

# The Last Letter To St. Francis Xavier

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The purpose of this article is merely to reproduce the exact words of St. Ignatius Loyola in his last letter to St. Francis Xavier on June 28, 1553.

However, the letter cannot be understood unless a few historical details are first explained. Only then can one see why St. Ignatius wrote the letter, and what he means throughout it.

In previous correspondence from India and Japan, St. Francis Xavier had explained to St. Ignatius two main points:—the kind of missionaries needed for the work, and his plan to go to China. For in his travels throughout the Far East, Francis Xavier had observed what kind of men made the best missionaries, and now they should be prepared before leaving Europe for India. Further, the voyage to China seemed necessary, since he could see no way of converting the Japanese unless the Chinese were first brought to Christ.

In Rome, on the other hand, Ignatius had his own difficulties. After

reading Xavier's letters on the type of missionaries needed, he could see only one solution. Xavier himself should return to Europe for a while, explain in complete detail, and choose the missionaries himself.

Then there was another very important point. Ignatius knew from first hand experience that the King of Portugal and the Apostolic See needed to be much better informed on the situation in the Orient, before they could be expected to give their maximum cooperation to the work of Xavier. Single letters a year or two apart were not enough to enlighten them on conditions, nor to move them to carry out what was best for the work of the Missions.

So on June 28th, 1553, not long after he had received Xavier's letter about going to China, Ignatius, maturely considering the whole panorama from Rome through Portugal to the Indies and beyond, realized that the many problems could be settled only by bringing Xavier back to Europe for a time. At least once be-

fore, about the beginning of 1549, Ignatius had planned the same move. Now he actually sends the command.

Here translated from the original Spanish, is the letter which he wrote:

"May the abundant grace and love eternal of Christ Our Lord always help and favor us.

Most Dear Brother in Our Lord:

We have received here your letters of January 28, 1552 later than we should have, because of the difficulty of travel from Portugal to Rome; and for this reason you will not have had a reply as quickly as I would wish. We understand that God Our Lord has opened the door for the preaching of His gospel and for the conversion of the people in Japan and China by your ministry, and we are greatly consoled in His divine majesty, hoping that the knowledge of Him and His glory may every day be further extended, and among people who can perpetuate and carry forward with the divine favor what they have acquired.

It has likewise seemed to me the proper thing that you have sent there and to China Master Gaspar and others. And if you yourself have already gone to China (where you say you are thinking of going, if things in India do not prevent you), that also I will approve, since I am persuaded that it is the Eternal Wisdom that is guiding you. All the same, as far as the situation can be understood from here, I judge God Our Lord will be better served in you if you will have remained in India,

sending others and directing them, that they may do what you would have to do; for in this way you will accomplish in many places what you yourself would do in only one.

Still more I say: considering the greater service of God Our Lord and the help of souls in those regions, and how much their good depends on Portugal, I have determined to command you in virtue of holy obedience that, in the midst of your many journeys, you now make this journey to Portugal at the first opportunity of good passage. And this I command in the name of Christ Our Lord, though it be to return promptly to India.

And that you can inform those who might wish to detain you there for the good of the Indies, I will tell you the reasons that move me to this decision, as I view the situation from here and consider likewise the good of the Indies themselves.

First, you know how important for the conservation and growth of Christianity in those regions and in Guinea and Brazil is the good order which the King of Portugal can give from his kingdom. And a prince with such Christian desires and holy intentions as the King of Portugal, once informed by one who from experience knows conditions out there as well as you do, you can well think he will be moved to do many things for the service of God Our Lord and the help of those regions, for which you will be the representative before him.

Secondly, it is important that the

Apostolic See should have certain and complete information about conditions in the Indies, and from a person in whom it has full confidence. Thus proper provision may be made for spiritual things, necessary or very important for the good of this new Christian settlement and of the old Christians who live in it. Now once again you would be more suited for this task than any of the others, because of the knowledge which you have and the knowledge which others have of you.

Likewise, you know how important it is for the good of the Indies that the men who are sent there be fitted for the work to be accomplished in various places. Now for this your coming to Portugal and here would help much. For not only would many more be moved to desire to go there, but even among those who are moved you would see who are fit to go and who not; who would be suited for one place, who for another. And to hit the mark in this selection, you yourself judge if it is important. All that you write from there is not enough for us here to understand, if you yourself—or someone who like you knows conditions — do not actually treat with and know those who have to be sent.

In addition to all these reasons, all of which are for the good of India, I think you would incline the King toward the undertaking in Ethiopia, which for so many years now is ready to be carried out as far as

our part goes, and yet no result is seen. Likewise, from Portugal you could help no little the affairs of the Congo and Brazil, which you cannot do from India, since communication is lacking. And if it seems to you that your presence is important for governing there, you will be able to govern no less from Portugal than from Japan or China; in fact, much better. So, seeing that you have already been absent for longer periods, take this leave now. Leave there the Rectors whom you judge best, and one who will have universal charge of all there, with the consultors whom you think suited, and God Our Lord will be with them.

For other things I refer you to Master Polanco. From my heart recommending myself much to your prayers, I beg the divine goodness to give to all his plentiful grace that we may always perceive His most holy will and fulfill it perfectly.

From Rome, June 28, 1553.

Once arrived in Portugal, you will be at the obedience of the King for whatever disposition he will make of your person to the glory of God Our Lord.

Totally yours in Our Lord,

IGNATIUS.

Francis, of course, never received this letter. Some seven months previous to this very day on which Ignatius was writing, as Francis waited desperately on Sancian for the vessel that would carry him to China, God Himself had summoned him Home.