

Day Seven

March 10

Living with Saint Francis Xavier

Arriving in Goa, the major Portuguese city in the East, Francis Xavier was embarking on a way of life far different from what he had known. And he was to live only ten more years, dying at the age of 46.



I have long outlived my patron saint. I am now 83. When I was 55, my life was radically changed. A Jesuit with whom I had spent the years 1948 -51 in studies had first become a missionary in Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon). From there he went to work on behalf of refugees in Thailand; and subsequently to do the same for refugees in Africa where he has lately died.

But in 1982 he visited me in Washington, D. C., where I was then serving as chaplain of the Georgetown University Law Center. He proposed that I come out to Thailand that summer and teach Hmong refugees. I did that and it changed my life.

Though I returned to my post at Georgetown, I heard, in the following summer, that Jesuit Refugee Service/USA was to be initiated. I knew I wanted that job. I applied for it and got it.

Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Jesuits, had founded the Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome in 1980. He wanted to commit the Jesuits to being a living presence to the boat people fleeing Vietnam. The Service has grown to be a huge part of the modern Society of Jesus spread out over many parts of the world.

My part was more modest: to educate Jesuit communities and institutions in the United States to what this new service was about, to get them to play a more important role in aid to refugees, and to try to get Jesuits and other religious to volunteer to serve in refugee camps. Francis Xavier provided many graces throughout this project.