



Novena of Grace 2021

GRACE OF THE DAY & INSPIRATION FROM THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

Day 1 | Tuesday 9 March | Barbara Henderson

Good evening! Each day of this Novena of Grace, we will prayerfully ask for a grace from God. Today **we pray for the grace to heal, forgive and repair, letting our hearts be merciful.**

Each day - since it was St. Francis Xavier's appearance to a priest that gave birth to the tradition of the Novena of Grace - we will also tell you a brief story about or give you a quote illustrating how Francis Xavier lived out the grace in his own life.

We begin by hearing about the life of Francis Xavier:

Francis was a man of tremendous adaptability as he traveled all over Asia, Southeast Asia and Japan as a missionary. He seemed to understand that the world was big and our hearts have to be big too.

Though Francis Xavier's zeal and call may look different than ours, he sought to follow Christ and the pattern of Christ as intimately as possible, a "love and desire" for union that he knew would completely transform his life.

When Francis Xavier arrived in Goa, India, he confronted the European settlers' inhumane treatment of slaves, their lack of care for the poor, their use and abuse of concubines. Though the settlers were Christians, the society they ruled ignored the Gospel message. Francis dedicated himself to teaching the colonists and to serving the subjects of their injustice. Today, Catholic Social Teaching would name what Francis encountered as the social sins of slavery, injustice, and sexual exploitation. In so doing, he had courage to name the injustices and the heart to forgive.

In this spirit, **we pray for the grace to heal, forgive and repair, letting our hearts be merciful.**



Novena of Grace 2021

Day 2 | Wednesday 10 March | Corbin Johnson

Good evening! Welcome to the Novena of Grace! I'm Corbin Johnson. Each day of this Novena of Grace, we start by humbly asking for a grace from God. Today **we pray for the grace to recognize and live God's love, letting our hearts be courageous.**

In today's readings, we hear how Jesus's radical call to love is a fulfillment of the laws and we are encouraged to follow Jesus in living out God's love. In today's world, as in Francis Xavier's time, it can be difficult to live God's message of love. But in one of the last letters we have from Francis, he writes that it would be a greater danger to distrust God's love:

"It would now be a much greater danger to distrust his mercy and power through fear of the dangers which we could incur in his service- for, if it is to his greater service, he will protect us from the dangers of this life- than it would be to endure all the evils which could be inflicted upon by the enemies of God." (To Father Francisco Pérez, in Malacca, From Sancian, October 22, 1552)

At times the laws of our world can seem at odds with the laws of God. We are reminded of the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail:

"One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws... An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." (Letter from a Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963)

So today – inspired by Francis and Dr. King to obey and teach God's law of love - **we pray for the grace to recognize and live God's love, letting our hearts be courageous.**



Novena of Grace 2021

Day 3 | Thursday 11 March | Pete Henriot, SJ

Good evening! Welcome to the Novena of Grace! I'm Pete Henriot. **Today, we pray for the grace to open our hearts to the many social problems around us.**

You know how our hearts are so central to our life, to every moment of our life. I learned that very clearly a few years ago when I had major heart surgery. I'm here today because of the good care of a very skilled heart doctor -- and maybe that's true of a few others of you making this 2021 Novena.

But the Scripture tonight is going to tell us another very strong lesson about care of our hearts. Our response to Psalm 95 is very clear with our repeated petition: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts!" And the prophet Jeremiah tells the sad story of some earlier followers of our Good God: "My people have walked in the hardness of their evil hearts."

And so you and I need to examine our hearts to be sure that they are not getting cold and hardened, in these days of so many social problems and challenges around us: COVID-19, systemic racism, ecological dangers, degrading sexism. You name it!

Francis Xavier recognised social problems and challenges around him and opened his heart to the poor and the sick and abandoned while preaching the Good News of Salvation in India.

And Francis prayed very clearly: "*May God our Lord grant us in time the gift to perceive his holy will. He wishes that we should always be ready to fulfill it whenever he manifests it to us and lets us feel it within our souls.*" Indeed, "within our hearts" too!

So today, following St. Francis Xavier's example, **we pray for the grace to open our hearts to the many social problems around us.**



Novena of Grace 2021

Day 4 | Friday 12 March | Barbara Henderson

Good evening! Today, March 12th, is the anniversary of the canonizations of St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier. Following their example, **we pray for the grace to have compassion for our neighbors, opening our hearts to loving them.**

In 1549, from Japan, Francis Xavier wrote a letter to the Jesuits of Goa. It's important to remember that these words were offered to a collective group of Jesuits:

"I therefore ask you to base all that you do entirely upon God and not to trust your own abilities, knowledge or reputation; and in this way I shall know that you are ready for all the great trials spiritual as well as worldly, which can afflict you, for God raises up and supports the humble, especially those who in small and lowly matters have seen, as in a polished mirror, their own weaknesses and have conquered them."

Francis Xavier spoke of God's support for those who have made a humble accounting of their own weaknesses. He spoke these words of hope and support to a community anticipating struggle.

In the Gospel today, Mark writes, "Love your neighbor as yourself. Love God with all your heart...with all your understanding... with all your strength." *Mark 12:28-34*

So today, in the spirit of Francis Xavier and Mark the evangelist, **we pray for the grace to have compassion for our neighbors, opening our hearts to loving them.**



Novena of Grace 2021

Day 5 | Saturday 13 March | Corbin Johnson

Good morning! Today is the anniversary of the election of Pope Francis. So it is fitting that this morning, **we pray for the grace to rest in God's merciful embrace, letting our hearts be softened.**

In his 1549 letter to the community of Jesuits in Goa, Francis Xavier wrote of placing our trust in God's mercy:

"We are confused when we reflect upon this great grace which our Lord is giving us along with many others and perceive the manifest mercy that he is employing in our regard..."

Judge now for yourselves how calm, consoled, and completely filled with joy our lives would be if we were what we should be, having all our hopes in him from whom all good comes. He does not deceive those who trust in him, but is, instead, more generous with his gifts than we are in our requests and hopes. For the love of our Lord, help us to give thanks for such great favors" (To His companions Living in Goa, From Kagoshima, November 5, 1549)

Saint Francis highlights the confusion that we can feel when we try to understand how it is that we sinners are so loved by God - a spiritual insight that forms the basis of the first week of the spiritual exercises that Saint Ignatius taught his brothers in faith. Francis recognizes the spiritual gifts of consolation that follow putting our trust in God's love and mercy.

So today, with the example of Francis to guide us, we place our trust in God and **we pray for the grace to rest in God's merciful embrace, letting our hearts be softened.**



Novena of Grace 2021

Day 6 | Sunday 14 March | Pete Henriot, SJ

Good morning! Today **we pray for the grace to let our hearts be touched by God's ever-present mercy.**

God is rich in mercy, always ready to shower us with this great grace, unearned by us. Pope Francis speaks again and again of mercy, acknowledging of himself: "I am a forgiven sinner."

In seeking God's mercy, we accept a gift already given, the unearned grace of forgiveness. Many of us experience that so richly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance. Our God is merciful, we just have to authentically ask for mercy -- unearned and undeserved as it is.

The Sacrament of Confession is not, in Pope Francis's challenging words, a "dry cleaning experience" where we have to detail every spot and blemish to be sure that we're looking good!

After Francis Xavier died, the Jesuits in Japan commented that Francis Xavier didn't often have the language to verbally share his message of God's mercy in Japanese, but his facial expression and presence brought a stronger and more tangible message of mercy.

So today, following Francis Xavier's example, **we pray for the grace to let our hearts be touched by God's ever-present mercy.**



Novena of Grace 2021

Day 7 | Monday 15 March | Corbin Johnson

Today **we pray for the grace to open our hearts to the bountiful possibilities of God's love.**

St. Francis Xavier lived in a way that illustrated his belief in something that he could not yet see. He willingly answered the call of God and his friend Ignatius to travel to parts of the world that he had never seen to spread the mission of God's kingdom that did not yet exist. In the midst of the global pandemics of COVID-19, hunger, war, poverty, and environmental destruction, Pope Francis reminds us that we are called to create a civilization of love. He reminds us that we are, at our heart, an Easter people who derive hope from the resurrection:

"The impact of everything that's happening, the serious consequences that are already being reported and glimpsed, the pain and mourning for our loved ones disorient, distress and paralyse us. It is the heaviness of the tombstone that imposes itself on the future and that threatens, with its realism, to bury all hope..."

It is urgent to discern and find the pulse of the Spirit to promote, together with others, the dynamics that can testify and channel the new life that the Lord wants to generate at this specific moment in history... This is the propitious time to encourage ourselves to a new imagining of the possible with the realism that only the Gospel can provide us...

The globalisation of indifference will continue to threaten and tempt our journey... Hopefully it will find us, for our part, with the necessary antibodies of justice, charity and solidarity.

Let us not be afraid to live the alternative of the civilisation of love, which is a civilisation of hope: against anguish and fear, sadness and discouragement, passivity and fatigue. The civilization of love is built daily, without interruption. It involves the committed effort of everyone. Therefore, it involves a committed community of brothers and sisters." (A Plan for Resurrection, April 17, 2020)

So today, following the actions of Saint Francis and the words of Pope Francis, **we pray for the grace to open our hearts to the bountiful possibilities of God's love.**



Novena of Grace 2021

Day 8 | Tuesday 16 March | Pete Henriot, SJ

Good evening. **We pray for the grace of sharing the heart of Jesus with those most in need.**

Today's scripture tells us of the freshness and life-giving wonder of water. It may remind us of good times we experienced in the water around us!

But we are also reminded as we draw near to the end of this year's Novena of Grace that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed deep structural inequities in our society: health care disparities, vaccine access, poverty consequences., etc. The pandemic needs a strong cure, beginning with the recognition that we are all equal in God's sight and hence equally deserving of our loving care.

Jesus is not blind to those who suffer but even today shows has strong concern for those who endure the isolation and anxieties of COVID-19. This should prompt us to share his love today by responding to the pandemic with all appropriate measures (e.g., masks, social distancing) and showing special kindnesses to the lonely, the frightened, the neglected.

Francis Xavier baptised the poor and sick Indians and also offered loving care for their material needs. This irritated the Europeans who didn't recognise the human dignity of the Indians.

As so today, **we pray for the grace of sharing the heart of Jesus with those most in need.**



Novena of Grace 2021

Day 9 | Wednesday 17 March | Barbara Henderson

Each day of these Nine Days of Grace, we have prayerfully asked for a grace from God. Today, the final day, **we pray for the grace to comfort and show mercy with the heart of a mother.**

We hear from *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier* of a time when Francis was caught in a hurricane. He wrote:

“When the storm was at its worst, I commended myself to God our Lord, beginning by first taking as advocates on earth all those of the blessed Society of Jesus, together with all those who are devoted to it. [...] Nor did I neglect to take as advocates all the saints in the glory of paradise. [...]

I found such great consolation from all this help and assistance during the storm that it was perhaps many times greater than what I experienced after I had been freed from the peril. [...]

In another time of uncertainty, Francis Xavier prayed:

“May God our Lord grant us in time the gift to perceive his holy will. He wishes that we should always be ready to fulfill it whenever he manifests it to us and lets us feel it within our souls. To fare well in this life, we must be pilgrims ready to go wherever we can serve God our Lord the more. “

Francis Xavier recognized how the Lord comforted and assisted him during times of turmoil and uncertainty, offering him grace like a mother would; and that we are likewise called to show mercy whenever and wherever God calls.

So as we end this Novena of Grace we follow the caring example of Francis, **and we pray for the grace to comfort - and show mercy - with the heart of a mother.**