



ST. FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI



A Study in Virtue

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini (also known as Mother Cabrini) is an outstanding example of all of the virtues covered in the PACE curriculum: Self-Discipline, Work, Perseverance, Faith/Trust, Compassion, Friendship, Courage, Loyalty, Responsibility, and Honesty. After reading about the life of St. Frances, answer the questions on the following pages.

Frances Cabrini was born two months prematurely on July 15th, 1850 in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, Italy. She was the 13th and last child of Stella and Agostino Cabrini (only four children survived to adulthood). She was baptized on the same day of her birth and given the name Maria Francesca. As a child, she was devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and admired the Jesuit saint, Francis Xavier. In fact, she wanted to be a missionary like him, and her dream was to go to China.

Frances always had a desire to become a religious sister but was turned down several times because of her weak health. In 1877, she finally became a nun and started teaching at an orphanage in Codogno, Italy. Soon after, Frances founded a new religious order, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. In the first five years of her new order, Frances established a convent, seven homes, and a free school for poor children. But Frances (now called “Mother Cabrini”) still had her dream: to do missionary work in China.

During this time, many Italians emigrated to the United States because of poverty and war at home in Italy. After they arrived in the U.S., they discovered that it was not as easy as they thought to make a living and to assimilate into the American culture. They struggled to learn English and were easily exploited. Many Americans considered them dirty and stupid, and treated them with contempt and cruelty. They were also losing their Catholic faith because there were no Italian priests to celebrate Mass. Many of these Italian immigrants soon found themselves malnourished, jobless, sick, and discouraged.

The condition of the Italians came to the attention of a bishop in Italy, Bishop Giovanni Scalabrini of Piacenza. He spoke to Frances about the plight of their countrymen in the United States, particularly in New York City. She was saddened to hear this news but still dreamed of going to China, and so she sought an audience with Pope Leo XIII to receive permission to do this.

But this was not meant to be. During their meeting, the pope told Mother Cabrini to go “not to the East, but to the West.” Although disappointed, Frances obeyed the pope. Bishop Scalabrini encouraged Frances to leave as soon as possible for the United States to help the suffering Italian immigrants. She and six nuns from her order left Italy and arrived in New York City on March 31st, 1889.

The Missionary Sisters were met by several priests who had been sent by Bishop Scalabrini to set up Italian churches in New York. The next day, Mother Cabrini had a meeting with the archbishop of New York. He suggested that she return to Italy because there was no place for her to live nor money to help her with her work. But Frances respectfully told him that she would stay, because she had been sent by the pope for this mission. Realizing that she would have to fulfill her mission by her own means, she sought out people who could give her financial aid. She was soon blessed with the friendship of a prosperous Italian couple who encouraged and supported her and became lifelong friends.

In New York, the Missionary Sisters quickly discovered the depth of poverty and maltreatment of their fellow countrymen. These people were living in ghettos and filthy tenements in an area of Lower Manhattan called “Five Points.” While most were unemployed, some had only menial jobs and earned very little money. Many were ill and left to die in the streets because they were not allowed in the city hospitals. Italians were considered too dirty to receive medical treatment alongside American patients. Mother’s compassionate heart found this unacceptable, and she vowed to do something about it.

Frances took her new mission very seriously. She not only wanted to change the feelings of prejudice against Italian immigrants, but also to save souls of her people and to help them become good, American citizens. Immediately, she and her sisters went into the Italian homes with food and clothing, which they personally sewed. Mother Cabrini always felt that if people had decent, clean clothes, it would give them dignity. Soon, she opened an orphanage and sent for more sisters from Italy to help teach and take care of the children. The following year, she founded a hospital for poor Italians so that they could finally receive medical attention. She named it “Columbus Hospital” after the famous Italian explorer.

Over the years, Mother Cabrini zealously continued her missionary work despite many hardships, including chronic illness, lack of funds, fires, robberies, riots, and dishonest businessmen who tried to cheat her. What kept her going? The answer lies in her own words: “I will go anywhere and do anything in order to communicate the love of Jesus to those who do not know Him or have forgotten Him.” By the time of her death, she had founded a religious order that numbered over 2,000 sisters and had established 67 schools, hospitals, and orphanages in the U.S., South America, and Europe.

Mother Cabrini became a naturalized American citizen in 1909. Eight years later, she died at the age of 67. She was canonized in 1946 as the first American saint and the patron saint of immigrants. Her feast day is November 13th. There are shrines dedicated to Mother Cabrini in Denver, Chicago, and New York City.



EXERCISES



I. Matching Sentences: Finish the sentence with the correct ending. Write the letter in the space.

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|--|-------|--|
| 1. November 13 th is | _____ | A. encouraged Frances to go to the U.S. |
| 2. In 1850, St. Frances was | _____ | B. became an American citizen. |
| 3. St. Frances started the order of the | _____ | C. Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. |
| 4. On March 31 st , 1889, | _____ | D. born in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano. |
| 5. The pope and Bishop Scalabrini | _____ | E. Frances and 6 sisters arrived in the U.S. |
| 6. In 1909, Mother Cabrini | _____ | F. the prejudice against Italian in America. |
| 7. The Italians were treated badly because | _____ | G. St. Frances Cabrini's feast day. |
| 8. Mother Cabrini helped to change | _____ | H. they didn't speak English and were considered dirty and ignorant. |

II. Chronological Order: Put these sentences in chronological order from 1-6. Write #1 next to sentence that tells what happened first, then second, etc. The first one is done for you.

◆ Mother Cabrini becomes a naturalized American citizen.	
◆ Mother Cabrini and her sisters open schools and hospitals to help immigrants in America.	
◆ Mother Cabrini is canonized a saint in Rome.	
◆ St. Frances founds the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.	
◆ St. Frances is born Maria Francesca Cabrini in Italy.	1
◆ Pope Leo XIII tells Mother Cabrini to go "not to the East, but to the West."	

III. Bible Quote: Answer the question below.

Mother Cabrini's favorite Bible quote was: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). How did this quote affect St. Frances Cabrini in her missionary work?

IV. Discussion: *Look at these moments in the life of St. Frances Cabrini and discuss which virtues they exemplify. Choose from this list: Self-Discipline, Work, Perseverance, Faith/Trust, Compassion, Friendship, Courage, Loyalty, Responsibility, and Honesty.*

1. Frances obeys Pope Leo XIII when he tells her to go to the “west, not to the east.”
2. Frances stays in New York, despite being told to return to Italy.
3. Frances leaves Italy for New York in 1889 to go to an unknown country.
4. Frances names her first hospital “Columbus.”
5. Frances and the sisters bring food and clothing to the Italians living in the ghettos.

V. Writing: *Answer the questions below.*

1. How did St. Frances Cabrini demonstrate the virtue of perseverance?

2. How did St. Frances Cabrini demonstrate the virtue of faith/trust?

3. How did St. Frances Cabrini demonstrate the virtue of work?

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini—Answer Key

I. Matching Sentences

1. G; 2. D; 3. C; 4. E; 5. A; 6. B; 7. H; 8. F

II. Chronological Order

5, 4, 6, 2, 1, 3

III. Bible Quote

Answers may vary. Some thoughts:

- Because of her faith in Christ, she believed that she would accomplish whatever she was called upon to do as a missionary.
- Despite all the hardships that she faced, St. Frances always believed that if God willed something to be done, she would find a way to overcome the difficulties.
- St. Frances was weak and ill through most of her life, but she felt that her strength came from the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

IV. Discussion

Answers may vary.

1. Self-Discipline; 2. Perseverance; 3. Courage/Faith; 4. Loyalty; 5. Compassion/Work/Responsibility

V. Writing

Answers may vary. Some thoughts:

1. Some examples of perseverance:
 - She was turned down several times before finally becoming a nun.
 - She stayed in New York despite being told to go back to Italy.
 - She continued with her missionary work despite many hardships.
2. Some examples of faith/trust:
 - She had great faith in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the namesake of her religious order.
 - She trusted in God and friends to help her financially and emotionally support her in her work.
 - She was willing to do anything for God: “I will go anywhere and do anything in order to communicate the love of Jesus to those who do not know Him or have forgotten Him.”
3. Some examples of work:
 - Founding a religious order is hard work!
 - In the first 5 years of her new order, Frances established a convent, 7 homes, and a free school for poor children.
 - Mother and her sisters set up a school for orphans only a week after they arrived in the country.
 - Mother and her sisters went into the Italian homes and gave them food and new clothing that they sewed.
 - By the end of her life, she had founded a religious order that numbered over 2,000 sisters, and established 67 schools, hospitals, and orphanages in the U.S., South America, and Europe.