



St. Francis Xavier, SJ

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, we find this line: “But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” For many of us living in the 21st century, Jesus’ command to go to the “ends of the earth” to share the Gospel message is a sacrifice, but not an insurmountable one—after all, it’s just a plane ride away.

But in the 1500s, there were no airplanes—and a trip to the “ends of the earth” often meant you were going there to stay. That was the risk that St. Francis Xavier took to share the love of Christ with strangers in distant lands. Though he was born to wealth—he grew up in a castle in the Basque region of Spain—Francis would eventually commit to a life of poverty that would take him to the Far East. While studying at the University of Paris, he met Ignatius of Loyola—future founder of the Jesuits, and future saint. Francis followed Ignatius to Venice, where the two men were ordained to the priesthood. Just a few years later, Francis and Ignatius went before the pope in Rome and were formally recognized as members of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits had been founded.

St. Francis Xavier embodied St. Ignatius’ original intention for the society—that of roaming missionary preachers. In March of 1540, Francis left Rome at the request of the king of Portugal to preach the Gospel in India. He made his way to Goa, India, where he preached, cared for the sick and taught children.

Over the next 10 years, Francis would travel throughout India, the Philippines and Japan—and a host of islands in between—preaching the Good News. He met and mentored numerous men and women in the faith, encouraging many to consider a religious vocation. Francis always sought to live among the people he encountered, to learn and respect their customs and culture.

St. Francis Xavier is rightly recognized as one of the patron saints of missionaries for the way he lived his mission, traveling and proclaiming the message of Christ through his words and actions. He challenges us to examine our own lives, to see how we proclaim that message of love, peace and justice. With whom might we share this message? From whom have we received it?