



Feast of St Francis Xavier, Priest



Date: Wednesday, December 3, 2025 | **Season:** Advent | **Year:** A

First Reading: Isaiah 25:6–10a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1–6 | **Response:** Psalm 23:6cd

Gospel Acclamation: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 15:29–37

Preached at: The Jesuit Institute in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Dear friends in Christ, this homily carries one simple image: God prepares a table on the mountain, and through saints like Francis Xavier he sends us out to bring the world there.

Francis Xavier, one of the first companions of Ignatius, stands as a sign of what grace can do when a heart is set ablaze by mission. He began as a clever young academic in Paris, ambitious for reputation, eager for advancement. But in the long, searching conversations that formed the early Society of Jesus, his heart was re-shaped. Ignatius invited him to imagine the world as God sees it, to hear the cries of distant peoples who had never been told of Christ, to feel the ache of a world longing for hope. And Francis said yes. He crossed seas that made him sick, travelled through cultures that puzzled him, learned languages that stretched him, adapted his dress and customs so the Gospel could find a home; yet he was happiest living simply with the poor. He died on a sandbank, gazing toward China, still dreaming of the next soul to invite to God's table. His life became a map for the missionary heart of the Society of Jesus: to go anywhere, to serve anyone, to offer everything.

With Francis in our minds, we turn to our first reading from Isaiah, where God promises a feast on the mountain for all peoples. Isaiah imagines a day when every nation, not only Israel, will sit together and eat richly from God's generosity. This is not a private meal; it is a banquet meant for the world. The shroud is lifted, tears are dried, death itself is undone. No wonder this text is often chosen at funerals, for it offers a tenderness that wraps grief with hope. But today it

speaks even more strongly of Advent, the season of longing, the season of promise, the season that teaches us to lift our eyes toward the mountain where God is already preparing a welcome for every tribe and tongue.

How could a Jesuit hear such a reading and not think of Francis Xavier? Isaiah's mountain becomes the horizon Francis chased across oceans. Isaiah's feast becomes the hope Francis carried in his weary hands. Isaiah's promise becomes the very heartbeat of the missionary impulse at the centre of the Society of Jesus: the conviction that no human being lies outside the circle of God's care. In a world where borders harden and suspicion grows, where our own South Africa wrestles with xenophobia, inequality, and the frayed threads of community life, Isaiah's vision is not only beautiful; it is necessary. Our Catholic faith places dignity at the centre, insisting that every person is welcome at God's table. Isaiah dares us to believe it is true and to act accordingly.

Pir Psalm draws this even closer. The Lord is not only preparing a table for the nations; he prepares a table for you. In valleys filled with shadow, in seasons where fear stiffens the heart, the shepherd walks beside us. He sets a table in the presence of all that threatens to undo us. He anoints, he restores, he stays. If Isaiah speaks to the world, Psalm 23 speaks to the soul. It echoes in the hearts of our students who wonder what the future holds, in the families anxious about rising costs, in communities wounded by violence. It reminds us that mission is never a task we perform alone. We walk with the shepherd. We act because he is with us. Goodness and kindness follow us not as a distant hope but as companions on the road.

Our Gospel unfolds on another mountain. The crowds gather: the blind, the lame, the sick, the silent. They place them at the feet of Jesus, and he heals them. Here, Isaiah's prophecy takes flesh. The nations come. The mountain rises. The feast begins with healing. And again we see Jesus' heart moved by compassion. He refuses to send them away hungry. He refuses to separate their spiritual need from their physical hunger. His compassion is whole, not partial.

The disciples, still learning the shape of grace, ask where they could possibly find enough bread. How human their question is. How often we ask the same in our own land, where poverty deepens, joblessness grows, and many feel their loaves are far too few. Yet Jesus takes what they have. Seven loaves. A few fish. Seven, the number of completeness; seven, the number linked with the nations

beyond Israel. The early Church saw in this miracle a sign that God's feast is meant for the whole world, not only the first flock. Francis Xavier must have heard this Gospel and thought: this is why I go. This is why I sail. This is why I knock on doors in villages whose names I cannot pronounce. The world is hungry. The Lord refuses to send it away.

In the spirit of Ignatian prayer, imagine yourself on that hillside. Feel the rough grass beneath you. Hear the crowd breathing around you. Watch as Jesus turns and asks for your loaves. See Francis beside you, offering his life in the same gesture. Ask yourself: what is Jesus asking me to offer in this Advent season? What small gift can he multiply for the sake of a hungry world? Is it time? Is it reconciliation? Is it courage to speak against injustice? Is it the choice to see the dignity of the stranger in our land?

When Advent begins, the Church whispers a gentle truth: God is drawing near, and he asks us to draw others near with him. Francis Xavier lived that truth with every mile he travelled. And if we ask what Advent looks like in the life of a Jesuit, perhaps it looks like a man on a ship, sick yet joyful, carrying the Gospel across the waves because he believed the feast was ready and the world deserved an invitation.

So let us take our place at the mountain table. Let us walk with the shepherd. Let us trust that the little we bring can become abundance in God's hands. And let us, like Francis, go where love sends us.

For our prayer this week:

- Where is Jesus inviting me to climb the mountain and sit with him in this Advent season?
- What small offering is he asking me to place in his hands for the healing of others?
- How might the spirit of Francis Xavier shape the way I live, serve, and hope this week?

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.