

## “ The Spirit of St Pierre Favre

“A man in love with the glory of God, who by the grace of the holy Spirit, knows how to weigh the things that are of God, will be able more easily to obtain faith by the gift of the Holy Spirit, by means of which he will be able to work great and wonderful things to the glory of God.”

*Memoriale (1542-46)*

“I ask of you, my Lord,  
to remove anything which separates me from you,  
and you from me.  
Remove anything that makes me  
unworthy of your sight, your control, your rebuke,  
of your speech and conversation,  
of your kindness and love.  
Cast from me every evil  
that stands in the way of my seeing you,  
hearing, tasting, savouring and touching you,  
fearing and being mindful of you,  
knowing, trusting, loving and possessing you,  
being conscious of your presence  
and, as far as may be, enjoying you.  
This is what I ask for myself  
and earnestly desire from you.  
Amen.”

*A Prayer of Pierre Favre*

“I suggest to you nothing more than repeating  
frequently in your heart:  
‘Christ poor, and I rich.  
Christ fasting, and I full.  
Christ naked, and I clad.  
Christ suffering, and I living in enjoyment.’”

*Conversation at the Court of Spain (1545)*



## A Brief Biography of Pierre Favre

- 1506 Pierre Favre is born at Villaret in France and grows up tending sheep in the mountains of the Haute Savoie
- 1514 Begins studies at the parish school and soon completes the Latin grammar course
- 1516 Pierre determines to spend his life in the service of Christ although he does not know what that will turn out to be
- 1516 Moves to the Collège La Roche where he is taught and greatly influenced by the learned and holy Pierre Veilhard
- 1525 Favre begins studies at the University of Paris, his roommate is Francis Xavier
- 1529 Ignatius Loyola becomes a third roommate
- 1534 Favre is directed in the Spiritual Exercises by St Ignatius
- 1534 July, Favre is ordained priest
- 1534 August, at Montmatre, Ignatius, Favre and five companions, vow a life of poverty and chastity
- 1537 Favre is appointed to teach Scripture at the Sapienza, Rome’s university
- 1539 Sent to help reform of the diocese of Parma
- 1540 Sent as theological advisor to the Emperor at the Diet of Worms and then at Ratisbon – an attempt to reconcile Protestants and Catholics
- 1540 The Society of Jesus is approved by Pope Paul III with Favre as one of the first companions and founders
- 1542 Favre is missioned to Germany
- 1544 Missioned to Portugal
- 1545 Missioned to Spain
- 1546 May, Favre lays the foundation stone of the first Jesuit college at Gandía in Spain
- 1546 He is appointed a theologian at the Council of Trent, on his way there Favre falls ill and dies at Rome on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1546
- 1872 Pope Pius IX beatifies Favre
- 2013 December, Pope Francis declares Favre a saint



Pierre Favre SJ  
A New Saint

Even as a child, Pierre Favre was drawn to thinking and speaking about the things of God. At the age of six, he could be found sitting on a large stone in the village square giving little catechism classes to other children. The adults would listen in astonishment, and be admonished if they interrupted. They would reward him with apples and nuts which Pierre would divide out carefully among the poorest children.

**“I ask that I may in truth  
be a disciple of Christ  
and an attentive listener to his words  
and those of all the saints . . .  
to be helpful to all in every way  
and hurtful to none.”**

Pierre Favre, *Memoriale* (1542-46)

His parents were poor and Pierre would tend the sheep in the high mountain pastures. But he was a bright child and yearned for the opportunity to go to school. His parents scraped together their meagre resources but he quickly exhausted all that the village school could teach him and, at even greater sacrifice, was sent to the Collège La Roche nine miles away. Here Pierre came under the care of Pierre Veilhard, a holy and learned man, who taught him not only Latin and Greek but also opened his mind to the ways of God.

After nine years at La Roche, Pierre went to the University of Paris, the most prestigious and forward-thinking university of his day.

It was here that Pierre shared a room with the young nobleman Francis Xavier and then with Ignatius Loyola also. He was able to help Ignatius, some 20 years his senior, with his study of Aristotle in Greek. Ignatius spoke with Pierre, often long into the night, about the inner life and his dreams to do great things for God. The three men became lifelong friends.

Pierre Favre and Francis Xavier were at the heart of the small group of companions who gathered around Ignatius. They described themselves as ‘friends in the Lord’ and dedicated themselves to praise, reverence and serve God under vows of poverty and chastity. They journeyed to Rome to seek the Pope’s blessing to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. But wars and storms prevented their departure and they put themselves at the Pope’s disposal to do whatever was needed.



An early and lifelike sketch in chalk of Pierre Favre  
(Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus)

Pierre was immediately appointed by the Pope to teach at Rome’s old university, the Sapienza.

**“Rule your thoughts and intentions so that all your occupations and exertions may be directed to the glory of God . . . Strive that, resting or working, God may be your first motive, then your own and your neighbour’s salvation.”**

Pierre Favre, *Rule for the Confraternity at Parma* (1542)

Quickly gaining a reputation for wisdom, learning, kindness and holiness, Favre was much in demand and served at the Courts of the Holy Roman Emperor, and in Spain and Portugal. But all the while, he would live in the local hostel for the sick and the destitute, and would take time to instruct and care for the poor. Everywhere he travelled, Favre would use the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius to open people’s souls and show them the presence of God in their lives where they had not noticed and encouraged them to respond generously to his call.

**“Yes, I am a pilgrim and so are all my  
Companions, and not only in this part of the  
country but all the world over, and so I shall be,  
thank God, till my death.”**

Pierre Favre, *Letter to Wendelina van den Berg* (1547)

It was as he was making his way to the Council of Trent as a papal theologian that Favre fell ill. He died in Rome in the presence of his Jesuit companions, including St Ignatius himself, on 1st August 1546, the second of the first generation of Jesuits to ‘plant the Society in heaven’