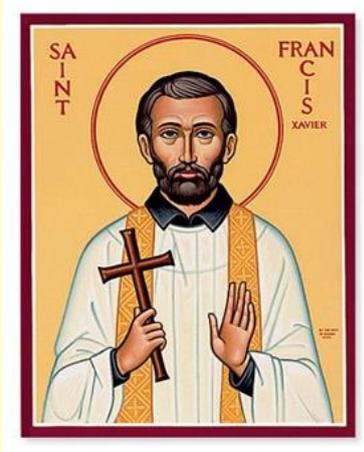


OUR SCHOOL PATRON – ST FRANCIS XAVIER (1506-1552)



Francis Xavier was born in the Castle of Xavier, near Pamplona, in the Basque area of Spanish Navarre, on April 7th 1506. He was born into a noble family and was the youngest of five children, two girls and three boys. His father died when Francis was aged nine.

From his childhood, Francis would have been familiar with both the Spanish and Basque languages. He received his early education at home in the castle with his mother and the parish priest probably being his only teachers.

In the late summer of 1525, Francis left home to pursue his studies at the University of Paris. He would never return home and would never see his family again. In fact, for the next eleven years, Paris would be his home.

In Paris he enrolled in the College of Sainte-Barbe. In March 1530, upon completing his philosophical studies, he received a Master of Arts degree. Then from 1530 until 1534 he was an instructor in philosophy in the College of Beauvais, and from 1534 to 1536 a student of theology.

It was here, in the college as a student, that Francis met two other students who would have a huge influence on his life, Pierre Favre and Ignatius of Loyola. In 1526 Francis Xavier met Pierre and they became college roommates and friends. In 1529 they were joined by Ignatius of Loyola, who was then just new to the college.

Ignatius had been a former soldier and but was now devoting his life to God. He was 38 when he arrived in Paris with a view to improving his religious formation. He had already written a little book, based on his personal experiences, which he later called the Spiritual Exercises.

From the outset, Pierre Favre was impressed by Ignatius' good and spiritual way of life. Initially however, Francis Xavier did not take too kindly to Ignatius, even though Ignatius often came to the financial assistance of Francis, who, as a student, liked to live as a noble and lived much beyond his means.

Ignatius had seen the potential that lay hidden beneath Francis' worldly ambitions. It is written that Francis heard a constant refrain from Ignatius: "*What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world but lose his own soul*" (Matt. 16:26).

Francis Xavier was slowly and eventually won over by Ignatius of Loyola and the two would become life-long friends and would found the then new religious order, the Society of Jesus (The Jesuits).

In Paris, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier and Pierre Favre were joined by four others: Simon Rodriguez, Jaime Laynez, Alphonso Salmeron and Nicolas Bobadilla. Together these seven companions were united in wanting to spread the Gospel and devoting their lives to the service of God.



They decided that they would take vows of chastity and poverty and then make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. On August 15th 1534 (the feast of the Assumption), in the chapel of Montmartre near Paris, these seven companions made their vows. This was an important step in the foundation of the Society of Jesus.

Francis Xavier was later ordained a priest in Venice on June 24th 1537. He was then 31. He said his first Mass on September 30th of that year and according to those present he did so with tears in his eyes. He was indeed a very prayerful man. He prayed frequently and was often found deep in prayer. This was a quality that remained with him throughout his life.

Because of a war between the Turks and Venice, Francis and his companions were unable to begin their journey to the Holy Land. They went to Rome and offered their service to the Pope, Paul III.

At about this time, the King of Portugal made a request to the Pope for priests to minister to the needs of the growing number of subjects in the Portuguese overseas colonies. The Pope was hesitant. He was aware of the danger involved in treacherous nature of the sea-routes to the Portuguese colonies in the East. The Pope eventually agreed to send two priests but he left the choice of whom to send to Ignatius. Ignatius, finally but with some reluctance, called upon Francis Xavier to go to India.

Ignatius often ended his letters to Jesuits going to the missions with the expression *ite, inflammate omnia*—***"go, set the world on fire."***□



"Set the world on fire" is a curious expression. Fire destroys; the world is already on fire with hatred, resentment, greed, lust, and other passions that consume individuals and whole societies. But fire purifies too; in the Bible, flames burn up the weeds and the refiner's

fire purifies gold. Then there are the tongues of fire that descend on the apostles at Pentecost, bringing the power of the Holy Spirit. It is possible that this image might have been in Ignatius's mind when he told his Jesuits to set the world on fire. He wanted everyone to be set afire with passion and zeal for the Kingdom of God.

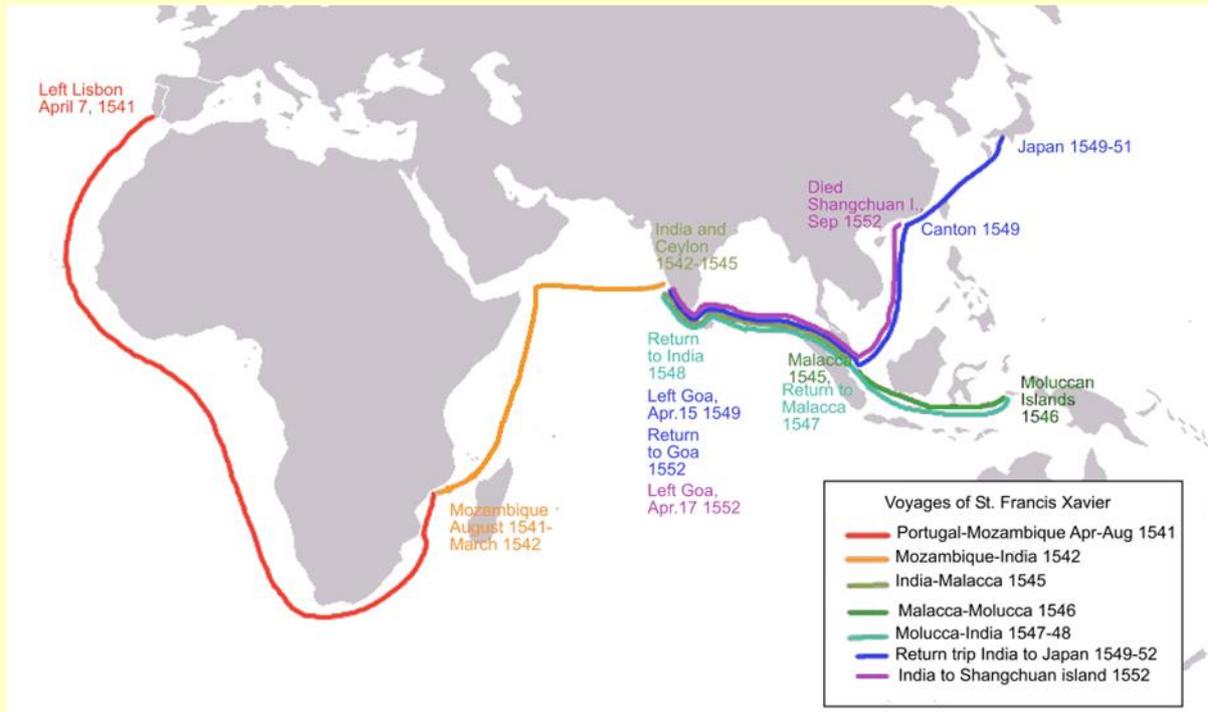
In 1540 Francis travelled from Rome to Lisbon. Here he spent a year, living at a hospice and helping to care for the sick there, visiting the poor, and visiting those in prison. Finally, in 1541, Francis Xavier set sail on his first missionary journey to India.

Francis Xavier left Lisbon on April 7, 1541 (his 35th birthday), together with two other Jesuits on board the Santiago and in a fleet of five ships. The seas were rough and the conditions difficult. Francis spoke of the voyage later in a letter to his companions in Rome: ***"...I was seasick for two months and I was sorely tired for forty days off the coast of Guinea both because of the oppressive heat and the lack of winds."***



From August of that year until March 1542, Francis remained in Mozambique because of the dangerous seas during wintertime. During his stay there Francis cared for the sick and the dying. He set sail for Goa, leaving his two companions in Mozambique to care for the sick. He reached Goa, India, the capital of the then Portuguese colonies, on May 6th 1542.

Voyages of St Francis Xavier

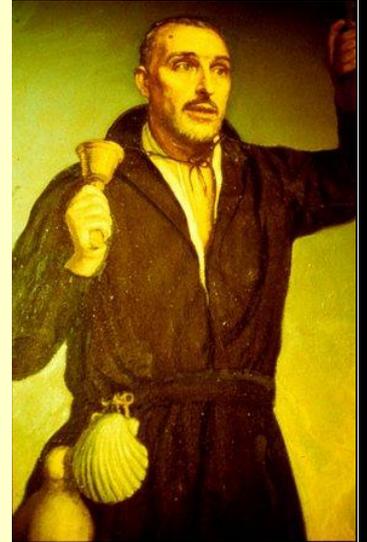


Because it was the monsoon climate, Francis was forced to spend the next four months in Goa. Finally in September he was able to travel to the Fishery Coast in Southern India where he had originally intended to go at the request of the King.

From his base at the hospice in Goa, Francis commenced his missionary work. During the course of a normal day, he would be nursing the sick, comforting the dying and administering the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion. He would then visit the prisons where he often counselled the inmates to repent for their sins of the past and change their way of life.

Francis's missionary methods were primitive. When he arrived in a village, he rang a bell to summon the children and the idle. He taught them the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Our Father, and other common prayers. Using little songs that the children loved to sing, he instructed them in Christian doctrine. These songs caught on with other villagers, spreading Francis's message. Then, when people expressed simple faith in the creed, he baptized them.

Francis preached in Portuguese and his words had to be translated into Konkani, the native language of Goa. He attempted to overcome this language barrier by setting-into-tune most of the common prayers and teaching. Francis was known as a cheerful and good humoured man. Witnesses reported that 'he did everything with great joy... and cheerfulness...always very joyful and pleasant with a smile on his face; in this manner he used to deal with all, whether good or bad...always smiling with everybody, especially with those who lived badly...'.



Some believe that Francis Xavier had a miraculous gift of languages, which enabled him to communicate fluently with everyone, but that was not the case. Francis struggled with foreign languages and was barely able to express the creed, commandments, and prayers in Tamil and other native languages. He had to rely on impromptu interpreters and translators, so he was never completely sure he had accurately communicated his message. The real miracle on tongues was that Xavier spread the gospel so far and to so many with such little grasp of their languages.

At the end of September, as soon as the sea became navigable after the monsoon, Francis Xavier left Goa for the Fishery Coast in Southern India. He returned to his base in Goa and back to the Fishery Coast several times. In October 1543, after a year spent on the Fishery Coast, he returned to Goa. At this stage, he learned that the Society of Jesus had been formally approved by the Pope and that Ignatius had been elected general and that his companions had taken solemn vows. Francis himself took his own vows before the bishop of Goa. Francis now became superior of India.

In September 1545, Francis Xavier set sail for Malacca in present day Malaysia. He used the same missionary methods he had developed in Goa and perfected in South India. He journeyed from Malacca to the islands of the Pacific Rim. It was a series of treacherous sea voyages. The land was not so safe either but he continued tirelessly and bravely.

On one of his journeys in these islands, he is known to have lost his crucifix during a storm. The distress which he experienced was intense but short-lived as his crucifix was found the next day - attached to a crab which was coming ashore. For the Jesuit and those with him at the time, it was nothing short of a miracle.

He returned to Malacca, where in 1547 he was introduced to Anjiro, a Japanese man who had sought refuge with the Portuguese and was christened as Paolo. This new convert expressed a strong desire to meet with this Francis Xavier, a priest all Malacca was talking about. With his moderate knowledge of Portuguese, Paolo impressed him. This was 'a man who wanted to know more about the faith'. Paolo convinced Francis that the Japanese would turn to Christ if they were convinced that Christians practiced what they preached. Francis made up his mind. He was going to Japan.

He returned to Goa in 1548 and formally took over teaching at the College of the Holy Faith in 1548. This college trained priests from all over Asia and the eastern seaboard of Africa. These 'natives of distant lands' travelled back to their homelands to carry on the work of the Church.

Francis Xavier reached Japan on July 27, 1549, but it wasn't until August 15 that he went ashore at Kagoshima, the principal port of the province of Satsuma, on the island of Kyushu. He was received in a friendly manner and was hosted by Paulo's family until October 1550. From October to December 1550, he resided in Yamaguchi. Shortly before Christmas, he left for Kyoto, but failed to meet with the Emperor. He returned to Yamaguchi in March 1551. There he was permitted to preach by the daimyo, but not knowing the Japanese language he had to limit himself to reading aloud the translation of a catechism.

Francis worked for more than two years in Japan spreading the gospel and founding churches and saw his successor-Jesuits established. He then decided to return to India. Back in India in 1552 he also began to make preparations for his next journey. With the help of a merchant Diégo Pereira, an old friend from Cochin, Francis was going to China.

On April 17 he set sail, with Diégo Pereira, leaving Goa on board the Santa Cruz for China. In early September 1552, the Santa Cruz reached the Chinese island of Shangchuan, 14 km away from the southern coast of mainland China.

Since the entrance of foreigners into China was strictly forbidden, Francis looked for someone who could take him to the mainland in secret. He found a Chinese merchant who, for a large sum of money, promised to do so by night, in his own boat. But he failed to arrive as promised on November 19. Two days later, Francis fainted after celebrating Mass. He became ill and during the next few days his condition worsened. On the night of December 3, 1552 Francis Xavier died. His dying words were: In te, Domine, speravi,

non confundar in aeternum ('In you, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded'.) He died on the island of Shangchuan at the age of 46, without having reached mainland China.

Francis Xavier's body, dressed in the vestments which he had used for celebrating Mass, was placed in a wooden coffin and buried on a beach of Shangchuan island. His friends then decided to bring his body back to Malacca. When his grave was opened his body was found to be fresh and incorrupt. His body was then temporarily buried in St. Paul's church in Malacca on March 22, 1553. An open grave in the church now marks the place of Francis Xavier's burial.

On December 11, 1553, Xavier's body was shipped to Goa. The body, having resisted extensive decay, is now in the Basilica of Bom J sus in Goa, where it was placed into a silver casket on December 2, 1637. The silver casket is lowered for public viewing only during the public exposition which occurs for a period of six weeks every ten years, the most recent of which took place in 2014. There is a debate as to how the body could have remained incorrupt for so long. Some say that Francis Xavier was mummified, while others argue that the incorruptible body is evidence of a miracle

He was beatified by Pope Gregory XV, on March 12, 1622. He is now the patron of all the missions of the Catholic Church and the patron of our school.

*O FRANCIS XAVIER, missionary of joy
And apostle of the Gospel, first companion of Ignatius,
And a voice that proclaimed the way of the Lord:
You did not choose riches and honours
but preferred to follow Christ, poor and humble.
Instead of merely communicating your own thoughts
You gave witness to the wisdom of the Cross.
You did not promise worldly happiness
but invited all to seek the joy of Heaven.
Tireless messenger of the Good News,
You announced to the farthest ends of the earth
the Name that saves.*

*Tenacious advocate of justice,
You planted in human hearts the law of love.
Intimately united with the Divine Mysteries,
You called your contemporaries to true life.
Having put on the mind of Christ,
You became a sign of forgiveness
and of mercy for many.*

(Notes compiled from a variety of sources – Peter Anderson 2014)