

# COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE



## **SAINT FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI** **July 15, 1850 - December 22, 1917**

Francesca Cabrini was born in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, located in the region of Lombardia. The youngest of thirteen children of wealthy cherry tree farmers Agostino Cabrini and Stella Oldini, she later became a religious sister who founded the *Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*. This Catholic religious institute was a major support to the Italian immigrants to the United States. Also known as Mother Cabrini, she was the first naturalized citizen of the United States to be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church.

At the age of thirteen, Francesca attended a school run by the *Daughters of the Sacred Heart*. Five years later, she graduated cum laude with a teaching certificate. In 1870, Francesca became the headmistress of the House of Providence orphanage in Codogno, where she taught and drew a small community of women to live a religious way of life. Francesca took religious vows in 1877 and added Xavier to her name to honor the Jesuit saint Francis Xavier, the Patron Saint of Missionary Service.

In November 1880, Mother Francis Xavier Cabrini and six other women who had taken religious vows with her, founded the *Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* (M.S.C.). She continued as its Superior General until her death. The sisters took in orphans and foundlings, opened a day school to help pay expenses, started classes in needlework and sold their fine embroidery to earn a little more money. The institute established seven homes and a free school and nursery in its first five years. These good works brought Mother Cabrini to the

attention of (the now Blessed) Giovanni Scalabrini, Bishop of Piacenza, and of Pope Leo XIII.

In September 1887, Mother Cabrini sought approval of the Pope to establish missions in China. He suggested that she go instead to the United States and help the impoverished Italian immigrants who were immigrating in mass to that nation. "Not to the East, but to the West" was his advice.

Mother Cabrini arrived in New York City on March 31, 1889 along with six other sisters, where they encountered disappointment and difficulties. Archbishop Michael Corrigan found them housing at the convent of the *Sisters of Charity*, where they were permitted to stay as long as necessary. Mother Cabrini obtained the permission of the Archbishop to found an orphanage, which is located in West Park, New York and is known as Saint Cabrini Home. Mother Cabrini was naturalized as a United States citizen in 1909.

Mother Cabrini organized catechism and education classes for the Italian immigrants and provided for the needs of the many orphans. She established schools and orphanages despite tremendous odds. Resourceful as she was prayerful, she was successful in securing donations for what was needed in terms of money, time, and labor. She founded Columbus Hospital and Italian Hospital in New York City. Both hospitals merged in the 1890's and became known as Cabrini Medical Center. The facility closed in 2008 due to financial difficulties.

The Sisters opened Columbus Extension Hospital in Chicago (later renamed Saint Cabrini Hospital) in the heart of the city's Italian neighborhood on the Near West Side. Both hospitals eventually closed near the end of the 20th century. Their foundress' name lives on in Chicago's Cabrini Street.

Mother Cabrini founded sixty-seven institutions: New York; Chicago and Des Plaines, Illinois; Seattle; New Orleans; Denver and Golden, Colorado; Los Angeles; Philadelphia; and in countries throughout South America and Europe.

Mother Cabrini died in Columbus Hospital in Chicago, Illinois on December 22, 1917 at the age of sixty-seven due to complications from dysentery. She was beatified on November 13, 1938 by Pope Pius XI, and canonized on July 7, 1946, by Pope Pius XII. Her beatification miracle involved the restoration of sight and healing the disfigurements of a one-day old baby. The child, Peter Smith, would later be present at her canonization and become a priest. Her canonization miracle involved the healing of a terminally ill member of her congregation. When she was canonized, 120,000 people from all over the area filled Soldier Field for a Mass of Thanksgiving.

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini is the Patron Saint of Immigrants and of the religious institute, the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará (Servidoras). Her Feast Day is December 22nd, the day of her death, the day ordinarily chosen as a saint's feast day. In the United States, her memorial is celebrated on November 13th, the day of her beatification.

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