



SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER
April 7, 1506 – December 2, 1552
By Father Jon Schnobrich

Recently, I tore my ACL and had surgery to repair it. When I first met the surgeon, I was presented with three options for the ACL graft that would, essentially, replace my shredded ligament. I chose to go with the cadaver graft, which meant that the surgeon would remove what was left of my ACL and replace it with a ligament from a cadaver. Although the thought of another person's tissue in my knee is a little strange, I am grateful for their donation for without it, I would not be able to return to the sports and activities that I so enjoy.

What was most interesting about the rehab process was learning the way in which the body must *revascularize* this new tissue. Because the cadaver graft was originally not my own ligament, my body had to begin working its way through this new tissue to bring blood into it, enliven it, and then eventually make it part of me.

Upon reflection, the work of 'revascularization' that the body does to assimilate new tissue can be seen as a metaphor for evangelization. If, as a result of original sin, the human family was cut off from the life-blood (if you will) of God's grace, then the work of evangelization is similar to enlivening parts of the body that exist without the supernatural life of God flowing through them. For the Church in the modern world, and especially for today's clergy, this 'revascularization' of the body of Christ is essential to our mission. We must, however, look to the successful evangelists who have gone before us to learn how they brought God's life into the parts of the body. St. Francis Xavier is one such example.

What makes Xavier's priestly life so extraordinary is what God was able to accomplish through him in such a short period of time. His missionary life only began in 1542 and lasted a decade before he died; yet he reached 10 countries and islands where he tirelessly proclaimed the Gospel, catechized, baptized, and fathered the faith of the natives there. The actual number of converts as a result of Xavier's efforts is unknown, but it would not be unreasonable to think that it was in the tens of thousands. His apostolic zeal was unwavering, and evidenced by the fruit of his labors. Not only is St. Francis Xavier considered the greatest evangelist since the Apostles, but the Bull of his Canonization listed 18 miracles specifically accredited to him, although tradition attests to many others.

What does it mean to evangelize? How was Xavier so triumphant in his efforts, amidst the immense challenges he faced linguistically and culturally? To paraphrase the 7th century Benedictine Monk St. Ildephonsus, "The Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation *evangelized* Mary; he showed her ache. This was the ache she felt from the beginning of her life." By this definition, then, to evangelize is to awaken the ache in another, and then lead them to Christ.

One aspect that gives us the advantage in the work of evangelization is the common denominator for every person, every parish, every diocese, or every country that we may be called to serve – everyone has the ache for love. Xavier entered countries, visited islands, and spoke with people who had never even heard the name 'Jesus Christ' before, but he was convicted that each of them had the ache for love within their heart. In the success he had as an evangelist, he teaches us that our efforts today must center around this same conviction so that we priests, co-workers with Christ, may help to *revascularize* the heart of the human family in order that the ache within our brothers and sisters may awaken to receive the life of God.



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