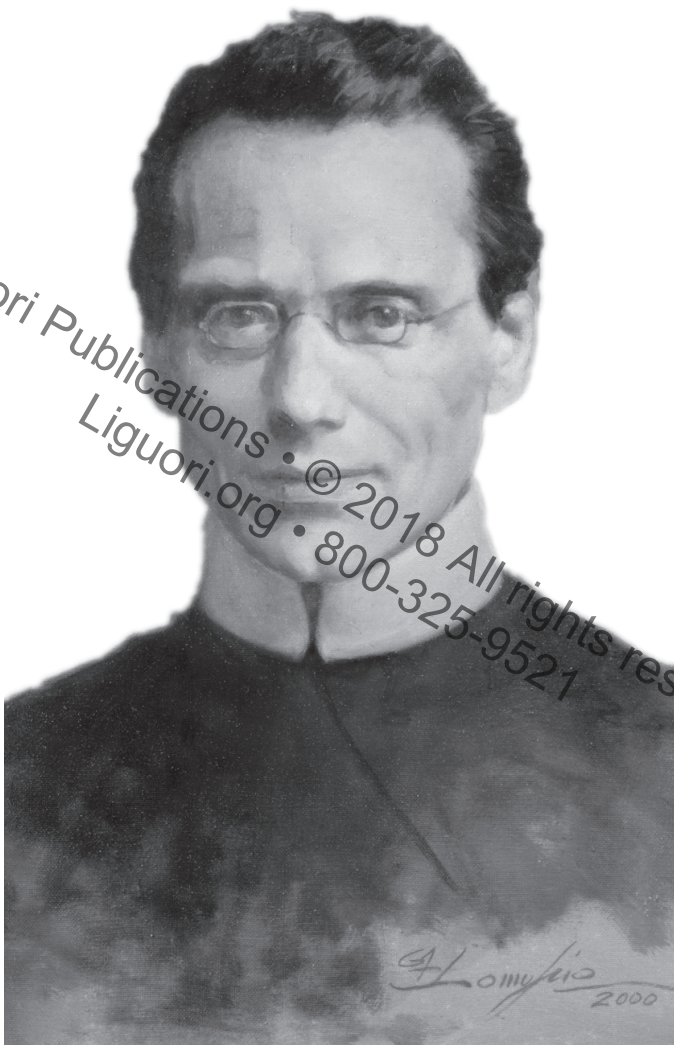




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ZEALOUS MISSIONARY

From the Perspective of

BLESSED FRANCIS
XAVIER SEELOS

FR. RICHARD BOEVER, CSSR



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Introduction

AT MY BROTHER'S ISOLATED CATTLE FARM southwest of St. Louis, I often use a cabin as a hermitage. There, a wind chime rings. Aluminum tubes of varying lengths emit unique tones when they're struck by a wooden disk hanging in the middle. Most of the time when I look at the wind chime, I notice little more than the aluminum tubes. They are the chime's most evident features, but the heart of the instrument is the wooden disk in the center that makes them ring.

This chime makes me think of the lifelong accomplishments of Francis Xavier Seelos (1819–67), such as his selfless caring for yellow fever victims. On the wind chime (symbolizing Blessed Seelos' life), each tube represents a different achievement. To give purpose to the chime (his life) and make each tube sound sweet, it takes the heart of a saint and the wind of God.

In this book, my intention is to help you know Blessed

Francis Xavier Seelos as a person and acquaint you with his accomplishments. Having studied Francis Xavier's life and letters, I wrote this biography in the first person. While I have taken poetic license and some liberties, this book is historically sound, reading much like the excerpts of his letters that you will find throughout the text. Some of Fr. Seelos' quotations have been highlighted in display type. For more of Fr. Seelos' letters, I recommend you read the collection gathered in *Sincerely, Seelos* by Fr. Carl W. Hoegerl, CSsR.

My book includes the date of each letter and the person to whom Blessed Seelos wrote. I pray that my efforts inspire you and provide you insight.

Fr. Rich Boever, CSsR

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Chronology

- 1819 Born, Füssen, Germany (January 11)
- 1825–31 Elementary school
- 1828 Confirmation
- 1830 First holy Communion
- 1831–32 Private academic tutoring
- 1832–39 *Gymnasium*, Augsburg, St. Stephan's
- 1839–41 University, Munich, philosophy
- 1841–42 University, Munich, theology;
Dillingen seminary, St. Jerome
- 1843 Sails to America (March 17–April 20)
- 1843–44 Novitiate at St. James, Baltimore
- 1844 Professes vows as a Redemptorist (May 16)

1844	Ordained a priest (December 22)
1845–54	Parish priest, St. Philomena, Pittsburgh
1847	Novice master, St. Philomena
1851–54	Pastor and religious superior, St. Philomena
1854–57	Pastor and religious superior, St. Alphonsus, Baltimore
1857–62	Pastor, superior, prefect of students, Sts. Peter and Paul, Cumberland, MD
1862–65	Students move with Seelos to St. Mary's, Annapolis, MD
	Pastor and religious superior
1863–65	Superior of mission band, Annapolis
1865–66	St. Mary's, Detroit
1866–67	St. Mary's Assumption, New Orleans
1867	Dies of yellow fever caring for the sick, New Orleans (October 4)
2000	Beatified by St. John Paul II

CHAPTER 1

European Years

FÜSSEN IS A KIND OF FAIRY-TALE TOWN nestled near the Bavarian Alps in the shadow of King Ludwig's Hohenschwangau Castle in southern Germany. In my day, the still-young nineteenth century, we were only about 190 households with 1,547 inhabitants, and all but twenty residents were Catholic. The capital, Munich, is about sixty miles northeast of our little town, but in those days we didn't go that far from home. We were small-town people who greeted each other with "*Grüss Gott!*" meaning, "May God bless you!" It was wonderful living among the gabled roofs, narrow streets, and rolling hills that surrounded the town.

I was born at home, Number 13 Spitalgasse Street, on January 11, 1819, and brought to church to be baptized that same day. I would be granted only forty-eight years of life. I was the sixth child born to the Seelos family. Elizabeth

was first; followed by the twins, who died during their first year on earth; then Josephine and Ambrose. After me, more children: Antonia, Frances, Ulrich (who lived but a short time), Anna, Adam, and Kunigunda. Twelve children were given to my parents: three entered into the holy state of matrimony, three remained single, and two became religious sisters. I became a Redemptorist priest who missioned in North America.

My father, Mang Seelos, was a weaver and cloth maker by trade, and my mother, Frances Schwarzenbach, was a holy *hausfrau* who raised the children. I was rather sickly as a child, which gave my mother an extra challenge. My brothers and sisters would say I was also a bit spoiled. Probably true. They noted that I liked to laugh, for which I sometimes got into trouble at school. I enjoyed my friends and liked to cut up a bit. One day when I was in grade school, I used my father's tailcoat and hat to dress up as a clown for the day's carnival festivities. When Father saw me, I got into trouble.

Each day the family rose early for Mass, followed by breakfast and our other daily routines. Before each meal, we prayed together, and after dinner in the evenings the children took turns reading aloud about the saint of the day. On one occasion, when it was my turn to read, I mispronounced the name of St. Polycarp as "Saint Polycrap." My brothers and sisters laughed wildly, but my father cor-

rected me sternly, and I learned how important it was to pronounce the words I read the right way. His admonition came in handy later in life during my preaching. There's no doubt we were raised in a very Catholic manner, and we thought that was the way every family lived.



Francis began his formal education at age six in this building, once known as "the old kornhaus."

When I was six years old, I began my formal education in the *volksschule*, generally thought of as our parish school but officially a public elementary school. The school building was located on the corner of Schrannengasse and Brunnengasse. It was known in town as “the old *kornhaus*” because the first floor was the marketplace for the sale of corn to the local inhabitants. The school occupied the second floor. Our school year comprised two semesters, from November to Easter and from May through August. Classes were held six days a week, from eight until ten o’clock in the morning and from one to three o’clock in the afternoon. We were drilled in what is called “the three R’s” in America. We also had classes in religion and moral development, and we attended morning Mass each day.

I especially liked music and singing, and I even learned the violin. Music delighted me and helped me express all the wonder I felt within my heart. I went to the *volksschule* for six years and was rewarded with good grades for my studiousness. I was also an altar server at St. Mang’s Church, where I received my confirmation in 1828 and first Communion in 1830. These were special celebrations for me and happy days.

When I was a child, the Industrial Revolution was sweeping across Europe, and life was changing for many people. Technology affected my father’s trade because new machines could manufacture cloth cheaper than he could

weave it. We suffered financially during my elementary school years. My parents never shared their worries about money with us children, but we understood that their lives were difficult. Then, in 1830, unexpectedly and by God's providence, my father got a new job. He was appointed the sacristan at St. Mang's Church, and shortly after my sister Kunigunda's birth, we moved into the sacristan's house on Sankt Mang Platz.

Letter to the family in 1862: But believe me, dear sister, growing up this way is just the best, where children get a bit acquainted with poverty in this world, and get to know what need is, and how parents have to worry to obtain their daily bread. Such children understand very well that this world cannot be the ultimate goal of our desires; and that there must be a higher and better life, for which the present one is only a sorrowful preparation. If children learned this, they have learned a great lesson which, together with later sorrows, has brought many a frivolous young person back again to the right path. So, dear sister, strive to thank God for everything; to be patient in suffering, and in this way to offer yourself for your family.