

# SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

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## St Francis Xavier

The ancestral castle of the family Xavier lay in the Kingdom of Navarre which, in the early sixteenth century straddled the Pyrenees. It was, therefore, partly in modern day France, partly in Spain; and war broke out between the kings of those two countries for the possession of Navarre.

The family of Xavier supported the King of France, and Juan and Miguel Xavier went off to fight for him. France was defeated; and the King of Spain decreed that the Xavier brothers, when captured, were to be put to death. Juan and Miguel refused to surrender, and holed up in a small fortress, named Fuentarabia, where they held out for four years. Finally the king and they reached an agreement: the brothers' lives would be spared but the greater part of the family's possessions were forfeited to the king, and the fortifications of Xavier castle were thrown down.

### The Young Francis

When his brothers came home from the war, therefore, Francis Xavier found himself now aged fifteen, the sixth and youngest child in a family in disgrace with its King, quite poorly off, and with no prospects for the future. How was he to make his way in the world?

Francis was born on 7 April 1506. Both his parents were excellent Catholics, his eldest sister was a nun in a nearby convent, and an uncle was a well thought of theologian in the city of Pamplona. Every morning the whole household of family and servants assembled for Mass in the castle chapel, and, in the evening, for prayers.

Francis himself was a bright, cheerful youth who had no difficulty in charming everyone into liking him. He was also very ambitious. Having seen what being a soldier could mean if one were on the losing side, he gave no thought to the army when it came to choosing a career. He asked his uncle Michael for advice. His uncle suggested a career at some university. Francis was, uncle thought, clever enough, and his personality was sure to win him influential friends. He might, in time, gain fame and wealth enough to satisfy even his ambitions.

Francis took the advice and set off to enrol at the university of Paris. He was now nineteen and, except for money had everything: he was both good-natured and handsome; he was a good athlete; and, a good student himself, was always ready to help others with their study problems. There was every reason why he should be popular and he was - too popular for his own good.

### The Undergraduate

Two kinds of people wanted Francis as a friend. The first wanted him, a nobleman of Navarre, as an added

touch of glamour to their 'good times'. The second were the followers of Martin Luther, for whom it would be quite a triumph if they could convince a Xavier that he should become a Protestant. For a while Francis went along with the wild bunch who were out after a good time. They drank too much, brawled too much, gambled too much. Easy-going himself, Francis did not mind being in their company. The only thing that worried him was that their revels took him away from his studies in which he was determined he would excel. The parting of their ways, however, came when they tried to persuade him to take up with, as they did, the immoral women of the city. Unchastity had no attraction for Francis.

For a time, also, Francis was happy with the flattering company of the Lutheran Protestants. After all, if his future was to be in the universities of Europe, the more he knew about what was going on in the world of ideas, and in the Church, the better for him. The parting of the ways for Francis and this group came about with more difficulty than with the other.

Francis shared a room with two other undergraduates. One was a shepherd boy from Savoy named Peter Favre. (Born within a week of Francis, the Blessed Peter Favre was destined to become the first priest in the Society of Jesus and to die even younger than Xavier in 1546.) Francis liked Peter. Everyone did. Peter eventually came to feel uneasy at the fact that in all his life he had never known what it was to have an enemy. The other undergraduate was a fellow countryman of Francis and, like him, a nobleman. For him, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis did not much care. He was, Francis thought, a disgrace to the nobility of Spain, for, in the vacations, he went on begging tours (as far afield as London) to beg enough money to keep himself at the university. Besides, he limped; and if he was still a student at the age of thirty-six, he could not be very bright. Still Xavier had to admit that Loyola was not all that bad. He would listen sympathetically when Francis wanted an ear into which to pour his dreams and ambitions. More practically, he furthered those ambitions by persuading others to make Francis their tutor. This made his name known, and provided a much needed bit of income.

Ignatius took it upon himself to warn the young Francis about the company he was keeping. Francis resented having his choice of friends criticized. Ignatius probably expected this, but the real risk he was taking was that Francis would obstinately attach himself all the more closely to his Protestant acquaintances. Francis, however, was not an obstinate man and he loved his Catholic faith. He saw that Ignatius was right and he was too generous to harbour resentment. Later, when people tried to turn Francis' brother against Ignatius, Francis wrote to him.

I assure you upon my honour that never in my life will I be able to repay my debt to him both for helping me many times with money and with friends, and for having caused me to separate myself from evil companions whose character I, in my inexperience, did not recognize. I beg you, therefore, to give him such welcome as you would give to me myself.

### **The First Jesuits**

By the time Francis came to write those words he had completely and willingly surrendered himself to the influence of Ignatius. On his part, Ignatius had seen from the start that Francis had the makings of a great man and he had set out to win him to a plan he had devised. Ignatius wanted to get together a band of men who would live in poverty and whose ambition was nothing except to go to the Holy Land and win the Moslems there to the knowledge and love of Christ our Lord.

For a long time Francis had resisted. His family's name and income would rise only if he rose in the world. Besides, he was a true Catholic and would use his gifts and any position of authority he might hold to defend the Church. To make his position clear to Ignatius, Francis applied to the King of Spain for a 'Patent of Nobility' which would help his ambitions along - for he had just obtained his first teaching position at the university. This was in 1531. The two men had first met in 1529. However, by the time the patent arrived in

1536, Francis had long lost interest in it; for, at the end of 1533, he had made the decision to join Ignatius in following Christ our Lord in poverty and labour.

Meanwhile, Ignatius had won Peter Favre and some others to join him in his plans. On the feast of Our Lady's Assumption, 15 August 1534, the seven friends went to a small chapel in Montmartre. There the only priest among them, Favre, celebrated Mass. Before receiving Communion, each of the seven took a vow of chastity and of poverty, and vowed, too, to attempt to make Christians of the Moslems in the Holy Land. If, for any reason, they could not get to the Holy Land, they would go to Rome and offer themselves to the Pope for whatever work he wanted them to do.

### **Francis in Europe**

In those days, it was from Venice that ships sailed for the Holy Land. From Paris, the friends set out to walk to Venice. It was winter, and the Alps would have to be crossed. The countryside through which they had to pass was, at that time, the battlefield of a war between French and Spanish armies. Undaunted, the companions pressed on, begging their food as they went. At night, if they happened to be in a town, they would go to the hospital to sleep - but only after they had washed and fed the patients, dressed their wounds, and made them comfortable for the night. It sounds all quite normal. However, in the sixteenth century, 'hospitals' were little more than places to which the poorest of the poor dragged themselves when sick - generally to die there unattended. They were places of horror and filth and unimaginable human misery and suffering.

When they reached Venice the companions worked in the hospitals there (Francis in the hospital for incurables) while at the same time they prepared themselves for their ordination as priests. Francis was ordained in June 1537 and, after preparing himself by prayer for some weeks, celebrated his first Mass in July. After his ordination, Francis went to Bologna. The Bolognese came to love the Spaniard; and Bologna became the first city to elect Francis, once he was canonized, its Patron Saint. The priest at whose house Francis lodged (but would not eat - he begged for his own food) later wrote of his guest:

He was a man slow to speak but whose words, when he did speak, went straight to people's hearts. At Mass, and particularly if it was a Mass of the Passion of Christ, he wept abundant tears. One Friday while saying Mass in the Church of Saint Lucy, he was rapt out of himself for more than an hour at the Memento [the 'I remember Christ, His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension,' prayer that immediately follows the Consecration], though the server tried hard to rouse him by tugging at his vestments. After Mass he would spend the entire day hearing confessions, visiting the sick in the hospitals and prisoners in the gaols, serving the poor, preaching in the city squares, and teaching children or other uninstructed persons Christian doctrine. Though very ill all the while, he never omitted his early morning prayer or his Mass or any of his daily avocations.

Francis worked so hard in this city that he was soon near death through exhaustion. Learning of Francis' illness, Ignatius called him to Rome. It was towards the end of 1538 and the doctors gave Francis two months to live. He recovered, however, and for the next two years he acted as secretary to Ignatius - an arrangement Ignatius had always wanted and hoped would be permanent. However, in 1540, Ignatius had to farewell his young friend forever, for circumstances compelled him to send Francis to India.

### **To The East**

In the time of Francis Xavier, tiny Portugal had created for itself a vast empire in India and the East. The heart of this empire was Goa - called Goa the Golden - on the central west coast of India. With few exceptions, the Portuguese who went to the East to make their fortunes soon gave up the practice of their

Faith even though they built Churches which were more magnificent than most in Europe. To the Indians, whom they made virtual slaves, they were the worst possible advertisement for Christianity.

To help improve matters, King John III of Portugal asked Ignatius to send some of his Jesuits to Goa. Ignatius chose two. Almost immediately, one fell dangerously ill, and Ignatius had to send Francis. It took Francis three months to get from Rome to Lisbon, the capital and chief port of Portugal. As he went he preached, taught and served the sick in the hospitals as usual. Having got to Lisbon he was delayed there for nearly a year, spending the time in preaching and teaching. The time came to sail. Suddenly, the King decided he did not want to lose Francis' companion; Xavier would have to go alone. In a way, Francis would be 'alone' for the rest of his life. He would never see any of his old friends again; he would meet hardly a person in any position of authority in the East who shared his ambition of bringing the East to Christ; he would die the loneliest of deaths.

Francis knew that to be alone until death would be his fate. On the point of leaving Lisbon, he wrote to the Jesuits in Rome:

You will not be able to write more than once a year. But when you do write, give me news of everybody by name. Make your letters so long that I shall have a week's reading in each. Tell me every scrap of news. And, above all, pray that we all may meet again in heaven.

When their letters did arrive, Francis would cut the signatures from them and wear his friends' names in a little pouch which rested against that most affectionate of hearts.

Nevertheless, it was with unbounded joy that Francis looked to the East. How many men, he asked, had ever been given such a chance to bring so many people to know and love Our Lord? The India fleet sailed from Lisbon on Francis' thirty-fifth birthday. It arrived in Goa thirteen months later. Ahead of him lay just ten years of life - ten years of incredible missionary effort, of voyaging, of hardships and dangers, of heroic failures and striking successes.

### **The Church's Mission**

The missionary activity of the Church (so Vatican II tells us in a Decree on that subject) stems from a two-fold source - from her being 'the universal sacrament of salvation' and from her divine founder's command to preach the Good News to every creature. Thus,

what was once preached by the Lord, or what was once wrought in him for the saving of the human race, must be proclaimed and spread abroad to the ends of the earth. . . Thus, what he once accomplished for the salvation of all may, in the course of time, come to achieve its effect in all.

Since Christ Our Lord spoke the word, 'Go',

the duty has weighed upon the Church to spread the faith and the saving work of Christ. . . The term 'missions' is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel are sent out by the Church and go forth into the whole world to carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ.

Generally speaking (as this Decree of Vatican II points out) such missionary activity proceeds by phases.

First, there is the living witness given by the missionaries themselves to the Faith which lives in them and directs their lives and activity. Next comes the preaching of the Gospel and the gathering together of a People of God. Finally, there is the formation of this People into a Christian community which, in time, will grow into a Particular Church,

mirroring as perfectly as possible the Universal Church, and itself 'missionary' in respect of those who are living in the same territory and who do not yet believe in Christ.

### **The Missionary**

Missionaries are they whom the Church sends to achieve these goals; and while acknowledging that all that is required in an ideal missionary 'can in reality, scarcely be met in individual missionaries', the Council nevertheless sketches the character of the ideal 'herald of the Gospel'. The description could have been written from the life of Francis Xavier:

(The missionary) must be ready to take initiatives, constant in the execution of projects, persevering in difficulties, patient and strong of heart in bearing with solitude, fatigue, and fruitless labour. He must bring an open mind and heart to men, and gladly shoulder the duties entrusted to him. He needs a noble spirit for adapting himself to strange customs and changing circumstances. He needs a sympathetic mind and a responsive heart for co-operating with his brethren and with all who dedicate themselves to a common task. Thus, together with the faithful, missionaries will be of one heart and mind, in imitation of the apostolic community.

The above description of the ideal missionary is prefaced by the remark that special training is necessary for missionaries. Xavier, of course, had none. Nor, for a time, did he believe it necessary.

His knowledge, for example, of Islam and the great religious traditions of the East was of the slightest, nor did he show much sympathy for them (though he would have willingly held every adherent of those religions in his heart) and he set no great store by learning. He wrote back to Europe:

In these heathen places, the only education necessary is to be able to teach the prayers and to go about baptizing little ones. . .

and insisted that priests for whom no job could be found in Europe could do great work for God in India.

It was in the face of an appalling lack of priests in regions so limitless that Xavier thus wrote. In time - having learned from his own heroic and never very successful attempts to learn the languages of the East and his experiences of the importance attached to their traditional cultures by the peoples of the East - Francis came to insist that only 'learned' men be sent to those regions. Thus he as it were justified in advance the daring and innovative missionary styles of men such as de Nobili and Ricci.

### **A Voyage to India**

In the sixteenth century a voyage to India was fraught with hardships and dangers. Passengers in their hundreds (with Francis, some seven hundred men embarked on the *Santiago*) crowded on board the ships which, for accommodation, provided them with little more than standing room on deck where they were exposed to the burning heat of the sun in the tropics and the perishing cold of the lower latitudes. Most had only the clothes in which they embarked and these were soon reduced to evil-smelling rags. Salt meat and fish comprised the staple diet, and what little water they had soon became so foul and worm-infected that it

had to be drunk through a cloth covering the mouth. Disease of every description was commonly rampant and it often happened that the majority of the passengers died (anything up to four hundred on a single ship) before India was reached. Less constant hazards were the pirates off the Azores, the prolonged periods of stifling in the doldrums off the Guinea coast, the storms met with in rounding the Cape of Good Hope, and the uncharted shoals and reefs which littered the sea-way.

On this voyage (as he would on every voyage he ever made) Francis gave himself completely to nursing the sick and assisting the dying, to giving catechetical instructions, to preaching, to hearing confessions. The ship's surgeon on the *Santiago* later testified:

I came out from Portugal on the same ship as Father Francis and often watched him at his charitable occupations and while he taught Christian doctrine. He used to beg alms from other passengers for the poor and sick persons. He took personal charge of such as were ailing or prostrated by illness. From this work of mercy and from his hearing of confessions he allowed himself never a moment's respite but cheerfully accomplished it all. Everybody held him to be a saint, and that was my fixed opinion.

All this was accomplished in the course of a voyage of which Francis himself wrote:

As for myself, the hardships of the voyage were of such a kind that (but that the voyage was undertaken for God) otherwise I would not, for the whole world, have faced them for a single day.

These words occur in the first letter Francis sent back to Europe. It was written on New Year's Day, 1542, from Mozambique on the east coast of Africa, where the travellers had arrived in August. All told, they were there for six months during which time (so the above-mentioned witness continues)

the Father gave himself so completely to the service of those who were taken from the five ships already ill and to those who fell ill afterwards . . . that only forty or forty-one of the sufferers died. Everybody regarded this as a marvellous thing; indeed, as a real miracle due, under God, to the devotedness and goodness of the Father. He himself fell ill in consequence of his crushing labours, and I took him to my lodging to care for him. So bad did he become that I had to bleed him nine times, and for three whole days he was out of his senses. I noticed that while in delirium he raved unintelligibly about other things, but in speaking of the things of God was perfectly lucid and coherent. As soon as he was convalescent, he resumed his former labours with all his old enthusiasm.

Even when he himself was hospitalized with fever, Francis was at work. Another witness testified how, having urged Francis, who was then very ill, to moderate his activities, he was told, 'Tonight I have a little business to do with a poor fellow who is at death's door and astray in his mind. When I have finished that business I will relax.' The witness continued:

Next morning I went to the hospital again and visited the Father in the cell which he occupied. I found the sailor lying in his bed, an affair made out of thongs with nothing over them but a scrap of old cloth and a pillow.

Up against the bed was a piece of wood taken from a gun-carriage, and on this the Father himself lay, conversing with the sailor who had completely recovered his senses as soon as he was put

into the bed. He died that evening after making his confession and receiving holy Viaticum, and his good end caused the Father great happiness. Indeed, he always looked happy no matter what his sufferings and burdens.

To all to whom he came, Xavier came (in Professor Manning Clark's felicitous words) 'as a most loving brother, wholly in Christ', and this his heart's disposition was evidently habitually reflected in his expression. One of his co-workers, **Manuel de Morais** (whom Francis dismissed from the Society, for all that, he had demonstrated great heroism in his apostolate, having been sold into slavery to the Moslems) testified that 'merely to look at him (Francis) made one feel a happier and better man'.

In February 1542, the newly-appointed Governor of Portuguese India decided to tarry in Mozambique no longer himself and yet would not face the rest of the voyage to India without the company of Francis. Xavier was, therefore, compelled to embark with the Governor on the *Coulam*, a ship newly arrived from India. They set sail in the teeth of the monsoon, hugging the African coast as far as the Gulf of Aden, stopping only briefly at Malindi in present-day Kenya and at the island of Socotra at the mouth of the Gulf.

Malindi was a Moslem stronghold, and a world beyond Xavier's comprehension. However, on poverty-stricken Socotra he found that the natives there claimed to be Christians, descendants of the original converts of St Thomas the Apostle. They had churches in which, four times a day, prayers were recited in a language which the worshippers did not understand; but they had, also, no knowledge of Baptism. Francis was welcomed with great good will and he baptized a large number of children. His request to be allowed to remain on Socotra was refused by Governor de Sousa, and they sailed on to Goa on the central west coast of India where they arrived on 6 May 1542.

### Goa The Golden

At Goa, Francis immediately made the hospital his home and from there engaged in such a deal of activity that he himself admitted that could he have been simultaneously in ten different places he would have been fully occupied in each. The governor of the hospital marvelled at Francis' habit of taking his brief night's rest lying on the floor by the bed of the man most dangerously ill so as to be able to help the poor fellow at a moment's notice'.

So Francis began his work among the Portuguese. Perhaps the biggest single problem was that so many of them were living with women who mothered their children but whom they would not marry because they were Indian. This meant that they were excluded from the Sacraments; and from this exclusion there followed a general carelessness about religion. Francis set out to remedy the evil. His charm, his gentleness, his endless patience, his evident love for the children of these unions made the Portuguese only too happy to have him in their houses and, what is more important, to listen to him as he gently urged them to mend their ways. Many did. Some even said that it seemed as if God spoke to them through Francis.

Even those who were unwilling to go that far agreed that Francis was a saint. It was seen, too, that Francis looked for nothing for himself. Everything he was given he gave away; and what little he had was of the poorest quality. There was a standard joke among the colonists - that the Father's cloak was so patched that it could be used as a chessboard. Perhaps Francis tired of hearing the joke; perhaps he wished to make a better one. The time came when, someone having made the remark about his cloak to him, Francis promptly asked him for the price of a new one. Delighted, he immediately did so. Francis gave the money to some beggars and continued to wear the same old cloak.

Francis did not simply charm or talk the Portuguese of Goa into leading better lives. He also prayed them into it. After a day's work, he would spend some hours of the night in prayer, and to prayer he added frequent penances. And now, having done for the Portuguese all that he felt he could for the present, Francis began to look further afield, with the result that in the course of a handful of years he would be twice shipwrecked -

once floating on a plank in the sea for three days, would say Mass on a volcanic island during an earthquake so violent that he thought the altar would collapse, would travel thousands of leagues of perilous waters in frail native craft, would be constantly threatened with violence and with death by poison and the knife, would still storms at sea, cure the sick and, even, raise a dead child to life. Above all, he would bring the Faith to many and many back to the Faith.

### **The Fishery Coast**

The first to whom Francis took himself were the Paravas. Numbering about thirty thousand they lived in some thirty villages scattered along the coast for about 225 km beginning at Cape Comorin (almost the southern most tip of India, nearly 1500 km from Goa) to Tuticorin on the East Coast. Christianity was not unknown to them. About a decade before Xavier's arrival some priests from Goa (quite ignorant of Tamil, the Paravas' language) had arrived from Goa, had preached to and baptized many, and then abandoned them. Xavier went accompanied by interpreters who spoke both Portuguese and Tamil.

The Paravas were pearl-fishers - a romantic sounding occupation and bringing with it thoughts of a simple, carefree way of life on the shores of tropic seas. For the Paravas on the fishery coast it was, in fact, a kind of hell on earth. They were simply the slaves of their chiefs. The chiefs got all the pearls; the tribesmen did not even receive payment for risking their lives to gather them. What time they could call their own they spent fishing and wringing sparse crops from the barren soil, and they lived in wretched huts on the beaches.

Sometimes, not even the Paravas' chiefs got the pearls. Sudden raids by pirates would see to that. If Francis were there when the pirates arrived, he would simply go out to meet them and, holding up his crucifix, command them to leave. And they did. No wonder that stories grew up about that crucifix. One story told how Francis, making a journey by sea, lost it overboard. Some days later, as he was walking on the sea-shore, a crab approached him carrying his crucifix in his claws and presented it to him. When told about Francis such stories were easily believed.

The Paravas, then, were the first to whom Francis came. Working at first through interpreters (later he would dispense with them) Francis taught them the Faith. He translated the Creed and the commonest of Catholic prayers into their tongue and made up little songs for them to sing. In a few months he decided that they were ready for Baptism and he himself baptized ten thousand souls. Today, all their descendants are still Catholics.

Thenceforth the Paravas held a special place in Francis's heart. He himself visited them frequently - of the ten years he lived in the East, two were devoted to them; he sent other priests to them; and, even from Japan, he pursued their interests by letter. A priest companion of Xavier, Francis Mansilhas (to whom, in his letters, Francis opened his heart as to no other) later testified:

I knew Father Francis in Portugal and I went about with him for six or seven years on the Fishery Coast. No human being could have done what he did or have lived as he lived,

(in that appalling climate Francis subsisted on rice and made do with two or three hours sleep per night)

without being full of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, his life was more that of a saint and angel than of a man. Many a time, out of his love for God and our holy faith, he offered himself to martyrdom in the midst of his incessant labours and sufferings . . . if he could find time in the night, as he never could during the day, he gave himself completely to prayer and contemplation. Day and night he consoled men, hearing their confessions, visiting them when sick, begging alms for them when they were poor. He had nothing of his own and on himself never spent a penny. As much as one could dream of a man doing he did, and more.

## Charism And Method

Sometimes both Xavier's methods and his convert's motives are questioned. It is charged that he was too much of 'a saint in a hurry', that his preparation of converts for Baptism was shallow, that he was too briefly in too many places. It is suggested, too, that the main motive for so many of the native peoples' embracing Christianity was to place themselves thereby under Portuguese protection against the constant harassment and enslavement of them by the Moslems. **Nothing, in fact, supports these accusations.**

Striking proof of the genuineness of the conversion of these southern Indians was given in Xavier's own lifetime and in an area he himself did not visit. While he was at Cape Comorin Francis heard of the Careas, fisher-folk as were the Paravas, who inhabited places at both ends of the island bridge between India and Ceylon (or Sri Lanka, as it is now known). They were, he heard, anxious that he should come to them as he had to the Paravas. Unable to go himself, he sent a native Indian Deacon (whose name is not known) to minister to them. Within weeks, the Deacon had baptized nearly one thousand of the inhabitants on the island of Manan (or Manar), close to Ceylon. Not long afterwards, some six hundred of them cheerfully died as martyrs rather than renounce their new-found Faith. The perpetrator of this massacre, a Sultan of Ceylon, was never brought to justice and lived to have thousands more native Christians put to death.

Nor were Francis' methods chancey and haphazard. He lived an adventurous life but was not himself an adventurer. He had a clear idea of what he was doing. By keeping mainly to places which had a Portuguese trading post he was keeping to areas of permanent settlement; and since they were trading posts there was a regular coming and going of ships between those places and India. Where Francis went as a pioneer others could easily follow to carry on what he had begun. And there were others to take up where he left off, for soon there was a small but constant flow of Jesuits from Europe arriving in India, and these were sent on a more permanent basis to the areas which Xavier had pioneered. Even when he had only ten men, Francis wished to send two of them to the Christians of Socotra, harassed continually as they were by the Muslims who forcibly converted the children to Islam. The Portuguese authorities, however, would not permit it, since there was no garrison on the island.

And what men they were that Xavier had at his disposal. Among them was the first of the long line of Jesuit martyrs - **Antonio Criminali**, of whom Francis wrote, 'a saintly man, born to be a missionary for these countries'. Xavier made him Superior of the Fishery Coast mission, in which capacity he died, aged only twenty nine, a martyr at Vedalai (just north of Tuticorin on India's eastern coast). Another was **Nunus Ribiero**, martyred while carrying on the work Xavier had commenced in the Moluccas (or Spice Islands in present day eastern Indonesia, including Ambon or Amboina, Halmahera, Ternate, Morotai, and Rau Island), and yet another, **Juan Beira**, whose story is perhaps the most remarkable of those whose destinies were determined by Xavier's placement of them.

Formerly a Canon of the cathedral of Corunna, in Spain, Juan Beira spent nine years working in islands of which Francis himself wrote,

I know not whether anywhere else in the whole world men zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of souls have as much toil and hardship to face and perils of death to brave as in the Isles of Moro [between Indonesia, the Philippines and Borneo.]. . . I think that those islands will bring forth many martyrs to our Society and that soon the right name for them will be the Islands of Martyrdom rather than the Islands of Moro.

During a persecution by the Moslems, Beira spent nine months on the run in the forests of mountainous Halmahera in the Moluccas group of islands, living on roots and grasses, sleeping in the branches of trees, and stealing out at night to comfort the surviving Christians. Twice betrayed by renegades, he was sold into slavery to the Moslems by whom he was tortured almost to death, and he was compelled to watch while

Christian babies were snatched from their mothers' arms and dashed against the rocks. Twice he escaped and continued his mission. Twelve times he was wrecked as, in his little canoe, he made his way from one tiny island to another. Once he spent two days and nights clinging to a plank in the sea until he was cast ashore. There he survived on seaweed until he was able to return to his Christians. Gradually, his mind gave way and he was returned to India. At times his mind cleared and, with mutilated hands, he was able to say Mass. He finally died once more in full possession of his faculties.

As for Francis himself, what Vatican II says of missionary activity must be borne in mind:

Since Christians have different gifts each one must collaborate in the work of the Gospel according to his own opportunity, ability, charismatic gifts and call to service. Hence all alike, those who sow and those who reap, those who plant and those who water, must be united. Thus, in a free and orderly fashion co-operating toward a common goal, they can spend their forces harmoniously for the up-building of the Church.

Therefore, the labours of the heralds of the Gospel and the help given by the rest of the Christian faithful must be so directed and intertwined that all things be done in order.

Francis' own charism was to plant; but he made provision for the watering of what he planted and for the later gathering of a rich harvest.

### **From The Fishery Coast To Cochin**

Having despatched the Deacon to care for the Careas (as narrated above) Francis himself set out from Manapad on the east coast and slightly south of the India-Ceylon 'island bridge', and south of Tuticorin, to traverse the 300 km back to Cochin, some distance south of Goa on India's west coast. Because of the hostility to Christianity shown by many of the rulers whose territories he would traverse, the journey, made on foot, was fraught with peril. He wrote of his intentions to Mansilhas - in which letter it is comforting to note that even saints can become world-weary. The purpose of this journey was to get the authorities to organize a punitive expedition against the author of the massacre of the Deacon's converts and the letter seems to convey the feeling that Francis knew that, in the face of considerations of trade, he would not succeed.

I earnestly commend myself to your prayers and to those of the children. With such help I have no fear of the terrors with which the Christians here try to inspire me. They urge me not to go by land because all who are hostile to them nurse a far bigger grudge against me. I am so out of humour with life that I prefer to die in the attempt to promote the faith rather than witness the wrongs done before my eyes without my having any power to redress them.

On this journey Francis baptized nearly all the Macuan fishermen who inhabited the Kingdom of Travancore. One can only wonder at the magnetism of his personality that he could so easily sweep such thousands into his net - and so permanently: today, all the descendants of those fisher-folk are still Catholics. On arriving at Cochin, in December, Francis immediately made arrangements for a more permanent evangelization of his Macuans and of their neighbours who had asked him to go also to them.

Unsuccessful in his mission to Cochin, Francis was now restless as well as world-weary. From Cochin on the west coast he sailed to Negapatan on the east coast further to the north of his earlier apostolic endeavours. Having ministered to the Portuguese there he then set out for San Thome (also called Mylapore and now a

suburb of Madras or Chennai) some 250 km to the north. Twice storms drove them back to Negapatan and so Francis finally made the journey on foot.

San Thome was the reputed burial place of St Thomas the Apostle, and there Francis stayed with the priest in charge of the Saint's shrine. Francis' occupation was to pray 'without intermission' to know God's will: should he go, as he thought, to Macassar ((on the large eastern Indonesian island of Celebes or Sulawesi in the East Indies) and to Malacca (on the Malay Peninsula)? In prayer for enlightenment Francis passed the nights in a little shed in a garden his host would not enter at night for fear of evil spirits - on which fear Francis gently played, telling his host of strange happenings in the night. Later, the priest summed up the Saint's stay with him:

By his teaching and holy life he did great good and our Lord Jesus Christ great service in this town. He drew many out of mortal sin, regularized illicit unions, and brought peace and the fear of God among us. Almost everybody became his disciple through witnessing his goodness. His was the life of the Apostles down to the last detail.

### **Among The Islands**

Francis set sail for Malacca on the western side of the Malay Peninsula, arriving there towards the end of September 1545. 'What between storms and pirates,' he wrote, 'I encountered many dangers on that voyage'. What he encountered in Malacca was even more grievous to him, for the city was the proverbial sink of iniquity, and where illicit unions were plentiful in Goa, whole harems of native women were commonplace among the Portuguese of Malacca. Despite his frustration (of which he wrote) at his ineptitude at the language, Francis set to work. Today, most of the Eurasian population of that ancient port are Catholics.

The soldiers of the garrison had little but gambling to relieve the boredom of their existence but their games of chance commonly ended in violence and blasphemy. Francis exerted himself to convert gambling into game-playing, on the principle that 'To be merry without offending God is better any day than grumbling and quarrelling'. As usual, Francis lived in the hospital attending to the sick while he preached, taught Christian doctrine and heard confessions. He laboured to get the Creed and the prayers set down in a language which would be understood by the natives of Macassar, which was the real goal of this journey.

Francis sailed from Malacca on New Year's Day, 1546, and it was a month and a half and over seventeen hundred nautical miles later that he landed among that group of islands known collectively as the Moluccas which lie between Celebes and New Guinea.

The first of the islands on which he set foot was Amboina - scene of the story of the crab and the crucifix - where he arrived on 14 February. It was the Lenten Season and,

The fleet (of eight Portuguese warships with a large number of Spanish prisoners) kept me busy from morning to night, hearing an endless stream of confessions, visiting the sick, absolving and comforting the dying, preaching . . .

Mention was made above, in quoting Xavier's host at San Thome, of Francis' success as a peacemaker. Here in Amboina he achieved the considerable feat of bringing about peace between the captive Spaniards and their Portuguese captors.

In mid-June Francis pushed on from Amboina to another of the Moluccas, the island of Ternate. A tiny dot of twenty-five square miles, it consisted (except for a narrow coastal strip) wholly of a forest-clad and active volcano. It was, however, one of the few homes of the greatly prized clove. The population, Xavier found,

was even more depraved than that of Malacca. The sheer goodness of Francis startled them. Soon he was able to write,

It was the good pleasure of God our Lord that I should find, in a brief time, great favour in the eyes of the Portuguese on the island, and no less in the eyes of the native people both Christian and pagan.

From Ternate Francis proceeded, still north, to the Halmaheira Group, visiting the island of that name as well as the lesser islands of Rau and Morotai. These were the scenes of the later apostolate of Juan Beira, and Halmaheira was where Francis said Mass during an earthquake. It was also the home of a barbarous people who made murder a pastime.

In three months Francis thus visited thousands of Christians who had in the past been baptized, abandoned and finally brutalized by the Portuguese.

Xavier then returned to Ternate where he remained another three months until Easter was over when he returned to Amboina, Malacca (remaining there six months) and finally back to India. During this time in Malacca (in December 1547) two notable events occurred. First, for the first time Francis Xavier heard of the country called Japan, first seen by Europeans in 1542. Second, Francis gave a remarkable instance of a well-attested fact in his life - the frequency with which he saw far-distant events as they happened.

Malacca had been attacked by pirates and a fleet of ten small Portuguese ships had set off in pursuit. Weeks went by without news, and wives of the crews began consulting sorcerers and diviners for news of their husbands. On Sunday, 4 December, Francis, having just finished his sermon at Mass, was suddenly rapt out of himself. Soon he spoke, rebuking the women concerned and saying,

Rather they ought to lift up their hearts to God in thankfulness and to say an Our Father and Hail Mary in gratitude, for I tell you that today, this very day, our fleet has won a great victory and scattered the enemy.

### **St Paul's**

Xavier was back at Cochin by mid-January 1548, from where he wrote to King John III of Portugal mentioning that he was in two minds about whether to go to Japan himself or send others there instead. Meanwhile, local affairs claimed his attention in Goa, in Bassein, in Goa once more (for the baptism, at Pentecost, of three Japanese), in Cape Comorin, in Cochin, and finally in Goa once more.

Francis' chief concern in Goa at this time was St Paul's College. St Paul's had originally been founded by a diocesan priest, Diogo de Borba, as a school for non-Portuguese boys - a school the priest hoped would grow into a seminary. Francis was generous in assigning his Jesuits to assist in the project for he knew that he could not rely solely on Europe for manpower. Indeed, within four months of his arrival in India, Xavier was writing to Europe about the need for a numerous indigenous clergy. He shared the convictions which Pope Pius XI would express in his *Rerum Ecclesiae* in 1926 - the lateness of which date indicating how rare was Xavier's attitude. The Pope wrote:

Let us recall to your attention how important it is that you build up an indigenous clergy. If you do not work with all your might to accomplish this, we maintain that your apostolate will not only be crippled but it will become an obstacle and an impediment to the establishment and

organization of the Church in those countries.

From the start St Paul's flourished and within a few years had students from a dozen eastern and African countries. In January 1549 Francis acceded to de Borba's repeated request that the Society of Jesus should take over responsibility for the College. Unfortunately, Francis was compelled, during his absence from Goa, to leave in charge of St Paul's a man who was a martinet and who dreamed of making the College the exclusive preserve of the sons of Portuguese. What native students did not flee the place voluntarily, these the Rector dismissed. The Viceroy intervened and compelled the Rector to receive the boys for whom the College was originally intended. The Rector promptly resigned and took himself off to Ceylon. From afar, Francis grieved over the destruction being visited upon this far-sighted project. He acted strongly, ordering the Rector to go to Diu - a Portuguese held island about 300 km north-west of Bombay. The exile, however, chose to go to Rome to justify himself. On the way, however, his ship was wrecked and he himself drowned.

### Japan Calls

In 1547 there arrived in Malacca a Japanese named Angero. He was a fugitive from justice and had fled first to China. There he met some Portuguese traders and from them he heard about Francis. Angero decided he must meet him; and for this purpose he had come to Malacca. Francis was not there, but Angero waited, filling in the time by taking instructions in the beliefs of Christians.

Still Francis did not come and Angero decided to return to Japan. A storm drove the ship on which he sailed to take refuge in a Chinese port where he found one of the men who had first told him of Xavier. This man persuaded Angero to return with him to Malacca where they arrived in December 1548. This time Angero found Francis. From Angero, Francis learnt everything he could about Japan - its geography, its people, its customs, its religion and its language. On every topic, Angero was full of misinformation, as Francis would later find out. Together they returned to Goa where Francis had the bishop baptize Angero, giving him the name Paul of the Holy Faith.

By April 1549 Francis had organized everything and was now able to set sail for Japan.

With him were Paul and three Jesuits, one of whom was a priest. The only ship leaving for Japan at that time was one captained by a Chinese who was called the Pirate, for that is what he was. They sailed on 24 June, the anniversary of Francis' ordination, and on the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption (the fifteenth since Montmartre) they landed at Kagoshima, a port on the bay which divides the southernmost tip of Japan into two.

### In Japan

Among the first Japanese Francis baptized was a man called Kimura. He was to become the grandfather of the **Blessed Leonard Kimura**, a Jesuit lay-brother martyred in the great persecution.

As he travelled, preaching the Gospel, Francis found that his grasp of the Japanese language was very poor. His early efforts as a preacher caused much laughter and mockery; children would follow him about, jeering and throwing stones at him. In time, Francis improved and made a considerable number of converts among the people. However, he made little headway with the local religious leaders, few of whom became Catholics.

Francis also discovered that the people of Japan liked pomp and ceremony, and an impressive appearance. This last was essential if one hoped to be granted an interview with any of the many local leaders. Wishing to see a local ruler, Francis decided to appear before him as the ambassador of the Pope and of King John III. (Both had, in fact, named Francis their ambassador on his first going to the East). With the aid of the Portuguese traders, he mounted a most splendid procession and, to the accompaniment of music, made his

way to the local ruler's palace.

Francis was also making a point. He could, if he chose, enjoy great wealth. He chose not to. Therefore he was not interested in the wealth of Japan but in the souls of the Japanese people.

This journey up through Japan was mainly one of exploration. Francis was deciding such things as: where would he establish mission centres? how many men would he need to send? which of his men would be best to send? what preparations should they make? and so on. He himself had made some headway: he had made a good number of converts; he had learnt a great deal. He was disappointed that the supreme ruler of the country (who, in fact, had Francis known it, had no real power) would not grant him an interview; but he was full of confidence for the future. He returned to Goa, arriving there at the beginning of 1552.

### **China Calls**

Events which most people would call miraculous were common enough in the life of Francis Xavier. On this journey back from Japan to Goa, the larger ship took a smaller vessel in tow. Francis was on the larger. A storm swept down on them. The tow line snapped, and the two vessels parted company. Francis prayed. Three days later, the storm having abated, the smaller ship was sighted - still following the larger. Every man on board the smaller ship swore that all through the storm they saw Francis at the helm of their ship. Two Moslems on board it asked Francis to make them of his Faith.

Now back in Goa, Francis spent four months attending to matters which concerned the Society of Jesus in India and in all the islands to which he had sent his men.

Ever since he had come to the East, Xavier had heard of the ancient civilization of China. In addition, while in Japan, he had come to the conclusion that China was the key to the East. The Japanese so admired Chinese civilization that it was clear to Francis that the quickest way to convert Japan would be to convert China first. He decided to go and do so.

On 17 April 1552 Francis called together his friends in Goa. To them he said:

So live on earth that we may meet in heaven. The end has come for me on earth. I shall not return alive to Goa; but my body will be brought here.

He went to Malacca, hoping for no delay in going from there to China. However, the plague was raging and he was delayed. High politics were being played and when Francis finally sailed it was on a ship whose crew was hostile to him.

The hostility lessened somewhat during the voyage - for good reason. At one time the ship lay becalmed for fifteen days and the water supply almost ran out. Francis told the crew to fill the water casks with sea water. They did so, and he blessed the casks. The sea water became fresh and sweet.

In August, the ships reached Sancian, an island near Canton. This was as close as the Chinese would permit the Portuguese to come. Their stay on the island had to be short and they were not allowed to erect any permanent building there. To attempt to land on the Chinese mainland meant death by torture, and, for this reason, no one was willing to take Francis there even secretly. Francis decided he would make his own way there; perhaps he could bribe the captain of some Chinese junk to take him. He agreed to wait until the Portuguese had gone so that they could not be involved. Soon, with the approach of the stormy season, all the ships except that of the leader of the expedition had gone. The crew lived on board the ship; Francis lived on the island in a flimsy shelter. With him was a young Chinese (who had forgotten his mother tongue) who had lived at St Paul's College in Goa for eight years and whom Francis had long ago baptized as Antonio.

November came. On the twentieth, Francis said Mass for the last time; for on that day he was seized by a terrible fever.

The crew of the remaining ship took him on board, but the tossing of the vessel made him worse. He was returned to the island and to the sole care and company of Antonio. Clutching his crucifix, Francis lay lost in delirium while the fever wracked his body. Antonio later wrote:

At noon on Thursday (the 12th day of his sickness) he regained his senses but spoke only to call upon the Blessed Trinity . . . always one of his tenderest devotions. I heard him again repeat the words, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me', and he exclaimed again and again, 'O Virgin Mother of God, remember me'. He continued to have these and similar words on his lips until the night of Friday passed on towards the dawn of Saturday when I could see he was dying and put a lighted candle in his hand. Then, with the name of Jesus on his lips, he rendered his soul to his Creator and Lord with great repose and quietude.

### **Return To Goa**

Francis Xavier had lived forty-six years. When dawn came, Antonio told the crew of the ship that the saint was dead. They put his body in a rough coffin. This they filled with quick lime: that, they thought, would soon consume the flesh, and they could take the bones back to Goa.

It was two months before the storms let up sufficiently for them to think of sailing. They dug up the coffin to collect the bones. Opening it, they found not the bones but the body of the saint. It was completely untouched: the limbs were flexible, the face was bright and shining. They took the body on board just as it was, and sailed for Malacca.

From the moment that the ship arrived there, the plague which had again been raging, abruptly ceased. The body was taken to the Church, and miracles took place: blind people recovered their sight, sick people were cured. The body was then buried in a grave cut into the rock. The grave was too small, and the body had to be forced into it. The rough-hewn rock cut the flesh, and blood flowed as from a living body.

Nine months later it was taken up again for the journey to Goa. It was still perfectly whole - and so it remained for some four hundred years. On the arrival of the body at Goa, a similar spate of miracles as at Malacca occurred. Francis was still caring for his people.

Francis Xavier was declared a Saint by Pope Gregory XV in 1622.

### **Postscript**

In 1694, one hundred and forty-two years after Francis' death, the Jesuit secretary to the new Vicar Apostolic of the East, examined the body for an hour and a half. From the secretary's pen we have a sketch of how Francis looked to his contemporaries:

The Saint's hair is black and slightly curling. The forehead is broad and high, with two rather large veins, soft and of a purple tint, running down the middle, as is often seen in talented people who concentrate a great deal. The eyes are black, lively and sweet, with so penetrating a glance that he would seem to be alive and breathing. The lips are of a bright reddish colour, and the beard is thick. In the checks there is a very delicate vermilion. The tongue is quite flexible, red and moist, and the chin is beautifully proportioned. In a word, the body has all the appearance of being that of a living man . . .