duties overwhelmed him, so he enlisted some enthusiastic children to minister to the sick. He sent the children to the homes of the ill and had them gather the family and neighbors. He trained them to proclaim the creed and to assure the sick that if they believed, they would be cured. Thus, Xavier not only responded to requests for prayer, but he managed to spread Christian doctrine throughout the village. Because the sick and their families had faith, he said, "God has shown great mercy to them, healing them in both body and soul." The children of the village had become little miracle workers.

In his passion for spreading the gospel, in his simple obedience, in his humble disregard for himself, the saint was a near perfect imitation of Christ.

The miracle of crab

It is a real incident. M. G. Torres describes that when Saint Francis Xavier was navigating through the Amboino Islands, then all of a sudden a big storm had come. The sailors of the ship had lost the control of the ship. Then the saint prayed to God and in this process, a big wave has come and took him cross with him. After his prayers, the storm became quiet. Everyone on the ship was happy except the saint as he was sad on the loss of his cross. The next day, when they arrived on the land, Saint Francis was taking walk on the seaside and there was a miracle of the God, as a crab was coming with the same cross. The creature returned the cross to the saint and again went back in the water.

The divine help in many languages

In the play, a rare miracle has been also associated with the saint. When the holy saint is in the Japanese palace, he is unhappy that he can only predicate in Spanish. Then he asks for the divine help and God sends him four persons, who can translate the message of the saint in four languages, i.e. indio (Hindi), Japanese, Portuguese and in the Chinese language. From four clouds, came different interpreter. The saint predicates and each character

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understand and then translates in the local language. Everyone is surprised by this miracle. There are written evidence that when the saint predicated in Travancore, he used to predicate in the language which he never learnt or knew. His eloquence in the Indian languages was perfect.