

FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI

Patron Saint of Immigrants

By Frank Zeoli



On Columbus Day, October 12, 2020, Governor Andrew Cuomo dedicated a statue to Mother Frances Cabrini in Battery Park in Manhattan. Located in the shadows of the Statute of Liberty, this monument is a testament to the strength and courage of the countless immigrants who sacrificed everything to make a better life for their families here in our country. Being the only Italian American saint, she holds a special place in the hearts and minds of Italian Americans here in the Capital District.

Mother Cabrini was born Maria Francesca Cabrini on July 15, 1850 in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano about 19 miles southeast of Milan in the Italian region of Lombardy. Her parents, Agostino & Stella, were wealthy cherry tree farmers.

She was the youngest of thirteen children. Sadly, only four of the thirteen survived beyond adolescence. Born two months premature and small and weak as a child, she remained in delicate health throughout her life. She received a convent education at a school run by the Sacred Heart.

After the deaths of her parents in 1870 when she was just 20, she applied for admission to the Sacred Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart but was turned down because of her poor health.



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In 1874, she began teaching at the Provident House orphanage in Cadagao, Italy. 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.

When the orphanage closed, she founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart to care for sick children in both schools and hospitals. She wanted to go to China and finish her work but Pope Leo XIII urged her to go to the United States to help the Italian immigrants. On March 31, 1889, she arrived in NYC with six other nuns.

In 1909, she became a naturalized citizen of the United States. She then received permission to start an orphanage known today as the Saint Cabrini home.

She is credited for returning sight to a child blinded when a 50% silver nitrate solution instead of the normal 1% solution was put in the child's eyes. She was also credited for curing a very ill person in her congregation.

On December 22, 1917, she died due to complications from dysentery.

Saint Frances Cabrini's body is now displayed under glass in the altar at the St. Frances Cabrini Shrine in the Washington Heights area of Manhattan. Mother Cabrini's bones are encased in a wax replica of her body.

She was beatified on November 13, 1938 by Pope Pius the XI and canonized by Pope Pius XII on July 7, 1946, making her the first U.S. citizen to become a saint.



With pride, the Italian Americans in the south end of Albany started a society in honor of the only Italian American Saint. The society has celebrated a mass and held a reception in honor of Mother Cabrini on November 13th, her feast day, for over 20 years.