

Day One

March 4

Living with Saint Francis Xavier



St. Francis Xavier, born in 1506, was the last of 5 children. I was the last of 11. I often wondered why I was named after him. My father was named Francis (Frank), but not Francis Xavier. When I was really old enough to wonder about this, I could no longer ask my parents because they had both died when I was young.

Then one day I saw my baptismal certificate and “Ah, the solution.” I had been born on February 19 and was taken to our parish church during the time of the Novena of Grace to be baptized. So, as you might expect in 1927: the priest made all the decisions. I guess my parents, even if asked, half-heartedly agreed. I was baptized “Francis Xavier.”

That was the first grace won for me by the Novena of Grace. Many more were to follow so I hope you will stay with me during the following 8 days so I can share with you those many graces.

In 1927 most parishes in Baltimore offered the Novena of Grace from March 4th to 12th. Public billboards announced the numerous times of the day that novena services were held at St. Ignatius Loyola Church, the Jesuit church in downtown Baltimore. The faithful flocked there for services, confessions and to reverence the relic of St. Francis Xavier. There was no competition from TV in those days.

An older brother had attended Loyola High School in Baltimore and brought one of his Jesuit priest-teachers home for dinner one Sunday. I was hooked. I guess it was inevitable that I too should go to Loyola and, in 1945, hardly a month out of high school, enter the Jesuits.