**PIM UPDATE**

**REDEMPTORIST CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION**

**OCTOBER 5, 2020**

**FEAST OF BLESSED FRANCIS XAVIER SEELOS, C.Ss.R.**

Today we celebrate the feast of a man who would probably be very surprised that we consider him remarkable or worthy of note-not to say veneration-at all. Known as “the cheerful ascetic”, Francis Xavier Seelos was born in Europe, and lived most of his life as a Redemptorist missionary on North American soil. Seelos lived in a time when the mass migration of people to North America from lands across the sea created unprecedented opportunities and challenges for the Church, for society and for the Redemptorists. Knowing this, he yearned to be part of what he rightly understood as a tremendous missionary opportunity. He was called out of his cultural, ecclesial, geographic, and linguistic comfort zones.

Meeting the missionary needs in a new land called him to learn new pastoral skills and new languages. In the end, he faced a pandemic and, in the midst of it, did what he always did - he gave his whole life for the most abandoned. Let’s take a look at his life, and possibly discover how he might inspire us today.

**THE EARLY YEARS**

Francis Xavier Seelos was born on January 11, 1819 in Füssen, Bavaria, Germany. He was baptized on the same day in the parish church of St. Mang. He was one of 12 children, of which 9 survived into adulthood. Throughout his childhood, Seelos was so sickly that he was not expected to live beyond his childhood. During this time, his mother tried to prepare him for heaven by admonishing him to be patient and telling him beautiful stories of the saints. His sister Antonia said, “He was always so amiable and tranquil that we loved him most of all.” This thoroughly Catholic atmosphere implanted in the soul of young Xavier the seeds of an all-pervasive spiritual outlook on life.

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• What about you? Where did you first hear stories of faith?

• Who introduced you to the person of Jesus Christ?

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**Seelos’ birthplace, Füssen**

**The Seelos family home**

At the age of 5, Seelos started school. Along with the standard studies, singing was a large part of Seelos’ school life. He was taught hymns and folk songs, enthusiastically sang at the children’s Mass, and learned to play violin. He retained a love of singing all his life. He was Confirmed in 1828 and in 1830 received his first Holy Communion “with very great devotion,” notes his sister, Antonia. He was also an altar boy and helped his father in the local church, where he was “wholly in his element,” according to Antonia.

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**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION FROM THE CSsR LECTIONARY AND SACRAMENTARY SUPPLEMENT**

Lord, may our sharing in your sacraments nourish in us the faith

handed down by the Apostles and which Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos

served with such loving dedication.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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**SEELOS THE STUDENT**

Seelos graduated from high school in 1839. He went to Munich to study philosophy and then, having expressed a desire for the priesthood since childhood, in 1842 he entered the diocesan seminary in Munich. An encounter with the Redemptorists changed the course of his young life. Soon after meeting the missionaries of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists), he decided to enter the Congregation. Seelos entered the Augsburg diocesan seminary, and also applied to the Redemptorists to become a candidate for the North American mission. On November 22, 1842, he was accepted as a novice with the Redemptorists in the US. It was the Feast of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music. That feast day was ever afterward memorable to him, and he wrote several poems in honour of St. Cecilia.

On March 17, 1843, Seelos set sail for the United States on a ship called the St Nicholas. He arrived in New York city on April 20, after a long voyage of five weeks, which he spent in prayer and study, teaching catechism lessons, and visiting the sick on the St. Nicholas. On May 16, he began his novitiate year at St James the Less, Baltimore. Seelos was in the midst of a great sea of people, on the move, leaving Europe in search of a fresh start, an adventure, or to find a better life in America. Many fled persecution, famine, disease, poverty and oppression.

**St. John Neumann, CSsR FINDING A MENTOR**

On May 16, 1844, Francis Seelos professed vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and perseverance. On December 22, 1844, He was ordained a priest in the Redemptorist Church of St. James the Less in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. 1845 was a momentous year of learning and growth for the newly ordained Redemptorist. On August 8, 1845, he was assigned to St. Philomena parish in Pittsburgh as assistant pastor, under the guidance of Fr. John Neumann, who would eventually become St. John Neumann. Seelos says of Neumann, “He loved me as his own son. Above all, the example of his virtuous life is always before my eyes – his constant modesty, his great humility, and his all-conquering long-suffering.” During his time spent with Neumann, Seelos dedicated himself to preaching missions. Regarding their relationship, Seelos said: “He has introduced me to the active life” and, “he has guided me as a spiritual director and confessor.”

Seelos’ availability and innate kindness in understanding and responding to the needs of the faithful quickly made him well known as an expert confessor and spiritual director, so much so that people came to him even from neighboring towns.

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\* What about you?

\* Have you ever taken someone as your mentor or guide? How did this relationship help you grow or develop?

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**A PASSION FOR MISSION**

In September of 1847, at 28 years old and just three years after taking his own vows, Seelos is appointed novice master at St. Philomena’s. This appointment was short-lived, but a pattern was developing. After this, missionary outreach was always interspersed with periods during which Seelos was a director of formation, charged with guiding and forming young Redemptorist missionaries.

In 1851, Seelos began a term as pastor and rector of St. Philomena’s Parish. At thirty-two, he was years younger than the fathers and brothers he was asked to lead. But this disparity of age doesn’t seem to intimidate him in being faithful to his duties as a rector. His simple acts of kindness and love for the poor and sick of the area have been handed down among parishioners for many years after his departure. They consider his prayers as very powerful with God, due to several cures of the sick.

In 1856, Seelos was appointed pastor and rector of St. Alphonsus Parish in Baltimore, Maryland. Moving from St. Philomena to St. Alphonsus was like going from a peaceful village to a bustling metropolis. His appointment included not only St. Alphonsus, but two parish centers, two smaller parishes on the outskirts of Baltimore, and four mission stations outside the city. Despite the exponential increase in workload, he always took upon himself more than his weak constitution could carry and never succumb.

A year later, he suffered a violent hemorrhage, which caused him to be hospitalized for four weeks. Always quick to see the bright side, he wrote to his sister, Sr. Damiana, “You can see from this how fortunate I feel in this sickness, and how I truly consider it as one of the greatest gifts of grace from the Lord.”

To offer him a more tolerable workload, his superiors appointed Seelos as superior, pastor and novice master of St. Mary’s in Annapolis, Maryland. Only a month after arriving he was transferred to Cumberland, Maryland to become the superior and prefect of students at the Redemptorist seminary, charged with creating a positive spirit in the community after some strife. Why Seelos? A superior described him thus: “The one whom I think best fitted for it is Fr. Seelos. He is a saint in spirituality, and an angel in sweetness.” Seelos did not disappoint. The number of seminary students doubled within months.

After a brief period of parish ministry in Detroit, Michigan, he was assigned in 1866 to the Redemptorist community in New Orleans, Louisiana as pastor of the Church of St. Mary of the Assumption. He became known as a pastor who was joyously available to his faithful and singularly concerned for the poorest and the most abandoned. But Francis Xavier Seelos’ ministry in New Orleans was destined to be brief.

In the month of September, exhausted from visiting and caring for the victims of yellow fever, he contracted the dreaded disease. After several weeks of patiently enduring his illness, he passed on to eternal life on October 4, 1867, at the age of 48 years and 9 months.

**BEATIFICATION**

St. John Paul II proclaimed Father Seelos “Blessed” on April 9, 2000. His Feast Day is October 5.