

large crowd. His body was buried in the church's crypt. Many have come to his tomb over the years, and miracles continue to occur through the intercession of Father Seelos!

In 1902, around 40 years after his death, the process toward his canonization was begun. There were people still living that knew Father Seelos; they would tell their stories of healing and conversion. Many of these are documented.

One gentleman tells his story of meeting Fr. Seelos. His legs were weak, and he had to use crutches to walk. He came to see Fr. Seelos, and was so convinced and determined that Fr. Seelos could "heal" him; he threw his crutches out the window and told Fr. Seelos, *I am here to ask your prayers, and believe you can heal me!* Father Seelos said, *Well I don't know if I can help you, but wait.* Father Seelos went to get his Bible, opened it, and began reading scripture to the man. He blessed the man with the Bible, and yes—he did receive his healing.

Father Seelos worked directly with individual people—men and women, young and old, sinners and saints—who were making their way to eternal life through the troubles, difficulties, and temptations of this world. He radiated spirituality and personality. He is called the *joyful ascetic*.

People are attracted to joy and sincerity, and Father Seelos had both—plus a deep spirituality. He performed his duties and accepted his daily crosses with humility and joy. His example clearly shows that holiness is attained not in doing what the world considers heroic, but in being true to the responsibilities of one's state in life.

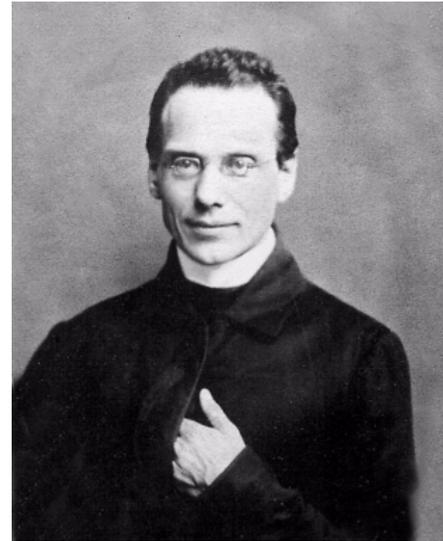
The National Shrine has kept his memory alive; spreading the story of his life, and encouraging others to turn to him for healing and help. People come from all over to visit the Shrine, the museum, and to venerate his tomb. Each year, thousands of letters of petition and thanksgiving pour in to the Center from all parts of the USA. Visit their website at: seelos.org

Sources: seelos.org, vatican.va, Liguori publications

Socials with the Saints – PILGRIM CENTER of HOPE

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Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos

*Missionary Priest, Joyful Ascetic
& Miracle Worker*

Born: January 11, 1819

Died: October 5, 1867

Beatified: April 9, 2000

Major Shrine: National Shrine of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos, New Orleans, Louisiana

Memorial: October 5

Born in Bavaria, Germany, Francis was baptized the same day in his

parish church. Since childhood, he had a desire to become a priest.

What was his childhood like? His was a close-knit Catholic family. His sister described their daily routine: *The whole family rose early each morning and went to Mass. They would return, have breakfast and then each one went to his accustomed work and the children went to school. Before meals, the family recited the Angelus. And during meals, the children had to tell what they had learned in school. After their evening meal, they had a set time for spiritual reading, which was usually on the life of the Saint of the day.*

As a young man growing up in Germany; he joined a university fraternity, took fencing and dancing lessons, and enjoyed snuffing tobacco. He did have an irritating habit, though. According to his classmates, he always sang at the top of his lungs. At Mass, he startled others and embarrassed friends by belting out every hymn!

At the age of 23, he entered the diocesan seminary, and soon after met a missionary priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (also called the Redemptorists). Their main mission was to evangelize the most abandoned. Seelos decided to join the Congregation, and wanted to minister to the German-speaking immigrants in the United States.

He was accepted into the Congregation, and arrived in New York to complete his studies. He was ordained a priest at the age of 25 in the Redemptorist Church of St. James in Baltimore, Maryland. After being

Ordained, he worked for nine years in the parish of St. Philomena in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Guess who was his pastor at that Church. It was Fr. John Neumann, who is now a canonized saint. John Neumann later became a bishop. During his time with Fr. Neumann, Seelos said that Father introduced him to the active life and guided him as a spiritual director and confessor. Seelos dedicated himself to preaching missions and hearing confessions.

There were only 21 priests to care for 45,000 Catholics in western Pennsylvania, and the pastoral needs were overwhelming. The sermons of Father Seelos drew large crowds, and there were often lines outside of his confessional, where he heard confessions in English, German, and French.

Seelos' 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. The themes of his preaching were rich in biblical content, and he had the gift of preaching to all regardless of education, culture, or background. His preaching was heard and understood by everyone, and included his storytelling talent; he would often act out scripture stories.

His concern for souls was so sincere! It bore fruit; at times the line outside his confessional would snake through the church and out the door. People would wait 2 to 3 hours for confession with Fr. Seelos! His gentle, friendly manner made it easy for penitents to confide in him, and his confidence in God's mercy lifted their spirits. He would tell them: *No one was ever lost because his sin was too great, but because his trust was too small!*

As a Redemptorist missionary, he practiced a simple lifestyle and a simple manner of expressing himself. He shared his deep devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, under her title of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. This is the title of Mary to which the Redemptorists have a devotion. The image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is an ancient icon, and one of the most well-known and loved images of Mary. Seelos would often call upon Our Mother of Perpetual Help. So can we! Just think about the two words *perpetual help* – this means that her intercession is uninterrupted, unending, and constant when we call for her to help us. Fr. Seelos had this deep devotion to Mary.

For three years, he worked as a tireless preacher, traveling through more than ten states with other Redemptorists, leading many parish missions.

When he was 41 years old, he was recommended as a candidate for the office of Bishop for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Well, he did not want to be a bishop. He had written to his superior saying he was not worthy of the office and that he had no experience. Seelos' request went to Pope Pius IX, and he was excused. Of course, Seelos was happy about that.

Father Seelos was happy being a missionary priest – serving his parish community and so many who came to him from all over the city. People saw him as easy-going and approachable. A destitute man remembered the cold winter day that Father Seelos passed him on the street. Father looked at the rags tied around the man's feet and stopped him. Father sat on the curb, pulled off his boots, and handed his boots to the man with a kind word. Then, he continued his way in his stocking feet!

This was a time of strong Catholic persecution in America. It took more than a little courage for Father Seelos to go out into the streets or countryside to fulfill his pastoral duties. Hostile gangs would routinely threaten and heckle Catholics in public; some threw torches at church buildings, setting them on fire. One time, Father was pelted by rocks, severely beaten, and threatened at gunpoint. This sounds very similar to the life of Saint Paul!

In 1866, he was assigned to the Redemptorist community in New Orleans, Louisiana. He also became the pastor of the Church of the Assumption. Most of the community members had been Father's students.

Father Seelos was known for his immense joy and robust laughter. He had a joke for every occasion, enjoyed making others laugh, and was a marvelous storyteller. He and some other priests formed sort of a club where humorous stories were told, and the priests would enjoy laughing together. Father Seelos was known to have the hardest laughter!

He was widely regarded as a holy man. People continued to confide in him and to call for him when they were sick. Some reported that remarkable conversions and cures followed his visits. Others said they felt more lighthearted or hopeful after spending time in his presence.

Father Seelos died at the age of 48 of yellow fever, after having attended to many who had the disease. His body was prepared for burial and laid out in his casket in the parish church. Many noticed that the color of his body changed to a healthier color and did not become rigid. Miracles were reported by those who touched his body or touched rosaries and other objects to his body and were later used to heal people. His funeral was attended by a