

Friday, April 4

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

### Overflowing Gratitude

*I'm ready to offer the thanksgiving sacrifice  
and pray in the name of GOD*

St. Francis Xavier, founder of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, reached an island off China in 1552, but died on the island of Shangchuan without reaching the mainland. A more successful mission came in 1582, including Matteo Ricci.

For the next two centuries, particularly under the 138 years of just three Qing emperors – Kangxi (1661-1722), Yongzheng (1723-1735), Qianlong (1736-1799) – Christianity was part of the highest levels of Chinese government and disseminated into many parts of the realm. Only because the Jesuits were learned scholars, only because they had a deep love for Western science, particularly astronomy, only because they immersed themselves into becoming Chinese – only by excellence did they gain a hearing for their faith.

By 1850 there were a ¼ million Catholics in China, and by 1900 at least ¾ million. By the reign of Qianlong, they had lost most of their connections with the emperor, most of their favored positions in the bureaucracy, most of their influence into high-level discussions. And yet they continued to move the hearts of many Chinese.

I grew up despising Catholics – and didn't know it. My first positive contact came from a Jesuit studying in Beirut who organized a weekly discussion group with half a dozen of us and fed us the latest from his learnings. Only two years later in seminary did I realize that he was in the advance group who were preparing the documents for what we now know as the Second Vatican Council. What a treat!

But my first experiences as a young pastor with Catholic parishes – very little influenced by the changes in Vatican II – only confirmed my worst prejudices against Catholics. The local priest was 'awful' in his attitude and rejections.

Until I moved to Illinois. Weeks before I arrived, the Catholic priest in town sent me a warm handwritten note welcoming me. When I arrived, he embraced me as a friend and opened his arms wide to include me. In monthly meetings he shared the joys and concerns, the successes and failures, the shining moments and the doubts that surrounded his daily work. He transformed my understanding of all things Catholic. Thank you, God, for a priest who lived for his people. Thank you, God, for an obedient laborer of the Pope who shared his salvation by grace. Thank you, God, for celebrator of the Mass who heard the cries of his flock. Thank you, God, for a man who could call you Mother. What can I give to the Lord for all the blessings God's poured out on me?

A Way to Pray – Gratitude

- Let's begin with what I see, hear, smell, taste, touch now

- And then move out to the people I saw yesterday
- And then move back to the people who raised me
- And then move forward to the generations I see ahead
- And then let them all be held in the hand of God.
- Thank you, God.