

SANTA FRANCESCA SAVERIO CABRINI E LE DONNE ITALIANE A CHICAGO

*Report of General Superior: Sister Maria Eliane Azevedo da Silva,
Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
in the Press Room of Montecitorio
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Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon. It is indeed a great pleasure to be here today, on the 77th anniversary of the canonization of St. Frances Cabrini.

I wish to thank the artist, Mr. Meo Carbone, and those who organized this event very much. I also thank those personalities gathered here, all of whom are involved in the important matter of Italian women in Chicago and Mother Cabrini. I would like to give a special thanks to the distinguished Professor, Dominic Candeloro, who, together with the writers Kathy Catrabone and Gloria Nardini, has produced this most interesting volume that includes our Saint Frances Cabrini.

I am grateful on this occasion to Sr. Maria Barbagallo, MSC, an intellectual and charismatic defender of Mother Cabrini's legacy in our times who has collaborated greatly in the organization of this report.

Naturally, I cannot give an exhaustive account here of the extraordinary feminine presence of Francesca Cabrini in the world of emigration, but I would like to point out some aspects that I think are worth noting, in view of the situation of so many emigrants today in various parts of the world, and especially the situation of women.

When Mother Cabrini returned to Chicago in 1903, with the goal of opening a hospital for Italian immigrants, the Missionary Sisters of Mother Cabrini had already been present in the city since 1899 with a parochial school and other activities. Mother had already traveled throughout much of the United States, founding 14 works, including schools, orphanages, boarding schools, and hospitals.

She therefore knew the situation of the migrant women who were generally victims of prejudice, working as factory workers, maids, helpers in the cotton harvest and in other jobs, and who suffered unequal economic treatment.

Based on some of the studies she conducted, it is clear that she was also familiar with feminist political movements that focused on women's difficulties, in raising the awareness of public institutions. She did not enter into social, political and cultural debates with articles, discussions and interviews, except in rare cases. **Instead, she herself and her sisters themselves provided the model for a modern and emancipated woman, capable of contributing effectively to the progress of society.**

Frances Cabrini and her missionaries found themselves plunged into the most difficult environments of American life, and through facts tried to change an existing mentality into a human and Christian attitude towards the work of women, especially Italian women.

But that is not all. What emerges in the life of Mother Cabrini is the concrete and universal love drawn from the Love of the Heart of Jesus, which enabled so many Missionaries to sustain (even today), care for and heal physical and moral wounds in the Cabrinian apostolates.

In 1908, Mother Cabrini was invited to the First Congress of Italian Women, evidently made up of women from privileged social classes, who were beginning to discuss issues on the status of women. In practice, they were not involved in the work of human advancement, as Mother Cabrini shows in her letter of reply in which she apologizes for not being able to participate, precisely because she was busy managing the apostolic works. Professor and historian, Lucetta Scaraffia, provides an excellent analysis of Mother Cabrini's Letter to the Women of the Congress:

"In this letter, Mother Cabrini also demonstrates uncommon skills of observation and analysis of the social conditions of emigrants, especially those of women. A high-level businesswoman and, at the same time, an intellectual capable of writing effective pages of social denunciation combined with the intense spirituality of the holy missionary."

In the letter, Mother Cabrini defends and highlights the qualities of women, her desire for the re-evaluation of the dignity of women and the social and cultural image of Italy.

Today, Mother Cabrini still conveys to us a message of hope and peace, precisely in her way of understanding life - in the culture of welcome, internationality, intercultural dialogue, defense of the rights of the most vulnerable, especially those of women and children.

Some of our missionaries are members of national and international bodies for the defense, advancement and dignity of women. Finally, it is with great satisfaction that I can attest to the fact that our mission has been recognized and honored nationally and internationally for the testimony of various religious women in this commitment of the Church and the mission of St. Frances Cabrini.

I am grateful to you all for having organized and participated in this event.

Thank you.