



St. Frances Xavier Cabrini

Born: July 15, 1850 Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, Province of Lodi, Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, Austrian Empire

Died: December 22, 1917 (aged 67) Chicago, Illinois, US

Venerated: in Roman Catholic Church

Beatified: November 13, 1938, by Pope Pius XI

Canonized: July 7, 1946, by Pope Pius XII

Major shrine: St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Shrine, New York City

Feast: November 13

Patronage: Immigrants, hospital administrators, Lincoln

Frances Xavier Cabrini MSC (July 15, 1850 - December 22, 1917), also called Mother Cabrini, was an Italian-American religious sister, who founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a Catholic religious institute that was a major support to the Italian immigrants to the United States. She was the first naturalized citizen of the United States to be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, on July 7, 1946.

Early life

Francesca Cabrini was born July 15, 1850, in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, in the Lombard Province of Lodi, then part of the Austrian Empire, the youngest of the thirteen children of Agostino Cabrini and Stella Oldini, who were wealthy cherry tree farmers. Sadly, only four of the thirteen survived beyond adolescence. Small and weak as a child, born two months premature, she remained in delicate health throughout her life.

When she went to visit to her uncle, Don Luigi Oldini of Livagra, a priest who lived beside a swift canal, she made little boats of paper, dropped violets in them, called the

flowers missionaries, and launched them to sail off to India and China.

At thirteen, Francesca attended a school run by the Daughters of the Sacred Heart. Five years later she graduated cum laude, with a teaching certificate.[3] After the deaths of her parents in 1870, she applied for admission to the religious congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart at Arluno. These sisters were her former teachers, but, reluctantly, they told her she was too frail for their life. She 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. Cabrini took religious vows in 1877 and added Xavier to her name to honor the Jesuit saint, Francis Xavier, the patron saint of missionary service.

Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

In November 1880, she and six other women who had taken religious vows with her founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (M.S.C.). Cabrini composed the Rule and Constitutions of the religious institute, and 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. Its good works brought Cabrini to the attention of (the now Blessed) Giovanni Scalabrini, Bishop of Piacenza, and of Pope Leo XIII.

Missionary

Stained glass window depicting Mother Cabrini, Martyr Roman Catholic Church, Chesapeake, Virginia.

In September 1877, Cabrini went to seek approval of the pope to establish missions in China. Instead, he suggested to her that she go to the United States to help the Italian immigrants who were flooding to that nation in that era, mostly in great poverty. "Not to the East, but to the West" was his advice.

Cabrini left for the United States, arriving in New York City on March 31, 1889, along with six other sisters. In New York she encountered disappointment and difficulties. Archbishop Michael Corrigan, who was not immediately supportive, found them housing at the convent of the Sisters of Charity, where they were allowed to stay as long as necessary. She obtained the permission of the archbishop to found an orphanage, which is located in West Park, New York today and is known as Saint Cabrini Home.

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. She was as resourceful as she was prayerful, finding people who would donate what she needed in money, time, labor, and support. In New York City, she founded Columbus Hospital and Italian Hospital. In the 1980s, they were merged into Cabrini Medical Center. The facility closed in 2008.

In Chicago, the sisters opened Columbus Extension Hospital (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.

She founded 67 institutions: in New York; Chicago and Des Plaines, Illinois; Seattle; New Orleans; Denver and Golden, Colorado; Los Angeles; Philadelphia;[5] and in countries throughout South America and Europe. Long after her death, the Missionary Sisters

would achieve Cabrini's goal of being missionaries to China. In only a short time, after much social and religious upheaval there, the Sisters left China and, subsequently, a Siberian placement.

Cabrini was naturalized as a United States citizen in 1909.

Death

Cabrini died of complications from dysentery at age 67 in Columbus Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, on December 22, 1917, while preparing Christmas candy for the local children. By that time, she had founded 67 missionary institutions to serve the sick and poor and train additional sisters to carry on the work.

Her body was originally interred at Saint Cabrini Home, an orphanage she founded in West Park, Ulster County, New York.

Veneration

In 1931, her body was exhumed as part of the canonization process. At that time, her head was removed and is preserved in the chapel of the congregation's international motherhouse in Rome. An arm is at the national shrine in Chicago, while most of the rest of her body is at the shrine in New York.

Cabrini 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 who had been blinded by a 50% silver nitrate solution instead of the normal 1% solution in the child's eyes. The child, named 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.

Cabrini's feast day is December 22, the day of her death, the day ordinarily chosen as a saint's feast day. In the United States, her memorial (third-class feast in the extraordinary form) is celebrated on November 13, the day of her beatification, in order to avoid conflicting with the greater ferias of Advent.

St. 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).