

Traditional Jesuit, "Fr. X." provides CFN readers with daily meditations for the beloved and efficacious Novena of Grace.

Why a Novena? And Why a Novena in Honor of Saint Francis Xavier?

"The Nine Most Powerful Novenas that God Cannot Resist!" So promised the title of a book prominently displayed in an otherwise sound Catholic book store. That title got me thinking: "If God can't 'resist' a novena, then the novena is more powerful than God, and then God isn't God."

Another problem with the title of the book is that it speaks of God "resisting" our prayers—that is, if we want something good from God, we have to prepare ourselves to overcome the resistance of that stingy God we're praying to. A novena, on this view, is a strategy to pry blessings out of the ordinarily closed fist of God.

Of course, such a view of God is different from what Our Blessed Lord revealed. We are to come to God as trusting children approaching their beloved father.

So... why a novena? And why a novena in honor of Saint Francis Xavier? Let me draw an analogy. The promise of entering religious life is that if you live the charism of the founder of that community, you enjoy the kind of relationship with God that the founder had. Different founders emphasized different aspects of the life and love of God. Thus the Benedictines find God especially in the beauty of order. The Franciscans find God especially in poverty and simplicity. The Dominicans find God especially in truth. The Carmelites find God especially in love. And Jesuits (as Francis Xavier exemplified) find God especially in action – God is always at work in the world, and Jesuits join themselves to God in that work. Saint Francis Xavier lived a life in answer to the call of the "Spiritual Exercises" of Saint Ignatius Loyola. He lived and died seeking to "distinguish himself in the service of Christ the King" and strove "to be with Christ as one who labors."

So, just as one might enter religious life to become more like the founder of a given community, one who prays a novena seeks to become like the saint whom the novena honors. Beyond any favors we might wish a saint to intercede for us in this life, we pray a novena for our sanctification—for our becoming more "saint-like", more like the saint whose intercession we seek.

Why pray a novena to Saint Francis Xavier? Why invoke his intercession? I say that we should do so because the Church and the world need more holy men and women like him. The Church and the world need now more saints who are on fire for the love of God, who have a zeal for souls, and wish to make Christ known and loved throughout the world. Much

of the world is still ignorant of Christ; many have rejected Christ; even more have forgotten Christ. In our times, Saint Francis Xavier would not have been able to keep still or keep silent. He would get to work, determined to give his all to bring Christ to the world, and the world to Christ. If that is your goal too, then you can look forward to many graces as you pray this novena in honor of Saint Francis Xavier.

Now, a bit about the history of the novena, with instructions on how to pray it faithfully.

HISTORY: The Novena of Grace, which begins March 4th and ends on the 12th, the day of the canonization of St. Francis Xavier, owes its origin to the Saint himself. At Naples, in December, 1633, Father Marcello Mastrilli, S.J. was at the point of death. The Saint appeared to him and, bidding him renew a vow he had made to labor in Japan, said:

PROMISE: "All those who implore my help daily for nine consecutive days, from the 4th to the 12th of March included, and worthily receive the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist on one of the nine days, will experience my protection and may hope with entire assurance to obtain from God any grace they ask for the good of their souls and the glory of God."

The Father arose, instantly cured. So well has the Saint kept this promise that this devotion in his honor became universally known as the Novena of Grace. Its efficacy is not restricted to the dates mentioned. It may be made very appropriately from November 25 - December 3, the feast of St. Francis Xavier. Though any prayers can be said in honor of the Saint, the foregoing are generally recommended.

Prayers for the Novena

Novena Prayer to St. Francis Xavier

(By Father Marcello Mastrilli, S.J.)

O most lovable and loving St. Francis Xavier, in union with thee, I adore the Divine Majesty with all reverence. Filled with deep joy on account of the extraordinary graces which God bestowed upon thee during thy sojourn here on earth, and on account of the extraordinary glory conferred upon thee after death, I thank Him from the depths of my soul. I implore thee at the same time from my innermost heart, to secure for me through thy powerful intercession the special grace to live a holy life and die a holy death. I also beseech thee to obtain for me the following graces. (Make some petition). But should my supplication not be in keeping with the greater honor of God or the good of my soul, obtain for me then what is more conducive to both. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be. (300 Days Indulgence)

To the Passion and Precious Blood of Jesus

Antiphon: His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground. One of the soldiers opened His side with a spear, and immediately there poured forth blood and water.

V. O Lord, come to the aid of Thy servants.

R. Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood.

Let us pray: O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou didst come down from Heaven and shed Thy Most Precious Blood on the Cross for our salvation; by Thy Sacred Wounds and the bitterness with which Thy holy Soul departed from Thy Body, we humbly beseech Thee, through the merits and intercession of Thy servant, St. Francis Xavier, who always bore in his heart Thy bitter Passion, mercifully grant us the favors we ask of Thy infinite mercy, Who livest and reignest, world without end. Amen.

To the Immaculate Conception

Antiphon: Thy Immaculate Conception, O Virgin Mother of God, has brought joy to the whole world, for from Thee has arisen the Sun of Justice, Christ our Lord.

V. In Thy Conception, Thou wert immaculate.

R. Holy Mother of God, pray for us.

Let us pray: O God, Who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary didst prepare a worthy habitation for Thy Divine Son, preserving Her by the foreseen merits of the Passion and Death of Thy Son from every stain of sin: we beseech Thee through Her intercession and the prayers of St. Francis, who always devoutly venerated Her Immaculate Conception, to cleanse us from all sin, in order that we may be partakers in the Divine Grace, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

To the Holy Angels

Antiphon: Holy Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim: praise the Lord and be our intercessors with God.

V. He hath given His Angels charge over thee.

R. To keep thee in all thy ways.

Let us pray: O Lord Who doth dispense the services of angels and men in a wonderful order,

mercifully grant that our life may be defended by them on earth, as they always protected St. Francis, and that what we ask of Thee we may obtain by their intercession, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

To St. Francis Xavier

Antiphon: The Lord led the just man by right paths and showed him the Kingdom of God.

V. Pray for us, St. Francis Xavier.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: O God, Thou wast pleased by the preaching and miracles of St. Francis Xavier, to unite unto Thy Church the nations of the Indies. Grant, we beseech Thee, that we who reverence his glorious merits may also imitate his example, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of St. Francis Xavier for the Conversion of Infidels

Eternal God, Creator of all things, remember that Thou alone didst create the souls of infidels, framing them to Thy Own image and likeness; behold, O Lord! how, to Thy dishonor, hell is daily replenished with them. Remember, O Lord! Thy Only Son, Jesus Christ, Who suffered for them, most bountifully shedding His Precious Blood: suffer not, O Lord Thy Son and our Lord to be any longer despised by infidels; but rather, being appeased by the entreaties and prayers of the elect, the Saints, and of the Church, the most blessed spouse of Thy Son, vouchsafe to be mindful of Thy mercy, and forgetting their idolatry and infidelity, cause them also to know Him Whom Thou didst send, Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, Who is our health, life, and resurrection, through Whom we are freed and saved, to Whom be all glory forever. Amen.

Saint Francis Xavier's Hymn of Love

O God, I love Thee for Thyself,
And not that I may Heaven gain,
Nor because those who love Thee not,
Must suffer hell's eternal pain.

Thou O my Jesus! Thou didst me
Upon the Cross embrace;
For me didst bear the nails and spear
And manifold disgrace;

And griefs and torments numberless,

And sweat of agony;
E'en death itself - and all for one Who was Thine enemy.

Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ,
Should I not love Thee well:
Not for the sake of winning Heaven,
Or of escaping hell;
Not with the hope of gaining aught, not seeking a reward;
But, as Thyself hast loved
me, O ever-loving Lord?

E'en so I love Thee, and will
love, and in Thy praise will sing;
Solely because Thou art my
God and my eternal King.