



Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Patroness of Immigrants

Maria Francesca Cabrini was born on July 15, 1850, in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, Italy. From a young age, she was enthralled by the stories of missionaries and knew even then that she wanted to lead a religious life. However, due to her frail health, she was not permitted to join existing religious communities. Undeterred, and encouraged by a local bishop, she founded her own order, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and became Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini. Though Mother Cabrini would go on to experience many obstacles throughout her life, none would stop her from fulfilling a life in service to others. Her perseverance led her to become the first canonized American citizen, and, in 1950, just four years after proclaiming her a saint, Pope Pius XII declared her the universal Patroness of Immigrants.

Mother Cabrini spent several years building up the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and hoped to bring their mission to China. However, during an audience with Pope Leo XIII, Mother Cabrini was told to go “not to the East, but to the West.” By 1889, with the Holy Father’s personal blessing, Mother Cabrini and six Missionary Sisters were in New York City and were tasked with aiding the thousands of Italian immigrants already in the United States. But New York was a difficult environment—in addition to the language barrier, the city was faced with widespread poverty and rampant anti-immigrant (and especially anti-Italian) sentiment. The obstacles were all the greater for a woman in her time. Still, Mother Cabrini remained steadfast in her mission and established orphanages, catechism classes, and schools to support and uplift the Italian community, among others in need.

Her success in New York sparked requests for the work of Mother Cabrini and her Sisters to be replicated all across the United States. They worked to establish schools, hospitals, and orphanages for the growing populations of immigrants and also helped them to remain connected to their faith, which proved challenging in their new surroundings. They would also travel to South America and, eventually, Asia. Over her lifetime, Mother Cabrini made 24 trans-Atlantic crossings and established a total of 67 institutions. In 1909, she naturalized as a U.S. citizen.

Mother Cabrini remained devoted to serving others until her death on December 22, 1917. In 1946, Pope Pius XII canonized Mother Cabrini, waiving the traditional 50-year waiting period in recognition of her extraordinary virtue, stating: “She gathered endangered youth in safe houses, and taught the holy and rightful principles. She consoled the spirit of the imprisoned, giving them the comfort of life eternal... She consoled the sick and the infirm gathered in hospitals, and cared for them assiduously. Especially towards immigrants, who had left their own homes... did she extend a friendly hand, a sheltering refuge, relief and help.”

Today, the legacy of Mother Cabrini lives on. The work of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus can be found on 6 continents and 15 countries throughout the world.



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

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