

The Story of Francisco Xavier

Apostle of the East

Francisco Xavier is one of the most exciting and adventurous figures of the sixteenth century. He travelled where few westerners had been: to India, to Malaysia, to Japan, and to China. He undertook long and arduous voyages, risking everything to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to farmer and fisherman, king and emperor.

Francisco was born in the castle at Javier, only a few miles from the birthplace of St Ignatius at Loyola. While students at the University of Paris, they became lifelong friends. Both were from noble and wealthy families, assured of comfort, success and fame. But Ignatius was already well on the road to being a pilgrim for God, devoting his life to helping souls.

At first this was not a calling Francisco shared. But Ignatius' persistent and gentle taunting, "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world but forfeit his life?"⁴ eventually claimed Francisco as his 'friend in the Lord.'

Joined by others at Paris, these first companions formed what would soon become known as the Company (or Society) of Jesus, bound by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, ready to go wherever the need was greatest.

Formed by the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius' little book of exercises for the spirit, these first Jesuits were on fire with the love of God, a love which showed itself in deeds: begging alms, teaching catechism, tending to the poor, the sick, and prostitutes and to those rejected by society.

In 1539, King John III of Portugal asked Ignatius for two Jesuits to go to the flourishing Portuguese colony of Goa in India. Another man dropped out at the last moment and Francisco Xavier seized his opportunity to do greater things for God.

⁴ Mark 8:36