

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini

A Prayer

“O God, through the works of Saint Francis Cabrini You brought comfort and love to the immigrants and all those in need. May her example and work be continued in the lives of those dedicated to you. Amen.”

A Quote

“We must pray without tiring, for the salvation of mankind does not depend on material success; nor on sciences that cloud the intellect. Neither does it depend on arms and human industries, but on Jesus alone.”

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini



Patron Saint of Immigrants

Feast Day on November 13

Maria Francesca Cabrini was born in Lombardy, Italy, in 1850. She was the youngest of 13 children. She suffered from chronic poor health throughout her entire life, partly because she was born two months prematurely. From a young age she desired to be a missionary nun to China; she even dressed her dolls up as nuns and pretended that they went on missions to China.

Frances taught school for several years. In 1870 she was saddened by the death of both of her parents. She sought to become a nun but was refused entrance by two religious orders because of her poor health. In 1874 her bishop, recognizing her potential, asked her to take control of an orphanage called the House of Providence. She accepted and organized the orphanage's staff of women into a religious community. In 1877 Frances and seven other women took their first vows as a part of the new order. Though Frances was an excellent superior of her order, the bishop closed the orphanage in 1880, largely because many of the women treated Frances with disrespect and obstructed her work.

The bishop told Frances that since she wanted to be a missionary and there were no orders of missionary sisters, Frances would have to found such an order. So Frances wrote a rule for herself and her seven faithful followers; she called her order the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The principal mission of the order was to be the Christian education of young girls.

In 1887 Frances went to Rome, and with a lot of effort, she convinced the Vatican to approve her new order. In fact, the Holy See even asked her to open a free school and a children's home in Rome. Frances had always desired to go on a mission to China; but several bishops encouraged her to go to the Americas. At first she declined to do so. But when she asked Pope Leo XIII, he told her, "Not to the East, but to the West." Therefore she and six of her sisters arrived in New York City on March 31, 1889.

The sisters were sent to New York to take charge of an orphanage; however, when they arrived the archbishop

informed them that the plans had fallen through and the nuns would need to return to Italy. With characteristic firmness, Francis replied, "The pope has sent me here, and here I must stay." Within a month she had a modest orphanage started. Later that year Francis took over an orphanage and started a boarding school in Nicaragua; and on her way back to New York she started a foundation in New Orleans.

Saint Frances and her society worked in South America, the United States, and Europe. Though she had a real dislike for water travel, during her lifetime she crossed the ocean at least 25 times! By 1907 her order had over 1,000 members in 8 countries running orphanages, free schools, high schools, and hospitals. When asked about all the great difficulties she faced, she responded, "Are we doing this? Or is the Lord?"

Though her health began failing in 1911 she continued working hard. On December 22, 1917, she died in a convent in Chicago from complications from malaria. She was beatified November 13, 1938, and canonized July 7, 1946, by Pope Pius XII. Because Mother Cabrini became an official United States' citizen in 1909, she is the very first American to be declared a saint!

Saint Frances added "Xavier" to her name in honor of Saint Francis Xavier, who spent many years as a great missionary in China. Though Saint Frances never made the trip herself, years after her death some of St. Frances' Sisters finally went as missionaries to China. Like the body of St. Bernadette, St. Frances' body is still incorrupt, which means her body did not decay as bodies normally do.

Goal for the month:

In this Lenten season continue to do something to help the sick and needy around you. For example, participate in Operation Rice Bowl by donating money to and offering prayers for those in need. Also, ask St. Frances Xavier Cabrini for her intercession for all the immigrants experiencing difficulty in a new place.