



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MISSIONARIES OF THE SACRED HEART
ON 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF MOTHER CABRINI'S BIRTH**

*To Reverend Mother
Lina Colombini
Superior General
of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart*

1. I joyfully join the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in thanking the Lord on the 150th anniversary of the birth of its foundress, Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini, and the 50th anniversary of her being proclaimed patroness of immigrants. These happy occasions, which enrich the Jubilee journey of your institute, are special opportunities to rediscover the zeal and creative love of your charism in view of the new challenges arising from the world of human mobility.

On this occasion, I first want to thank you on behalf of the poor and needy, who experience God's tenderness in you, dear Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Along with them, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude for the great good that you untiringly accomplish, following in the footsteps of your holy foundress.

2. Frances Cabrini was born and baptized on 15 July 1850 in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano in northern Italy, to a family rich in faith and piety. Early in life she began her journey as a disciple of the Lord, who led her to the heights of sanctity in mysterious and unforeseen ways.

The turning-point in her life was entering the "House of Providence" in Codogno, where tribulations and difficulties strengthened her missionary fervour and her resolve to dedicate herself totally to the Lord. She received the religious habit, and while keeping the name Frances, later added Xavier to it in memory of the great Jesuit missionary and patron of the missions. Thanks to the encouragement and support of Bishop Domenico Maria Gelmini of Lodi, Sr Frances Xavier left the "House of Providence" with seven companions to found your institute in an old Franciscan monastery. First called

the "Salesian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart", they received diocesan approval in 1881.

Pope Leo XIII asked her to care for poor Italian immigrants. Mother Cabrini asked her sisters for evangelical obedience, mortification, renunciation, vigilance of the heart and interior silence as necessary virtues for conforming their lives to Christ and for fostering and living their missionary desires. Vocations surprisingly blossomed and the institute rapidly expanded in Lombardy and beyond the region, with the opening of the first house in Rome and papal approval of the "Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" on 12 March 1888, scarcely eight years after their foundation.

The famous words of Pope Leo XIII to your foundress, "Not to the East, but to the West", are well known. She longed to go to China, but his words gave new energy and direction to her missionary zeal. The invitation of the Vicar of Christ directed her towards the masses of immigrants who, at the end of the 1800s, were crossing the ocean in large numbers to the United States of America, often in conditions of extreme poverty.

3. From that moment on, Mother Cabrini's tireless apostolic work was more and more inspired by her desire to bring salvation to all, and in a hurry. She used to say: "The Heart of Jesus does things in such a hurry that I can barely keep up with him". With a group of sisters she left for New York on the first of many voyages in which, as a messenger of hope, she would achieve ever new goals in her tireless apostolate: Nicaragua, Brazil and Argentina, in addition to France, Spain and England.

Armed with remarkable boldness, she started schools, hospitals and orphanages from nothing for the masses of the poor who ventured into the new world in search of work. Not knowing the language and lacking the wherewithal to find a respectable place in American society, they were often victims of the unscrupulous. Her motherly heart, which gave her no peace, reached out to them everywhere: in hovels, prisons and mines. Never intimidated by toil or distance, Mother Cabrini traveled from New York to New Jersey, from Pennsylvania to Illinois, from California to Louisiana and Colorado. Even today in the United States, where she is still familiarly called "Mother Cabrini", there is a surprisingly deep devotion to someone who, while loving her country of origin, wanted to take American citizenship.

She was beatified by Pope Pius XI in 1938, just 21 years after her death in Chicago on 22 December 1917, and was canonized in 1946 by Pope Pius XII. In the Holy Year of 1950, he proclaimed her patroness of immigrants: this little woman who, by defending the dignity of those forced to live far from their country, had become an indomitable peacemaker.

4. Reverend Mother, these jubilee anniversaries, which your Family is celebrating in the Holy Year 2000, prompt you to look with renewed intensity at the profound motives that made St Frances Xavier Cabrini an intrepid missionary of Christ and sustained her tireless and prophetic work on behalf of the very poor.

Her extraordinary activity - as you well know - drew its strength from prayer, especially from long periods before the tabernacle. Christ was everything to her. Her constant concern was to discern his will in the directives of the Church's Magisterium and in the events of life themselves.

Dear sisters, seeking the will of the divine Bridegroom should also be the centre of your lives. At the school of Jesus' Heart, you can learn to hear the cries of the poor, in order to respond in the best way to their material and spiritual problems. This is the mission that your Mother is entrusting to you at the beginning of a new millennium, so full of

expectation and hope, but also marked by the bleeding wounds in the living body of humanity, especially in the poorest countries of the world.

Recent General Chapters have called you to the spirituality of the Incarnation as an expression of Jesus' love for humanity.

Furthermore, in these years you have made options for the poor and defenceless, which have prompted you to share the difficult conditions of the favelas and the rural areas of North-East Brazil. You have also cared for street children and have worked to promote the dignity of women.

Today's complex migrations, which have partly changed direction from times past, have spurred you to incarnate the spirit of Mother Cabrini with creativity and generosity in the modern, unprecedented situations of migrants. You have opened your houses to immigrant families and enrolled their children in your schools. You have become actively involved in numerous shelters, where today's stories and faces often seem to recall the problems and needs of your holy foundress' time: obtaining residence permits, language instruction, integration into society and help for the undocumented in detention centres.

5. This apostolic fervour, open to ever-growing collaboration with the laity, asks each of you, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, to have a strong sense of your institute's specific vocation and to work constantly for the defence and advancement of every human being. Strive to serve the Lord in caring, welcoming communities, so that you can bear witness to the Gospel values that should distinguish you. You will then be wise teachers of the laity who want to share your charism, and your collaboration with them will be inspired by the Gospel and the ideals of sacrifice, loving care and dialogue that flow from the Gospel message.

I pray to the Lord that, through your example, many young people will be attracted by the missionary ideal of Mother Cabrini, which is so timely in our day. May the celebration of the Holy Year 2000 and the providential anniversaries you are commemorating be beneficial occasions for each member of the institute to grow in fidelity and love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. May each of you often repeat throughout your lives these words of the Apostle which were so dear to your holy

foundress: "Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat - I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (*Phil 4: 13*).

May the Blessed Virgin, to whom Mother Cabrini was greatly devoted, protect you and intercede for you all. May St Frances Xavier and all your patron saints watch over you from heaven. I offer you my affection and cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Reverend Mother, to your sisters, your lay collaborators, their families and all who receive your loving care.

From the Vatican, 31 May 2000.

