

DECEMBER 3 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

The readings from Isaiah and the Gospel focus on the theme of compassion and consolation.

Isaiah tells the Israelites that the Lord will make a feast for all on the holy mountain. The Lord will destroy death forever. The Lord will wipe away tears.

In our Gospel, Jesus has compassion for the crowds. He does not stop there. He will console them with bread, which will remind the people of the Lord, the feeding of the Israelites during their exodus with bread from heaven.

It is the same compassion and consolation that would lead Francis Xavier, whose feast we celebrate today. It would take him from his native Navarre in the Basque province of Spain all the way to India, to the Moluccas and Japan.

St. Francis Xavier is especially dear to me, because my ancestors heard the Good News through him and became believers and Catholics. Next month, I hope to visit Goa in India, and I will go to the village where my parents, grandparents, great-grandparents lived. They went to the local church. They were baptized. They received the sacraments. They were buried from there.

In 1973, my father proudly took me to the little chapel to celebrate one of my many first Masses the week after my ordination. The church was Salvador do Mundo, close to the village of Penha de França. I will pray for those whose names are included in the Daily TV Mass book, and I will light a candle to ask the Lord to bless you.

Francis Xavier was born to a noble but impoverished family. Today, you can visit Xavier Castle in Spain. He had ambitions. He wanted to join

the clerical state and eventually reach some high position. Perhaps he had the prestigious Diocese of Burgos in mind, but the Lord had other plans.

Xavier was known for his stubbornness and stamina, which is typical of the Basque people. This would be both his strength and his weakness. He would persevere where others would have thrown in the towel. But this persistence caused him to step on the toes both of the local people and the Portuguese authorities.

Francis Xavier was 36 years old when he landed in Goa in 1542. He would work there for merely 10 years. Most of this time would be in travelling, so much so that he was nicknamed a saint in a hurry. Not saint in a hurry, but saint in a hurry. He would stop at a place, teach, baptize, and move on to the next village, town or county.

But he impressed the people with his humility and dedication. He lived without fanfare. He darned his own clothes. He mended his own footwear. He would walk through the streets ringing a bell, calling children. He would teach them prayers and catechism. He realized that people learn best through singing. He would compose songs and write verses to teach them the catechism. He would then baptize them and move on.

He baptized so many that St. Ignatius would write to him from Spain, “Less water, Francis, and more teaching.” But he left the decision to Francis, because Francis was on the spot and Francis would be aware of the circumstances and the conditions.

In the Gospel, Jesus saw the multitude who had been listening to him for days. He had compassion on them. When the disciples said to him, “Disperse the crowds so that they may go to the villages and buy food,” Jesus tersely replied, “You feed them.”

Francis Xavier put this same command into practice. When he saw the people in need of spiritual nourishment, he would not leave it to teachers or catechists. He would do it himself. He would walk the streets and talk about God's mercy and salvation for all who were there to listen to him.

He also realized that if the Gospel is to be preached and understood and accepted, then the core message of the Gospel had to be wrapped in a language of the local people, using examples and conditions that they could relate to in daily life. There was no point in talking about castles in Spain when the people were building mahals and temples and mosques.

Francis took time to know the culture, the tradition and the customs of the people in Goa, the people in the Moluccas and Japan. Today, we would call this ministry inculturation. Francis Xavier started that 400 years ago.

Another very important truth that Francis kept in mind: the revelation of God to the people in the East was there long before Francis Xavier arrived in 1542. He was aware that the Good News would continue long after he died and was buried. Francis Xavier was convinced that all he had to do was to stoke the embers of the Good News. He must encourage the fainthearted. He must challenge the brave to step out of their comfort zone. Only then would the command of Jesus be fulfilled: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News."

Some of Francis Xavier's summary decisions would not be used or even tolerated today, but no one would contest his zeal, his dedication, and his love for the Gospel, and the people for whom or to whom he would bring the Good News.

God bless you all.