

Saint Francis Xavier



Francis Xavier was born in his family's castle in Spain in 1506. He studied philosophy at the University of Paris. Francis was a bright student who enjoyed discussing the great thinkers of his time. When Francis graduated, he was hired to teach as a university professor in Paris.

At the university, Francis met Ignatius Loyola, a man who would change Francis' life forever. Ignatius saw in Francis an ability to spread the Gospel to those who had never heard of Jesus. It took Ignatius a while to convince Francis that this was what God wanted him to do, but eventually Francis agreed. Together with a few other interested men, Francis Xavier and Ignatius Loyola began the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits.

In Venice, Italy, in 1537, Francis and Ignatius were ordained to the priesthood. They went to Rome and worked at building up their new order of priests. In 1540, the king of Portugal invited Francis to join his delegation on a sailing trip to Goa, on the west coast of India. This trip became Francis Xavier's first journey as a missionary.

Father Francis traveled farther into India, and then on to Japan and other lands in the Far East. Throughout his missionary travels, Francis introduced thousands of people to Jesus. It is said that he baptized so many people in one day that he could no longer hold up his arms!

Francis would stop at nothing to help people live better lives. He washed the wounds of people with skin diseases and taught religion classes to children. He endured extreme heat and cold in order to work with the poor he met on his travels. Francis even fought off invaders with only his prayers and his crucifix.

Francis' dream was to preach the Gospel to the people of China. At that time, however, China did not allow foreigners. Finally, with the help of the Portuguese government, Francis was given permission to enter China. But he never made it. At the age of forty-six, Francis died of a severe fever on a small island off the coast of China.

Francis Xavier was made a saint in 1602. We celebrate his feast day on December 3. He is the patron saint of sailors and missionaries.

