Mission Territory – It Might Not Be What You Think…

Many an older religious would gladly say, "I spent most of my life in the Missions." There was a time when "Mission Territory" was anywhere that wasn't Europe. Later, it could also refer to anywhere that wasn't North America. Where is mission territory located today?

That question is not so easily answered. There was a time when the country with the most Jesuits was the United States. Now, the country with the most Jesuits is India, which was certainly mission territory during the time of Saint Francis Xavier. Yet in India today, Catholics are certainly in a minority relative to the rest of the population- so is India mission territory or not?

How about this as a definition of "Mission Territory"? *'Mission Territory' is any place where Jesus Christ is not known and loved; any place where He is rejected or forgotten; any place where the saving truths and Sacraments He entrusted to the one Church He founded are not freely, fully and faithfully proclaimed and administered.*

That definition, after a moment or two, might prompt a knowing smile and the declaration, "But Father! With that definition, 'Mission Territory' could be anyplace and everyplace!" Yes, that's true – and even that definition is not adequate.

I would have to add that "Mission Territory" includes any person not yet enjoying the Beatific Vision. Every human soul on earth is "Mission Territory." Every human soul on earth is not yet perfected in conformity to Christ; every human soul on earth is in some way incompletely embracing the sovereignty of Christ the King. And, but for the grace of God, every human soul on earth contains the seeds of rebellion, or at least lukewarmness. Consequently, I say that every time and place on earth, every human soul on earth, is "Mission Territory."

That being so, how shall we pray the Novena of Grace in honor of Saint Francis Xavier this year? I know that some folks are disinclined to pray the novena or have a devotion to Xavier at all because they think that their state in life precludes their being a missionary or having a missionary spirit. A nursing mother, for example, a nun in a cloister, a doctor scheduled for surgery in the morning – surely, these can't drop everything at once and leave for distant lands to proclaim the Gospel. That is true.

Yet all of us – *all of us* – can bear witness to Christ on behalf of our neighbor, by virtue of our words and deeds. And all of us – *all of us* – on this earth are in need of further conversion, of a more profound and complete submission to the authority and love of Christ the King. Therefore, we can say that when we are with our neighbor, we are on mission to

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bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ, and so share a kinship with the great missionary Saint Francis Xavier.

Likewise, in quiet and solitary moments, when we are about to make a decision, when we pray, and even (perhaps especially) when we are tempted, we can say that we are ourselves "Mission Territory", in need of the saving grace that only Christ through His Church can offer. We are always on mission, and we are always "Mission Territory", and that's why we should pray this Novena of Grace, in honor of and in company with that heroic missionary now our intercessor, Saint Francis Xavier.

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

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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.

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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

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God and my eternal King.

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