

Daily Homily
St. Frances Xavier Cabrini; religious
Memorial
32 Week, Ordinary Time, Friday
13 November 2020
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I love the story of Mother Cabrini...woman religious and underdog in many respects, but she rose above all the ways in which many tried to limit her and keep her at bay.

From the beginning she was limited, but she did not allow that to deter her determination. She was born in Italy in 1850. She was born prematurely and, therefore, she was physically frail and weak. This sense of fragility would last throughout her life. However, she would not let her easily broken nature limit her mighty sense of strength and resilience.

After her parents died when she was twenty. At this time she asked to join the religious sisters who educated her in her youth. However, they refused to allow her to enter, citing that she was too sickly, and she would only be a burden on the community. Coming up against that wall, she invited her friends and other women to join her in living the life of a religious sister and doing charitable work for others. Eventually, this group of devoted women became Frances Cabrini's own religious order, Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Six other women joined her in taking vows. It was then that Frances added Xavier to her name, in honor of the missionary, St. Francis Xavier. Initially, the sisters worked with orphans and opened day care centers and schools in Italy.

A few years later, Frances went to seek approval from the Holy Father to allow her ministry to extend all the way to China. The Pope told her, "don't go East, go West." She did. Even though deathly afraid of water, she traveled by boat to the United States and established herself, after much resistance and lack of support from the local church – told, even, to return to Italy, that her services were not needed, she established herself in New York City. She offered her services to the Italian immigrants primarily.

This so-called frail, weak woman was a force and a powerhouse of prayer and ingenuity in the United States. Within thirty-five years she saw that the Italian immigrants were persecuted and were in danger of losing their faith. She established in her time, sixty-seven institutions that were dedicated to the poor, the abandoned, the sick, and the uneducated. She organized schools and adult education classes. And because of her growing religious community back in Italy and her relationship with the Vatican, she traveled over thirty times across the Atlantic Ocean, despite her great anxiety of water and her fear of drowning.

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini became a United States citizen in 1909. She died at the age of 67 in 1917 and her body is enshrined outside of Manhattan in New York City. She was canonized a saint in 1946 and became the first United States citizen to be named a saint. She is the patron of immigrants.

What is her lesson of holiness for us? When people say that you are weak and frail, be strong. When obstacles come your way, go around them or through them. When others tell you that you are not needed, dive in. When people say that you are a burden, take up your load. When fear or anxiety creeps in, don't let it inhibit your life. And when it comes to finding and keeping the will of God respond with a whole-hearted and 100%: YES, YES, YES!