

Speech – Gathering with Indian Religious Community at St. Monica – December 3, 2024

Dear friends; it is a privilege to gather with you today, precisely on the Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier. The zeal of Saint Francis Xavier for the Gospel, and his unwavering commitment to proclaiming the Good News to the ends of the earth, remain a beacon for us, especially as we serve as ministers of the Lord here in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Let us reflect on his inspiring life as a missionary, priest, and servant of Christ.

Saint Francis Xavier's life epitomized the missionary spirit. From the bustling streets of Goa to the shores of Japan, he embraced the call to proclaim Christ with courage and compassion. His extraordinary achievements were not born from human strength alone, but from a profound humility that allowed the Holy Spirit to work through him. His reliance on the Spirit challenges us today: Do we allow ourselves to be led by God, trusting that His strength is made perfect in our weakness?

Missionary zeal, as Xavier demonstrated, is not a mere human endeavor; it is born of the Spirit. This zeal requires us to become vessels of God's grace, open and docile, like the 'shoot from the trunk of Jesse' proclaimed in today's first reading from Isaiah (Is 11:1). In moments of trial, when our efforts seem fruitless or the cultural barriers overwhelming, let us remember: the Spirit transforms even the most desolate landscapes into vibrant fields of new life.

As missionaries, we are called to immerse ourselves in the cultures and lives of the people we serve, as Saint Paul exhorts: "I have become all things to all, to save at least some" (1 Cor 9:22).

Saint Francis Xavier exemplified this, learning languages, respecting local customs, and incorporating popular piety into his evangelization. His life reminds us that genuine missionary work is not about imposing but proposing Christ in a way that resonates deeply with those we serve.

Here in San Antonio, we minister in a land rich with cultural diversity. Like Francis Xavier, we must bridge divides and foster communion, embodying Christ's love in every encounter. Whether ministering to families, accompanying youth, or celebrating with the faithful, let us remember the wisdom of today's Gospel: "You have hidden these things from the wise and the learned; you have revealed them to the childlike" (Mt 11:25). We must approach each person with the simplicity and openness of a child, trusting that God will reveal Himself through our small acts of love and service.

Missionary work is not about grandiosity but faithfulness. In the missionary lands of the New Evangelization, it is mostly about witnessing. As Isaiah prophesied, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him" (Is 11:2). This same Spirit rests upon us, empowering us with gifts of wisdom, courage, and understanding. With these gifts, we are equipped to proclaim Christ boldly and joyfully, even amid the challenges of our ministry.

Speaking about Saint Francis Xavier, Pope Francis has pointed out: "His intense activity was always joined with prayer, with the mystical and contemplative union with God." Let us renew our awareness and conviction that without Christ we can do nothing. Our prayer must remind us of our total dependence on the Holy Spirit, the gift of Jesus and the Father for us.

May Saint Francis Xavier inspire us to be relentless in our mission, humble in our service, and steadfast in our faith. Let us pray for his intercession, and the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, that the same Spirit that guided him may renew us today, enabling us to bring the light of Christ to all we meet.

Thank you, and may God bless you abundantly in your ministry.