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**Mark 16: 9-17**

**Resurrection and the Great Commission**

**9** Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.

**10** She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept.

**11** But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

**12** After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country.

**13** And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

**14** Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.

**15** And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Living the Dream, The Agony of St Francis Xavier at Sanchin, China.**

I cannot read this gospel and not think first of my Mother’s permanent deacon friend, Tom. In her last 30 years my mother became friends with Tom at her parish in rural Washington State. As it turned out Tom also had grown up in a small town in South Dakota and they had a lot in common.

Over the years, I was able to join their parish for Sunday Mass and a few Christmas liturgies. Tom would always ask me where I had been and what I had been up to. Tom knew that I had spent a year in the Philippines, four years in the Bahamas, had visited China, and spent time in Europe. Tom would say that I had at least the first half of the Great Commission down. Go out to all the world. I had gone out to much of the world! It is very Jesuit to go out. In fact, during formation, Jesuits learn we do not have a home.

St. Francis Xavier did not have a home in the last decade of his life. And even after he left his family in Navarre, he had studied in Paris, spent time in Vienna, and unable to get to Jerusalem, had resigned himself to helping Saint Ignatius in Rome.

In1622, 70 years after his death in 1552, St. Francis Xavier was canonized, and for the last century has been celebrated by the Universal Church as an example of extraordinary missionary zeal, often being called the greatest missionary since the apostles.

In a period of 10 years it is unimaginable, as one commentator noted, that the he:

*Could have visited so many countries*

*traversed so many seas, preached the Gospel to so many nations*

*converted so many ….*

*And [brought such a] …great number of*[*souls*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm)*…to Christ.*

(Astrain, A. (1909). St. Francis Xavier. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved February 21, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06233b.htm>.)

We have all been inspired by St. Francis Xavier’s life and ministry. Tonight I would like comment on the unusual painting of St. Francis you have been given, and reflect with you on the messages we could take from that painting.

We see so many paintings of St. Francis baptizing, converting, and sharing the gospel with peoples of many nations and cultures. We do not see many paintings of St. Francis dying.

This painting in the Church of Saint Francis Xavier, Missoula, Montana painted by a Jesuit Brother Joseph Carignano (1853–1919) in the mid-1890’s, in his spare time, as he cooked for the Jesuits working in the high school and the parish. This is one of his sixty or so paintings in the Missoula church. And he painted almost that many in the Blackfoot Mission Church of Saint Ignatius, at Saint Ignatius, Montana. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St.\_Francis\_Xavier\_Church\_(Missoula,\_Montana)

Here we see St. Francis in Sanchin, China, where he died.

The simple hut was built for St. Francis on the island as he was too ill to go on to his goal, China itself.

Notice that St. Francis bed is set up outside the crude hut where he could look (beyond that water) at the place which he thought would be the most dramatic and transformative of his mission opportunities—the conversation of China, the Celestial Empire, to Christ. So close but yet so far.

Yes, he had had great apostolic success in Portugal, India, and Japan.

He had brought the love of God and faith to many thousands, and healing to many others. He is still the Church’s best example of tireless evangelization.

So what do I see in this painting of Saint Francis that inspires me.

I see a profoundly disappointed man.

He could see his next goal. But he will not accomplish it.

It was right there on the horizon. But he could not get there.

A man who had accomplished so much, how could he not succeed in this plan-- The agony that this failure must have been for him.

Francis did not know that Jesuits would come after him to China.

Coincidentally, the Jesuit who did make it to China and had great missionary success there, Father Matteo Ricci, was born the same year that St. Francis Xavier died, 1552.

This small hut would be his last bed. Notice the lovely simplicity of the scene. I suspect that the figures of Christ welcoming him and the angels, one offering Francis a crown, were additions from the artistic imagination of Brother Carignano and may not have been the vision Saint Francis had from his death bed.

The scene is so peaceful. In fact it is beautiful, if we can prescind from the message of loss in the painting. I believe we see loss because we know what it is like to have our plans fail. We can imagine how we will serve Christ and the Kingdom, and we believe that our plans obviously should be God’s plan for us, but is not.

This reflection about how Saint Francis life ended, and his adjustment to God’s plan, is where we see another Ignatian lesson.

We know that no matter how inspired our plans are with ‘holy desires’, we must constantly look for God’s continued confirmation, and stay attuned to the work of God in the reality of our lives. God inspires us to attempt great things, but does not promise us that we will succeed. Just as God inspired Saint Ignatius to go to the Holy Land, but despite all Ignatius’ best efforts and his attempted bargaining, with God and with the Franciscans, Ignatius was not permitted to stay there. The Franciscans who to this day are still charged by the Vatican to be the caretakers of the shines of the Holy Land would not permit the Pilgrim, as Ignatius called himself, to stay there. So you see our tensions with the Franciscans go all the way back to the beginning. In an unexpected turn Pope Francis may have healed the Jesuit/Franciscan relationship, we will see.

The other Ignatian message which St. Francis gives us is that God’s call may cost us to lose things that are very important to us. St. Francis and St. Ignatius had been friends since the beginning, actually before the beginning of the Society, while they were students at the University of Paris. They had been at the center of the conversation about whether and then how they would form a religious community, and then how they would live out their individual desires to serve Christ in community.

So later, in 1540, just after the Vatican approval of the Jesuit order, Pope Paul III asked that two Jesuits would start a mission in the Portuguese colonies in India. Saint Ignatius did not at first choose St. Francis for this. At the last minute one of those chosen to go to India was ill and could not go. Saint Ignatius looked for another and Saint Francis offered to go.

We forget today that for many, including, but not limited to Jesuits, intercontinental travel in the 16th Century, like a trip to India, was seen as a lifelong assignment. Francis knew that he would likely not see Ignatius again. These two best friends from the beginning would write long letters to each other, five letters in 10 years, as the letters took many months to reach the other. God choose to separate these two friends, as each was called to a different role in the early Society of Jesus.

God kept calling St. Francis to move on to the next mission challenge. Finally it was the opportunity to go to the Celestial Kingdom, the vast Chinese empire, in search of the rich harvest of souls for Christ that might be possible there. China’s rich cultural resources and large population, were just too much of an opportunity for Francis to pass on.

So what do we learn from Saint Francis Xavier. We see lived out a call to serve God our Lord and to spend ourselves in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations.

As we see Saint Matthew’s Great Commission in chapter 28:

**19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

**20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

God was with Saint Francis in his many missionary successes and with him as well in Sanchin, as God called Saint Francis home. We pray tonight that we too are able to offer “our all” in service to the Mission of Christ, and thus be prepared when God calls us to himself. This is one of our request of God this night, following the example of Saint Francis Xavier whose life and service has inspired us and so many others for almost 500 years.