The Joy and Justice of Gratitude

What set Saint Francis Xavier on fire for love of God and zeal for souls? What prompted him to risk his health and life, leave behind his dearest friends, and go to the ends of the earth with no expectation of ever returning home? The answer to that complex question can be summed up in just one word: "Gratitude."

Gratitude, Saint Ignatius Loyola taught his companions, is the virtue that is most pleasing to Heaven. When every other resolution fails, when we find ourselves wavering, when we find ourselves on the brink of temptation and inclining towards sin, we can stop and ask ourselves: "How can I here and now prove to God that I am grateful?" Asking that question and acting accordingly can be a bulwark against sin and despair, because any honest Christian will tell you that there is *always* a reason to be grateful. And it is always praiseworthy and just to prove our gratitude to Almighty God.

Saint Ignatius also taught his companions that love is shown more in deeds than in words. Anyone can talk a good line—the challenge is to put one's stated beliefs and values into concrete action. Clearly, Saint Francis Xavier learned that lesson well. He got on the boat, left home, and never looked back, welcoming the opportunity to prove his gratitude.

Xavier was formed in the school of prayer that is the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius. These Exercises end with what Jesuits call "the *Contemplatio*", variously translated as "the contemplation to attain the love of God" or "the contemplation to learn to love as God loves" or "the contemplation to gain love." Let's review the actual text of the *Contemplatio*, see how Xavier applied it to his life, and then ask how we can apply it to ours.

From the *Spiritual Exercises*:

CONTEMPLATION TO GAIN LOVE

Note. First, it is well to remark two things: the first is that love ought to be put more in deeds than in words.

The second, love consists in interchange between the two parties; that is to say in the lover's giving and communicating to the beloved what he has or out of what he has or can; and so, on the contrary, the beloved to the lover. So that if the one has knowledge, he give to the one who has it not. The same of honors, of riches; and so the one to the other.

CONTEMPLATION TO GAIN LOVE

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Prayer. The usual Prayer.

First Prelude. The first Prelude is a composition, which is here to see how I am standing before God our Lord, and of the Angels and of the Saints interceding for me.

Second Prelude. The second, to ask for what I want. It will be here to ask for interior knowledge of so great good received, in order that being entirely grateful, I may be able in all to love and serve His Divine Majesty.

First Point. The First Point is, to bring to memory the benefits received, of Creation, Redemption and particular gifts, pondering with much feeling how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He has, and then the same Lord desires to give me Himself as much as He can, according to His Divine ordination.

And with this to reflect on myself, considering with much reason and justice, what I ought on my side to offer and give to His Divine Majesty, that is to say, everything that is mine, and myself with it, as one who makes an offering with much feeling:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will — all that I have and possess. Thou gavest it to me: to Thee, Lord, I return it! All is Thine, dispose of it according to all Thy will. Give me Thy love and grace, for this is enough for me.

Second Point. The second, to look how God dwells in creatures, in the elements, giving them being, in the plants vegetating, in the animals feeling in them, in men giving them to understand: 21 and so in me, giving me being, animating me, giving me sensation and making me to understand; 22 likewise making a temple of me, being created to the likeness and image of His Divine Majesty; reflecting as much on myself in the way which is said in the first Point, or in another which I feel to be better. In the same manner will be done on each Point which follows.

Third Point. The third, to consider how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth — that is, behaves like one who labors — as in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, etc., giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation, etc.

Then to reflect on myself.

Fourth Point. The fourth, to look how all the good things and gifts descend from above, as my poor power from the supreme and infinite power from above; and so justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc.; as from the sun descend the rays, from the fountain the waters, etc.

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Then to finish reflecting on myself, as has been said.

I will end with a Colloquy and an OUR FATHER.

Which words of the text stand out? How about these? "…all the good things and gifts descend from above…" Recognizing this, Ignatius himself, and Xavier, in his turn, responded to God with, "Take, Lord, and receive…" Both saints made a glad return to God of the abundant life they had received from God. What would the rest of this day look like, what would tomorrow look like, what would our eternity look like, if, like Saint Francis Xavier, we chose to live by gratitude?

As we conclude the Novena of Grace, let's be mindful of the privilege of praying in the company of so great a saint as Francis Xavier. Let's be mindful of the privilege of being members of the one Church Christ founded. And let's be alert to our daily opportunities to prove to God that we are truly grateful.

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.

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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.

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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?

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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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