

Praying with St Francis Xavier

The Novena of Grace

The Church has always rejoiced in the “great cloud of witnesses”¹ who are the saints. These men and women, over the generations and in so many places, have shown what it is to live the Christian life, sometimes to the point of surrendering their own lives in martyrdom. Their earthly lives may have ended but their prayers continue in heaven.

The Church has long believed that the saints intercede on our behalf, asking God for the graces and blessings which we forget to ask for or for which we find no time to pray: “Their intercession is their most exalted service to God’s plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.”²

Devotion to Francisco Xavier has always been immensely popular as he fires the imagination with his heroic travels to distant peoples and lands across the globe.

This novena is nine days of prayer, in the company of St Francis Xavier, through the letters he wrote. As a Jesuit, Francisco underwent and then, in turn, led others through the *Spiritual Exercises* of his great friend St Ignatius Loyola.

His writings reflect the spiritual insights and preoccupations of the *Spiritual Exercises*. We pray to know ourselves better, to discern the will of God for each of us in the daily unfolding of our lives, to hear and generously answer Christ’s call to follow him, whatever the cost, and to understand that everything is unmerited gift from God, poured out lavishly upon us “as rays from the sun or waters from the spring.”³

The present form of the Novena was begun in the seventeenth century by Fr Marcello Mastrilli SJ (1603-37). While working in Naples, he sustained serious head injuries

¹ Hebrews 12:1

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n.2683 (1992)

³ Ignatius Loyola *Spiritual Exercises* n.237