

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Now the Time of Salvation **St. Francis Xavier**, priest, Patron of Joliet Diocese
Saturday, December 3, 2016 **1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23; Mk 16:15-20** (The light of God
should somehow shine through the relationships of the community of Christ in the way they live,
in the way they deal with worldly matters, and everything.)

“But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.”

Today is the feast of **Francis Xavier**, who is the patron of our diocese. Francis was a **missionary** like the early apostles. He went forth as well and to many parts of the world: India, Sri Lanka, Japan, finally he dies on an island off the China mainland.

Now Francis’s idea was to get the gospel planted. In those days they thought a little bit differently from today about what it means to plant the gospel. Today the emphasis is on community and quality and roots. **In those days they came and went rather quickly, preached the gospel, got a sort of initial acceptance by a group of people anyway, baptized them, and then left, which was perhaps not the best method.** They meant well, but they were impelled, as Paul was in the first reading, **to save as many as possible**, as they put it. That’s how they were thinking. They wanted to spread themselves as thin as possible. In retrospect the Church reflected on this and decided that that perhaps is not the best method. **Today the emphasis is more on going deeper and focusing on the transformation of the community into the likeness of Christ**, not simply baptizing and leaving. So **the Church itself has to grow and deal with the signs of the times and the different circumstances of life and try to adapt to them.**

But you see in the very beginning of **apostolic Church there was always this great anxiety to get the gospel message out into the world.** It’s expressed in Mark’s gospel. It’s expressed in the Letter to the Corinthians, this **great anxiety to save as many as possible.** What

this is rooted in is an observation, an intuition, an insight that people are often led astray in life. Francis, for example, noted that children were very adaptable, open, very much attracted to the gospel, not so much adults. And I think this reflects a truth. We are born good. **We are given gifts of God from the very beginning, and are relatively open to them. The older we get, the less so.** We get off on tangents. We get settled in ruts. This is not good. Whether it will completely disrupt the goal of God in our lives is another matter, but it's not good.

And the goal of the gospel is not simply some ultimate salvation, but salvation now. Now is the time. **Now is the time of salvation. For the community of people who believe in Christ there should be a present day flourishing of the grace of the Holy Spirit.** And the light of God should somehow shine through the relationships of the community of Christ in the way they live, in the way they deal with worldly matters, and everything. That is really the goal of the mission of the Church. It's a goal that Paul spent his life trying to accomplish. It's a goal St. Francis Xavier tried to accomplish with his life. And **it's a goal we all should be working on.**