

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 1 SUNDAY 4-3-2018

St. Francis Xavier was born at Xavier Castle in Spain in 1506. He went to the University of Paris when he was eighteen, where he studied and taught Philosophy. Here he met St. Ignatius Loyola, who was about to start the Society of Jesus. When Francis was thirty-four, St. Ignatius sent him as a missionary to the East Indies. During his travels as a missionary in Goa, India, Japan and other lands of the east, St. Francis made thousands of converts. In fact, he baptized so many people that he became too weak to raise his arms. Francis' love for Jesus was so strong that he could not rest at the thought of so many people who had never heard the Gospel. He found that there were so many villages where there were Christians but no priest to say Mass or teach them their prayers and the Commandments of God's Law. During his painful journeys and hard work, the saint was full of a special joy that came from God. St. Francis longed to get into China, into which no foreigner was permitted. At last, the arrangements were made, but he fell ill. He died almost alone in 1552 on an island off the Chinese coast when he was just forty-six-years- and 8 months old. Today his body

is preserved in a church in Goa.

St Francis Xavier blazed a trail, like a blazing meteorite across the sky and people revered him in the east.

Goa, Southern India and so on, Singapore and Japan particularly Nagasaki, which I will be talking about later during the week.

The theme of this Novena is “God So Loved the World that he gave his only begotten Son”, another translation of this “For God So Loved the World he gave his only beloved Son for us so that we will not stray away but have eternal life”, that's the centre of our faith, the Christian faith. God gave everything for us. He loves till the end. We carry that meaning in today's world, just as St Francis Xavier went out with that message to the ends of the world, in the East at that time. God so loves the world, present tense, who gives his only beloved son, in the Eucharist, in our heart and in our lives. That is everything. That love and bestowing salvation as we struggle in our lives and the offer of eternal life. Goodness and truth and the eternal love of God, in our hearts transcends and transforms our lives. That's our destiny. We hold on to it. People like St Francis Xavier, went with that message.

St Francis Xavier is named after St Francis of Assisi, an extraordinary man who went centuries before him.

Another man named after St Francis in our own day is Pope Francis, who in his own way wants to bring back love and mercy to the ends of the earth.

So, our Novena is about all that. It is about a time of prayer, traditionally in this city since 1712 when down in St Mary's Lane, there was a little chapel in penal times as we call them. By a Priest there Cornelius Neary, and began in Gardiner St church in 1832, the year the church was built. It is a time of prayer and true intercession of a Saint of particular person, who's heart was dedicated to Christ. I want you to bring the light of the love, that truth, that Gospel to the ends of the Earth. We pray for his intercession through this Novena, that is what this Novena is about, we pray for people and our own needs. Such as parents in Temple Street Hospital across the way, we pray for them, we pray for our neighbour's needs as well. We also pray during this time of Novena for the intercession of Blessed John Sullivan, who was beatified here last May and his remains are here and who intercedes for us too. So we have St Francis Xavier and Blessed John Sullivan with us during this time.

We are now living in a secular world; Ireland is becoming international in a certain sense. I don't want to be simplistic. But, to hold faith in today's society is a wonderful gift, to hold humanity and faith that's a

light. The light of Christ shines out in some way. Christ is the light of nations and that is a great inspiration, choosing where that light goes out. It incorporates all people, the people of God. We are all God's people. This is a Novena of humanity and faith and we draw our example from St Francis Xavier and indeed Blessed John Sullivan. May they strengthen us during this time of prayer. With this in mind, we bring our prayers, through the intercession of Saint Francis Xavier as we pray the Novena Prayer...

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 2 MONDAY 5-3-2018

Let us look at the Gospel passage today, in which we heard how the Lord Jesus was rejected in His own village in Nazareth. He has preached to them and even performed miracles before them, but the people hardened their hearts and refused to believe in Him. Why is that so? That is because Jesus hailed from that very village, where all the people likely had known Him in person since when He was very young, after He returned to Nazareth with His foster father St. Joseph and His mother Mary.

That is why they likely assumed that they knew Who He was, the mere Son of a lowly carpenter of the village. At that time, being a carpenter was truly a lowly and undesirable occupation to have, having to work very hard and yet gaining very little, and only contempt and ridicule from others who used his service. And this prejudice continued on to apply to the Lord Himself, Who was likely also a carpenter like His foster father St. Joseph.

We see here the irony of their actions, (Jesus often exclaimed that he had not found such faith in Israel, for example the centurion) those who were at Nazareth who were in fact belonging to God's own

people, the descendants of Israel. While Naaman, the Syrian pagan and non-Israelite came to believe in God despite his earlier reservations and doubts, but he believed nonetheless, as compared to the Israelites who hardened their hearts and refused to believe, just as what happened to the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, the Sadducees and their followers.

My soul is yearning for you my God: when can I enter and see the face of God, was today's Psalm (PS 42/43.) This is the deepest yearning of the human heart.

People often yearn for different things, But sometimes the yearning is lost in the human heart.

Yearning is intrinsic to our lives: for beauty, peace, joy. It's deep in the human heart and in all cultures and peoples.

But, the ultimate yearning ... is for God.

In our impoverished western world, with all its sadness, that ultimate yearning is pushed to the margins. This is what secular society is doing.

We cannot deny, there are good things in secular society but there is this great lack of meaningful substance, faith.

To live by faith in a modern world, despite our weakness and fragility and despite the weakness of our institutional church, we must come to know the figure of Christ and to be uplifted by that and to let

that light shine.

That is a wonderful gift.

For God so loved the world that he gave us his beloved son. He gives us everything, in other words ... that we might have eternal life.

Francis Xavier was completely overcome by that love. He came to Paris and met Ignatius and by accident through the King of Portugal he was sent to India on the Santiago in April 1541.

When he arrived at Goa on the west side of India: he was like a spring uncoiled with his energy and passion. Today we can see the results of his enduring love and faith, by the beautiful basilica in Goa today where his remains are (Novena there annually before the feast on the 3rd December.

One of his loves was his work with the pearl fishermen who were exploited. These were nominally Christians and Francis loved them. Now classified as among the most backward classes in India: the untouchables, poorest people in India. SFX loved and cared for the untouchables in India.

The light of the Gospel was brought to the East.

We carry the light of the Gospel in some way and that shines.

I would say this: as important as SFX was, I believe that in the story of our own lives and what we've had

to cope with. Each of us is important to God and has as important a role as Francis Xavier.

We all have our different gifts and stage of life. The eternal God looks on each of us and calls us by name and brings us into being. If you or I could see it, my goodness, that would be such a wonderful thing.

The journey takes place in different ways. But sometimes we miss the ultimate reality: you have made us for yourself, O Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.!

We join with SFX and with Blessed John Sullivan.

We pray for certain intentions now.

The light of the Gospel shines through each one of us.

We have each our own uniqueness and the love of God is there for each of us.

May we know the love of God and may our hearts reach out.

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 3 TUESDAY 5-3-2018

The focus of the first reading: the Jewish religion has come apart and the Jewish people cry to God: “do not disappoint us”

“treat us gently as you yourself are gentle and very merciful”: this is a central theme of the Old Testament
Like in Jeremiah I have loved you with an everlasting love

And in Isaiah: You are mine, you are precious in my eyes.

New Testament: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

The theme of mercy: the theme of the ministry of Pope Francis.

Forgiveness is not always an easy thing ... it sounds easy. People say: “Move on in your life; get on with it. But in the circumstances of our lives it’s not so easy, is it. There’s no simple formula. I have to live the process myself.

The best I can do sometimes is just to pray for that person.

St Francis Xavier Story: the Christians in Nagasaki

The Cause of Tagashi Nagai: died in 1951 of Leukemia: a physician and a pioneer in radiology which gave

eventually him leukemia.

He was not satisfied with the ancestral religion and began searching.

He ended up in a household of “hidden Christians” in Nagasaki: he found his heart open to the faith and married the daughter of the family named Midori.

They had 4 or 5 children

9th August 1945 the atom bomb dropped on the epicentre of the catholic community in Nagasaki.

Utter devastation!

Up to 75,000 people died

At the time the bomb fell Dr. Nagai was working in the radiology department of Nagasaki Medical College Hospital and was badly injured because of the building collapse. But with the rest of the staff he helped the victims of the atomic explosion.

On returning home he entered the house and all he found of his wife was her atomized rosary beads

The two children survived.

Tagashi builds a rudimentary house and continued. He preached peace and forgiveness and died in 1951.

His faith was strong but his heart was broken

He wrote the book: “The bells of Nagasaki”. With the money earned he planted cherry trees all around.

Mercy, forgiveness, love: mercy till the end

St Francis Xavier had pity and understanding for

people.

Blessed John Sullivan as well.

In the things that come our way in life may we also
have that mercy. Father forgive them: they know not
what they do.

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 4 WEDNESDAY 6-3-2018

Gospel reading is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. He's pointing out the heart of things: what's really important.

We've to keep coming to the heart of things.

Therefore we must keep coming to our hearts which are our deepest selves.

God is greater than anything I can view or aspire to but god is also in our little hearts.

The heart is a vulnerable place: sometimes we shield ourselves, but really we are called to live in our hearts.

Your heart and mine: our deepest selves.

John Henry Newman, an Anglican who became Catholic: heart speaks to heart.

He meant this about the extraordinary capacity he had to relate to others.

For Newman prayer being at the heart of Christianity.

St Francis Xavier going out with the love of Christ.

With the Pearl-fishers St Francis he was the very soul of pity and understanding.

Peter Faber (Peter Favre). Shepherd boy from the French Alps. Very clever but got to Paris.

Best book written about him by Mary Purcell. He wasn't a very exciting person so he is known as The

Quiet Companion.

He was the companion of St Francis Xavier. When Francis went to the East, Peter's main ministry was in Germany and he was appointed to go and dialogue with the Lutherans. Christianity was fractured and broken.

As a theologian missioned to meet the Protestants Peter Faber was very upset by the point-scoring that went on, which led to a greater split among Christians. He was upset about the tendency to seek to win arguments.

Years ahead of his time he asked "Can we not emphasize what unites us and then with love and understanding see what divides.

He felt if only Catholics could have love and concern for the reformers then things might be different.

The confession box was a special place where Peter Faber excelled.

In 1546 he died at the age of 40: a few years before St Francis Xavier.

Another person to whom the heart was important is Therese of Lisieux: patron of the missions along with St Francis Xavier. Therese's heart went out to the ends of the earth. Although in one place all her life, her heart reached out across the world.

The heart is universal. To live with and in our heart is

to live with God. The simple way we do things is as universal and far-reaching as the mission of St Francis Xavier.

Through the heart that we have been given we can reach out too.

And the heart of God is Christ, opened up for us in faith

In St Francis Xavier's letters (which were huge long letters often made in 6 copies so as not to lose them) he wrote about the heart of God which gives everything to us.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 5 THURSDAY 8-3-2015

A simple word, I want offer today really is listening, listening. So it is in the psalm today and the first reading that we heard, Jeremiah's words, listen to the voice of God coming to him the prophet Jeremiah.

"Listen to my voice, then I will be your God and you shall be my people!". Over and over, that was the message that Jeremiah heard over his 45 years of ministry. He lived for a long time and his whole life could be described as failure, because everything fell apart on him and he was always rejected. Yet, over and over this message would come in some way, listen to my voice, the voice of God. Listen!

The Psalm, "O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts"... and that's important, listen to the voice of the Lord and harden not your hearts, be open, listen and we see in Gospel that some wanted a sign from heaven. It can often be that we close our hearts and close our ears. Open your hearts, open your hearts. The way the Lord speaks, unless you become like a little child you cannot enter the kingdom of God, which means the openness of spirit, dependency and all that. Openness. And then you're open to the kingdom of God. So, offer ourselves this

day, your life and mine, can I listen?

So in the rush and stress of today's life, there's no time to listen really. But there would be a lot of talk, but really listening, in the heart, if someone is talking to me. Ultimately, listening, is our faith.

The theme of this Novena, hearing God's of Word of the Lord, "For God So Loved the World". God so loves the World that he gives us everything, he gives us his heart, he gives us his only son, he pours out everything for us. That's the meaning of the cross. He takes it unto himself the sin the World, that we would not be lost but have eternal life. So, I think, listening each day in some ways is a big part of faith. It may be listening to another, listening to my own heart in a way, if I may put it that way. Listening. Listening to the word of God.

The living Lord speaks in some way through another, through the Word of God, through the sacraments, it's there. Listen to the voice of the Lord and each other, that's a matter for our hearts. The heart, I was talking about that yesterday. The heart is a place of prayer, people often say to me, "I'm not praying well" or "prayer's dropped out". Their heart is the place of prayer, the Holy Spirit prays with us, even when we don't know how to pray. The Spirit, is praying with us. Prayer goes on 24 hours a day, I may not be tuned

into it, but it's going on.

The music of God, the beautiful music we hear in the church is a sign of God. But the Music of God, the music of the blessed Trinity, the music of the people gone before us and those on the earth, the melody of God is there, but I have to tune into it. I'm used to the old radios, I don't know the modern ones very well, where you have knobs and you have to tune carefully into a frequency, and sometimes all you got was static. Maybe, I tune into the melody of prayer and I get a lot of static, but it's going on, night and day, waking or sleeping. No matter what you do, there is prayer going on tune into it, get to the melody of it. Prayer, it's there and going on.

The heart, listening. The heart of Mary. I was thinking about that quite a bit, those words that twice describes this phrase in Luke's Gospel, "Mary, pondered all these things and treasured them in her heart". Mary pondered and reflected on all these things and treasured them in her heart. The heart of Mary, the heart of each one of us, today, International Women's day and the heart, listening to others, to children, to the grandchildren, to one another. The value of listening. The heart of a mother, who listens. That's so important, Mary pondered all these things and treasured them in her heart, listening.

As Father Xavier was talking about St Francis travelling through Japan, after 3 years in India, he was listening to something and we set out in a great voyage to Malaccas, first of all, near Singapore. My father was there years and years ago, we used to have a Malacca cane at home. Then, he travelled on from there to the islands of Indonesia, The Muuncas. He came very close to yet undiscovered Australia. But he was listening, he was following the voice of the Lord in some way, as best he could. Then, ultimately back to India, he had to go back and then the whole thing about Japan, something tells me, my heart tells me I have to go to Japan, which had only been discovered by European 5 years earlier. So an amazing journey began. Listening, following.

I think, Edith Stein (otherwise known as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) in 20th century, her listening. Jewish in background, born on the day of atonement. That was all significant for her, which ultimately reflects our Lord's love to the end. Her young life, a young girl growing, talented, intellectual, the faith of her Jewish Mother was very important to her. But ultimately, the journey led on and through a couple, a Lutheran couple, she came to Christian faith. Something about it drew her in very strongly. because the husband of that couple was killed in the first world

war. Edith, saw the faith of the widow, of the woman who was left. Which led her to the life of St Theresa of Avilla, she was very involved in Catholic woman's movement in the 30's, then she joined the Carmelites and wrote a bit, till her life was offered up in Auschwitz concentration camp, where they died in the gas chamber on 9 August 1942.

Listening and following, it's so important for us to listen. Listen to the voice of the Lord this day, in the sunlight, in the first signs of spring after the snow. I was saying it last night, the heart is universally as is listening. Our hearts as Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the other co-patron of the Mission. Our hearts go out, even when we're struggling with the bits and pieces of our lives. Our hearts go out to the needs of people, whether we can help or not, Troicairie for example, the needs of people. People close to us. There's a wonderful text of St. Augustine, if I may mention him. He's reflecting on the Psalm and he hears the words of Psalm 61 in Bible and 141. Hear my cry/Listen to my prayer as I cry from the depths of the earth. And here's Christ calling from the depth of the Earth, for all people and all their needs, Christ is calling out. "Hear my cry as I call from the ends of the Earth, when my heart was in tribulation and trouble." All people from all corners of the Earth, such as issues in Congo, Fr

Richard in Sudan, Fr Gerry in Chad. Our hearts are universally and keep them that way. No person is immune to the struggles of life. But our heart and our prayer goes out.

The heart is the source of our lives, our humanity, our faith and may we have a listening heart and listen. Listen to the cry of the poor, listen to the voice of the Lord, listen to that central message which is ours. God so loves the World, that he gives us everything, his Beloved Son, he pours that out in love, for us and for all, so that we would not be lost or stray away but have eternal life. God's love will always be in our hearts, and through our own love and as humanity as we feel, often fragile and failing in that, the love of God and Christ go out to other. That's our calling, that's our privilege, that's our joy.

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 6 FRIDAY 9-3-2018

In the first reading we heard those words of the prophet Hosea, "Israel, come back to the Lord, your God" and then about the people, this phrase "I will love them with all my heart". God's way and ultimately in the prophecies of Hosea, that's a prophecy in its own way, referring to the ultimate revelation of the heart of God in Christ. I will love them with all my heart.

There's another lovely phrase that is the second piece of Hosea's small book, in the northern kingdom as it was at the time. There is a lovely phrase, which I think has a deep meaning for all of us too. Chapter 2, "I will lead you out into the desert, and speak to your heart." I will speak to your heart. Further down he says "I will betroth you to myself forever, with integrity and kindness, with faithful love and justice." I will betroth you to myself forever. Integrity, kindness, with justice and faithful love. If we take those words in alone, each of us, a mystery of God, the mystery of marriage, I will betroth you to myself, with integrity and kindness. I will love you with all my heart, wonderful words really. Just the 2 commandments then, as we have then, given by Jesus is in response to that really. "You

should love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul" and "Love your neighbour as yourself". The two go together, they're the great commandments, that's a huge thing. The Jewish people every day must say that first prayer, it's called the Shema. "You should love the Lord your God with all your heart", they say it day and night and must keep saying it.

St Francis encountered different world religions and cultures, in his travels. First of all, he met the world of Islam on his way out to India, 5 months he was in Mozambique in an area, called Murundi and dealing with the Muslims there. He went in to understand them, there was certainly a very good man leading them who was understanding and Francis was antagonistic. Later when he came to India, he didn't understand something about the whole continent of India and the deep things that were there. He saw some things that weren't so attractive. But he didn't see the deep things in that culture and the deepest things of their religion. And then by the time he came to Japan, something's changing in him. The curiosity of the people, their interest in things, their questions. Their way really struck him. Of course, he wanted to go onto China, he never got there but he wanted to go to the Emperor, the whole culture, the wonderful

culture of the people of China.

Why do I mention those things? Because, in our time, my time. The big event in my life in a way, was the 2nd Vatican Council. Good Pope John calling it, I always remember that, we would have prayers at schools down the country for the success of the ecumenical council. But that council had a great involved issue, at a particular time in the history of the church and so on. The document *Lumen Gentium*, the light of the nation, Christ is the light of the nation, it's about the church, the people of God and the universal call to holiness. It singles out the different religions, above all the Jewish people and how as it says, we had a bad history with the Jewish people and of course in the 20th century above all. These people remain most dear to God, is in the council's document. Then, people who look to the one God, people who in their conscience in whatever way, strive for what is good and right, it honours all that. That's very important and honouring that and all those different strands in society and in the world today, that's important for us too, the world we live in today.

With regard to Islam, I don't know if you know of the Trappist monks in Algeria who were martyred in 1993, I now think they're going to be beatified. There was a wonderful film made about them, called "Of God's

and Men", maybe some of you have seen that. I ended up seeing it 4 times, when it was shown in the lighthouse. I remember the film itself was an extraordinary experience for those making it, it wasn't just make a film. But the whole background to it and something happened to them in making it. Why I mention that is, these monks were in a poor area of Algeria, Tibhirine, and around the monastery grew up a village of poor Muslim people, who were fair to the monks and they in turn loved the people. Then of course, there was the violence and there's a history of colonial violence in Algeria before, some of the monks were there to make up for that. Then there's a violence and figures show how some extremist/radicalists, whatever they were called in those days, came to the Monastery on Christmas Eve and how the leader with a lot of blood on his hands came in. The abbot met him, it's very well done in the film and the way he speaks to him and says "We are celebrating tonight the birth of the Son of God, it's a very special moment for us and the man draws back in a certain way and he puts the Quran to the man. Among those who are closest to us, in the Quran, are the Christians, those who are Brothers and as the phrase has it, waxed of pride. There is no pride in it, they are close to us. The violence later overtook later

and number of them were killed. Their burial place, the monastery is deserted now, but there is burial place where the remains of the monks are. It's a place of pilgrimage for the Muslim people. So we see those things happened, it's important to think about.

I've been going to Chiswick in London for quite a few years, to a parish there, but I remember the year before last on a Sunday, where there are 4 masses and then people will be spilled out on Chiswick High Street, very busy place, even on a Sunday, but I remember being asked by one of the people, a young lady, to come inside and asked me for a blessing. I went in and there was this very lovely young woman, but her leg was in a cast, she looked like she was suffering. She said, "Please Father, I want a blessing", I was just about to do it and she said "I am Muslim", and I gave her a blessing appropriate to that. But, what I want to say is just that there was a spirit in that person and I knew there was faith.

Heart speaks to heart. Blessed John Henry Newman, used to say mass here in 1852 when he came to found the Catholic University and lived in digs around the corner in Dorset Street and used to come here very morning. These are the important things, there is the world of Islam. There is a world of India, Mother India, Bharat Mata Ki Jai (Hail Mother India), there's an

extraordinary spirit there in places too, the deepest realities of Hinduism, towards the mystery of God. Remember a number of years ago, being struck by one of the biggest feast in India, Kumbh Mela, it's called. Jupiter in Aries, Sun and Moon in Capricorn; or Jupiter in Taurus and Sun in Capricorn and at the meeting of the 2 rivers, the Ganges and Yamuna. the numbers that come there to bathe in the Ganges. They reckon that last time it was there was up to 23 million people that came. There's a deep thing happening there, like by the river Jordan, there's something about being cleansed and renewed and that spirit.

A person who I am very fond, it Rabindranath Tagore, the son of India who died in 1942. A great figure of faith, of humanity and that. His little book, called "Gitanjali", some offerings to the creator and though he translated them into English him and got the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. But there's offerings to the creator, filled with beautiful melodies over and over again. One has been translated into a Christian Hymn in the Church of India, "He comes, he comes, he ever comes", he is always coming to us and even in the rains of July, he coming to us, he's coming to me and even when sorrow after sorrow presses upon my heart, he comes to me. So there's that and it's very

important.

Then the Jewish faith itself, these people most dear to God. John Paul II, spoke of people of the covenant, we have to remember that. Edith Stein, that I've mentioned, her story, her coming to the Catholic faith. Her journey, born on the feast of atonement. Then the Nazis in Germany, so she moved to Holland, where her sister joined her, Rosa, who became a catholic. Then the Catholic Hierarchy issued a public statement read in all the churches of the nation on 20 July 1942 condemning Nazi racism. In a retaliatory response on 26 July 1942 the Reichskommissar of the Netherlands, Arthur Seyss-Inquart ordered the arrest of all Jewish converts who had previously been spared. The Gestapo gave it to the convent and Rosa was collapsing in front when they were being brought out and Edith said to her, "Come Rosa, let us go for our people", "Come Rosa, let us go for our people", then this awful journey across cattle trucks on the trains, packed in. St Therese of the Cross is her religious name looked after the children and she was gassed and killed on the 9th August 1942.

It occurred to me this morning on the 9th of August 1945, Midori Nagai, the wife of Takashi Nagai died in Nagasaki, the atom bomb. Two 9th of August and I hope, Madori and Takashi are canonised.

Anyway, the Jewish people and Edith Stein, "Come, let us go for our people". These are important things I feel in our own lives and are our faith, in ourselves. We are people of faith and what we carry then is that what is really unique. We carry and offer to the world a revelation in God and Christ. God gives his whole heart to us, his whole life in Christ and we carry that meaning in life. We live that out in our time, our circumstances in the island of ours with all its issues and good things and yet, bewildered at times. God so loves the world that he gives us his only begotten Son, St. Paul he emptied himself, he gave everything to us. Then the words of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World", that's our faith, heart of God revealed. The whole mystery of Holy Week and Easter, having loved those in the world, he loved them till the end. St Francis Xavier, above all, is pointing to the cross, the place of the love of God, for us and for all. That's the central revelation and the source and centre of human history. St Francis of Assisi, the original Francis, when meeting the sultan of Egypt in the middle of the crusade and bloodthirstiness, he didn't believe in the violence. The words he gave to his followers always coming into a church, he used the words "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, for by your holy cross

you have redeemed the world". That's our faith, we live by that and we offer that. ""We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world". May our faith be strengthened and may we respect and revere people in this world and let our hearts reach out in love and to their hearts as well.

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 7 SATURDAY 10-3-2018

Usually on Saturdays, we think of Mary, her presence, her part in our lives and her motherhood. Tomorrow is Mothering Sunday; we think of Mary too in the way the March for Life which is today in the city centre. Motherhood, life, cherishing all that is just so important. But when we think of Mary her faithful love and presence in our lives.

The first reading read for us, has this theme of "We turn to God" and God will look after us and we don't have to worry, but the Lord is saying back to them that you're very fickle, it says here, what I want is love not sacrifice. In fact, I think the translation should be "What I want is faithful love, not sacrifice." Knowledge of God and not offerings of holocaust, what I want is faithful love. Mary's life was a life of faithful love. Francis Xavier's love and as Matthew, our Jesuit Novice, was explaining to us this morning in going to Japan. It was a life of faithful love and growing in knowledge and understanding.

It's interesting that St Francis arrived in Japan in Kagoshima, and he noted it was on the Feast of the Assumption, 15th August 1549, it was a long journey from where he had been in Malacca. He had met

Anjirō there, a Japanese who had travelled twice 2,000 miles to meet him. He missed him the first time. He knew there was something special about Anjirō. But then Francis had to go back up to India again, all those precious people to him and then eventually the long journey with Anjirō and other Jesuits to Japan. He arrived there on the 15th August 1549.

As Matthew was also explaining, what in effect happened to him in Japan was he fell in love with the Japanese people, something happened. The courtesy, their uprightness, their way, he fell in love with them - is the right way to describe it. The story goes on, for another 2 years, which we have heard about during the week.

I've mentioned her before and I'll mention her before, Mary of Kagoshima, she was a lovely Japanese girl. Members of her family hosted Francis and his companions, she was baptised by him and was giving her rosary beads also by him. Her faith was so important in her life. There was persecution in Kagoshima and she became the only Christian left. For nearly 39 years she was all alone, then a Jesuit brother met her in her old age and still she was there, living in utter poverty, but holding her dignity and her rosary. He brought her back to Nagasaki, where there were

Christians, who revered her and she spent her last years there and was buried in a wonderful funeral mass. One of the Saints of God, in the most wonderful way, the hidden people, Mary of Kagoshima, still with her rosary beads till the end and they're buried with her.

The story of Japanese Christians to me at least, I've never been there though I've known some people who have been and met one lady yesterday. A good friend of mine who was a Colombian priest, Fr Brendan Fahy who died a year ago, a wonderful man, who was a number of years in Japan. I remember the work I used to do in the summer, in our retreat house in North Wales, St Beuno's, he was on the staff there. He was full of spirit of the Japanese and it just struck me what that is. The story of the Japanese Christians, especially in Nagasaki, over the years, the centuries, the most amazing story.

In 1863, two French priests from the Société des Missions Étrangères, Fathers Louis Furet and Bernard Petitjean, landed in Nagasaki with the intention of building a church honouring the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan, nine European priests and seventeen Japanese Christians who were crucified in 1597 by order of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. A beautiful church was built and

is now a National Monument in Japan. A wonderful church with the windows and Japanese work in it. On March 17, 1865, shortly after the completion of the original cathedral, Father Petitjean saw a group of people standing in front of the cathedral. They indicated to the priest that they wanted him to open the doors. As the priest knelt at the altar, an old woman from the group approached him and said "We have the same feeling in our hearts as you do. Where is the statue of the Virgin Mary?", "Do you believe in the Blessed Virgin Mary" and "Do you believe in the man in white overseas", he meant the Pope. Yes, he answered. Gradually 3,000 people came to light. The hidden Christians. They had been without a priest for 230 years, but the people had passed on faith from generation to generation. There was a person in charge of catechism for each generation, a person in charge of the liturgical calendar, working it out for each year and there was a person who was officially designated as the baptisers. 3,000 came to the light, more in other places. Some had drifted into more Buddhist things as well as Christian things. One of the key things they had through this period, was statues of Mary in their homes. It's a most amazing story and I advise you look up the hidden people of Nagasaki, there are wonderful programmes on the hidden

Christians. They are the most dignified people one could meet, the courtesy and the faith.

There are 130 chapels or churches in Nagasaki prefecture, as it's called. The cathedral was rebuilt after the atom bomb, it was completely destroyed, but they found the great bell of the cathedral underground. They dug it up and for, all the people who died, who've I've talked about, on Christmas Day 1945, just a few months after the atom bomb dropped and amid the utter devastation, they mounted it on some kind of sticks and tripod and the bell rang again. It seemed to have a huge effect on the people to once again hear the bell of Nagasaki. I believe at Christmas, now, the bells of Nagasaki all around, they are rung for Christmas. It's a wonderful thing.

The fidelity of those people, depending on Our Lady and the statues of Our Lady, their dignity, their courtesy, their faith and again how Takashi Nagai came to faith in finding himself in the house of Christians and married Midori and Midori died, 9th August 1945, the atom bomb struck the very centre of where the hidden Christians lived. She was among one of the 75,000 that died altogether.

The poor of God, it's a theme in the Bible, the poor of God, the people who are faithful, often small and

forgotten, the hidden Christians in Japan, small and forgotten. Ourselves now as best we can be feeling unworthy, but living by faith, in our times, our challenges and upholding faith, life and the light. Small and forgotten. Mary and Joseph, are described in Luke's Gospel, are described as the poor and forgotten. God came among the poor. The Lord hears the cry of the poor, but may we through the example of other Francis Xavier, Mary of Kagoshima, the hidden Christians, our forbearers, the ones who supported us in our faith. We all live out our faith and know the dignity of it, it's wonderful and then Mary our mother, she's given to us, this is your mother. May she support all of us in our faith and with Mothering Sunday tomorrow, we remember our Mothers and we remember Mary.

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 8 SUNDAY 11-3-2018

There's a contrast today in the readings, between unbelief, people who added infidelity to infidelity and then, the call to belief, to faith and so on. The Old Testament that reading from chronicles sums up the situation of the chosen the people and how they ended up in exile for the 70 years and then Cyrus somehow anointed by God without knowing it, was able to let them back to rebuild the temple. God still faithful to his unfaithful people.

We have wonderful second reading today, God loved us with so much love that he is generous with his mercy. We were dead through our sins he brought us to life with Christ, and it is through grace that we have been saved. I was talking over the week the people of South India, the untouchable, the poor people, the pearl fishers, the fishing boat people, people in Goa, the people in Japan, the hidden Christians, all those centuries they knew that grace and they held by it and knew that the grace upheld them.

"We are God's work of art", isn't that a wonderful phrase. "We are God's work of Art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it". If we could think of that, each

of us, we are each God's work of art. Something has been in formed in us as an artist forms something. God delights in us.

In the Gospel today, Nicodemus comes by night and he's not going to come in the daylight. He's hedging his bets, you could say, he's in other words, he's agnostic in a way, there's different points of views in everything in life. The words of the Lord are clear to him and ultimately of course in the Gospel e appears again.

The Son of Man must be lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent and took away the poison out the people and absorbed it into himself. So, Our Lord is lifted up to take away the poison out of existence, he alone can take it and in its place he is putting love. That's our faith. That's the faith we celebrate, especially at Holy Week and Easter. It's a faith that St Francis Xavier is pointing out, by pointing to the Cross, here in the painting behind me. Then, in this translation, "God so loved the World so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost". I use the present tense, God so loves the world, this strange, beautiful, tragic, unbelieving, sometimes believing world. God so loves the world, that he gives

his own Beloved, he gives everything to us, so that, we would not be lost but have eternal life. These are very important things.

Just to pondering ourselves, twice there we have everyone who believes in him will have eternal life in him. Twice its said, having eternal life. Its interesting further in the Gospel of John in 3 places, its present tense. Whoever believes in my word (as it says in Chapter 5) has eternal life, it's said further on, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life. Further on in chapter 6, in the discourse bread of life, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life. To me that's very extraordinary. But it's true. Eternal life is somehow present already in us, in our lives, in what we manage and cope with and we like to think "God, isn't that way in my life". But it is so, whoever believes in me or hears my word or eats my flesh or drinks my blood has eternal life. One day we will look back and go, oh my goodness that was true. Already it was there, it is there, now, somehow, in some way, in my heart and in your heart. It all depends on that, God's love for us and to be open to him.

A wonderful book by an Anglican writer, he's died now, called William Johnson, called "Love's endeavours, Love's expenses", it's a wonderful meditation and there's a lovely poem in it about God's love for us, it shows true and it written about his own life, written in blood nearly. It shows how God's love in Christ precarious, God risks everything in loving us. That's the nature of love. Love is not, oh everything's in place and perfect, love is love when it's vulnerable, precarious, defenceless. Love and faith. There's wonderful things in that. You heard that phrase there, you are God's work of art and there's a lovely thing with that. A true artist who's really trying to make something very special, risks everything, that could be quick be destroyed. They might do a painting or a piece of music, but trying to do something that is really good, you risk something. They're poised in the big failure in a way that it could be destroyed, but you risk something and beauty comes about.

Michelangelo with the Pieta in the Vatican, I'm sure you all know of it, that wonderful work of marble showing Our Lady with the body of Our Lord, it could have gone wrong, it could have broken up or something. So, God's love in one way in the world and

the risk with our world and everything that's in it, its poised on the brink of failure, but love in the end will succeed. God's love for us, it's there. God's love for Christ. A vulnerable love, a true love, a love till the end. I love you with all my heart. I love you with an everlasting and faithful love.

Christ's love, there's a particular thing that I love in the Gospels, the story of the Leper coming to Jesus particularly in Mark's Gospel, he say "If you will it, you can cleanse me, you can me clean" and Jesus looking at him, and the translation we have is not good, for Jesus looking at him feeling sorry for him, when he say of course I want you to be cleansed, but the word there Jesus, sorry for the Greek, *splanchnistheis*, utterly gutted, he was utterly moved in his inmost being for this person, he was filled with tenderness. The word *splanchnistheis* is a very deep word in the Gospel where it occurs and it really is a maternal word, from the fruit of one's womb, that kind of love and Jesus lives that. That he was going somewhere, where he sees the widow coming out to bury her son, her only child. He's utterly moved in his inner most being for that child, that's the love of God in Christ. That's Christ's love, it also used when her was utterly moved in

tenderness for the people. Because they were harassed and rejected, sheep without a shepherd, utterly moved, utterly gutted, maternal word. Of course, where did he learn it from in a way, his Mother, it's his Mother's love. It's what he knew in his own humanity. It's God's love, his mother's love.

Julian of Norwich, an English mystic in 1373, in her showing of love, died at the age of 30, she saw Christ as Mother, in some way. Love is God's meaning in everything, God's meaning is love. So, on this day, Mothering Sunday, thinking of Our Lord's Mother, thinking of that love. Thinking of the love of God in Christ, may we be people with that quality and faith in our lives, of faith, of love, of courage, like the hidden Christians of Japan, all those centuries, their dignity and courtesy and the faith they have in Nagasaki, may we have that in ourselves and remember the little unremembered acts of kindness and love. May we live this love out and look to the love of the Lord, day by day in our lives.

NOVENA OF GRACE

DAY 9 MONDAY 12-3-2018

The first reading is a beautiful one, the promise, it's taken up again at the very end in the Book of Revelations at the end of the scriptures we have. "I create new heavens and a new Earth, and the past will not be remembered, and will come no more to men's minds. Be glad and rejoice for ever and ever for what I am creating, because I now create Jerusalem, "Joy" and her people "Gladness". I shall rejoice over Jerusalem and exult in my people". The theme taken up after the Gospels, the letter of St Paul, the letters of St John and in the Book of Revelations, there in chapter 21, looking to the future, through all the persecutions and tribulations on the Earth, this vision of the New Jerusalem and its coming down from heaven like a bride adorned for her husband, it will be a wedding banquet. The new heaven and the new earth. That's the word of God in some ways it is already with us but it is ahead in its fullness, a wonderful text. Joy and Gladness will be there.

The joy and gladness of the court official when his little son, his little child was cured and all the other cures we see throughout the Gospels. He and all his household believed. Belief. True faith, brings gladness

in the heart. The beauty of the Gospel, it is a beautiful reality presented in the Gospel, the faith goes with it. The beauty of the Gospel, gladdens our hearts, beauty always does. True beauty. The beauty of beautiful music, music touches us very deeply when it is truly beautiful, it doesn't run over our sadness and our sorrows, but it brings us to joy. Music does that.

The face of Christ, is the one we look to and that face, that person, that world, is beautiful. It's the radiance of Christ. There is a line in one of the Psalms, look towards him and be ready, to look at him. St Theresa of Avila, look towards him that is looking at you lovingly, looks towards him and believe in him, that's our prayer. Pope Francis first document was The Joy of the Gospel. the joy of Saint Francis in Japan particularly, there's some phrase he said at one time, "Don't be giving me so much joy, it's too much". The Joy of the Gospel. I think, because I've been talking about them this week, the Christians of Nagasaki, his legacy in a way and all they came through over the centuries. Mary of Kagoshima, she was till the end, the one Christian years and years later left, after having been baptised and given a rosary by Francis Xavier, survived through persecutions, then she was found years and years later still there with faith, with her

rosary beads in desperate poverty. There's something about her. She was then brought by boat down to Nagasaki, where the Christians were and they loved and revered her, she died in the midst of that love.

The 230 years they were without a priest, when they once again came to the light 1865 onwards. I encourage you to look them up and read about them, what they went through and the others I've spoken about during the week, when you at them today, the dignity, the courtesy, the joy, the faith they have, which is born out of suffering. But, somehow, it's a wonderful thing. The Christians of Goa and South India, as well.

We ourselves here also. We are joined to them, we are joined to our forbearers, we are joined to people who have gone before us who we have revered who surround us, the great crowd of witnesses that surrounds us, who brought into our lives humanity and faith. This is our time, this is our situation and with the things we have to manage and cope with now and they're not all easy, to say the least. The things we cope with in life.

Each one of us, called by name into the uniqueness of our lives, our circumstances, faith, humanity. I just want to read to you from another Blessed connected

here as well as Blessed John Sullivan, in Blessed John Henry Newman, also another Anglican convert. After this conversion, he was asked to found a Catholic University in town here, but it was a big struggle. Newman House, University and Church are from around that time. But when he first came he used to live in digs around the corner in Dorset Street and used to come here every day to say Mass and have breakfast inside. Just one thing he wrote for us all among the prayers he wrote for us, called meditations and devotions, they were found after he died, but he wanted them found for people to meditate on. I think you'll probably recognise this, he wants us all to think of, we are each called by name, God calls each one of us by name. That's also in scripture, I called you by name, you are mine.

God knows me and calls me by my name...

God has created me to do Him some definite service;
He has committed some work to me

which He has not committed to another.

I have my mission—I never may know it in this life,
but I shall be told it in the next.

Somehow I am necessary for His purposes...

I have a part in this great work;

I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection

between persons.

He has not created me for naught. I shall do good,

I shall do His work;

I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth

in my own place, while not intending it,

if I do but keep His commandments

and serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him.

Whatever, wherever I am,

I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him;

In perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him;

If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.

My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be

necessary causes of some great end,

which is quite beyond us.

He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life,

He may shorten it;

He knows what He is about.

He may take away my friends,

He may throw me among strangers,

He may make me feel desolate,

make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—

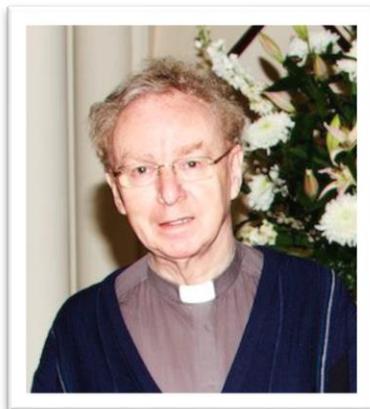
still He knows what He is about....

Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—

I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.

Each of us, that truth, lived out. Jeremiah, the potter, each of us being formed in our lives, has been placed in the potter's hands, so are you in mine. Look Lord, there's some better clay you can use, you better take it, but the Lord says No, whatever stuff I use, I am making something through it for your life.

Finally, the words of St Paul, Romans Chapter 8, Those who love him, God turns everything unto good. So let us be people of faith, trust in the Lord as the people of Nagasaki, as our forbearers and the people to come, we are part of God's people. May the Joy of the Gospel be in our hearts.



Fr Dermot Mansfield SJ