

THE SPIRITUAL WISDOM OF
ST. FRANCES CABRINI
FOR DIFFICULT TIMES

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701 Fort Washington Avenue
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United States, as well as from Europe and Central and South America. In 1909 she was granted citizenship in the United States. She died in Chicago on December 22, 1917 at the age of 67 of chronic endocarditis.

She was canonized in 1946 by Pope Pius XII, becoming the first American citizen to be named a saint. Four years later she was given the title of Patroness of Immigrants.

The Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and their co-sponsors continue to actively minister on six continents and in seventeen countries in the world. They seek to carry out the mission and charism of Mother Cabrini through evangelization, education, health care, working with the poor and underprivileged, with immigrants, migrants and refugees of all colors, nationalities and language, in developed and developing nations.

About the St. Frances Cabrini Shrine

The St. Frances Cabrini Shrine houses the remains of Mother Cabrini, and is a pilgrimage site for those wishing to draw closer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through her intercession. The Shrine is open from 9-5 all days except Monday and major holidays.

About St. Frances Cabrini



As a child in northern Italy, Francesca Cabrini was enthralled by stories of missionaries. Sadly, frail health made her unable to join a religious community. She received her teaching certificate, taught for a time in a village school, and then became administrator of an orphanage. In 1880, at the age of 30, Francesca founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The petite Mother Cabrini was eager to spread the love of Jesus around the world, and particularly longed to go to China. She obtained an audience with Pope Leo XIII with this goal in mind. However, the Pope told Mother Cabrini to go “not to the East, but to the West” to tend to the needs of the tens of thousands of Italian immigrants struggling in the United States.

Mother Cabrini and six of her Missionary Sisters set off for New York City in 1889. They faced a mass of human misery: families lived crammed into foul tenements, parents worked long days at unskilled labor for meagre wages, and children lacked food, supervision, and basic education.

Within days of her arrival, Mother Cabrini organized catechism classes and schooling for the children. She and the Missionary Sisters knocked door to door through rough neighborhoods, facing humiliating rebuffs and insults to gather funds to do their work. Their convent quickly became a haven for children from the notorious Five Points neighborhood. An orphanage was established, followed by parochial schools and a hospital.

Soon requests for Mother Cabrini’s help poured in from other cities in the

A Faith-Based View of Uncertainty

Frances Cabrini had never lived outside of Italy when she boarded the Bourgoigne to come to the United States in 1889. She was not fluent in English. She knew nothing of American culture or New York City politics. Many of the Italian immigrants she came to help were unfamiliar with their faith; some were antagonistic toward the Catholic Church.

Mother Cabrini headed into this unknown territory with only one goal: to serve God in whatever situation he placed her.

She expected difficulty. She viewed each potential obstacle as a way to draw closer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

“The evil spirit places before me frightening difficulties, troubles, disgraces and sorrows – but what shall I fear? Whatever happens, I will close my eyes and I will rest my head on the Heart of Jesus.”

“I want to surrender everywhere and in everything to the Holy Will of God, recognizing it in all situations, favorable or unfavorable, regardless of whatever or whomever it may involve.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini



Questions to Ponder

What does being unable to go about life as usual reveal about the difference between what I want to do and what God is asking of me today?

Am I sometimes unsatisfied or uncomfortable with doing small things for God? Why?

What small things can I do for Jesus at this time?

Bible Verses to Meditate Upon

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much”
Luke 16:10

“The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”
Matthew 23:11-12

Prayer

St. Frances Cabrini, you were so willing to do whatever God asked; whether the task was big or small, you saw it only as a way to serve him. Pray that I may have a heart humble enough to do whatever simple things Jesus asks of me today, and to find my contentment in being his servant. Amen.

“Enlighten my mind with a ray of your light and make me understand well what you want of me.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini

Moving Forward

St. Frances Cabrini was a woman perpetually on the move. Part of what propelled her forward in faith was that she focused on doing every small act – even sweeping an orphanage – with obedience and humility.

“It is not important to accomplish great and visible works,” she wrote, “The most important thing is to do well what Jesus wants of us, in the manner he wants it done, and in the circumstances he desires.”

St. Frances Cabrini did not bristle when her health issues brought her productivity to a halt, or chafe when she frequently had to forego earthly comforts. She counseled, “God’s grace is never lacking. He always bestows sufficient grace for us to reach that holiness which he desires for us.”

“We must not be deceived by great appearances, but attend solely to what is pleasing to God, even though it may seem small and insignificant.”

“Diligence in small things made the saints what they are.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini

Questions to ponder

What do I fear most about the year ahead?

In which types of situations will I need to turn to God most often?

What do I need to let go of in order to trust Jesus more?

Bible Verses to Meditate Upon

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

Prayer

St. Frances Cabrini, pray that I may learn to accept difficulty as a path that can lead to deeper trust in God. Teach me how to rest my head on the Heart of Jesus. Help me understand what it means to surrender. Amen.

“In whatever difficulty I may encounter I want to trust in the goodness of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who will never abandon me.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini

Managing Stress

As the head of a religious institute spread across three continents, Mother Cabrini had plenty to do. In addition to running the order, she founded and oversaw 67 schools, orphanages, and hospitals.

There was always an urgent issue, always financial pressure. Once when she was asked how she managed it all. Mother Cabrini laughed and replied, “Oh, I put it all in the Sacred Heart and then I don’t get the headache. I just say to the Sacred Heart, “It is your work I am doing and I can’t do it alone, so you must help me. Then I go to sleep and the help comes.”

Mother Cabrini could hand her problems over to Jesus with confidence because she handed over every other aspect of her life to him daily. Her work originated from her faith, and she prayed constantly to be united to God’s will.

“Jesus, bless me in all I do and do not permit me to distance myself from you even for a moment.”

“Jesus has told me clearly during these days, ‘You think of me and I will think of your affairs.’”

~ St. Frances Cabrini

Questions to ponder

What kinds of suffering and hardship are most difficult for me to accept?

Which forms of prayer – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication – do I neglect when I am in suffering?

Do I look at suffering as a means of becoming more like Christ?

Bible Verses to Meditate Upon

But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction.

Job 36:15

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18

Prayer

St. Frances Cabrini, pray that I may learn to see and accept suffering as a means to greater holiness. Amplify the “Thy will be done!” in all my prayers.

“If you carry the Cross willingly, the Cross will carry you.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini

Suffering

Chronic bronchitis. A heart condition. Malaria from travels in Central America. Mother Cabrini was no stranger to weak health and physical suffering.

Nor was she immune to deep disappointment, conflict, or sadness. The serenity which impressed those who knew her did not come naturally, but only with much prayer and great determination of will.

“We must not trouble ourselves over the sharp thorns that creatures give us,” she wrote during a particularly tumultuous time, “God permits it so that the soul...will come to understand that true and lasting consolations, which can transform her heart and lighten her load, will come only from Jesus.”

Mother Cabrini saw suffering as a kind of blessing, for it permits us to share in the suffering of Christ and draw closer to him.

“A patient soul who bears tribulations with love experiences God closer to her than someone who does not suffer at all.”

“If we do not know how to welcome the crosses God sends us, we lose the precious grace of offering him greater sacrifices.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini

Questions to ponder

What personal goals or desires haven't I completely surrendered to God?

When I offer my heart to Jesus, what seems to stay stuck?

How certain am I that I am doing the will of God throughout the entirety of each day? Where do I tend to veer off course most frequently?

Bible Verses to Meditate Upon

My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes delight in my ways.

Proverbs 23:26

Lord, I know that people's lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps.

Jeremiah 10:23

Prayer

St. Francis Cabrini, teach me to commit my heart to Jesus as fully as you did. Pray that I may see what keeps me from drawing closer to Jesus. Help me understand how to seek his will with my whole being. Amen.

~ St. Frances Cabrini

“Loving Jesus, spread wide the fibers of my soul to enable me to commit myself to you.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini

Fear

At age seven Francesca Cabrini fell into a fast-moving stream and barely escaped drowning. The traumatic incident led to bouts of severe bronchitis for several years.

“If I must confess my weakness,” she wrote decades later, “I have a great fear of water.” Yet this physically frail missionary crossed the ocean 23 times. How did she do it?

Mother Cabrini looked past her terror by focusing on something bigger beyond it. Her goal was never to make fear go away, nor did she buckle up and merely endure. Her path through fear was to fix her sight squarely on Jesus even when she was afraid.

“I am afraid, I am very afraid, but I trust fully in you. Ah, my sweet Jesus, I tightly embrace your Cross.”

“Often we weigh safety and danger and give priority to these rather than God’s service, the glory of God and the salvation of souls.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini

Questions to ponder

What fears interfere with my ability to pray?

If I knew for a fact that God was not going to change my situation, what would I have to do differently to remain faithful and draw closer to him?

Bible Verses to Meditate Upon

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
2 Timothy 4:7

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

Prayer

St. Francis Cabrini, pray that I may see clearly what I fear yet focus my vision on Jesus. Teach me to love Jesus ever more deeply in the midst of fear. Amen.

“There will be some occasions when a soul is deprived of comfort in her grief and desolation. That is when she needs to remain trustingly in Jesus’ embrace.”

~ St. Frances Cabrini