Seeing as God Sees, What Great Things We Can Do Together

One of the themes that captures the imagination in films and literature is how the hero seemingly starts with next to nothing, but then does incredible things; from Frodo in “Lord of the Rings” to Luke Skywalker coming off the farm in “Star Wars,” we’re all familiar with these incredible stories.

But while many are works of fiction, there are so many real-life stories that are reminders that God wants us to do great things too, and the tools are there.

This past week, our Church celebrated the feast day of Saint Francis Xavier Cabrini, who was the first United States citizen to be canonized. Following is a brief biography of her life from “Saint of the Day,” a Franciscan website where pretty much all you need to know is in the title - you can read about the saints honored each day of the year:

Frances Xavier Cabrini was the first United States citizen to be canonized. Her deep trust in the loving care of her God gave her the strength to be a valiant woman doing the work of Christ.

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Refused admission to the religious order which had educated her to be a teacher, she began charitable work at the House of Providence Orphanage in Cadogno, Italy. In September 1877, she made her vows there and took the religious habit. When the bishop closed the orphanage in 1880, he named Frances prioress of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Seven young women from the orphanage joined her.

Since her early childhood in Italy, Frances Xavier Cabrini had wanted to be a missionary in China but, at the urging of Pope Leo XIII, Frances went west instead of east. She traveled with six sisters to New York City to work with the thousands of Italian immigrants living there.

She found disappointment and difficulties with every step. When she arrived in New York, the house intended to be her first orphanage in the United States was not available. The archbishop advised her to return to Italy. But Frances Xavier Cabrini, truly a valiant woman, departed from the archbishop’s residence all the more determined to establish that orphanage. And she did.

In 35 years, Frances Xavier Cabrini founded 67 institutions dedicated to caring for the poor, the abandoned, the uneducated and the sick. Seeing great need among Italian immigrants who were losing their faith, she organized schools and adult education classes.

As a child, she was always frightened of water, unable to overcome her fear of drowning. Yet, despite this fear, she traveled across the Atlantic Ocean more than 30 times. She died of malaria in her own Columbus Hospital in Chicago.

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Because of her, so many people were helped - and it all came about against all odds.

This month of November is one where many of the readings focus on inviting us to think about our mortality, and the lives we lead. With that in mind, it's a good time to think about how we can do great things working with God.

Some things that can help us along the way include:

1) Prayer - knowing God is with us every step of the way. Listening to His voice so we can find our gifts, and gain fortitude to get through the challenging times;

2) Keeping our eyes fixed on the goal. There will inevitably be many setbacks on the way - all the saints experience this - but when we see the big picture and where we are going, God will use us to do great things. Sometimes we get focused on the here and now when things aren't working; or other times we get hung up on the past remembering the mistakes we made, or longing for "the good old days" but remember every saint had a past, every sinner has a future that can result in sainthood if only we work at it cooperating with God's grace.

3) Knowing we have others to help us. Jesus had the apostles. Mother Carbrini had many other sisters working with her. We need to be open to working with others, getting guidance from them, and not fearing asking for help remembering we work together in the vineyard of the Lord;

4) Being patient. It takes time for things to develop; sometimes when things don't work out, or we have setbacks, it can be tempting to give up. God believes in us though, we should believe in ourselves;

5) Always remembering it's about God, not us. All the saints do what they do for God's glory, not so one day there will be a statue of them. May we never forget we may not get the glory or praise for the things we do, but at the end of the day if we are making a difference in the lives of others, if we are changing lives for the better, and making this world a better place, we are doing good things!

As I said not too long ago in a daily Mass homily, some people spend their whole lives complaining and comparing; they compare themselves to others who seemingly have more; they complain that they lack talent or money and that it's just too hard. The saints though get to work, and in so doing change the world.

There's nothing at all wrong with enjoying the present moment, but as we all know we journey forward every day towards eternity and standing before God. May that not fill us with an unhealthy fear, the fear that God is somehow out to get us, but the healthy fear meant by "God fearing Christian," the fear of letting someone down you love because you want to make them happy. Gods love for us is so great, and He truly gives us so much - on our part may we follow the example of the saints, and not spend our lives

thinking about what we don’t have, but using what we do have to be people of hope who use our gifts for God’s glory.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul