

**Mass for Visit to St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology
Feast of St. Francis Xavier
Principal Patron of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis
December 3, 2014**

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My dear brothers [and sisters] in Christ: among the many impressive sights in Washington, D.C., one that is especially powerful is Arlington National Cemetery. This cemetery is the final earthly resting place for many prominent Americans who have served this country in various ways. Probably the most visited site in this cemetery, however, is not the grave of a former president or some military hero. Rather, it is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a place to honor those who have died in service to their country and whose name is known to God alone.

Each day, several hundreds of people witness the ceremonial changing of the guard at the tomb, watching the intricate details of these highly trained guards. Toward the end of the ceremony, the relief commander orders the relieved sentinel: "Pass on your orders." The current sentinel commands, "Post and orders, remain as directed." The newly posted sentinel replies, "Orders acknowledged," and steps into position.¹

Orders play an important role in life of one involved in the military. Much of their activity is based on the orders that they have received from their superiors. The orders are taken very seriously, as they try to observe them with a great deal of accuracy and attention. This aspect of military life provides a helpful parallel to the life of faith. In fact, the Church often uses terms from the military to describe different aspects of the faith. We speak of the Church here on earth as the Church Militant and we are sometimes referred to as Christian soldiers who make up the Lord's army as we struggle against the evils of this world and against the devil.

In our Gospel for today's Mass, we hear Jesus issuing His marching orders to His most trusted soldiers, the Apostles, as He prepares to ascend to His Father in Heaven. He instructs them to "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Just as the orders for the guards of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier remain the same each and every day, so too do these final orders from our Lord apply to every generation.

Today, we celebrate the feast of one those great soldiers, St. Francis Xavier. He stands out as one who received these orders from the Lord and gave himself completely to fulfilling that command with great energy and

attention. St. Francis Xavier was one of the initial members of the Society of Jesus, founded by a former soldier, St. Ignatius of Loyola. St. Ignatius had a great desire to work for the salvation of souls, bringing the Good News of the Gospel in obedience to Christ's command to the Apostles. This desire for souls was shared by St. Francis Xavier as we read in today's Office of Readings, where we hear him speak of the great need for missionaries as he writes:

Many, many people hereabouts are not becoming Christians for one reason only: there is nobody to make them Christians. Again and again I have thought of going round the universities of Europe, especially Paris, and everywhere crying out like a madman, riveting the attention of those with more learning than charity: "What a tragedy: how many souls are being shut out of heaven and falling into hell, thanks to you!"²

This missionary zeal for the salvation of souls is one that we are all invited to embrace, for it is at the heart of the desire of Christ for His people and it is what has been commanded of us from Him. In a particular way, for those of us who are preparing for or already serving in priestly ministry, this is at the very core of our mission. The Decree on the

Ministry and Life of Priests from the Second Vatican Council makes this clear with the following words:

The spiritual gift which priests receive at their ordination prepared them not for a sort of limited and narrow mission but for the widest possible and universal mission of salvation “even to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), for every priestly ministry shares in the universality of the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles.³

This feast day of St. Francis Xavier is a good opportunity for each of us to reflect on the privilege that we have received in being invited to share so intimately in this important work of spreading the faith. It should also challenge us to understand the obligations that are expected of us so that we might empty ourselves of our own human passions and agendas that stand in the way of our spending ourselves for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. In both of these regards, St. Francis Xavier stands out as a model for each of us to seek to imitate.

Living a life totally consecrated to Christ and His Church will only be possible if we have built our lives on that firm foundation of a life centered on Him. Each day, we pray and participate in the celebration of the Mass, not out of a sense of obligation or duty, but out of a desire to grow in love

with the one who has called us to follow Him and who continues to support us with the graces necessary to overcome whatever obstacle we may encounter. The greatest saints who accomplished the greatest amount of works did so not necessarily because they were the most qualified. Rather, they had great love which opened them to let God work through them in extraordinary ways.

May our reception of the Eucharist today enflame our hearts with a greater love for Christ and His Church, that we might more eagerly and completely dedicate ourselves to the orders that He has given to us to spread that love to those around us. In doing so, we, like St. Francis Xavier, will do our part in building up the Kingdom of God as we seek to bring as many souls as possible to share in the victory of Christ, our Risen King!

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Arlington National Cemetery, *The Changing of the Guard*, www.arlingtoncemetery.mil.

² St. Francis Xavier, Excerpt from St. Francis Xavier's letter to St. Ignatius of Loyola (*E Vita Francisci Xaverii, auctore H. Tursellini, Romae*, 1956, Lib. 4, epist. 4 [1542] et 5 [1544]).

³ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, §10.