

Day Six

March 9

Living with Saint Francis Xavier



While Ignatius may have intended to keep Francis Xavier near him, the demands on the young Society of Jesus were too great. When the King of Portugal wanted two Jesuits (at the time there were only 10) to sail to India, Ignatius designated Nicholas Bobadilla and Simon Rodriguez to go. Bobadilla fell ill and was withdrawn; in Lisbon the King determined to keep Rodriguez to found a college there. By default Xavier was chosen to go and thus became the first Jesuit missionary.

The ship carrying Xavier to the Far East left Lisbon on April 7, 1541, his 35th birthday. It did not arrive in India until May 6, 1542!

Travels in the 20th Century were not as taxing though I had my moments.

To fly from Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, to the interior of that country to visit Salvadoran refugees there, I had to fly in a 4-seater. Each piece of luggage had to be weighed; each of the 3 passengers and the pilot had to be weighed and our weight evenly distributed in the plane. On our descent over the mountains the plane had to make a first attempt to land by scattering the cows which were leisurely munching the grass on the landing strip. Then on the second try we landed. From the narrow confines of the plane, I moved on to the rear seat of a motor cycle, driven by the Jesuit chaplain of the camp, and we made off across the hazardous terrain toward the camp.

An even more perilous trip was that from Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, to the war-ravaged city of Sarajevo. This time the United Nations plane was large enough. But it was a cargo plane, taking supplies to the city; there were no seats; we managed as best we could on the floor. And on arrival in Sarajevo we had to don our bullet-proof vests and helmets and run from the plane to the air hangar to escape sniper fire. We did the same when we departed from the city.

Francis Xavier graced me through all these perils.