



BYRON
MILLER,
C.Ss.R.

NOVENA
in Honor of
**Blessed Francis
Xavier Seelos**

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Byron Miller, C.Ss.R.



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Father Francis Xavier Seelos

In the Solemn Jubilee Year 2000, the Lord's favor smiled upon his faithful servant, Father Francis Xavier Seelos, making him the only North American to be beatified in that year. The beatification ceremony took place in Saint Peter's Square in Rome on April 9, 2000.

The beatification trumpeted the jubilant news that Francis Seelos's exceptional holiness has now been demonstrated by thorough investigation and has been approved by the Church. The purpose of such a careful process is so that the faithful might be inspired by Father Seelos and might strive to imitate him. So exactly what is it about this humble Redemptorist missionary that caused the universal Church to recognize him as a man of heroic virtue, true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos was born on January 11, 1819, in Füssen, Bavaria, Germany. Having studied for the priesthood in Germany, he asked to be admitted to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists) with a view to future work in the United States.

In 1844 he was ordained a priest in Baltimore. His 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.

Faithful to the Redemptorist charism, Father Seelos practiced a simple lifestyle and manner of expressing himself. The themes of his preaching, rich in biblical content, were always heard and understood by everyone, regardless of education, culture, or background. A constant endeavor in his pastoral activity was instructing children in the faith, which he held as fundamental for the growth of the Christian community in the parish.

He was stationed in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Annapolis, Cumberland (Maryland), Detroit, and New Orleans. He preached missions and retreats throughout most of what was then the United States. He was transferred to New Orleans in 1866. In God's plan, however, his ministry there was destined to be brief. By September 1867, exhausted from visiting and caring for the victims of yellow fever, he contracted the dreaded disease. After several weeks of patiently enduring his illness, Father Seelos passed on to eternal life on October 4, 1867, at the age of forty-eight years and nine months. Many miracles are attributed to his intercession both during his life and after his death.

How to Pray This Novena

A novena is an ancient form of Christian prayer that expresses our steadfast trust in the power of prayer. A true sign of faith and an expression of love, a novena, or nine occasions of prayer, bears testimony to our human perseverance—a mere fraction of the infinite patience that God has for us! In the creation story in Genesis 1, God is pleased to see the seven-day handiwork of creation through to completion; likewise, our perseverance to see a novena through to its completion is cause for rejoicing in union with the Lord, for we are made in that same image of God who took delight in the accomplishment of creation and who delights in our prayerful persistence. “Pray, pray. Never cease to pray,” wrote Saint Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorist Congregation to which Father Seelos belonged.

This devotion is nothing more than an expression of love to our loving Redeemer. As such, the meditations present the example of Blessed Francis Seelos to inspire us to be as true as he was to the Gospel of Christ.

Begin each prayer occasion during the novena with the invocations and opening prayer (pages 7

and 8). After each meditation comes the closing prayer (page 31), consisting of verses written by Father Seelos, followed by his own suggestion to conclude with a Hail Mary.

Invocations

V. Lord, have mercy on us!

R. Christ, have mercy on us!

V. Lord, have mercy on us!

V. Christ, hear us!

R. Christ, graciously hear us!

V. Blessed Francis

R. pray for us.

Xavier Seelos,

Francis, pattern of cheerfulness,

Francis, lover of labors,

Francis, model of confessors,

Francis, gentle refuge of penitents,

Francis, example to seminarians,

Francis, pillar of peacefulness,

Francis, master of poverty,

Francis, comfort of the sick,

Francis, companion to the dying,

Francis, paragon of holiness,

Let us pray.

O God, you made your priest Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos outstanding in love, that he might proclaim the mysteries of redemption and comfort those in affliction. Grant, by his intercession, that we may work zealously for your glory and for the salvation of all. Amen

FIRST MEDITATION

Pattern of Cheerfulness

TESTIMONIAL

In beatifying Francis Xavier Seelos, the Church once more teaches us that the Christian life is not meant to be lived as a heavy burden, in sadness or in a dark asceticism. The life of Father Seelos itself shows us that holiness is a journey of faith to be undertaken with enthusiasm and serenity. This is so because Christians live in the certainty that Jesus Christ, through his Paschal Mystery, has already redeemed humanity and all of human history.

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, prefect of the
Congregation of Bishops Rome, April 12, 2000

REFLECTION

Father Francis Seelos was neither a provincial superior of the Redemptorist Congregation nor the bishop of a diocese, although in 1860 he was considered a potential candidate for the vacant bishopric of Pittsburgh. Father Seelos was not an administrator—at least, not according to his own self-assessment—like the saintly Redemptorist confrere with whom he lived in Pittsburgh, John Neumann, canonized in 1977. Perhaps Francis Seelos's heroic virtue gives its greatest witness not only in his pastoral zeal and union with the Lord but also in the pleasant disposition and cheerful attitude with which he undertook all of his pastoral duties. Such an approach to ministry may have a special appeal today, with the high burnout rate among clergy and the increasing demands of pastoral ministry in the face of fewer pastoral agents. Moreover, such a pleasant outlook on the life that God gives us may be especially appealing to anyone who feels the stress of today's fast-paced lifestyle, whether as homemaker, parent, student, corporate executive, or combinations thereof!

AFFECTIONS* AND PRAYERS

“Pleasure comes from without, but joy comes from within,” wrote Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. Inner joy, therefore, is not contingent upon sources outside of me. But how many times, Lord, have I allowed my disposition to be affected by others, by my possessions, and by forces beyond my control? Conversely, there are times when I have burdened and depressed others by dwelling on my own minor disappointments, ailments, and challenges of life. God, you desire us to be happy. “Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God,” wrote Father Teilhard de Chardin. Laughter reminds us how good it is to be alive. Help me to recognize you in the smile of others and reflect your warmth in my own expression of cheerful self-contentment, so that I “may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

**Affections* are the honest and trusting expression to God of who we are in the present moment.

SECOND MEDITATION

Lover of Labors

TESTIMONIAL

The amount of daily labor [Father Seelos] performed as chief pastor of Saint Mary's, prefect of the church, prefect of the brothers, spiritual director of the sisters and of thousands of seculars was truly astonishing. None of us ever saw him idle for a moment. He never went visiting, never sat talking in the parlor, but was always to be found either in his cell writing or praying, or else in the confessional, in the schools, or on sick calls. Indeed, he literally killed himself with labor, mortifications, and exertions. Nevertheless, he was the most cheerful and humorous of the community.

Father Benedict Neithart, C.Ss.R.
*A Short Account: The Death of Father
Francis Xavier Seelos, 1867*

REFLECTION

A biographer of Father Seelos writes, "One of the most notable things about him was that he was always busy—praying, teaching, counseling, and

studying. The odd moments of time left from his occupations he spent in letter writing to penitents and souls under his direction.” Father Seelos himself best revealed his work ethic when he told one of his ordination classes to avoid “a manner of life which is opposed to the performance of a definite, serious work.” His concern was that a superficial lifestyle might create interior confusion on “what it means to be faithful, persevering in performance of duties and external obligations.” He also thought it could create carelessness in giving “serious thought for the salvation of one’s soul.”

Francis Seelos’s untiring capacity for work was a trait shared with his father. Added to this was the evident inspiration of his spiritual father, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, who vowed never to waste a moment of time. While Father Seelos worked himself to near exhaustion, he also recognized the wisdom of relaxation and the occasional indulgence in favorite pastimes as a necessity to the work process.

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

My God, my God, my thoughts are often those of the psalmist: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws” (Psalm 22:14-15). How easily I tire of daily routines and exhausting work! Beside restful waters, Lord, lead me. Guide me in right paths for your name’s sake. Allow me quiet intervals to restore my sense of self-purpose; allow me active intervals to strengthen my resolve to create a life rich in good works toward my brothers and sisters. When life is weary and burdensome, may my restlessness only find rest in you.

THIRD MEDITATION

Model of Confessors and Gentle Refuge of Penitents

TESTIMONIAL

Of Father Seelos in the tribunal of penance it may be said that he was a true son and zealous imitator of his glorious Father St. Alphonsus. Like him, he was the friend and consoler of all in affliction. His confessional was always crowded. It seemed as if the whole congregation, wherever he might happen to be stationed, flocked to him to cast themselves and the burden of their sins at his saintly feet. For ordinary confessions a minute or two sufficed; but the few words of exhortation that fell from his lips dropped like burning coals into the hearts of his penitents.

Visitation nun who had Father Seelos
as a spiritual director and confessor
in Pittsburgh, quoted in
A Cheerful Ascetic,
by Michael J. Curley, C.Ss.R.

REFLECTION

Redemptorist Father Francis Seelos belonged to a religious congregation that boldly bears the title of the Redeemer. To redeem is to set free, and Father Seelos brought freedom to those held captive, particularly those in the confessional who were overly burdened by scruples and the harsh legalism of the time. People readily sensed his genuineness as he conveyed the magnanimous source of healing and inner peace that awaited them in this sacrament. Father Seelos's own words from a sermon beckoning penitents to the confessional attest to his understanding of our gentle God: "Yes, my beloved people, God is merciful.... If you sincerely repent and amend your life; if you forsake forever all those evil ways in order to follow Christ in self-denial and penance; if you really prepare for the life to come, rejoice, for here I present you the balm for all your wounds—the infinite mercy of God."

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

Many times, Lord, the self-admission of Blessed Francis Seelos is my own: "I desire for greater perfections, but the more I desire, the more I fall

short.” God of Compassion, I ask for the grace of an embracing heart, like the one you offer in the sacrament of penance. You well know my failings and limitations; still you invite my imperfections to wellness. For love of you, make me whole. Help me celebrate my weakness, as did Saint Paul, for therein lies my strength. (See 2 Corinthians 12:10.)

FOURTH MEDITATION

Example to Seminarians

TESTIMONIAL

This morning, there departed from the diocesan seminary here one of its most worthy members, Francis Xavier Seelos, to leave for North America and there, after entering the Redemptorist Order in Baltimore, to dedicate himself for his entire life to the important vocation of a missionary. May the Lord accompany with super-abundant blessing this truly apostolic undertaking of so worthy a follower of the great apostle of India, Francis Xavier, and at the same time, may this example of rare courage and apostolic zeal also inspire many other priests and seminarians, of the clergy of Catholic Bavaria,

endowed with the same necessary spirit, to follow in his footsteps. For the words of the Savior still apply to the northern half of America in a special way. 'The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Ask therefore the Master of the harvest to send laborers into His vineyard.'

From a newspaper of Augsburg, Germany,
December 9, 1842

REFLECTION

Father Seelos spent one-third of his priestly life ministering to future priests and brothers. His unconventional style as director of the seminarians endeared him to his students but caused concern among his superiors, who questioned his departure from the rigorous European model of seminary formation. Father Seelos could not separate his gregarious nature from his appointed position and used this spirited gift of his to animate others in their joy for the Lord. How he interacted with the students in recreation is illustrated by a well-known incident of the “laughing society.” Organized by three young seminarians, members of the society had to withhold laughter at a given signal when jokes were told. Father Seelos joined the society one day out of curiosity. He could readily laugh at

a joke, but unfortunately could not stop laughing at the signaled moment, and so was penalized to say several prayers. It only took a matter of minutes before Father Seelos had two or three rosaries to recite and had to disassociate himself from the grinning group lest he incur further penalties!

Father Seelos's characteristic good-natured levity did not prevent him from encouraging loftier matters in keeping with his role as director of seminarians. One of his students wrote, "With restless zeal good Father Seelos...sought to promote in the students the spirit of study, of prayer and self-denial, more through example than words."

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

The diary of Saint John Neumann, a mentor to Father Seelos, contains this entry: "Your will be done, O Lord. You see that the resolution to serve You is firmly fixed in my heart." In whatever vocation I follow in life, I too firmly resolve to serve you. You called me, Creator, before I was born, and from my mother's womb, you pronounced my name. Call me to faithfulness and preserve in me a childlike spirit with which to celebrate your reign.

Lord of the Harvest, let your gentle invitation be

heard in many hearts to bless your family throughout the world with an abundance of vocations to the priesthood and religious way of life. Blessed Francis Seelos never wearied of fostering vocations; stir up in me the enthusiasm to attract religious vocations, more through example than words. Help me to rejoice in the words of Father Seelos in saying, "Every day I realize more and more that our vocation is a treasure which we could have received only from the infinite goodness of God, and which we ourselves could never have earned."

FIFTH MEDITATION

Pillar of Peacefulness

TESTIMONIAL

Anyone who observed Father Seelos closely had to marvel at his face: it seemed to reflect the land of peace and joy. One had to believe that he was in interior communication with the blessed spirits on high. In particular, a certain dignity was visible in his demeanor when he approached the altar as priest for Mass to bring to the eternal Father his Only-Begotten Son in sacrifice. There he often

seemed no longer to be...of this sinful earth; and although his feet touched the ground, still he was, even exteriorly, much closer to heaven.

Extract from Bernard Beck, C.Ss.R.,
Transcripts and Notes,
Redemptorist Archives, Brooklyn

REFLECTION

Father Seelos ministered to a nation torn asunder during the tumultuous Civil War. His priestly services at this time extended to wounded soldiers and prisoners of war; however, it was the potential battle among the students entrusted to his care that gave Father Seelos an opportunity to invoke a higher realm. Aware that his seminarians were from both northern and southern states, Father Seelos prudently avoided polarizing statements. He saw his responsibility as one of creating Christian unity in a climate of partisanship. Father Seelos was a pillar of peacefulness in a time of division. Concerning the war, he wrote, "Earthly things are truly quite secondary to me and I leave all to the wise Providence of God. He only knows how to bring good out of evil."

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

My Jesus, peace is your gift to us. Give me inner tranquility and allow me to make peace with my shortcomings. Grant me the serenity to accept the things in life I cannot change.

Prince of Peace, stretch my vision to see opposing truths. Permit me the grace to disagree without being disagreeable. Help me tolerate a diversity of opinions with an open mind. Give me prudence to determine which opinions of mine are to be proclaimed loudly and which are better left unspoken. Guide my feet into your way of peace. (See Luke 1:79b.)

Bless the peacemakers, Lord. You call them your children. (See Matthew 5:9.) May I assist you in bringing good out of evil by working tirelessly for peace and justice and for the victims of violence.

SIXTH MEDITATION

Master of Poverty

TESTIMONIAL

Here as elsewhere, he was scarcely known when he already became the general favorite among all classes, male and female, young and old, rich and poor, white and black, secular and religious. His confessional was always thronged. Every sick person called for him. All the afflicted poured their tales of woe into his patient ears. In spite of himself he had to bear the heavy burden of popularity. He wondered, complained, resisted, but all to no purpose; it was impossible for him to be otherwise than kind and obliging to everyone, even the poorest and silliest. He knew no distinction of condition. He received [the lowly] with the same gentle deference as the highest gentleman and lady.

Father Benedict Neithart, C.Ss.R.
Reminiscences, 1876

REFLECTION

In Pittsburgh, Father Seelos encountered a poor man in the bitter cold whose toes were exposed

through his torn shoes. Father Seelos kindly asked the man for his shoes and gave in return the boots from his own feet, to arrive later at home wearing the tattered shoes himself. Father Seelos developed a love for the poor by walking in their shoes—literally and figuratively! One observer wrote that Father Seelos spent about a half hour every day in the company of the needy individual who regularly received meals in the rectory, immersing “himself completely in the situation of this poor man.” Moreover, Father Seelos made time for this interchange despite his busy schedule as superior of the religious community.

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

O Lord, hear the longing of the poor, listen to their every word, and strengthen their hearts. (See Psalm 10:17.) Strengthen my heart as well to meet the face of poverty, for it is in this countenance that my ready-made judgments are often confronted and my levels of comfort are often challenged. Despite my own busyness, allow the poor to teach me and transform my life into one of solidarity so that together we can bring about your reign.

SEVENTH MEDITATION

Comfort of the Sick

TESTIMONIAL

Were someone to think that the long and monotonous sickness annoys me, or that my spirit is filled with sadness, or that in this condition I consider myself unfortunate, he would certainly be mightily deceived. The truth is that I cannot thank our loving God enough that he arranged things in this way and provided me with this time of grace in which I can spiritually take deep and long breaths that give light and warmth; time to water and make fruitful my inner life.

Father Francis Xavier Seelos, 1857

REFLECTION

Of Father Seelos his confreres wrote, “He was charitable towards all—but especially to poor sinners—to the tempted or afflicted—and to the sick. He would frequently visit the latter, and, if they were in danger he would remain near them for hours at a time. He considered the sick as a blessing

to the community.” It is quite possible that Father Seelos displayed a fondness for the poor and the sick because he was so readily able to identify with both realities: Francis Seelos’s health had never been robust and the Seelos family was not known for prestige or fortune.

“For the suffering and troubled of every kind, he always had a word of helpful and consoling wisdom. He gave them the conviction that in every affliction and suffering, divine Providence has the very definite purpose of tearing people away from the world and of making them holy.”

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

Divine Physician, it is far easier at times for me to feel your presence in a brilliant sunrise than in a lackluster sickness. During his illnesses, Father Seelos found great comfort in being able to converse with you. “I am in heaven,” he wrote while bedridden. “Happy sickness that gives me this opportunity to regain spiritual strength and fervor.” May his example be a contagious spirit to show how I can be in dialogue with you during my own illness.

When maladies come my way, let me be still and know that you are God. (See Psalm 46:10.)

Do for me, Lord, what I am not able to do for myself. Renew in me the strength to please you in all things, sensitize me to the pain of others, and bless my caretakers for their concern.

EIGHTH MEDITATION

Companion to the Dying

TESTIMONIAL

Carry [Father Seelos] our heartfelt greetings. They will be perhaps the last greetings that will reach him from us on this earth.... One more petition that I never dared to address to my brother personally: After his death, please ask his superiors or one of the other Fathers to give you a little memento for me, and for each of my other dear ones. This memento may be very small. Just something... connected with his memory.

From a letter by Francis Seelos's sister, Antonia, upon hearing of a severe illness that almost took her brother's life in 1857

REFLECTION

It was in Saint James Church, Baltimore, where Father Seelos stood in the pulpit for the first time to preach on April 13, 1845. He had been ordained a priest the previous December. The occasion for his preaching—the Feast of the Patronage of Saint Joseph—was a most appropriate one, since Father Seelos had a special devotion to Saint Joseph, the guardian of the Holy Family.

An ancient prayer to Saint Joseph invites us to contemplate the tender image of the infant Jesus asleep in Saint Joseph's arms: "I dare not approach while He reposes near your heart. Press Him in my name and kiss His fine Head for me, and ask Him to return the kiss when I draw my dying breath."

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

When we come to the end of our pilgrimage and enter the presence of God, let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord. We groan while we are here, and we long to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. (See 2 Corinthians 5:2.) Clothe us in the garment of your radiant light for the feast of the new heaven and the new earth.

May our Mother Mary, Saint Joseph, all the saints, and Blessed Francis Seelos offer your gentle kiss of peace when we draw our dying breath. They will perhaps be the first to greet us and welcome us from this earth. And, because it is your wish that we not bear alone the hour of our death, unite us to “something connected with Father Seelos’s memory,” as a reminder of your consoling grace.

NINTH MEDITATION

Paragon of Holiness

TESTIMONIAL

It is useless for me to dwell upon [Father Seelos’s] well-known and edifying life. Everyone who saw him even for the first time pronounced him a living saint. How frequently have I not heard such expressions as these: “O the dear Saint! It does my heart good only to look at him.... But he not merely looked like a saint, but was one in reality.”

Father Benedict Neithart, C.Ss.R.
*A Short Account: The Death of
Father Francis Xavier Seelos, 1867*

If [Father Seelos] is not a saint, then all of us here in America will lose hope of becoming holy.

Brother Louis Kenning, C.Ss.R., 1869

REFLECTION

In modern times, Mother Teresa of Calcutta was highly regarded as a “living saint.” By all accounts, Father Seelos was also looked upon as a living saint from an early age. His companions already considered the young novice from Füssen a saint in the novitiate; later, his bishop wrote to Rome of the work that Father Seelos did in Pittsburgh, adding, “This priest is a man of truly remarkable sanctity of life.” Even before beatification made the title official, many people in his own lifetime affectionately referred to him as “the Blessed Father Seelos.” Rumors of his holiness intensified when stories circulated concerning the effectiveness of his prayers and healings. A mother whose daughter was healed when Father Seelos prayed over her remarked, “I have looked upon Father Seelos as a saintly priest, but up to now I did not know that God had given him such great power.”

Yet, like all the saints before him, Father Seelos never considered himself to be holy. He was

uncomfortable when others told him of his sanctity, and he tried to dispel such adulation with sincere modesty. Father Seelos, however, did acknowledge a personal desire to be a spiritual man. For him the means to this end was prayer: "Prayer must be my chief strength."

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

In every generation, bountiful God, you send us true witnesses of the faith to inspire us and remind us of our universal call to holiness. In Father Seelos's lifetime, few people could dwell long in his company without being made better by his presence. We too are made better by his intercession and the example of his life and holiness.

If it is your will, include Blessed Francis Seelos in the company of canonized saints, so that your Catholic Church may imitate his virtues, true to the Gospel of your Son. "The LORD my God will come, and all the [saints] with him.... And there shall be continuous day" (Zechariah 14:5,7).

For myself too I ask some share in the fellowship of the saints. Stir in me a personal desire to be spiritual. May this prayer of mine be my chief strength.

Closing Prayer

HEAVEN, THE LAND OF LOVE, THE LAND OF JOY

*Where is my sweet, my happy home?
I long to see it, there to come.
Is it on earth and here below,
Where tears in sadness often flow?*

*Ah, raise your heart and raise your eye,
And look above to heaven's sky!
Look there above, where from afar
Sweet heav'n invites by many a star,
By many a bright and sparkling light
To show the way through clouds and night.*

*It is above, above the sky,
A land of love, a land of joy.
Sweet Jesus, grant us there to come,
And there to find our happy home!*

Adapted verses of Father Francis Seelos,
Cumberland, Maryland, September 4, 1864.
Father Seelos included these verses in a personal
letter to a nun and suggested she read them from
time to time, accompanied by a Hail Mary.

Devotion to Blessed Francis Seelos

*O come,
let us praise the
Lord joyfully.*

In biblical times, a *yobel* (trumpet) proclaimed a jubilee year of favor from the Lord. Amid the sound of trumpet blasts in the Jubilee Year 2000, Father Francis Xavier Seelos, C.Ss.R., was declared Blessed by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II. We pray for the day when Father Seelos is “in that number, when the saints go marching in!”



*You are invited to help spread devotion to
Blessed Francis Seelos. For more information
on promoting the canonization cause of Blessed
Francis Seelos, please contact*

The National Shrine of Blessed Francis Seelos
2030 Constance Street
New Orleans, LA 70130-5099
(504) 525-2495
www.seelos.org

334 7686



This pamphlet presents the life of Father Seelos, a man true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He practiced a simple lifestyle while instructing children in the faith, preaching missions and retreats, and visiting and caring for the victims of yellow fever, where he contracted the disease and passed on to eternal life.

These nine meditations present the example of his devotion to God. Reflections and closing prayers precede each meditation. This novena of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos helps us pray passionately and lovingly to God while living a life of holiness as we embark on our journey of faith.



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