

If you want to get something done, ask a busy person to take charge. Today we honor Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini. Along with her Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart she founded 67 institutions (schools, hospitals, and orphanages) dedicated to caring for the poor, the abandoned, the uneducated and the sick in a little over 35 years. She crisscrossed the Atlantic more than 30 times traveling between Italy, the United States and South and Central America. Quite an amazing feat for someone frightened of water. As a child she feared drowning but overcame those fears with the help of God.ⁱ

Born July 15, 1850, Frances was the youngest of thirteen children. She lived in a small village called S'ant Angelo Lodigiano near the Milan, Italy. She was fascinated by the stories of missionaries as told to her by her uncle, a priest who made the faith come alive for her. Her older sister and a religious order of sisters also influenced her desire to become a religious. She wanted to join at the age of 22, but she was in ill health from caring for the sick during an epidemic. She was not able to enter and make her vows until the age of 27.ⁱⁱ

Three years later she founded the Institute of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with 7 young women who shared her missionary zeal. She had dreams of following the example of the Jesuit Francis Xavier with a strong desire to serve as a missionary in China. The closest she came was taking the name Francis Xavier for her religious name. Pope Leo XIII advised her to focus on Italian Immigrants in the United States.

Obedient to the will of the Pope, the main focus of her religious work became the pastoral care of Italian immigrants. No wonder she is the patron saint of immigrants and migrants. New to America and at a loss for how things worked, she helped the migrants learn the rules and laws of a new society while helping them to maintain their cultural and religious roots. Her missionary work also extended to South America where she founded schools in Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua and elsewhere. She once said, "I will go anywhere and do anything in order to communicate the love of Jesus to those who do not know Him or have forgotten Him."ⁱⁱⁱ

Poverty in Italy drove many to cross the Atlantic in search of a better life. Arriving on ships in great numbers with little more than the shirts on their backs, 100's of thousands of immigrants were processed at Ellis Island, home to the Statue of Liberty which was dedicated October 28, 1886. Located at the base of the statue is a quote that reads in part, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"^{iv} Today overlooking Ellis Island, a statue of Mother Cabrini standing in a boat with two children reminds us to continue to care for the outcast and the marginalized.^v

Key to her work was inviting the help of others. As the foundress of the Institute of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, she attracted many young women who wanted to join in the missionary work. Through her prayer and resourcefulness, she also attracted many people willing to support her efforts with donations of money, time, labor, and support.

"It is not what she accomplished, or how far she traveled that made her a great missionary saint. It was how she allowed God to accomplish remarkable achievements in and through her. Her immense love of God empowered her to reach out to the poor, the needy and the immigrants."^{vi} That same infinite source of love, God, wants to accomplish miracles in and through our lives. Every Christian is called to share the good news and to help others with corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Let us take to prayer the words of the psalmist, "With all my heart I seek you; let me not stray from your commands" (Ps 119:10).

ⁱ franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-frances-xavier-cabrini

ⁱⁱ ssvmusa.org/index.php/our-province/st-frances-xavier-cabrini/

ⁱⁱⁱ inspiringquotes.us/author/3959-frances-xavier-cabrini

^{iv} nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/colossus.htm#:~:text=With%20silent%20lips.,refuse%20of%20your%20teeming%20shore.

^v https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/mother-cabrini-gets-a-new-statue-in-new-york-city-26311

^{vi} mothercabrini.org