

Retreat *with* Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos

Byron Miller, CSsR



Imprimi Potest:

Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, the Redemptorists

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Biography

Francis Xavier Seelos was born on January 11, 1819, in Füssen, Bavaria, Germany. After studying for the priesthood in Germany, he asked to be admitted to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists) with a view toward future ministry 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 made him so renowned as an expert confessor and spiritual director that even people from neighboring towns came to see him.

Faithful to the Redemptorist charism, Fr. Seelos practiced a simple lifestyle and manner of expressing himself. The presentation and themes of his preaching, rich in biblical content, were always heard and understood by everyone, regardless of education, culture, or background.

He was stationed in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Annapolis and Cumberland (MD), Detroit, and New Orleans. He preached missions and retreats throughout much of what then comprised the United States. He was transferred to New Orleans in 1866. In God's plan, however, his ministry there was destined to be brief. Fr. Seelos entered into eternal life on October 4, 1867, at the age of forty-eight.

On April 9, 2000, Pope St. John Paul II beatified Fr. Francis Xavier Seelos during the Solemn Jubilee Year. Many miracles have been attributed to his intercession, both during his life and after his death.



Meet a Friend of Father Seelos'

Countless people were endeared to Francis Xavier Seelos because of his goodness and pleasant personality. He considered his many friendships to be a blessing from God. One such dear friend was Philip Antoni, who knew Fr. Seelos toward the end of his life.

Like Francis Seelos, Antoni was born in Bavaria and came to America in his twenties. He settled in New York, where he eventually worked as a decorator and carver. He moved to New Orleans in the early 1850s and started a small religious-articles store on Constance Street, in the shadow of St. Mary's Assumption Church. At the time of his death in 1908, Philip's prosperous business was recognized as one of the leading stores of its kind in the city.

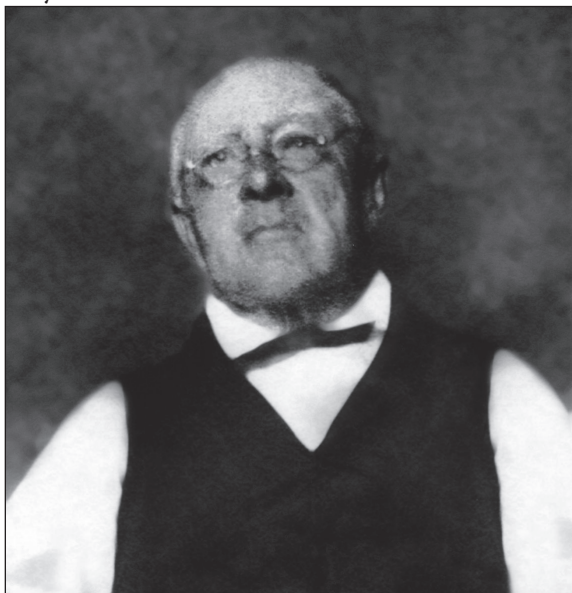
As a devout member of St. Mary's Assumption Church, Philip surely welcomed the arrival of the

new pastor, whose reputation for sanctity had preceded him. Before long, Fr. Seelos and Philip Antoni were good friends. Sadly, the friendship was short-lived.

When a yellow-fever epidemic hit New Orleans in 1867, the Redemptorist fathers and brothers were severely affected. A concerned Philip Antoni was regularly admitted into the rectory to help provide care to the bedridden. When Fr. Seelos himself contracted yellow fever, he entrusted his own mission cross to Philip Antoni. From his deathbed, Francis Seelos wanted to show appreciation to his friend for all the pastoral care he had given to him and his confreres.

The 1908 obituary “Pioneer Religious Bookseller Passes Away,” from a New Orleans newspaper, credits Philip Antoni with an interesting legacy. It remembers him as the man who “fixed the clock on St. Mary’s Assumption Church when all of the jewelers of the city gave it up as a bad job in 1875, and, although not identified with the jewelry trade at any time during his life, received great credit for this feat.”

Let us now turn back the clock and imagine Philip Antoni to be our personal retreat guide. Through the stories of Fr. Seelos at the beginning of each “Day” and the following reflection on our modern lives, we will come to see how Fr. Francis Xavier Seelos, CSsR, can become our good and holy friend, too.



Philip Antoni

Day I

The truth will set you free.

John 8:32

Philip Antoni, our retreat guide, recalls:

Fr. Seelos contracted yellow fever in September 1867 after ministering to those already stricken with the dreaded disease. New Orleans in September can still resemble the summer. But in Germany—where Fr. Seelos and I are from—the forests are brilliantly colored in the fall. I cannot help but think that while on his deathbed, Fr. Seelos had time to recall the autumn seasons of his homeland and those in the northeastern parts of the United States where he ministered so tirelessly.

For Reflection

Especially during the autumn season, some of the most familiar verses in American poetry emerge from our collective unconscious:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood...
...And I—I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

The Road Not Taken (1916)
Robert Frost

Recall, too, a familiar Gospel verse used in the play *A Man for All Seasons*: “The truth shall set you free” (John 8:32). The gospel truth not only liberates us, it can also set us apart and make us different. With due respect to Robert Frost, often it’s not so much the road itself, but the freedom to choose (or forge) our own path that really makes all the difference.

When Francis Seelos made the decision to abandon his ordinary, comfortable life in Germany for life as a missionary in faraway

America, he had already absorbed the truths that would set him apart and make him different in the eyes of many.

We create our road in life through the decisions we make as the available paths branch out along the way. One of those paths—perhaps one far less traveled these days—is our spiritual path. Is it a path that is inviting you?

In and out of season, allow the Lord of the Harvest to give you wisdom and courage in following the truth, even if it leads you down roads less traveled. Your journey on that spiritual path may set you free and you may be labeled as different for doing so, but it just might make the difference you've been looking for.

Prayerfully consider Luke 9:62, where Jesus admonishes anyone who begins plowing but keeps looking back.

Have you plowed a path in life that caused you to keep looking back at roads not taken?

Are you constantly in search of greener pastures?

Offer a spontaneous prayer for the insight to view the here and now as an abundant gift from God and to peacefully accept the path in life that you have created so far.

*Have a reason to live, and know
how to sacrifice yourself for it.*

F. X. Seelos

