

DAY 1 | Thursday, March 7

Tradition says that the Novena began when Francis Xavier appeared to a priest in a healing vision and promised that all who would ask his intercession with God for nine days would experience profound grace. Today we carry on that tradition, continuing to pray for nine days, asking for God's grace through the intercession of Francis Xavier.

The theme of this year's Novena is "I Am the Beloved!"

Beloved is the core of our being, and our hope stems from that truth.

We pray for a humble spirit that keeps us grounded in the love of God. We yearn for healing, hope, and renewal for our hearts and minds... to be freed from old ways, old hurts, old images of God... and to be closer to God in this journey we all walk together - as one community, reflecting our divine kaleidoscope of identities, stories, hopes, and desires.

Each day of this Novena we will learn more about the story of Francis Xavier, an ancestor in faith and a companion for our journey over these nine days of prayer, and throughout our lives. Through the intercession of Francis Xavier, may God's blessing pour out abundantly into our lives and our world.

Over 475 years ago, Francis Xavier walked the paths and roads of Asia ringing a bell. Francis rang the bell to call people together for learning, prayer, healing, and conversion. So, too, during this Novena of Grace, we will be called together with a bell, because we also gather for prayer, for healing, and for conversion.

As we begin our journey through these nine days of our Novena, let us befriend our companion, Francis Xavier. A fellow Jesuit who knew him described Francis in these words:

“I have never met anyone more filled with faith and hope, more open-minded than Francis. He never seems to lose his great joy and enthusiasm. He talks to both the good and the bad. Anything he is asked to do, Francis does willingly, simply because he loves everyone.”

(Pause)

Today, and each day, we join St. Francis Xavier on his journey, and together, **we pray for the grace to claim our identity as the Beloved people of God.**

DAY 2 | Friday, March 8

Francis Xavier was born in 1506, in Navarre, Spain, the fifth and youngest child of a large noble Basque family.

His early education was at home, but at the age of nineteen, Francis set off for Paris where he began his university studies. While at the university in Paris, Francis roomed with Peter Favre. Both Francis and his roommate, Peter, were more interested in making a successful career than they were in religious life or questions of faith.

When Ignatius of Loyola came to the University of Paris and became a third roommate to these two, Ignatius quickly won over Peter Favre. And during a period when Peter Favre was absent for a time, Ignatius and Francis finally had opportunities to talk more at length about faith. Their conversation proved very fruitful.

Tradition has it that Ignatius put this question to Francis:
“What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

With this question, Francis finally yielded to the grace God was offering him. He gave up an ecclesiastical career, which promised importance and status, for a life poor as the life of Jesus --- the life of a wandering missionary who welcomed all he met with the love of God.

(Pause)



Novena of Grace 2024

I Am the Beloved!

LIFE AND VOICE OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

Today, and each day, we join St. Francis Xavier on his journey, and together, **we pray for the grace to embody a deep intimacy of knowing and loving God with all our hearts.**

DAY 3 | Saturday, March 9

And now once again, we begin our time together with sharing something about the way Francis Xavier lived his life in prayerful conversation with God.

In 1540, Ignatius and Francis Xavier were living in Rome with two other members of the Society of Jesus. It was there that Francis was given his mission to travel to Asia.

It happened like this: The King of Portugal asked for two Jesuits to be sent to Goa, India, which was a Portuguese colony. Two were selected, but at the last minute (literally, the night before), one of the men who was supposed to go fell sick and could not travel. Desperate, Ignatius called Francis to his office, wanting to talk with him about the situation.

At this time, there were only 10 Jesuits in the entire world, and all of them were occupied with other missions. All except Francis. So, trusting in God and in his Jesuit brother Ignatius, Francis agreed to go to India.

He was aware that he might never see Europe and his dear friends again, and he also knew that about half of all ocean travelers at that time died at sea. Nevertheless, Francis Xavier said “yes” when Ignatius asked him to go on mission to India. He left for Lisbon the next day, March 15; 484 years ago. He was 34 years old.

In a later letter to a fellow Jesuit, Francis shared his prayer to listen and follow God’s will in this way:

"I am telling you this because I am not as yet certain about my own future. May God our Lord grant us in time the gift to perceive his holy will. He wishes that we should always be ready to fulfill it whenever he manifests it to us and lets us feel it within our souls. To fare well in this life, we must be pilgrims ready to go wherever we can serve God our Lord the more."

(Pause)

Each day of the Novena, we pray for a grace for our journey. Today, **we pray for the grace to be rooted in humility and the love of a righteous God.**

DAY 4 | Sunday, March 10

Francis Xavier, like Ignatius, was a Basque from a noble family. Francis ambioned early on in life to two things: to prove that his family was descended from the kings and queens of Navarre, and to acquire a high-ranking post in the Church.

After he met Ignatius, he found himself being led to other possibilities. Through conversation with Ignatius and the gift of discernment that unfolded as he made the *Spiritual Exercises*, Francis gradually opened himself to becoming a follower of Jesus and a companion of Ignatius.

Throughout his life as a Jesuit, Francis Xavier continued to manifest this gift for discernment, listening to the whisperings of Christ's Spirit and following that Spirit wherever it led – first, to Goa at Ignatius' invitation; then to the pearl divers of Paravas and inland to other villages of India; later to Japan; and finally to Sancian Island in an attempt to reach mainland China.

Although Francis and Ignatius never met again, they continued their faith conversations through frequent letters. For Francis, who journeyed far from all that was familiar, these letters from Ignatius were a spiritual lifeline. They kept him informed about the ways the Spirit was at work in the still young Society of Jesus. And Francis's letters served to unite Francis with other Jesuits working in India in common mission.

The prayerful bond shared by these friends in the Society brought Francis Xavier many consolations while he travelled far from those he loved. He would even cut out from each letter he received the name of each Jesuit written in their own writing, and carry these names with him always, so he had a sense of his

companions in faith.

He wrote:

"I ask... that you be particularly mindful of me and continuously commend me to God, since I live in such great need of his favor and assistance. I have great need of your continual spiritual assistance, for from much experience I have come to know that God our Lord has, through your intercessions, helped and assisted me in many toils of body and spirit."

(Pause)

Each day of the Novena, we pray for a grace.

Today, we pray for the grace to see with the eyes of our hearts in order to encounter others as Beloved.

DAY 5 | Monday, March 11

As we begin this day of the Novena, we do so honoring the anniversary of the canonizations of Saints Francis Xavier and Ignatius of Loyola.

One of the hallmarks of Francis' life was his compassion and love for those he met on his travels, particularly the poor and the sick. Not content simply to preach the Word of God and baptize people, Francis Xavier spent parts of almost every day nursing those who were ill in the hospitals of the towns through which he traveled or on the ships at the ports where his own ship docked.

His biographers relate story after story about Francis going into the holds of the ships on which he traveled to tend to those who were ill and dying, of sharing with the sick the food from his own table, and of even giving them his own bed and sleeping on the floor until they were well again.

Each day, with great delight, Francis preached the Word, taught catechism, and baptized people during the day. He spent his nights in the hospitals, ships, and villages caring for people.

Francis showed forth the mercy of Christ, moving from caring and companionship to conversion with all those whom he met. Francis wrote to his Jesuit brothers in Goa from Kagoshima, Japan:

"I thus am coming to a close without being able to stop writing about the great love which I have for you all as individuals and in general. If the hearts of those who love each other in Christ

could be seen in this present life, believe me, my dearest brothers, that you would see yourselves clearly in mine.”

(Pause)

Each day of the Novena, we pray for a grace.

Today, we pray for the grace to trust that the goodness God has created and is still being created today.

DAY 6 | Tuesday, March 12

Francis Xavier was not particularly good at learning languages. Nevertheless, he attempted to learn something in the languages of the people to whom he ministered and preached. He mentions in a letter to Ignatius that it took him 40 days to learn the 10 Commandments in Japanese!

In Japan, some of those who heard Francis said: “We did not understand a single word that Francis said, but his demeanor was so filled with light and joy and love that we were converted simply by his presence.”

This seems to have been the story wherever Francis went — among the Indian people of Goa, among the pearl divers of Paravas, among the outcasts in various villages, among the crews on the ships on which Francis sailed, among the Japanese — Francis carried within him a light that drew people to the mercy and love of Jesus. With all whom Francis met, his actions and his presence spoke louder, or at least better, than his words.

(Pause)

Each day of the Novena, we pray for a grace.

Today, we pray for the grace to go beyond our comfort zone and embrace others through interdependence.

DAY 7 | Wednesday, March 13

Each day of this Novena we have been becoming more acquainted with the life of St. Francis Xavier, as we have been making this nine-day retreat asking for his intercession.

With today's world view and understanding, we can see Francis as intolerant of the value of other spiritual traditions and religions. Francis' mission was to convert those who had not heard of Jesus to Christianity, and he cooperated with colonial European rulers of India to achieve his goals.

We acknowledge the times were different. Today, his methods would be troubling. And, we can also recognize that Francis was someone who, in loving God, deeply loved his neighbor, and desired for every person to come to know and love God. This allowed him to plant the seeds of a faith which proclaimed that **all human beings** were worthy of God's love. In his era, and through the centuries, this was revolutionary, even beyond Francis Xavier's own imagination.

Francis worked tirelessly to translate prayers and the creed into the native languages of the people he met and taught them they were all made in the image and likeness of God.

One excerpt from a Catechism he translated for the people of Goa, India says:

*"O my God, almighty and merciful Father, creator of all things of the world: I firmly believe in you, my God and Lord, since you are my entire good. You, Lord, created me and you have given me body and soul and all that I have. **And you, my God, have made me in your likeness.** Thanks be to God!"*

Today, decades after the end of colonial rule, the people of Goa revere and celebrate Francis Xavier and the powerful legacy of faith – rooted in relationship with God – which he left behind with the Goans he encountered, and their descendants.

(Pause)

Each day of the Novena, we ask for a grace.

Today, we pray for the grace to accept ourselves with compassion as Beloved.

DAY 8 | Thursday, March 14

Welcome to Day 8 and the penultimate day of our Novena.

Stories which accompanied Francis Xavier throughout his missionary journeys tell of the many hours he spent in prayer each night, after long exhausting days preaching and baptizing.

Over and over, his companions mentioned that they would wake up in the middle of the night to see Francis kneeling in prayer, talking with God.

It seems clear that his life was solidly anchored in God's spirit through prayer and contemplation. Perhaps it was this consistent and profound contact with God that allowed Francis to trust so wholeheartedly in God's presence with him at all times during his ministry. This literally gave Francis the strength and courage to continue on in sometimes difficult circumstances. And it was also this prayerful, consistent time with God which allowed Francis to be connected deeply with his sisters and brothers in foreign lands.

He wrote to his Jesuit brother Simon Rodrigues in Portugal from Cochin, or Kochi, India in 1549:

"... there is no greater consolation in this troubled life than to live in the midst of great perils of death, all directly encountered for the sole love and service of God our Lord and the increase of our holy faith. One finds more peace among these trials that he would if he were living apart from them. May God our Lord unite us in his holy glory!"

Francis Xavier modeled the idea that God working through us can do much more than we, on our own, could ever hope to accomplish.

(Pause)

Each day of the Novena, we pray for a grace.

Today, we pray for the grace to know that God calls us each by name.

DAY 9 | Wednesday, March 16

One final story about Francis Xavier:

Francis died on an island just off the shores of mainland China. He died far from his Jesuit brothers and from his good friend Ignatius; and he was ministered to by a native man from the area. No one else was there.

Francis had failed in his last missionary goal — to reach China. So, Francis died with a small cross made from branches near his bed. And it is reported that he died saying the “Glory Be” prayer.

Just as Francis died not completing his mission as he understood it, we might wonder at times when we face failures in our lives. We might ask when we have followed faithfully God’s call with great hope, why we might find ourselves frustrated and stopped by the human problems and structures of our times.

When this happens, we might look to Francis Xavier, who continued to place his hope in God, even at the moment of his death.

(Pause)

Today, on this final day of the Novena, we pray for the grace of courage to find and use our prophetic voices as truth-tellers.