The Sources of His Inspiration

I have many times asked seminarians, "What are the two best compliments that one could pay to a homilist?" Over the years, I've found that the compliments can be summarized in two points. The first is: "You can't fake that—you can only preach like that if you pray." The second is related to the first: "Wow! What got into him? Can I get some of that too?"

Might not these same points of praise be attributed to the great missionary, our patron, Saint Francis Xavier? Could anyone truly believe that his generosity, courage, zeal and energy could be possible without being sustained by prayer? By all accounts, Xavier was a man of tireless action. What threw him into the world of boundless need and sustained him there, was that he had first sunk deep roots into the life of prayer.

From his generous devotion to prayer and meditation, he learned to tend the growth of his own spiritual life and to urge others to do the same. According to witnesses, when he said farewell to any one, he embraced him and said: "Take care of the salvation of your soul." To the king of Portugal he wrote as follows: "Contemplate and keep continually before your eyes, the words of the Lord: 'For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?'" (Mark 8:36)

When Saint Ignatius Loyola first met Xavier at the University of Paris, the younger man was worldly and ambitious. Loyola repeated the Lord's question from the Gospel of Mark cited above, until Xavier agreed to make the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, that syllabus of prayer and meditation that is the hallmark of authentic Jesuit identity.

Knowing that allows us to answer the question the seminarians asked: "What got into him? Can I get some of that too?" If we would understand Saint Francis Xavier, and pray the Novena of Grace wisely and well, we have to have some contact with the Spiritual Exercises, which shaped his soul.

In particular, two meditations from the Spiritual Exercises will, I believe, help us to pray the Novena of Grace more fruitfully.

Saint Ignatius gives us the example of a good, earthly king who summons his subjects to a worthy campaign, joining him in the reclaiming of his kingdom. If men of honor would respond to the call of a temporal king, how much more should men rally to the call of Christ the Eternal King? And the words of Saint Ignatius Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises became matter of prayer for the future saint, Francis Xavier:

"…those who will want to be more devoted and distinguish themselves in all service of their

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King Eternal and universal Lord, not only will offer their persons to the labor, but even, acting against their own sensuality and against their carnal and worldly love, will make offerings of greater value and greater importance, saying:

'Eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation with Thy favor and help, in presence of Thy infinite Goodness and in presence of Thy glorious Mother and of all the Saints of the heavenly Court; that I want and desire, and it is my deliberate determination, if only it be Thy greater service and praise, to imitate Thee in bearing all injuries and all abuse and all poverty of spirit, and actual poverty, too, if Thy most Holy Majesty wants to choose and receive me to such life and state'."

Perhaps folks might find such a meditation to be daunting, even overwhelming. Perhaps one might argue that one's state in life or one's condition, say, as a husband and provider for a young family, or as a nursing mother, for example, might preclude one from praying honestly the bold words of that meditation. Very well. That may be so.

But I believe that *all* Catholics can pray, in the company of Saint Francis Xavier, this particular meditation from the Spiritual Exercises—a simple meditation that we can and should make every day. Remember that Xavier himself made this very meditation, and it led to his becoming a great saint:

"Imagining Christ our Lord present and placed on the Cross, let me make a Colloquy, how from Creator He is come to making Himself man, and from life eternal is come to temporal death, and so to die for my sins.

Likewise, looking at myself, what I have done for Christ, what I am doing for Christ, what I ought to do for Christ.

And so, seeing Him such, and so nailed on the Cross, to go over that which will present itself.

The Colloquy is made, properly speaking, as one friend speaks to another, or as a servant to his master; now asking some grace, now blaming oneself for some misdeed, now communicating one's affairs, and asking advice in them.

And let me say an OUR FATHER."

It is true that few of us can recreate in detail the particulars of the life of Saint Francis Xavier. But all of us can draw upon the very same sources that inspired in him his love of God and zeal for souls. And that fact should give us all great hope.

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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

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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

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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.

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