

The Great Evangelizer

December 3, 2020

Born in 1506 in Navarre, Spain, Francis Xavier was the youngest son of a wealthy state official. Although his brothers joined the army, Francis studied law and theology at the University of Paris, where he also met St. Ignatius of Loyola, the eventual founder of the Jesuits. Ignatius shared with Francis a dream of creating a group of men wholly devoted to the salvation of souls. On August 15, 1534, along with Francis and five others, Ignatius launched the community. The men took vows of lifelong poverty and service to the Pope. Six years later, those vows were invoked when King John III of Portugal petitioned the Pope to send missionaries to the East.

The Pope assented and chose Francis to lead the effort. After just two days' notice, the young Jesuit sailed from Lisbon to Goa, the capital of the Portuguese Indies, where he began his missionary work preaching to pearl fishermen. After two years of successful evangelization, he sailed to other regions, preaching and baptizing at an astounding rate. Records attribute more than 700,000 conversions to the tireless missionary:

In spite of constant weariness and sickness, Francis sailed across Asia, baptizing and evangelizing. He went from India, to Malaysia, to Sri Lanka. On August 15, 1549, fifteen years to the day after his initial vows, Francis landed in Japan, becoming the first Catholic missionary to enter that country. He preached to the natives there and when they told him about China, he wanted to head there too. Unfortunately, Francis fell ill and died on December 3, 1552, a few miles off the Chinese coast.

There is a verse from today's first reading which captures vividly the attitude of our Saint -

*Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—
in peace because they trust in you.
Trust in the LORD forever,
for in the LORD GOD
you have an everlasting rock.¹*

St Francis' confidence in the goodness and graciousness of God was unflappable because he was of steadfast mind. He understood that the rock is Jesus the Lord and that his work was to introduce people to Jesus. For it is when Jesus' words are heard, understood and lived out that our lives are established on the everlasting rock.

Every person will in one way or another experience the misfortunes that are part of life – the rains, floods and winds – St Francis did. However when our lives are founded on the word of God as contained in Holy Scripture and taught by the Church, we will be able to weather these storms with trusting confidence because our steadfast minds are kept in peace.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 26:3–4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

St. Francis Xavier's remarkable life models the "new ardor" required by the New Evangelization. His unshakeable zeal, triggered by the Holy Spirit, carried him through vast lands and tiresome travels. He never let difficulties overcome his zeal. He resolved to introduce people to the Risen Lord no matter what it took.

Today, on his feast day, we can let St. Francis' example inspire us to overcome our own obstacles to evangelization. We can ask, what's stopping me from sharing my faith more often? How can I overcome the fear, difficulty, or hesitancy that often bubbles up when thinking about evangelization? By imploring the intercession of St. Francis, and invoking the same Holy Spirit which fueled his success, we too can participate in the epic missionary adventure.²

² <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/the-most-effective-evangelist-in-history/18945/>