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Seasoning the Seasons™

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Feast of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini: November 13

Where were you born? Was it here in a city in the United States? Or maybe you were born in another country, like Kenya, or Peru, or India, or Germany. What about your parents, or grandparents, or great-grandparents? Were any of them born in another country? Do you have friends and classmates who were born in a different country and then came here to the United States? Someone who is born in one country and then moves to a different country to live permanently is called an immigrant. On November 13 we celebrate the feast day of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, who is the patron saint of immigrants.



Maria Francesca Cabrini was born in 1850 in the province of Lombardy in northern Italy. Her mother's name was Stella and her father's name was Agostino. Maria was the youngest of thirteen children. She was very small and weak as a child. But she was very religious and loved Jesus very much. Maria's father would tell his family many stories about the missionaries – those people who would go and tell other people about Jesus. Maria loved these stories, especially the stories about the missionaries who went to countries like China.

As she grew up, Maria wanted to go into religious life and become a Sister. She applied for admission to many different religious orders. But she was turned down, because of her ill health and weakness. These religious orders were afraid Maria would not have the strength to do the work of a missionary. So Maria went to school to study to become a school teacher. The school where she studied and lived was run by a religious order called the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, and Maria lived like a religious Sister.

After teaching school for several years, Maria was asked to go to Codogno in Italy to be in charge of an orphanage for young girls. This was in 1874. Three years later, Maria was finally allowed to profess religious vows. In those days, religious Sisters usually took a new name when they professed their vows. Maria took the name Frances Xavier. Frances was a

form of her middle name, Francesca. And she took the new middle name of Xavier after Saint Francis Xavier, who had been a famous missionary to the Orient. Remember how much Maria had wanted to be a missionary in China? One of her heroes growing up was Saint Francis Xavier, whose missionary stories Maria's father had told her.

On November 14, 1880, Sister Frances Xavier Cabrini founded a new religious order called the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As the head of this religious order, the other Sisters called her "Mother." So she became known as Mother Cabrini.

In 1888 Mother Cabrini started two missions in Rome, Italy. There she met a bishop who



had just founded a missionary institute to minister to Italians who had immigrated to other countries, and were now living outside Italy. Many of these Italians had immigrated here to the United States. When they first arrived here they felt very lost. They couldn't speak the English language, and they didn't get very good jobs. Italy was a country where most of the people were Roman Catholic, so these immigrants were Catholic and wanted to practice their Catholic faith and keep their feast days and traditions. But life for them here was very difficult. The bishop asked Mother Cabrini to leave Italy and become a missionary here in the United States working with the Italian immigrants.

When Mother Cabrini arrived here in the United States she couldn't speak English, but she worked very hard to help the Italian immigrants. She founded orphanages for the Italian children whose parents had died. Because there were so many orphans, Mother Cabrini begged for money to support the children. She also founded hospitals to care for the immigrants who were sick.

Mother Cabrini did much traveling as a missionary. She worked with immigrants in New York, New Orleans, Chicago, Seattle, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Colorado, Latin America, Paris, London and Madrid.

In 1909 Mother Cabrini became a citizen of the United States. She died in Chicago on December 22, 1917. She was canonized a saint in 1946, and is the first citizen of the United States to be canonized a saint. Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini is the patron saint of immigrants, orphans and hospital administrators. She is buried in an altar in a chapel in New York City, and if you visit New York you can visit this chapel and see where she is buried.

During her many travels, Mother Cabrini wrote letters and kept travel diaries, and these still exist today as a witness to her life and good works. Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini is a wonderful role model for us. Her life and good works remind us that we are all part of one world,

and that we are always to welcome and take care of those who might be new to our country or city or school. We are to help break down any divisions that exist between us and to love our neighbors – whatever their race or religion or background – as God loves all of us. No matter where we are from or what our background might be, we are all part of one family – the human family – God’s family.

