

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Dec 3rd 2016

Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier, Priest

Learning Perseverance in Difficult Times

Today we celebrate the feast of our Jesuit brother, St. Francis Xavier. Francis was one of the earliest companions of the Society of Jesus. He and several others met St. Ignatius of Loyola at the University of Paris where they were preparing themselves for apostolic works around the world. They formed the Religious Order, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

Francis, known today as the Patron Saint of Missionaries, left Europe and his Jesuit companions in the very early years of their religious order. He went to the Far East and worked extensively in India, Malaysia and Japan. When he died he was looking ahead to even richer fields of spreading the Good News of Jesus in the Orient.

Our first reading in today's liturgy would have been appealing to Francis. It is filled with hope, a significant theme in our Advent season. The Prophet Isaiah speaks the word of God filled with longing and joy and the possibilities of God's interaction with the People God calls his own.

Isaiah addresses himself to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, God's holy city, in the midst of troubled times. The people's spirit has been buffeted and bounced about and they needed to hear a message of hope. "The Lord will give you the bread you need and the water for which you thirst."

Indeed God fills their hungers and thirsts, both on the level of basic human needs and the needs of their spirits now pushed down and depressed by the circumstances of their lives. "On the day the Lord binds up the wounds of his people, he will heal (their) bruises." The promises of God are about to be revealed and realized.

Advent provides us with the time to prepare our hearts and souls for the reality of Jesus' entrance into our world. That entrance has already happened in the life-death-resurrection of The Christ, but we look for deepening of that promise in our own lives.

I can imagine Francis Xavier reveling in the beauty of God's promises and their fulfillment in the person of Jesus. Francis took seriously the "Go and baptize (them) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" which are part of the last words in St. Matthew's Gospel spoken by the Risen Christ to his disciples gathered on a hilltop in Galilee.

Xavier toiled tirelessly in baptizing the Far Eastern world. In him we have a wonderful model of how to bring Christ to our world. A world that cries out for peacefulness, joy, mercy and forgiveness.

Loving God let us hear your call to enhance the Reign of Heaven which you have graced us with in the life, death and Resurrection of our Brother Jesus. Help us to be faithful companions to our sisters and brothers you have been called in Baptism to be your People and those around the world who are eager to hear your word.

Tom Shanahan, S.J.-Creighton University's Relations and the Theology Department