



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

Image by Christine Sponchia

MEMORIAL OF SAINT FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI

By Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ

Today's First Reading

Love uprightness, you who are rulers on earth, be properly disposed towards the Lord and seek him in simplicity of heart; for he will be found by those who do not put him to the test, revealing himself to those who do not mistrust him. Perverse thoughts, however, separate people from God, and power, when put to the test, confounds the stupid.

Wisdom will never enter the soul of a wrong-doer, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin; for the holy Spirit of instruction flees deceitfulness, recoils from unintelligent thoughts, is thwarted by the onset of vice.

Wisdom is a spirit friendly to humanity, though she will not let a blasphemer's words go unpunished; since God observes the very soul and accurately surveys the heart, listening to every word. For the Spirit of the Lord fills the world, and that which holds everything together knows every word said.

WISDOM 1:1-7 (NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE)

Reflection

The above verses from the beginning of the Book of Wisdom introduce us to some of the ways the presence of God is revealed to us in Holy Wisdom. We are invited to love justice, or uprightness, in all of our actions; all are invited, from the rulers on earth to the humble person doing the ordinary simple tasks of human life. Holy Wisdom desires to enter into our lives; she listens to the movements of the heart and to our innermost thoughts before they are even known to us. She is a kindly spirit, friendly to all of humanity, gifting us with dreams and desires to reach out into the world in blessing and compassion.

This reading was chosen for the memorial liturgy of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, founder of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Frances was born on July 15, 1850 in a small town southeast of Milan, Italy. Because she was born two months premature, she remained weak throughout her childhood. At an early age she experienced the call to become a missionary in China, but because of frail health, she was rejected by two religious orders. Eventually, trained as a teacher, Frances taught school in a village named Vidardo, close to her home. Later Frances moved to Codogno to become the head of a girls' orphanage. In 1880 she worked with a group of young women who were teaching there and began to organize a religious institute called Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She made her profession of vows in that Institute and added "Xavier" to her name in honor of the great St. Francis Xavier, an early Jesuit missionary to Asia.

Despite Frances' history of poor health, her burning desire to become a missionary in China remained in her heart. When she sought approval to go to China, Pope Leo XIII asked her, instead, to go to the United States to minister to thousands of Italian immigrants who were poor, living in slums, and struggling to begin a new life in a strange land with little social and religious support. She agreed to go and in 1889 she arrived in New York City with a small group of Missionary Sisters. They worked tirelessly, serving the immigrant community for many years, including opening schools, orphanages, and hospitals, as well as visiting jails and prisons. Her religious order's ministry expanded to the western states, to Europe and to the rest of the Americas.

Mother Cabrini died on December 22, 1917 in Columbus Hospital in Chicago, which she had established in 1905. Her religious Institute still flourishes in 15 countries today. She was canonized in 1946, the first U.S. citizen to be declared a saint.



Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini
Photo: National Shrine of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini / Public Domain

For Pondering

Holy Wisdom found a home in Frances Cabrini. She discerned a missionary vocation and Wisdom found a way for her to dedicate her life to the most neglected and vulnerable immigrant community in the United States. Her compassion and missionary zeal brought her to those most in need at that time; she did not allow poor health or rejection to prevent her from answering her vocational call.

Perhaps she prayed these verses in Psalm 139: *O Lord, you understand my thoughts from afar... with all my ways you are familiar ... even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know the whole of it ... If I settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there, your hand shall guide me, and your right hand will hold me fast.*

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