

“ Like Water Encircles a Fish

The immeasurable goodness of the adorable heart of Jesus decreed in his wisdom to give me birth in a Catholic country in a most religious family (Journal 48).

God graced Frances Cabrini with a history of people who helped to lay the foundation of her faith, a faith that would send her to the ends of the earth.

On July 15, 1850 in the northern Italian town of Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, Frances was born the tenth of eleven children. Countless evenings her father, Agostino, read to his family from the missionary magazine *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*. She regularly witnessed her uncle, Father Luigi Oldini, acting with exceedingly kindness and charity toward the poor. She was also continuously exposed to the uncompromising faith and resoluteness of her older sister Rose who handled the bulk of her child rearing and education.

Monsignor Bassano Dedè, her parish pastor, became Frances's spiritual director when she was fifteen. The advice he often repeated to her was, "Go and tell your Jesus." These simple words struck a deep chord in Frances's heart. She recalled years later in a letter to him:

What sublime words. Because of my spiritual ignorance I did not understand them then, but now I understand the unique and sweet secret of those words. Each time that I encounter sufferings ... I pour out my soul to Jesus and I am consoled and comforted (Sullivan 33).

At age thirteen Frances left home for Arluno to attend a private school run by the Daughters of the Sacred Heart founded in 1831 by Teresa Verzeri (later canonized by Pope John Paul II). The spirituality and teachings of this religious order had such a great impact on Frances that she requested admittance on two separate occasions. Teresa expressed its spirit in this way:

The Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus . . . must burn with the same love of the Divine Heart for their neighbor: purest charity that has no aim save for the glory of God and the good of souls; universal charity that excludes no one but embraces all; generous charity that does not draw back from suffering, is not alarmed by contradiction, but rather, in suffering and opposition, grows in vigor and conquers through patience (Doveri 58).

Teresa's educational method ran contrary to the common teaching philosophy of the time by favoring love for the child over commands and rebukes, so that the teacher and student journeyed together in pursuit of the truth. Education as a work of love later became the foundation of Frances's own approach



"Cecchina" Cabrini at age 10 in 1860

to teaching, and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus became a way of life for her. One can see the striking similarity between Teresa's approach and how Frances later described the spirituality of the community she founded, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to Pope Leo XIII:

The purpose of this institute is to grow in personal holiness and promote the glory of God in every part of the world, excluding no class of people, no work which can benefit the salvation of souls, no corner of the earth—even the most distant, the most uncivilized... our hearts are inflamed with love and we are ready to undertake great works, trusting in Him who can do all things (Sullivan 55).

Years later, in her journal, she wrote:

God has surrounded me from my earliest years with his boundless love, encircling me on all sides like the waters of the sea which enclose a fish (Journal 66).

For her, everyone she encountered was given by God and a sign of His Presence and love.

House of Providence



Frances Xavier Cabrini wearing the original habit of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, 1880

At age eighteen, Frances Cabrini applied for admittance to the Daughters of the Sacred Heart but was denied, being deemed too frail for religious life. After receiving a teaching certificate, she accepted a position in neighboring Vidardo (LO). There she met Monsignor Antonio Serrati who became her guide, confidant, and life-long friend. Serrati commended her great personal and professional gifts to Bishop Dominic Gelmini of Lodi, who requested she take on the difficult task of reorganizing the girl's orphanage in Codogno (LO). Known as the House of Providence, it had fallen into grave disorder under the supervision of two women, Antonia Tondini and Maria Calza, who mismanaged affairs and committed flagrant abuses.

Frances obediently accepted and, in 1874, began to reform the orphanage which she indeed found in utter disrepair. Tondini and Calza soon resented her presence and bitterly resisted her at every turn. However, Frances's deep desire to become a nun surpassed the many difficulties she encountered. She found herself drawn to a group of women who had recently joined the Sisters of Providence and who earnestly sought to live the religious life. Motivated by their example, she, too, joined the community as a novice after only one month. She later wrote to Monsignor Dedè:

Probably because of my age, I was compelled to act without your counsel, which I value greatly. On the other hand, I know that I must yield, without further delay, to my strong religious desire. I am determined to stay here. Now I too am a Sister of Providence. On October 15, I received the religious habit and the name Sister Saveria [Xavier] Angelica (Sullivan 29).

Frances's presence very quickly began to bring order and new life: more women joined the community; the number of orphans in their care increased; existing educational programs expanded; and many new initiatives arose to serve the local community.

In 1877, at the age of 27, she and her companions made their profession of religious vows. At the same time, the Bishop also appointed Frances as Mother Superior, putting her in charge over Tondini and Calza. Enraged with envy, these two continued to abuse Frances at every opportunity with taunts and even threats of physical violence. Monsignor Serrati later affirmed: "There were occasions when they openly demonstrated their hatred for the superior, so much so that the sisters took turns at night guarding the door of the superior's room to prevent insults or even violence" (Sullivan 31).

In spite of these afflictions, Cabrini's obedience to her calling was unshakable. Her strong maternal love for those under her authority is seen in her letter to Bishop Gelmini on Christmas 1878:

Your Excellency, I strongly feel the weight of my difficult position. ... Pray ... that I may be granted the strength that is necessary to hide my sufferings so that I may be able to give comfort to the Sisters who depend so much on me (Sullivan 31).

In loving obedience, Frances suffered these trials, pouring her heart out to Jesus in her retreat notes of 1878:

...your mercy, my Lord, inspires me to suffer for your love and to imitate your life which was one continual martyrdom of suffering... Agonizing heart of my Jesus, help me through the abandonment you experienced in the garden of Gethsemane... grant that I may keep you company here ... in place of the disciples who sleep (Journal 11).

Frances persevered until 1880 when Bishop Gelmini dissolved the House of Providence. She was summoned to Lodi, where the bishop appealed to Frances to found a missionary institute of her own. Frances, joined by seven of the sisters who shared her missionary passion, immediately began to look for a house.

“ Found One Yourself

Frances emerged from the House of Providence in 1880 with a new sense of freedom and certainty. With her bishop proposing that she found a missionary institute, she lost no time looking for a place to house her foundation. It was named the Institute of the Salesian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (later renamed the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus), and Frances retained the name Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini.

Her main focus was the formation of the young women who entered the institute. Humility, simplicity, and charity were the virtues upon which Frances built her foundation. She herself set the tone by example:

Even while sewing, let us think in every stitch of touching sinners' hearts to stir them to arousal and repentance (Journal 14).

Frances's desire knew no bounds, and she no longer felt tied to every suggestion of her advisors. The bishop's proposal to found a missionary order of her own indicated his confidence in her leadership, and she responded by trusting ever more in her own faith and judgment. She established her first house in Codogno.

The order continued to draw women, and the years between 1881 and 1885 saw much growth and maturity: diocesan approval for her rule, new schools and a teacher's college residence in Milan, and two additional institutions in Lombardy. Yet Frances's health remained precarious, and she was often sick with fever:

I could die soon, very soon, because of the uncertainty of life or because of poor health which makes me see the tomb that awaits me... Merciful God ... grant that before death overtakes me ... I will hear and follow your footsteps! (Journal 13)

She remained totally dependent on God as her retreat notes from 1886 revealed:

My God ... if I could only extend my arms to embrace the world as a gift to you... Show me the way and I will do everything with your help! (Journal 26)

In 1887 Frances went to Rome. Her initial visit proved more fruitful than she could have imagined. She was asked to open a house and school in Rome, and only four months later she received the Decree of Commendation for her institute. It was also during this visit that Frances met Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini of Piacenza, the founder of a missionary institute dedicated to the neglected and destitute Italians abroad.

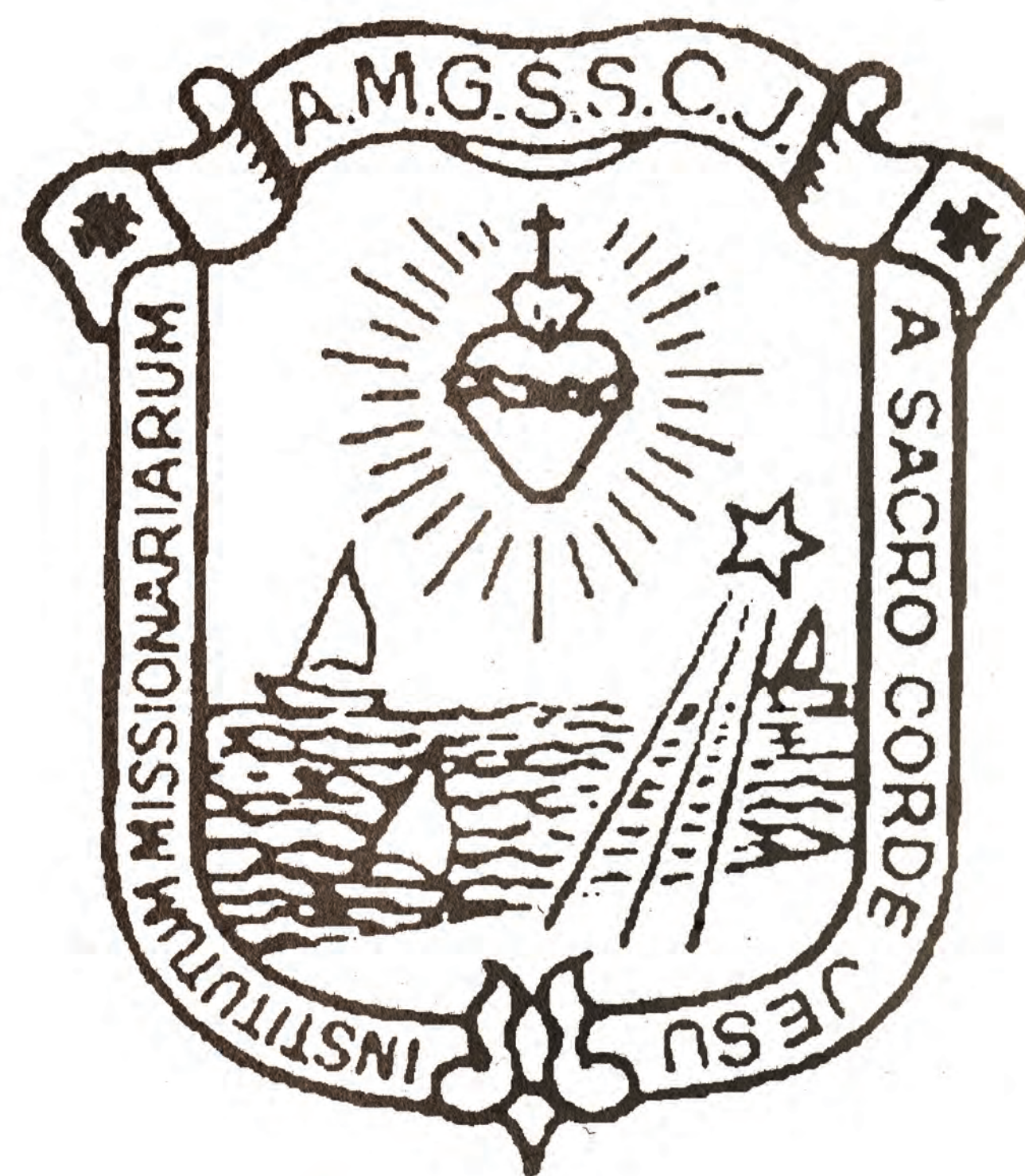
Scalabrini later asked Frances to go to New York to work with the oppressed Italian immigrants. She was hesitant since such a plan would postpone her dream to evangelize the Orient. Yet, during the following months Scalabrini persuaded Frances of the needs in New York as described by the city's archbishop, Michael Corrigan. Her Sisters also demonstrated their joy at the prospect of expanding their activities in America. Sister Serafina Tommasi wrote:

Mother General confided to me: "I don't know what to say because I am so happy and consoled to see that everyone ardently desires that this great work be undertaken. This really pleases me." She was deeply moved and her eyes filled with tears as she continued to speak: "If I didn't see this I would be crestfallen" (Sullivan 54).

Returning to Rome on January 10, 1889 Frances obtained a private audience with the Pope Leo XIII but was only able to answer questions, not receive the pontiff's counsel.

Days later she would kneel before Leo again prepared to remain wholeheartedly obedient to the Holy Father's wishes: China or the United States? Leo's reply proved providential:

Not to the East, but to the West. The institute is still young. It needs resources. Go the United States. There you will find the means which will enable you to undertake the great field of work (Sullivan 85).



The Seal of the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Cabrini responded with the conviction that his words were from the mouth of Jesus Himself. Any doubt and hesitation instantly dissolved and her heart was set free as can be seen by the energy, enthusiasm and great speed with which she proceeded. She later wrote:

What joy comes to the soul at the words of that holy old man. I would resist an angel for fear of an illusion, but I would believe the Pope. His words fill my soul with tranquility, comfort and assurance (Journal 85).

The First Mission to America



St. Joachim Church, New York City, where Mother Cabrini began her American missionary work

The love of God consumes her – it is evident on her face, in her words, in her dealings with others (Sullivan 49).

Sister Serafina Tommasi who accompanied Mother Cabrini on her first voyage to New York

Mother Cabrini's first ocean crossing from France to America in 1889 was a harsh one, and she and her six companions suffered from seasickness. Yet that did not impede them from caring for the 1500 impoverished emigrants traveling in steerage "whose accommodations resembled a stable" (Sullivan 79).

Their welcome on "terra firma" proved only slightly more hospitable than the conditions at sea. Archbishop Michael Corrigan, who had initially agreed to allow the sisters to work among the poor Italian immigrants, seems to have been dissuaded by voices ridiculing the donation of a building on Manhattan's fashionable East Side as a site for an immigrant orphanage. Corrigan even went as far as to suggest that the nuns return to Italy. We can only marvel at Mother Cabrini's determination, reminding him that she had been sent to

America by Pope Leo himself and there she would remain. She eventually won the bishop over by her graciousness, practicality and resolve. Moreover, he could not deny the value of the work she and the sisters would accomplish.

On the very first Sunday they were in New York, Mother and the sisters went to meet families at St. Joachim's Church, the first national parish founded for Italians, located in lower Manhattan. The sisters recounted how people crowded about them, eager to share their stories:

The mothers recommended their children to us. The fathers spoke of the unhappiness of the poor Italians who were treated like slaves... Our hearts were touched... About 350 boys and girls came to the church for religious instruction (Sullivan 72).

Frances wasted no time in trying to establish an orphanage – the very first foundation of the Missionary Sisters in America – on firm financial footing, but there were few options available to her. Mother Cabrini was forced to ask her sisters to go begging from house to house for donations. This form of support would eventually become customary for the later foundations the Sisters established in America. It also provided them with firsthand experience of the plight of the Italian immigrants who "were hated and treated like animals" (Sullivan 72).

Of primary concern for Mother Cabrini were the souls of those who had fallen away from the faith or had become indifferent to it. She often heard the refrain, "In this country one is not accustomed to attend Mass. We have no chance to think of anything except earning our daily bread" (Maynard 117). The Sister's presence among them brought a ray of hope and the visible witness of the love of God. A local newspaper at the time reported:

In these weeks, a group of women, of brunette complexion, dressed like Sisters of Charity, have been seen walking through the streets of Little Italy, climbing up narrow and dark stairs, going down basements and even risking to enter certain corners where not even the police dare to set foot. They wear a habit and a veil different from those of others. Few speak English. It is an Institute which looks after orphans and all its members are Italian. The five or six sisters who have settled in this city are the pioneers of the congregation in the United States. They are led by Mother Frances Cabrini, a woman with large eyes and an attractive smile. She does not speak English, but she is a woman of firm determination (Galilea 68).

Although far from Codogno and all the good sisters were accustomed to, the forgotten masses they encountered in the New World were not far from the Heart of Jesus; their mission had begun.

“ I Can Do All Things...

On her second trip to New York, Frances was asked to operate a hospital for the Italian immigrants. She was reluctant at first but was persuaded by several encounters. Once the sisters were ministering to a patient who showed them a letter he had received from Italy several months earlier. Since he was illiterate, it was the sisters who read to him the sad news of his mother's death. The opportunity to grieve with the lonely man affected Mother Cabrini greatly. Then too, Frances dreamt of seeing Our Lady with her sleeves rolled up comforting the afflicted. The Blessed Mother told her, "I am doing what you refuse to do." Answering this call ultimately gave her and her sisters experience she would later use in founding hospitals in Chicago, Denver, and Seattle.

So complete was Frances's identification with the heart of Jesus, that her desire for the glory of God knew no bounds. One can feel her heart swell with unwavering trust:

The Kingdom of God has no limits; its limits are those of the globe itself. Come, and let your glory be the glory of your celestial spouse, the working out of that celestial talent – the sublime vocation of cooperating with Christ for the salvation of souls. Come, for in the Vineyard of the great Father of the Family we are to gather rich and copious sheaves. There are some who think they are too poor, ignorant and weak to undertake such work. Do not fear; mistrust yourselves and confide in God, for as I have already said Omnia possum in Eo qui me confortat (Maynard 179).

The Missionary Sisters were a spectacle wherever they went; a spectacle of cheerfulness and certainty that could not help but arouse interest. Most often, it stirred the desire to draw near them through assistance of every kind: the offer of more suitable quarters, promises of introductions to leading citizens, a few coins, a bag of apples, or a simple declaration of friendship. Mother Cabrini's travel journal tells how passengers would often "compete with each other for the opportunity to chat with us or offer their help" (Travels 10).

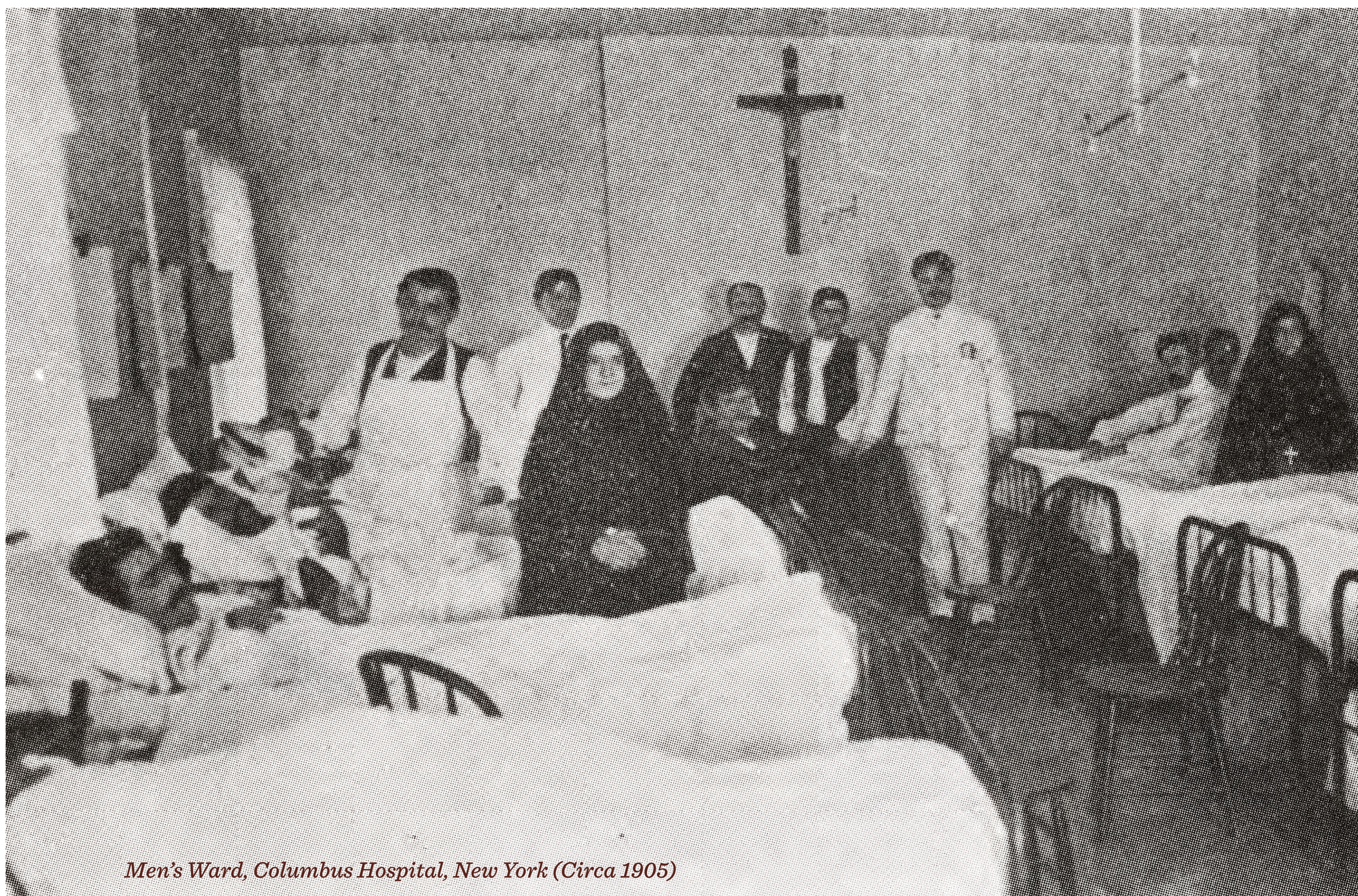
For Mother, the flurry of activity surrounding them was a show of the great favor of Jesus and His Blessed Mother. Frances discerned the beckoning signs of the Lord everywhere she went: in her superiors, in the good people she met aboard ship, in the local church and government officials who helped her set up new missions, in the parents who urged her to educate their children, and in the hearts of all who needed to know the love of Jesus.

Even nature itself extended God's loving embrace to His obedient servant:

Oh blessed voice of Obedience! When she has spoken, the Missionary crosses the immensity of the Atlantic or Pacific without concern about the movement of the clear waters, the billows that dance and sparkle in the air and cast themselves deeply into the abyss. In her sight the ocean becomes a magnificent, sublime spectacle, enrapturing her with wonder and admiration. They fill her heart with God (Travels 54).

It is simply astounding to think that anyone, let alone a woman of her day, could have accomplished the works she did. In her 28 years of missionary activity, she crossed the ocean 30 times, founded some 67 missions, and supervised firsthand the establishment of schools, orphanages, and hospitals on three continents. Never did she attribute to herself the rich harvest she reaped. She wrote in her journal:

It is the Holy Spirit, He Himself, Our beloved, who works, prays, helps us with wearisome tasks, enlightens, teaches, energizes and comforts us with His abundant and lasting insight. His motions and impulses direct us to every holy work. In sum, He is around us with the loving solicitude befitting His eternal love for us (Travels 47).



Men's Ward, Columbus Hospital, New York (Circa 1905)

“...in Christ Who Gives Me Strength

(Phil 4:13)



Girls at Sacred Heart Orphanage, West Park, New York

Mother Cabrini's decisions regarding establishments were often the source of dismay, even to her closest advisors. Yet time and again, her judgment proved most shrewd. One could say she had a nose for a good business deal, true to the entrepreneurial spirit of her native Lombardy. But more so, she had her eyes fixed on the hand of her master (Ps. 132:2) in the circumstances and opportunities that presented themselves.

In Argentina in 1895, as was her practice, she walked the various neighborhoods of Buenos Aires to scout out a location for a new school. After personally inspecting 60 different houses, she landed on one smack in the center of the city. The outcry from local supporters was fast and fearful: how could they rent such an expensive house without the promise of an adequate number of students? Frances courteously listened but answered, "It's very kind of you to tell me all this. But I have a secret inspiration for which I cannot account. I have decided to take that house at any price." They threw up their hands at her apparent naiveté (Maynard 209).

Her decision instead proved most astute. She later noted in her journal:

The courage shown in undertaking a difficult enterprise made a good impression on the people, so much so that the principal families brought us their children; and this went on so well that, when we left, the academy was already full and I had to arrange for a second and larger house (Maynard 209).

In 1899, Frances was determined to establish a base in Denver to reach immigrant miners, even though she had no idea where the needed resources would come from. After carefully pouring over the maps, she chose to open a hospital and an orphanage on the outskirts of the city. The Bishop sought to dissuade her for fear the institute would be too isolated. She won him over and in the following years, the city did indeed develop in that direction. She had secured a desirable property at a fraction of its value.

She was the consummate beggar for Christ, wedging her foot into any slightly opened door. She often won the hearts (and the wallets) of unlikely benefactors by her candor and kindness. She would rightly remind her donors that she was bestowing upon them the great honor of doing good and that they should be

grateful to her for asking. When things got especially tight, she relied on what she called the "Bank of Heaven" urging sisters to look again in places they had previously checked – a desk drawer, a coat pocket – and somehow the necessary sum would appear.

Mother Cabrini and her Missionaries worked ardently for the salvation of souls:

Oh, Love is not loved, my daughters! Love is not loved! And how can we remain cold, indifferent, and almost without heart at this thought? How can we forget ourselves in folly and nonsense? How can we put a limit on our affection and on our energy when we consider the interests of Jesus? Oh, how beautiful is the hymn of that fortunate bride who can say, 'Jesus loves me, and I love Him! He is the only object of my thoughts. I have printed Him on my hands and in the deepest recess of my heart.' ... Let our bride's small hands do the work of a hundred hands and bring His love and aid to the lost souls, to the poor in prisons, tenements, streets, mines, hospitals, fields, and wherever there is suffering! (Travels 20)

Italian immigrant sewer workers



Education of the Heart

Mother Cabrini desired that all her schools and educational institutions at various levels, including kindergarten, adopt a method of instruction that she called “education of the heart.” Its ideal was not only to introduce pupils to knowledge of things but also to cooperate with divine grace in leading students to their ultimate calling: holiness. In this way, their lives could be transformed into Christ’s loving presence permeating culture and redeeming the world. She instructed future teachers in this way:

[A teacher] knows what ... Pontiff Leo XIII said: by no means must the judgment of Solomon be renewed, cutting the child in half, by an unjust and cruel separation of intellect and will. She knows that while developing the children’s intellect and will, it is the duty of the educator to direct them to the acquisition of virtue leading to the ultimate end. She knows that those who in their early years have not received a religious education grow up without a notion of the highest truths... Gently, and sweetly, she makes her good influence felt in school, helped by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who soundlessly penetrates the intimate recesses of youthful hearts which, like soft wax, are ready to receive impressions... This is the fruit you are called to bring (Travels 256-257).

Mother Cabrini believed that education was an act of love. Education of the heart happens when teachers truly love their students as mothers love their children. Only those children who had the experience of being truly cared for would have enough confidence to grow in maturity. Teachers were not to speak of values only but to live them. Only tenderness combined with loving firmness could win a child’s heart. Teachers and pupils were together on a shared journey to holiness; together they were to exercise their faith, practice virtue and experience transformation toward the Ideal.

The following extracts from Mother Cabrini’s instructional notes illustrate the carefully formulated guidelines of her philosophy of education:

Fashion the hearts of the students to a love of religion and the practice of virtue.

Safeguard the children confided to you as on precious loan.

Let your example speak louder than your words.

Maintain a maternal solicitude for the children.

Study well the personalities, the strengths of the students, because one cannot presume they are all the same.

Treat each one according to their capacity and the gifts they have received from God.

Seek to form character.

Do not embarrass, correct patiently.

Do not show dislike either in words or actions.

Do not speak of the students’ defects to others (Uffici).

[Students] shall be charitable with their classmates, especially with the most deficient, not ridiculing them, nor recounting after class the little incidents that would humiliate them to their classmates.

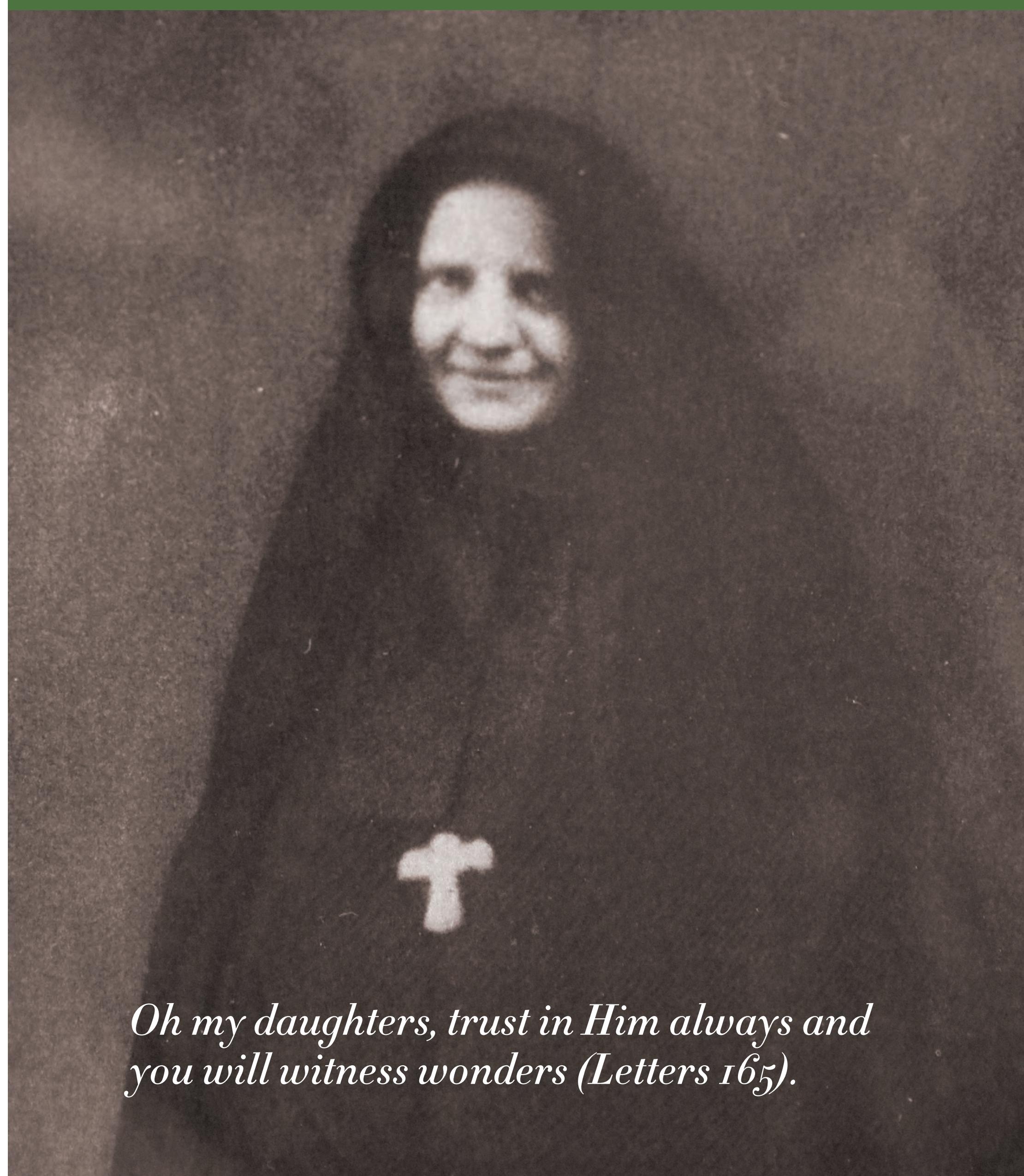
In their recreations the pupils will find the world in miniature. They will be in contact with characters very much different from theirs; let them know how to make use of this to learn one of the most important lessons of practical life.

In order to obtain good results in studies, they shall implore the help of God, from Whom all knowledge comes, and the protection of the Madonna, to whom they must have recourse by frequently raising their heart to her (Regolamento 14-16).

Assumption School, designed by Fritz Foltz, the first Italian parochial school in Chicago



“ Oh My Daughters



Oh my daughters, trust in Him always and you will witness wonders (Letters 165).

Mother Cabrini's photo taken in 1914 in Chicago

Many women asked to join her as Missionary sisters. Their vocations represented the first fruits of the desire Frances conceived in her own heart by saying “yes” to God’s plan. She ardently desired to bring the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the world. Her “daughters” belonged to Him as she did, and only He could say what was best for them. No one loved them more than the One who made their hearts burn for His love. They depended on Him as she did. “Her being and her strength was in this love to the point that if the Lord should lift his finger from her, in a moment she would lose everything” (*Journal*, Intro C).

She was also aware of the resistance they harbored to letting God have His way in them, herself included. She begged Him for the gift of humility. The ultimate substance of their lives was in Him and she considered humility the foundation of this relationship. Numerous letters written to her “daughters” attest to her constant maternal involvement in guidance, encouragement and correction:

Belonging

You are Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Who can tell, who can explain the meaning of these words? The Disciple of Love, after having rested his head on the heart of Jesus, says that no ear can hear, nor can the mind of man conceive the happiness of the elect; and you, dear children, you all belong to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Therefore, be the repositories of His graces, of His secrets, and of His intimate communication (Memorie).

Humility

O how powerful and excellent is humility! ... By all means, oh daughters, be humble of intellect and thought... Let each one regard herself the least of all, the only one unworthy of living with the spouse of Christ... Never ascribe to your merits those attributes which are God’s gifts to you. If at times you feel especially favored with graces and blessings, this should always serve to make you recognize more your own nothingness... (Travels 48)

Obedience and freedom

Only in obedience you will recognize the safety of your steps, the firmness of your work and the strength of your spirit. In this way, you will not only walk, but fly, like royal eagles along the paths of the most robust virtues. Your life will always be peaceful and happy, always being able to repeat to yourself, “I am sure of doing God’s will.” ... Do not do things by halves, oh daughters, but let your obedience be complete and perfect like that of Jesus (Travels 134).

Treasure

Tell Jesus that all things besides Him are insipid, boring and bitter; that He is your only love, that day and night you will seek Him as your peace, your joy, your only treasure... (Letters 112)

Cross

You lost your cross? Then you are the most unhappy person in the world because the one who has no cross is not a follower of Jesus Christ; so I wish you a very long and very large cross full of thorns, which you will carry as a precious jewel with a smile on your lips (Letters 222).

Prayer

The spirit of prayer means praying according to His divine pleasure, to desire all that Jesus desires and to want nothing not pleasing to Him. It means keeping our spirit always intent on prayer, every time and every place: working, walking, eating, speaking, in suffering, and in joy to pray habitually and always (Travels 132-133).

Courage

Let’s not be discouraged to see ourselves so far from the perfection of holy love which Jesus wishes to communicate to us. He is ready to help our efforts. What He wants is for us to have recourse to Him with a sincere will to correspond to His graces entrusting ourselves completely to His love (Travels 107).

“ I Am Your Spiritual Daughter



Pope Leo XIII, Circa 1898

Of the many friendships Frances formed over the course of her life, none was as important to her as the one she maintained with Pope Leo XIII. We already know how she sought his blessing upon her Institution and how she revered his word as the word of Christ. Each time she returned to Rome, Frances would ask to see Leo and he, for his part, would grant her audience whenever possible. Their mutual esteem and fondness only grew over time.

During one of these audiences, he held his right hand over her in benediction. He placed it on her head while with his left hand he drew her to him. She said afterwards, deeply moved, “It was like the Church opening its arms to the Missionary Sisters in an embrace” (Maynard 177).

Photogram of the 1896 film Sua Santità papa Leone XIII

They were kindred spirits, co-workers in the Lord’s vineyard. Mother Cabrini’s own writings attest to this. Once she commended a novice for her willingness to accept sacrifices and thereby “live up to her family name [Cepeda] which makes her a relative of St. Teresa and our incomparable, valiant Pope Leo XIII” (Travels 64). Frances manifested her love for the Lord through work – travelling, speaking with people, opening schools and orphanages, begging for funds, exhorting her Sisters. She once confessed to Leo that she enjoyed work too much!



Leo, too, was an extraordinary worker whose twenty-five year papacy is one of the longest in history. He is best known for his encyclical letter *Rerum novarum* which sought to bring attention to the plight of the working class. Before returning to the United States for the second time, Frances sought out the Pope to bid him farewell. Even though he was not giving audiences at that time, Leo sent word to her that she could see him on his way back from his daily visit to the Vatican Gardens. We are told that Leo dropped all formality during their impromptu meeting and cried out to her, “Let us work, Cabrini, let us work. Then what heaven will be ours!” (Maynard 178)

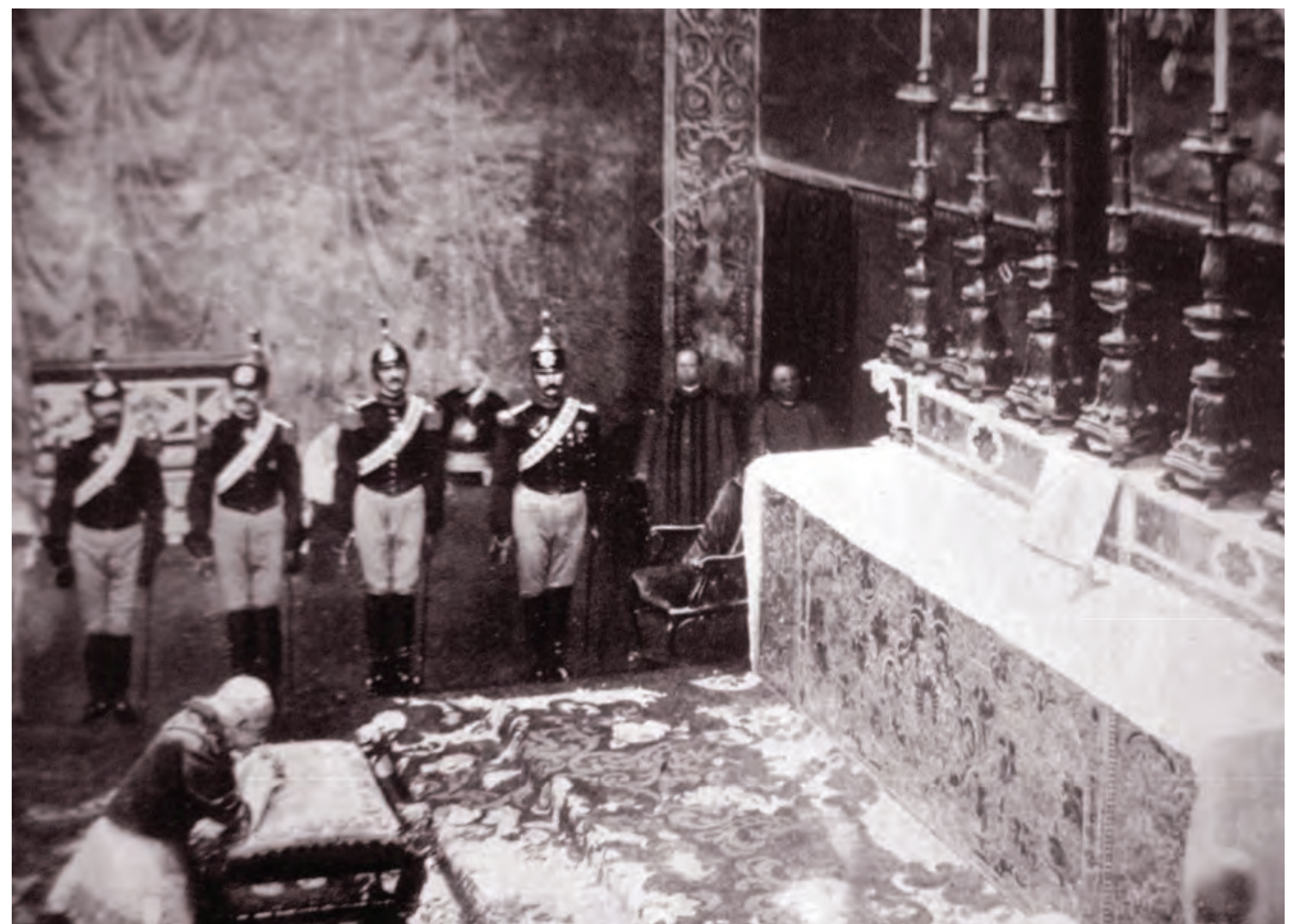
On another occasion, as Frances was preparing to set sail, Leo sent word that she was to go to him. Though the pontiff himself was eighty-eight years old and not well by then, he saw that Frances’s health had also declined, and he wanted to know how one so frail could do the work that he, a robust man, could not. Frances warmly replied:

Holy Father, I am your spiritual daughter. That is what gives me the necessary moral strength. I am not going to lose my health by serving that dear Jesus who made me a Missionary of His Sacred Heart (Maynard 216-217).

The Pope’s blessing and personal favor energized Frances and bestowed upon her that singular sense of purpose she carried all her life:

Accompanied by that blessing, I go about everywhere with the utmost confidence; no more shall fear ever depress my spirit, no matter how hard the way, no matter what obstacles may be thrown in that way by my spiritual enemies or temporal opponents. The Pope has spoken; God has spoken; I go my way secure (Martignoni 44).

Pope Leo praying at the high altar of the Sistine Chapel



“Too Small a World”

In January of 1913, the Vatican requested from Mother Cabrini detailed information regarding her order's work on behalf of immigrants. In March of that year she submitted the following report. She died four years later, in December 1917, and was canonized in 1946.

Houses of the Institute designated for the religious and moral assistance of immigrants from foreign lands.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Diocese of New York

NEW YORK CITY

Columbus Hospital, with a capacity of 160 beds, offers free hospitalization and care particularly to Italian immigrants. Annually it cares for about 1,600 patients in its wards and about 8,000 in the dispensary; that is, 40 percent of the Italian patients hospitalized in New York.

The Dispensary of Columbus Hospital is numbered along the first-class clinics in New York City. Annually, it examines about 18,000 patients, performs 700 operations, gives 12,000 surgical treatments, and 22,000 medications—all free.

The sisters assigned to Columbus Hospital instruct the patients in Christian doctrine, and they also teach religion to the children and adults in their homes or in the various parishes of the diocese. They visit families, prisons, and public hospitals. Later we shall relate how they perform these missions.

Sacred Heart Villa. A school opened for the daughters of middle-class Italians. It also serves as the reception house for the children destined for our orphanage in West Park.

The sisters of this school, as well as those of Columbus Hospital, go out to the various parishes to teach Christian doctrine, provide recreational activities on Sundays, visit the prisons and public hospitals, the poor houses and the families, all with the motive of helping the souls of the poor immigrants.

Transfiguration School. Approximately 400 students are taught according to diocesan and state curricula. The student body is composed mostly of children of Italian immigrants. Lessons in Italian and embroidery are also given.

Mission of Our Lady of Pompei. A free trade school frequented annually by about 300 children of Italian parentage.

Guardian Angel Mission. A free kindergarten for Italian children.

N. 1

DISTANZE

percorse dalla Serva di Dio Francesca Saverio Cabrini nei suoi viaggi di terra e di mare

Da New York a Genova	Miglia	4054	Riparto Miglia	23295	Da New York a New Orleans	Kilometri	1858	Attraverso la « Cordigliera » parte a cavallo		
• New York all'Avare	•	3131	• New York a Buenos Aires	•	5858	• New Orleans a Chicago	•	parte a piedi		Km. 1469
• New York a Liverpool	•	3036	• New Orleans a Nicaragua	•	1895	• Chicago a New York	•			
• New York a Napoli	•	3699	• Panama a Valparaiso	•	2615	• Chicago a Denver	•			
• New York a Panama	•	1972	• Buenos Aires a Rio Janeiro	•	1210	• Denver a Los-Angeles	•			
• New York a Corinto (Nicaragua)	•	2655	• Buenos Aires a Genova	•	6130	• Los Angeles a Seattle	•			
• New York a Rio Janeiro	•	4748	• Rio Janeiro a Genova	•	5040	• Seattle a Chicago	•			
			Totale Miglia	23295						
					Totale Miglia	46025				
							Totale Kilometri	15624		

N. B. - In queste cifre non sono compresi i viaggi più brevi attraverso l'Europa: quelli lunghi furono più volte ripetuti.



N. 2 FONDAZIONI

fatte dalla

The religious does not know or make distinctions between country, place or nationality because for her great soul, the world is too small (Journal 118).

Map of Frances Xavier Cabrini's travels published in 1929 as part of the inquiry into her sanctity

I long with love for you. My heart tells me that you created me because you loved me with a burning love! ... I feel myself consumed with love for you, and for me, it is a great sorrow, a slow martyrdom, not to be able to do more for you. Spread wide, loving Jesus, the fibers of my soul and make me come to you, make me work much for you, make me lead many souls to your divine heart (Journal 49).

CODOGNO, sulla dell'Istituto, fu dalla Serva di Dio, che non la conosceva, additata come adatta alla fondazione di un ospedale, per quanto grande fosse la sua ripugnanza, mossa da un sogno misterioso nel quale le apparve la Vergine Santissima in atto di servire gli ammalati e le disse: « Faccio io quel che non vuoi far tu ».

WEST PARK. Acquisita una proprietà abbandonata dai RR. PP. Gesuiti per mancanza d'acqua: addita alle sue Figlie il punto preciso dove, scavando, troveranno acqua, e difatti dal punto indicato scaturì la sorgente.

VILLA DEL SACRO CUORE - NEW-YORK. La Serva di Dio manda la più semplice delle Suore con l'ordine di depositare una moneta nella cassetta delle elemosine nella Chiesa di Sant'Antonio, di pregare il Santo e di andar poi per la città a cercare un luogo adatto per collegio. La Suora ritorna indicando la direzione per cui si sentì ispirata d'andare, e la Serva di Dio trova e acquista così una bella Casa con giardino nella più bella località di New-York.

CHICAGO. Pressata dall'Arcivescovo Mons. Quigley a fondare un Ospedale per Italiani, la Serva di Dio si mise alla ricerca del posto. Passando da Lincoln Park, dinanzi il lago, vide il lago. Nel fare ritorno e riuscì

terreni sconosciuti e mandare di più orfane di cui era priva. Cercate di non un suo buona, per E da quel che passò bere perché se alla sua il farai fabbricare che strada delle alle vatiche, tutto

Il terreno internamente se loro che infatti quel di Los Angeles strada e Burbank no selvaggio

Fattasi dare lo è il luogo arono infatti lago con di la Serva di Dio e un Bre-

te dalla M.

« dallo specchio N. 2.

M. RE ANTONIETTA DELLA CASA SUPERIORE GENERALE DELLE MISSIONARIE DEL S. CUORE

“ It Is God Who Works in Me

The good that I accomplish is the work of God who operates in me, like a child that writes because someone is guiding his hand (Journal 17).

WEST PARK, NEW YORK

Sacred Heart Orphanage. Designed to care for and educate, not only the children of Italian immigrants, but also those of other nationalities. At present we have approximately 200 orphans. West Park is beautifully situated on the banks of the Hudson River. It is a wholesome and lovely place for the children, especially for those who are sickly. This advantage is deeply appreciated by the authorities of New York City, who often commit children to our care and who subsidize the instruction.

The sisters from this house do catechetical work in the surrounding parishes, and other works of mercy as referred to above.

Diocese of Brooklyn

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Saint Charles School. Imparts instruction in English and Italian to about 650 Italian boys and girls. The sisters visit families, prisons, etc., do catechetical work in various parishes of the city and surrounding areas, supervise feast day oratories, children's sodalities, etc.

Diocese of Newark

ARLINGTON

Orphanage of Saint Anthony. Like that of West Park, it admits particularly Italian orphans and abandoned girls. The sisters also engage in family visitations and catechetical work, as above.

Diocese of Scranton

SCRANTON

School of Saint Lucy. A free school for Italian boys and girls. Instruction in Christian doctrine, etc., as above.

Diocese of Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA

School of Saint Anne (Saint Donato Parish School). Opened a few months ago for the benefit of Italian immigrants. The sisters in conformity with the institute attend to various missions explained above.

Archdiocese of Chicago

CHICAGO

Columbus Hospital. Works along the lines of the hospital of New York. Annually it cares for about 1,400 patients, accepting not only Italians, but Slavs, Poles, Germans and Spaniards.

Connected with this hospital, as with that of New York, is a **School of Nursing** which, after three years of study and practice, and after successful completion of the examination, grants, diplomas, qualifying the students as registered nurses.

While attending to the hospital training of these young ladies, the sisters aim to form them spiritually, according to the precepts of our holy religion, so that when the nurses are ministering to patients, they can offer the comforts of religion as well as the care of the body.

First Aid or Clinic of Columbus Hospital (Columbus Hospital Extension). Opened a little more than a year ago in the most populous Italian center in Chicago. It has already given free care to hundreds of Italians who come in ever-growing numbers.

The sisters of these two houses also teach catechism in many parishes. They visit public hospitals and prisons regularly. They also go to the Italian immigrants in the country towns to prepare them for the reception of the Sacraments.

Assumption School. Has an enrollment of approximately 700 boys and girls. Instruction follows the curriculum of the state. There are classes in Italian, sewing, etc.

Archdiocese of New Orleans

NEW ORLEANS

Sacred Heart Orphanage. Opened particularly for orphans of Italian immigrants, but it also accepts orphans of other nationalities. The sisters of this house are very involved in the rural missions, on the plantations, with visits to families, the prisons and hospitals, etc., and they achieve gratifying results.

Saint Philip's School. A free daycare center and kindergarten for Italian children. The chapel of Saint Philip's serves as a church for the Italian people.

Holy Cross School. As above with about 250 pupils.

The sisters of New Orleans have **the direction of the Cathedral School.** It is attended chiefly by Italians, in whose quarter it is located. It forms the center of a vast mission field for the immigrant families.

Diocese of Denver

DENVER

Regina Coeli Orphanage. Cares for and educates Italian girls; in particular, the children of miners who have lost their lives in the mines. According to the institute, the sisters attend to the various missions mentioned above.

Mount Carmel School. Educates approximately 500 children, mostly Italian.

Diocese of Monterey and Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES

Regina Coeli Orphanage. Takes care of Italian and Mexican girls.

Our Lady of the Angels School. Instruction in English and Italian. The enrollment is about 200 boys and girls. As in other places, the sisters here teach Christian doctrine in the parishes, visit the families and the sick, etc.

Diocese of Nesqually

SEATTLE

Orphanage of Mount Carmel. Offers a home to children, the majority of whom are Italian; others are of various nationalities. The chapel of the house serves as **a church for the Italians.** Connected with the orphanage is **a day school for Italian boys and girls.**

The sisters of this house, in addition to the missions undertaken by the institute and in the various dioceses, go to Oregon once a month to **visit families and prisons** for the welfare of souls. The Bishop of Oregon wishes us to open a hospital there to assist the Italians who are ill.

General Observations

Since the work of the institute is done uniformly in all the houses, so the following observations are applicable to all the works cited above.

Schools

All the schools established by the institute in the United States are free. English and Italian are taught. In each school there are classes in Christian doctrine, arts and crafts, and even recreational activities (*oratori festivi*), and playgrounds for the public school children, who are prepared for the reception of the Sacraments of Confession and Communion.

Orphanages

In the orphanages we accommodate girls who are orphans or who have been abandoned, especially Italians, but no child is to be refused because of nationality. Contrary to the American custom of discharging girls at the age of fourteen, they are kept in the institution until they can be satisfactorily placed with a good family or able to earn an honest living for themselves.

“ The Harvest Indeed Is Great

(Mt 9:37)

Hospitals

The principal goal of the hospitals is to assure that the poor who have come to the end of their lives and resources find not only alleviation for their corporal misery, but principally help for their souls. Experience has shown that the majority of these people have been far away from the Church for many years. Others, even though adults, have not been baptized, nor have they received their First Holy Communion. There are also many who were not married in church.

It is a consolation to see that many patients leave the hospital having been reconciled with God as well as having been helped physically.

By means of the hospitals and dispensaries, the sisters meet thousands of immigrants who are not only Italian, but of other nationalities. These poor, sick people, grateful to those who assisted them at the moment of their greatest need, that in which sickness added its toll to the rigors of poverty, are very well disposed to listen to sister's words about God, and the conversions are many and edifying.

Trade Schools

These schools have given proof that they are a good means of drawing youth and Catholic families away from the influence of Protestants, who proselytize among the Italians, especially by providing them with food and clothing. The only way to bring these errant sheep back to the fold is to provide them, at the cost of great sacrifice, with all the commodities the wealthy Protestants give them so abundantly. In the trade schools youth are furnished with material to make their own clothing. This provides an incentive for the mothers to send their daughters not only to school but to catechetical instruction.

Teaching Christian Doctrine

This is done in every house of the institute and in a great number of parishes, either in class or privately for adults. There are private instructions for converts who are preparing to be baptized. Retreats, given in preparation for Holy Communion, follow the Spiritual Exercises. There are sodalities, etc., for youth and adults.

Family Visits

The sisters visiting families take note of unbaptized children and unblessed marriages and inform the pastor accordingly. They encourage those who have left the Church to return to it, especially those who have joined Protestant sects, and the sisters oppose with all their might sectarian propaganda.

Visits to Hospitals and Prisons

The sisters visit the immigrants in public hospitals, poor houses and prisons. Here the results are most gratifying. Since the chaplains often do not know foreign languages, the sisters have an advantage over them. Since they come from various nations, they not only know Italian, but other languages as well, so they can better communicate with the patients and prisoners and dedicate themselves to the spiritual welfare of their immigrant compatriots with consoling results.

For example, at the bedside of patients, where a priest is often unwanted, the sister, with some fruit or a book, or a religious article, gains easy access, and with the grace of God finds a way of preparing these poor souls for the priest's visit and their return to God. In fact, the zealous chaplain of the prison in Oregon told our sisters in Seattle a few weeks ago: "You do more good in one visit to these prisons than I am able to do in a month."

The sisters go regularly to the American prisons to visit the inmates and to teach them Christian doctrine. They take special care to prepare the unhappy ones, who have been condemned to death, to die well. Nearly all those so prepared meet their death with resignation and edification. Even desperate cases become tranquil and reconciled with God when they are assured by the sisters that they would take care of their children and their families.

Missions in Rural Areas

In some dioceses, especially in those of New Orleans, Chicago, and Nesqually, this ministry takes place in the following manner:

Since the number of priests who speak Italian is small, the sisters go to centers of concentration of immigrants, which are located at a great distance from the church: on the mountains, in the mines, on the cotton plantations. Here they stay as long as it takes to visit the families, take note of those who have not received the sacraments, prepare them, and then call their own chaplain, or a priest assigned by the bishop, to administer the sacraments. Later, the pastor comes to gather his lost sheep who have returned to the fold. These missions have proved to be of great help and consolation to the bishops and the pastors, who continually ask for the assistance of the sisters exclaiming: "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few." Too few.

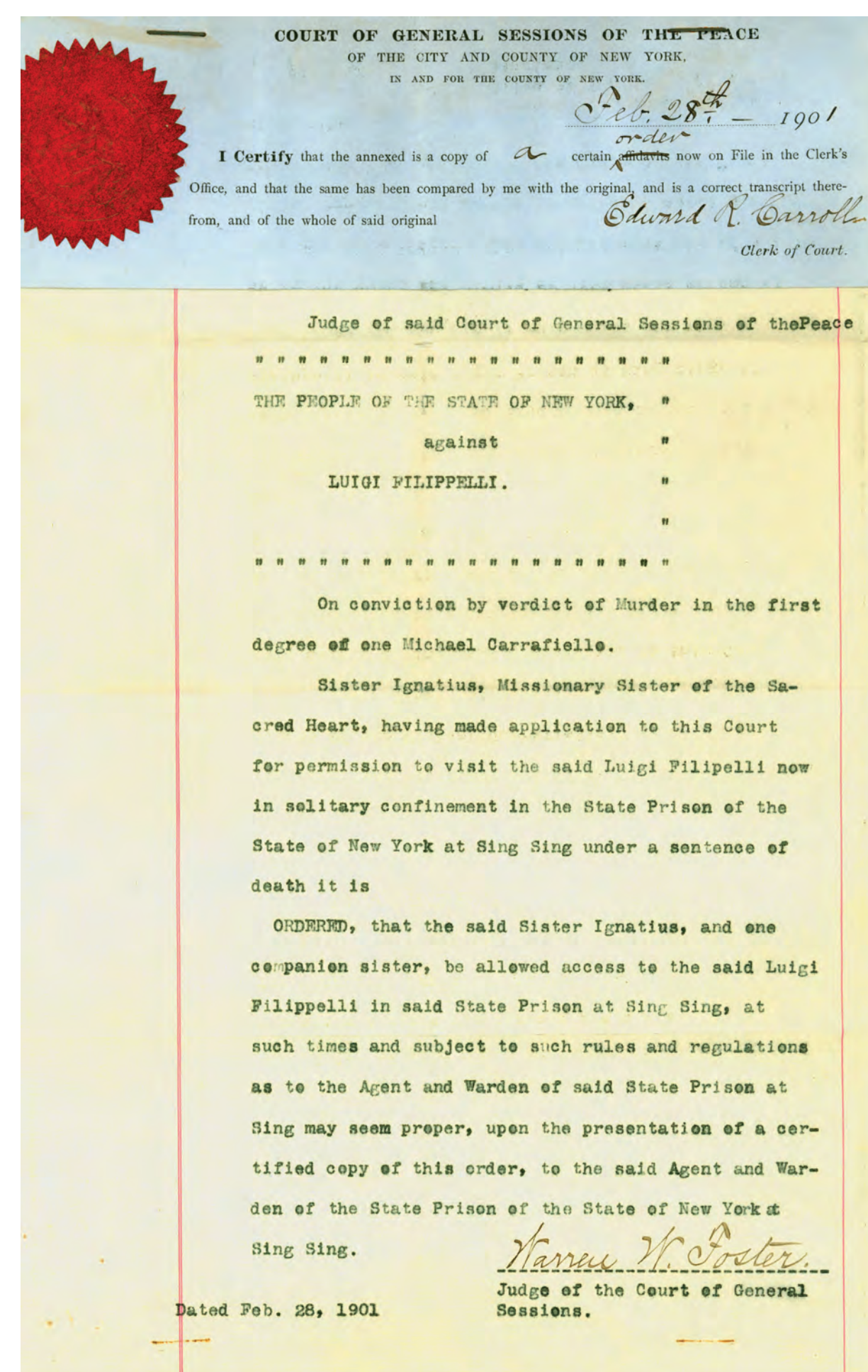
Each house that occupies itself with meeting the needs of the poor immigrants becomes a center for the Italians. The relationship between the sisters and the various colonies is most friendly. The poor and the workers feel as though they have mothers who are anxious to provide for their welfare.

They willingly see the sisters when they are laboring hard far from home earning the daily bread for their children. When the sisters descend into the mines, they are greeted by the miners as a smile from heaven. But it is especially in times of misfortune or sickness that they find in the religious house a piece of their homeland and help for all their needs.

When the sisters are unable to provide the help requested, they always see to it that the blind, the handicapped and the elderly are taken in elsewhere and are treated well. This is easy for the sisters to do because the relationship between the civil authorities and the sisters is always good. They have never refused, but always listened with deference to the sisters asking for aid for the poor immigrants. At times they have succeeded in having judges review cases in order to obtain a more favorable sentence for poor immigrants who were the victims of injustice and intrigue.

During the epidemic of yellow fever which raged in New Orleans in 1905, our poor Italians who saw a contaminator (*unitore*) in every doctor sent to treat them, vehemently repelled priests and doctors, and thus rendered useless the efforts of civic authorities to curb the spread of the disease. Only the sisters were admitted to the quarters where the worst patients hid themselves, preferring to die rather than fall into a doctor's hands. In this way we were able to prepare a large number of patients for death. Others were restored in body as well as in soul. This efficacious cooperation was so appreciated by the civic authorities that an automobile

and disinfectants were put at the sisters' disposition. The sisters' house became a veritable sanitation station to the general approval and satisfaction of the diocesan authorities and the grateful acknowledgement of American and Italian authorities.



A court order permitting Sister Ignatius to visit a prisoner Luigi Filippelli at the correctional facility Sing Sing, NY in 1901. Filippelli was convicted of murder and placed in solitary confinement under a sentence of death.