

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini
1850 - 1917

Frances Xavier Cabrini was the youngest of thirteen children born to a farming family in Lombardy, Italy. Longing to become a nun near her own birthplace, but turned down twice because she was not considered sufficiently healthy, God used her instead as an extraordinary missionary sister.

Frances' first step was to start her own novitiate for women serving in corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Part of her strategy was to take as novices women who, like herself, had been rejected by other Orders. This began the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, devoted to the education of girls. The Pope, Leo XIII, was so impressed by her zeal and her organizational abilities that he decided she might be the solution for a gnawing problem. At that time, Italians were immigrating in droves to the United States. Not speaking any English, they were not able to understand the German or Irish priests of their parishes, and their children were starved for religious instruction. The Pope decided to send Frances with seven of her nuns to a parish in New York City to address this need.

Although terrified of the ocean, Frances agreed. They arrived in New York only to find that the priest who had asked for them had no means for their support, and wanted them to return on the next ship. Undaunted, Frances simply went begging in the streets of the Italian quarter until they could open a house for her sisters. During the next twenty-seven years, in the face of great difficulties, the congregation spread all over the United States and further abroad. By the time of Mother Cabrini's death in Chicago in 1917, there were more than fifty hospitals, schools, orphanages and other foundations in existence.

Frances became an American citizen in 1909. She was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1946, the first naturalized American citizen to be so honored. Frances was named patroness of Immigrants in 1980.

