



The Savoyard Peter Favre was undisputed the most sincere and at the same time the most charming of the first companions of St Ignatius.

He originated from the wonderful alpine regions of the duchy Savoy, from the small village Villaret, sited about 1000 metres high, not far from Annecy. Here he was born on April 13th 1506. His parents Louis and Mary were simple peasants. It was difficult for them to let study their small, unusually talented shepherd boy Pierre. Finally they gave way to his many requests and tears and brought him to the two hours downhill sited small town Thônes, where the priest Crozet led a small school.

The progress of the 10-year old Pierre was so good that he could visit the college of La Roche at the age of twelve. After seven years of study he went, on recommendation of his cousin, the Prior of the Cartusian Monastery from Peposoir at the Grand Bornand, in autumn 1525 to Paris, to study there further. At that time he had not made any choice of profession yet. He was still undecided between medicine, law, and theology; and if theology, between clergy and monkhood. Only in 1530, under the active influence of his fellow student Ignatius of Loyola, who gave him the Spiritual Exercises, he decided to become a priest.

On May 30th 1534 he was ordained priest by the Paris Bishop Jean de Ballay. He celebrated his First Mass on July 22nd, the feast of the penitent Mary Magdalen, whom he particularly admired. Present by that First Mass were Ignatius and Rodrigues, and his friend of the same age Francis Xavier, and still three other students who belonged to the friend circle of Ignatius, i.e. Laínez, Salmerón and Bobadilla. Peter Favre was the only priest when the seven companions said their vows on Montmartre on August 15th 1534.

The Exercises, with which Favre was familiar like only few, became later the main instrument of his pastoral efforts. In Paris he won by Exercises Claude Jay, Codure and Broët. In Spain he won Francisco de Borja, the duke of Gandía, and in Mainz he affected the decision of the theology student Petrus Canisius to enter the young Jesuit Order on May 8th 1543.

Favre is the first Jesuit who was active in Germany. In a letter from April 5th 1541 he writes that 'his heart is tormented by a steady and intolerable pain, when he sees how Germany, the former honor of religion and the fame of Christianity, has partly fallen away already, and is partly close to it.

Since autumn 1540 Favre was active in Germany. Doctor Ortiz, the Legate of Emperor Charles V by the Vatican, who knew Favre from Paris, had asked him from Pope Paul III as companion and advisor for the religious discussions in Worms and Speyer, and the Imperial Diet in Regensburg.

In July 1544 Ignatius called him to Portugal and Spain. On July 17th 1546 he returned fever-ridden to Rome and died a few days later.

Favre did not know the German language well. Hence his presence by negotiations on higher level was not particularly helpful. And nevertheless he contributed to make known the Society of Jesus in Germany. Besides he informed Rome about the situation in Germany.

In 1561, fifteen years after his death, a chapel was established in his birth house. Francis of Sales writes in his *Philothea* (II, 16) how it was 'a comforting joy' for him to consecrate the altar of this chapel.

Favre left a religious diary. This *Memoriale* shows also that he was not unaffected by Franciscan (Ockham) and Dominican (Tauler) influences. This *Memoriale* fascinates time and again, and is the best window to Favre's soul.

Bellesort, a qualified critic, secretary of the Académie Française, expressed his opinion about this book as follows: 'It is one of the most tender confessions of inner experience in the entire mystic literature. Here a soul shows itself without any covering in its trembling before the light, and its shyness to the gentle guidance of grace. It is still feeling the chains of the flesh, and sometimes it shows by a painful word that they weighed more heavily in former times.'

Fifty years after his death the beatification process began, but it was only completed on September 5th 1872 by Pope Pius IX.

Rodrigues judged about Peter Favre: He was 'a free, open character, whose modest, gentle, friendly and kind-hearted nature exercised a marvelous attraction on all who kept company with him.'

--- Otto Syre, SJ Calendar of the Society of Jesus: <http://www.con-spiration.de/syre/indexe.html>