

Many miracles have been attributed to Saint Francis Xavier. He was said to have possessed the gift of tongues, to have healed the sick and even to have raised the dead; but for the last, at least, there is no real evidence. That he possessed the gift of prophecy seems to be certain, but he can hardly have possessed the gift of tongues. The evidence is, on the contrary, that he had to rely throughout on interpreters to translate his message into the different languages he required, and was often sadly misled. The real miracle of his life, as has been said, was the miracle of his personality, by which he was able to convert thousands to the faith wherever he went and to win their passionate devotion.

Saint Francis died abandoned with but one companion, without the sacraments or Christian burial. **But within a few weeks his body was recovered and found to be perfectly incorrupt.** It was brought to Goa and received there with a devotion and an enthusiasm which showed that the people had already recognized him as a saint. He was beatified by Pope Paul V in 1618 and canonized together with Saint Ignatius by Pope Gregory XV, on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1622. He is now the patron of all the missions of the Catholic Church. His feast day is December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

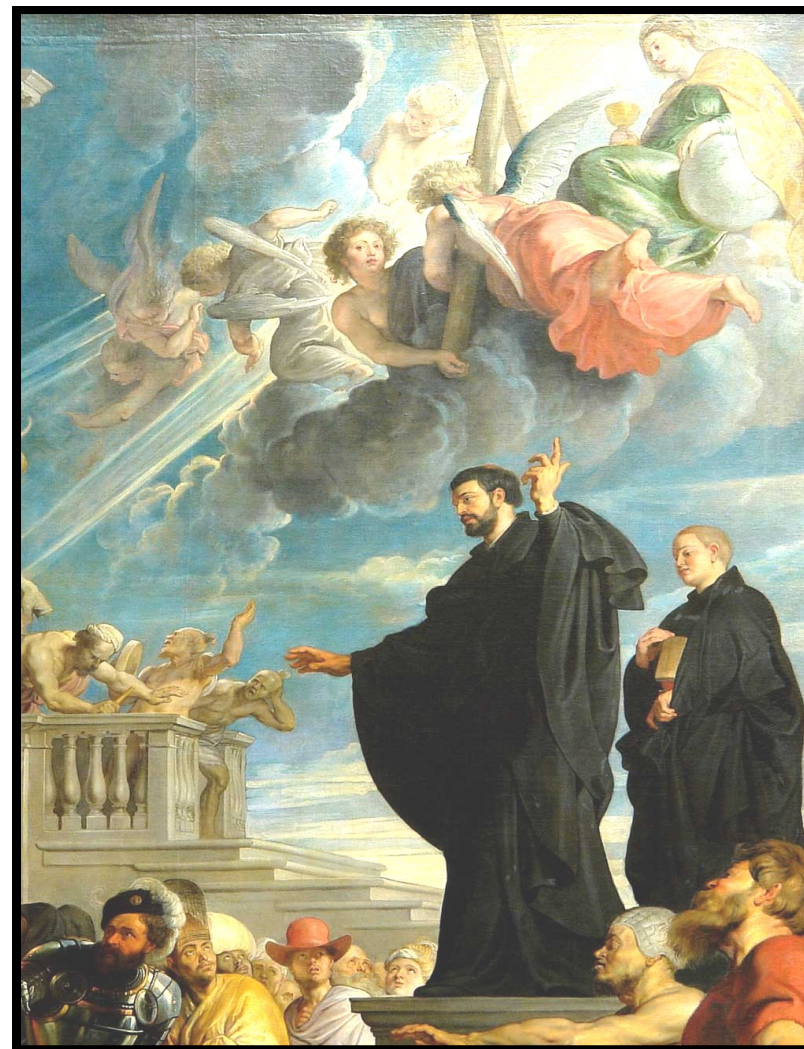
\*(excerpted from: [www.cin.org](http://www.cin.org))



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## *Saint Francis Xavier*

**Feast Day: December 3**



**Patron of the Missions**

## Saint Francis Xavier

\*Francis Xavier was born on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1506, in the Spanish kingdom of Navarre; and his native language, like that of Ignatius Loyola, whose devoted disciple he was to become, was Basque. He inherited the proud and passionate temperament of his race and could show himself both fiery and autocratic even to the end of his life. As a boy, he was ambitious and fond of sport, but he had a largeness of heart and generosity of nature which made him capable, once he had been converted, of heroic love and endurance.

His first encounter with Ignatius took place at the University of Paris, where Francis went at the age of nineteen. Ignatius was much the elder man, and it took him some time to win Francis from his worldly ambitions. But eventually Francis capitulated and gave himself with his whole soul to the new life which the Exercises of Ignatius opened up to him. He became one of the first members of the Society of Jesus and made his vows with Ignatius and five others on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1534, and was finally ordained a priest on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1537.

The first object of Ignatius and his companions had been to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but events turned out otherwise. Ignatius was asked by King John of Portugal to send priests to the new missions in India, and his choice fell eventually on Francis. Francis, it must be said, had no particular qualifications for this task. Though he took his degree at the University, he was possessed of no great learning, and the only books he took with him on all his missionary journeys were his breviary and a book of meditations. His ignorance of the religion of the people to whom he went to preach the gospel was complete. He regarded all 'moors' and 'pagans' as enemies of God and slaves of the devil, to be rescued at all costs from his power. His attitude never changed, and the devout Muslim, the learned Brahmin and the Buddhist monk made equally little impression on him.

In this respect his mind remained essentially medieval. He saw a vast new world opening before him and his one desire was to win it to Christ. He brought with him nothing but his consuming love for God and for the souls of his fellow men. It is noticeable that he never criticized the social, political or ecclesiastical institutions of his time.

He accepted the slave trade and the Inquisition alike apparently without question and, although he complained bitterly of the abuse of power, he never questioned the right of the Portuguese power in India and was prepared at all times to make use of it in the interests of the gospel.

Yet, though he might accept the external circumstances of life as he knew it, he preserved an absolute detachment of heart. He deliberately chose to live in the most complete poverty and refused to accept any of the material conveniences which were offered to him. His food was reduced to so small a quantity that it was a miracle that he kept himself alive. The only concession he would make in clothing for his long missionary journeys under a tropical sun was a pair of boots. He could put up with the most appalling conditions on his long sea voyages and endure the most agonizing extremes of heat and cold. Wherever he went, he would seek out the poor and the sick and spend his time in ministering to their needs. Yet while he was occupied all day with these incessant labors, he would spend the greater part of the night in prayer. And all this was done with a gaiety and lightness of heart, which reminds one of the other Francis-of-Assisi.

The story of his journeys is an epic of adventure. He arrived in Goa in May 1542 and went on from there to Cape Comorin in the south of India. Here he spent three years working among the pearl-fishers, or Paravas, of the Fishery Coast. From there he went on to the East Indies, to Malacca and the Moluccas, and finally, in 1549 he set out for Japan. He died on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1552, on a lonely island, vainly seeking to obtain entrance into China. Thus in ten years, he traversed the greater part of the Far East. When one considers the conditions of travel, the means of transport, the delays and difficulties which beset him at every stage, it is, even physically, an astounding achievement. It is even more remarkable when one considers that he left behind him a flourishing church wherever he went and the effects of his labors remain to the present day.