

OCTOBER – DECEMBER
2024



Stella Maris

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS AROUND THE WORLD

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Belfast, Northern Ireland

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Stella Maris is a Catholic charity supporting seafarers worldwide.

We provide practical and pastoral care to all seafarers, regardless of nationality, belief or race. Our port chaplains and volunteer ship visitors welcome seafarers, offer welfare services and advice, practical help, care and friendship.

Stella Maris is the largest ship visiting network in the world, working in 332 ports with 227 port chaplains around the world. We also run 53 seafarers' centres all over the world.

We are only able to continue our work through the generous donations of our supporters and volunteers.

➤ **To support Stella Maris with a donation visit www.stellamaris.org.uk/donate**

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Stella Maris provides seafarers with practical support, information and a listening ear



BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

More seafarers are now being helped in Northern Ireland – thanks to Stella Maris's new Port Chaplain Chris Reynolds.

Back in January, Chris Reynolds swapped teaching chemistry in secondary school for a front-line role with Stella Maris. The charity had begun building a presence in Northern Ireland in 2019.

As Regional Port Chaplain, Chris visits seafarers in ports across Northern Ireland including Belfast, Ardglass Foyle Port and Warrenpoint and hopes to continue to build the capacity of Stella Maris to reach seafarers soon in areas such as Kilkeel and Larne.

Chris is thoroughly enjoying his new role. He said: "I'm really enjoying it. Being here in Belfast, the job is fantastic. It's an absolute dream job for me. I'm out every day visiting ships, speaking to seafarers. As a former seafarer, I find that really engaging. I work very closely with the Mission to Seafarers, and they very kindly let me work out of their Seafarers Centre. It is a privilege to work alongside chaplains and ministers from other denominations doing what we can to provide practical support to the seafaring community.

"Deacon Joe O'Donnell has been very helpful. He's our Senior Area Port Chaplain for Scotland and Northern Ireland. He has been right there behind me the whole way; in the first instance I was able to follow his example but now more and more I am discovering my own way and growing in confidence in the role.

"If I've any questions, I've been able to ask him. I don't feel like I can't ask. I'm approaching 250 ship visits since taking on the role in January. However, it's more about the quality of the visit than the quantity.

"There will be a day when I visit six ships, which is great, but there will be a day when

I visit two because I could be taking people to hospital appointments, into town or to the Seafarers Centre."

In recent years, Deacon Joe O'Donnell had laid the foundations for Stella Maris in Northern Ireland with regular working visits there from Scotland.

Chris is now building on those foundations and expanding the charity's volunteer base in Northern Ireland. The charity's growth of activities in Northern Ireland has been supported by the Merchant Navy Welfare Board.

And perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise that Chris has settled in so well, given his previous experience: "I know the job of a seafarer can be fantastic. It's one of the best jobs out there and I encourage any young people to consider the merchant and maritime industry as a career.

"But it's also a very difficult job. It comes with lots of stresses and strains. I've done a lot of things in life as I tried to find where I belong, and I feel this role is a chance to bring together my experience at sea and my experience with the Redemptorists.

Joe O'Donnell is full of praise for his efforts: "The ship-visiting in Northern Ireland since Chris started has escalated quite high. That's because we now have a permanent presence in Belfast. It does make a big difference having Chris here."

STELLA MARIS BELFAST

Ardglass, Belfast, Kilkeel, Larne, Portavogie

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THE CHURCH YEAR AT SEA



2ND OCTOBER

THE HOLY GUARDIAN ANGELS

Three days ago the Church's liturgy celebrated the Archangels SS Michael, Gabriel and Raphael; today is the turn of those angels who, according to Scripture and tradition, guard and assist us at every moment. Each person has such a Guardian Angel and we rightly rejoice in their company.

Pray the Guardian Angel Prayer each day:

Angel of God, my guardian dear,
to whom God's love commits me here,
ever this day be at my side,
to light and guard,
to rule and guide.
Amen.

7TH OCTOBER

OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY

This Memorial (originally Our Lady of Victories) commemorates the battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571), when a Christian fleet defeated the Turks. The victory was attributed by Pope St Pius V to the recitation of the Holy Rosary. This great Marian prayer is sometimes traced back to St Dominic and his confrères, preaching against the Albigensian heresy in the thirteenth century, although it seems more likely to have taken its familiar form in the fifteenth century. Since then it has spread all over the world and has produced marvellous fruits, bringing countless Christians 'to Jesus through Mary.'

Take fifteen minutes to pray the rosary together today.



15TH OCTOBER

SAINT TERESA OF JESUS, VIRGIN AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

St Teresa (1515-1582) was born in Avila (Spain). She joined the Carmelite convent at Avila and, after a quarter of a century as a nun, began to reform the Order, with the help of St Peter of Alcántara and St John of the Cross. She founded seventeen reformed houses in Spain and, despite her busy life of administration, reached the highest 'mansions' of union with God. Her outstanding works of ascetical and mystical theology led her to be declared a doctor of the Church in 1970.



16TH OCTOBER

SAINT MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE, VIRGIN

St Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) was born at Verosvres in Burgundy (France) and joined the Order of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial. She received mystical revelations concerning the Sacred Heart of Jesus and, with the help of her Jesuit confessor, St Claude de la Colombière, spread this devotion throughout the world. She was canonised in 1920.

18TH OCTOBER

SAINT LUKE, EVANGELIST

St Luke (first century) was a Greek, possibly from Antioch, who trained as a doctor. He converted to Christianity, became a disciple of St Paul and wrote both a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. His vivid descriptions of the childhood of Jesus have led some to surmise that he was close to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He is believed to have died in his old age, and may have been martyred; he is patron of doctors and artists.

19TH OCTOBER

SAINTS JOHN DE BRÉBEUF AND ISAAC JOGUES, PRIESTS, AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

St John (Jean) de Brébeuf (1593-1649), St Isaac Jogues (1607- 46) and their six companions were Jesuit missionaries, originally from France, who dedicated their lives to preaching the Gospel among the indigenous peoples of North America. St John de Brébeuf was captured by the Iroquois, fastened to a stake, tortured to death and then partly eaten, near Midland, Ontario (Canada). St Isaac Jogues had already suffered slavery and mutilation during his missionary work, but returned to Canada from France. He was seized by the Mohawks, who thought he was a sorcerer, and tomahawked to death near Auriesville, New York in 1646.

POPE FRANCIS PRAYER INTENTIONS FOR OCTOBER 2024

**FOR A SHARED MISSION**

We pray that the Church continue to sustain in all ways a synodal lifestyle, as a sign of co-responsibility, promoting the participation, the communion and the mission shared among priests, religious and lay people.

1ST NOVEMBER

ALL SAINTS

The Solemnity of All Saints celebrates all those who are in heaven, in the light of God's face – both those recognised by the Church as saints and those known only to the Lord. We ask for their intercession and we strive to follow their example, so that we too can fulfil our vocation to be saints.



2ND NOVEMBER

THE COMMEMORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED (ALL SOULS' DAY)

Having celebrated the saints in heaven, the Church today turns her attentions to the Holy Souls in Purgatory – holy because heaven awaits them but suffering the pain of purification in the crucible of God's love. It is customary for priests to celebrate three Masses on this day for the Mass, the sacrifice of Calvary renewed on our altars, has always been the principal means of fulfilling the great commandment of charity towards the dead. The process of purgation can also be assisted through our prayers, penances and good works. Today we are reminded that the love which we have for one another in this world is stronger than death.

Pray for all your loved ones who have gone before you:

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them, may they rest in peace. Amen.

10TH NOVEMBER

SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

St Leo the Great (+ 461), a son of Tuscany, Italy and became Pope in 440. Though unable to attend the Council of Chalcedon in 451, his letter (or Tome) defining Christ's twofold nature was acclaimed as the Church's teaching: 'Peter has spoken through Leo.' His famous meeting with Attila the Hun outside Rome the following year saved the city from destruction then, although, despite his efforts, it was pillaged by Vandals in 455. Leo's theological writings earned him the title of Doctor of the Church.

21ST NOVEMBER

THE PRESENTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

The Presentation of Mary in the Temple as a young girl is based not on the New Testament but on an account in the apocryphal Gospel of James. In being presented in this way, the Blessed Virgin dedicated herself to the service of God and kept herself open to God's will. The feast prepares us for Advent and Christmas, when we celebrate the coming of her divine Son into the world.

30TH NOVEMBER

SAINT ANDREW, APOSTLE AND MARTYR, PATRON OF SCOTLAND

St Andrew (first century) was born at Bethsaida and worked as a fisherman. He is called the Protokletos or 'first called', for he was originally a disciple of St John the Baptist before following Christ and bringing with him his brother, St Peter. After Pentecost he zealously preached the Gospel and was crucified at Patras (Greece). He is the patron of Scotland, where his relics were formerly venerated at St Andrews.

25TH NOVEMBER

SAINT CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

St Catherine of Alexandria was a fourth century martyr. Later tradition makes her a well-born maiden of Alexandria (Egypt) who was martyred after refusing to worship pagan gods. During her interrogation, she ably defended the faith in a debate with the city's leading philosophers. According to legend, her body was taken by angels to Mount Sinai, where a monastery was built in her honour.



POPE FRANCIS PRAYER INTENTIONS FOR NOVEMBER 2024



FOR ANYONE WHO HAS LOST A CHILD

We pray that all parents who mourn the loss of a son or daughter find support in their community and receive peace and consolation from the Holy Spirit.

ADVENT

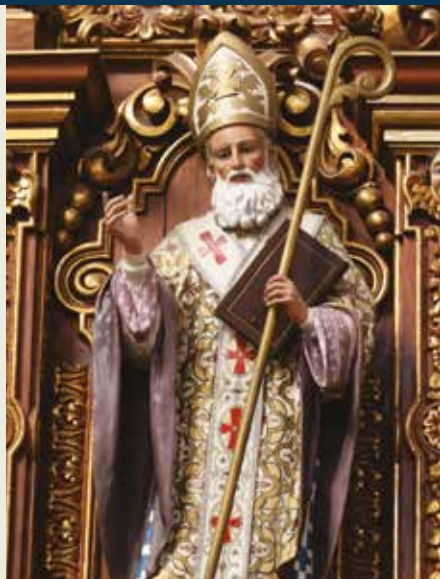
In December we have the four weeks of Advent to prepare for the coming of Christ. In the first two weeks of Advent the Church invites us to think about Jesus's coming in glory at the end of time – then from the 16th December onwards we think of Jesus's coming in humility in the manger in Bethlehem. It is a beautiful time of year but also a difficult one to be away from friends and family. Let us spend this month preparing for the coming of Jesus and praying for those with whom we would most like to spend it.

6TH DECEMBER

SAINT NICHOLAS, BISHOP

St Nicholas (fourth century) was born perhaps at Patara (now in Turkey) and became bishop of Myra. He may have been imprisoned under the Emperor Diocletian and have attended the Council of Nicaea which opposed the Arian heresy. He is venerated in both the East and the West, especially as a patron of sailors and of children, as can be seen in the Christmas tradition of 'Santa Claus'. The saint's relics were later brought to Bari (Italy).

Pray today for all sailors, especially those who are far away from their children in the run-up to Christmas.



7TH DECEMBER

SAINT AMBROSE, BISHOP AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

St Ambrose (c.340-397) was born in Trier (now in Germany, but then capital of the Roman prefecture of Gaul) and worked as a lawyer. In 370 he was appointed Governor of Liguria and Aemilia, with a residence in Milan. In 374 he was chosen to be the city's bishop, much to his surprise – not only was he a layman, but he was also not yet baptised: he was a catechumen preparing for baptism. He proved to be an outstanding bishop, not afraid to challenge the actions of the emperor and uncompromising in his struggle against Arianism. His converts included St Augustine and his teachings have led him to be numbered as one of the Latin Doctors of the Church.

9TH DECEMBER

**SAINT JUAN DIEGO
CUAUHTLATOATZIN**

St Juan Diego (1474-1548) was born near what is now Mexico City and converted to Christianity in middle age. He showed a great piety and walked many miles to attend Mass. While doing so on 9 December 1531, the Blessed Virgin appeared to him on Mount Tepeyac, asking that a shrine be built on the spot. The local bishop asked for a sign and Our Lady left a miraculous portrait of herself on St Juan Diego's tilma or mantle.



POPE FRANCIS PRAYER INTENTIONS FOR DECEMBER 2024

**FOR PILGRIMS OF HOPE**

We pray that this Jubilee Year strengthen our faith, helping us to recognize the Risen Christ in our daily lives, and that it may transform us into pilgrims of Christian hope.

Lectio Divina – a short introduction

How to link up with Jesus and with God if you can't get to Mass? Read the Word of God in scripture. It is like a letter from home, written specially for you – and God is writing to you. Perhaps light a candle to show God's presence.

Take a short passage, perhaps the Sunday gospel. Put yourself in the presence of God, open yourself to God, for God is all around you.

What is God writing to you about? What is Jesus saying to you? Imagine the scene. You are one of the disciples, listening and watching. Ask Jesus what he means for you.

Read the passage again, until it enters your heart. It may help to do this with others, to share with them and learn from them what Jesus is saying to them. Always end with a blessing, a sign of real friendship for your brothers and sisters and a prayer for each one's needs.

The Boy Jesus asking Questions

SCRIPTURE READING FOR OCTOBER

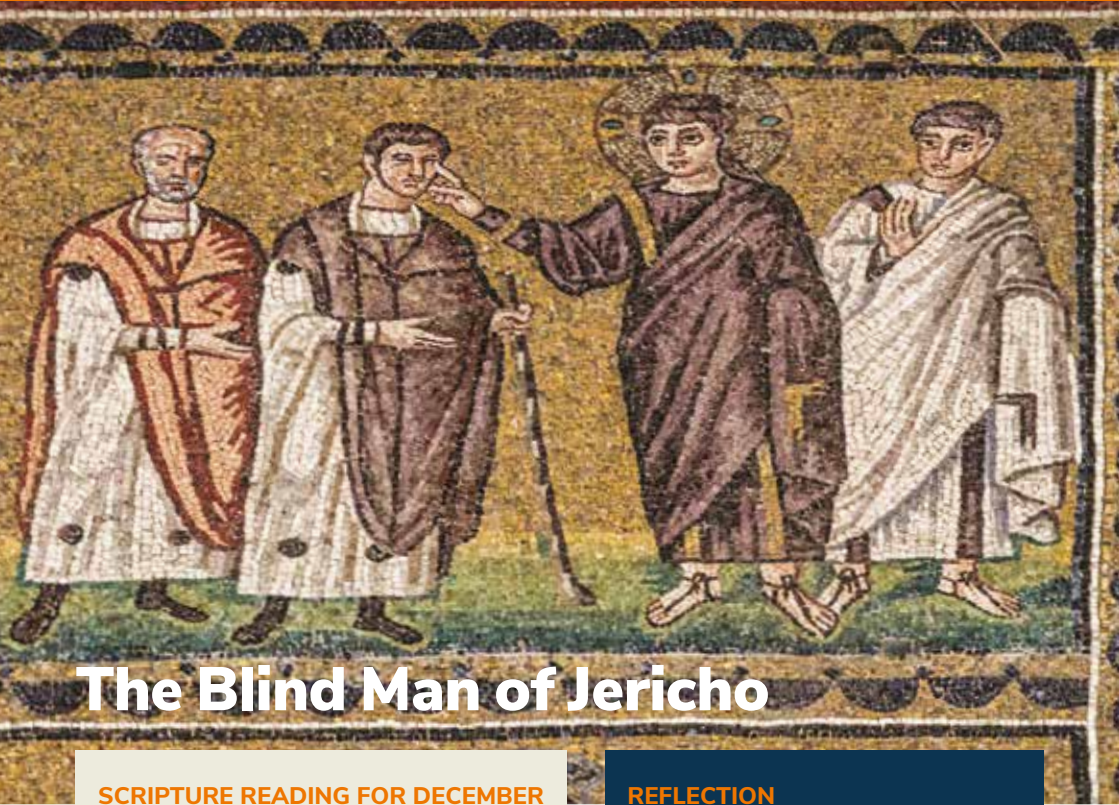
Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the festival as usual. When the days of the festival were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was in the party, and after a day's journey they started looking for him among their relations and acquaintances. When they could not find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him.

After three days, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. When they saw him they were overcome, and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? See, your father and I have been searching for you anxiously.' He replied, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' (Lk 2:41-52)

REFLECTION

Every month the Pope puts forward a special intention, something for which we should pray. This month it is that we should all search for the truth together, listen to one another and learn more about God and our belief in Christ as Son of God. Jesus himself was the Teacher, but he was always open to other people, ready to listen to their opinions. Once the risen Christ had left the disciples and had given them the Spirit at Pentecost, they constantly met together to consult, to learn from one another – often after disagreement – and to share the Wisdom of the Spirit as it was given to each of them.





The Blind Man of Jericho

SCRIPTURE READING FOR DECEMBER

They reached Jericho; and as he left Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus – that is, the son of Timaeus – a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, saying, 'Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me.' And many of them rebuked him and told him to keep quiet, but he only cried out much more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man saying, 'Courage! Get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus replied by saying, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'Rabbuni, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go, your faith has saved you.' And at once he could see again and followed him along the road. (Mk 10:46-52)

REFLECTION

As we prepare for the special Holy Year in 2025, the Pope asks us to pray that we may be pilgrims in hope. Whatever goes wrong, whatever disappointments attack us, may we still rely on the loving response of God. The blind man of Jericho went on calling on Jesus, even when everyone told him to shut up and stop pestering Jesus. It was an absurd request – whoever heard of a blind man receiving back his sight? – but he went on crying out to Jesus for help. Jesus was alert to his cries and his needs. As pilgrims in hope, we believe that even if we don't get what we asked for, Jesus will give us an answer to our prayers even more wonderful than we expected. He knows our needs better than we do.



Stella Maris launches Tanzania operation as region feels strain of Red Sea attacks

- **Stella Maris Tanzania will provide practical, pastoral and spiritual support to seafarers at the port of Dar es Salaam and on visits to fishing communities along the Tanzanian coast.**
- **New mission will serve increasing number of ship visits in East Africa as vessels divert away from perilous Red Sea routes.**
- **Rising numbers of seafarers face longer journey times, increasing stress and isolation.**
- **Stella Maris now has a presence in every major port from Kenya to Namibia.**

Stella Maris is extending operations in East Africa with the opening of a new operation in the port city of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to support seafarers and fishing communities.

Stella Maris Tanzania was officially inaugurated on Friday 28 June at a ceremony attended by the Archbishop of Dar es Salaam and representatives from local seafaring and fishing communities as well as those from the Kenyan Port Authority in Mombasa.

The new team is being spearheaded by chaplain Father Patrick Musumbu, a Kenyan national who has lived and worked in Tanzania for 7 years and is leaving the parish he has built there to lead Stella Maris in Dar es Salaam. He will work with a team of volunteers as part of a network including

neighbouring centres along the East and South African coast. Their work will also take them into local fishing communities and to the island of Zanzibar.

Stella Maris's Jonathan Heard, who is helping establish the team in Tanzania, said more seafarer support is vital on Africa's East Coast with seafarers under increasing strain in the region.

"Our new mission opens at a time when seafarers need additional support with the rising numbers of vessels diverting here to avoid the Red Sea," he said, "Not only does this mean more crews passing through the region; it also means that seafarers face being at sea significantly longer – sometimes months longer – than they anticipated.

"When seafarers spend very long periods of time at sea without adequate stops to rest and recuperate and without seeing anyone from outside their immediate crew, they are more likely to experience mental and physical health problems, and feelings of isolation and loneliness.

"We want to ensure that every seafarer visiting the African continent can get the help they need. That might be as simple as offering friendship and the opportunity to talk without judgement; providing free Wifi connectivity and the chance to make contact with family at home; arranging medical help for sick or injured seafarers; giving spiritual support if requested, or pastoral care for crews facing bereavement after a death on board."

Fr Pat and his team will also work with local fishing communities along the Tanzania coast where a relatively high

mortality rate of 1% is linked to unsafe practices as well as drug and alcohol misuse more common in poorer, rural areas. Their role will be to support these communities to fish more safely through education and practical support.

Stella Maris's East and Southern Africa network is one of eight regional networks set up and operated by the global charity to support seafarers and fishers around the world.

Jonathan Heard explains: "Our regional networks are coming together to share information and expertise and to advocate for seafarers and fishers in this part of Africa. Being part of a regional network means that we're not waiting for a problem to arise in port. Instead, we're communicating with our colleagues in neighbouring countries to understand the

needs of a ship's crew or an individual seafarer and preparing to offer the right type of support, in person, when they arrive in our port."

Speaking at the launch, Archbishop Ruwa-Ich, Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, said: "The life of the fisher and seafarer is very tough and they deserve the attention of the church ... [the archdiocese] are

willing and ready to support this noblest of endeavours. Fishers and seafarers live unseen lives and the church has a duty to reach those living on the margins. We thank Stella Maris for taking up this mission on our behalf, and we thank Stella Maris UK for their support in helping us start this mission, and their commitment to helping us."

Speaking on the day the new mission was inaugurated, Stella Maris CEO Tim Hill said:
"We are delighted to welcome Father Pat and his team to our international network. Stella Maris Tanzania enhances our existing programme in the region and our ability to provide continuous welfare assistance, collective advocacy and direct action for seafarers, fishers and their families around the world."

Mother Cabrini

Who is St Frances Cabrini?

The youngest of thirteen children, Frances Cabrini was born on July 15, 1850 in a small village called Sant'Angelo Lodigiano near the city of Milan, Italy. She grew up enthralled by the stories of missionaries and made up her mind to join a religious order. Because of her frail health, she was not permitted to join the Daughters of the Sacred Heart who had been her teachers and under whose guidance she obtained her teaching certificate.

However, in 1880, with seven young women, Frances founded the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She was as resourceful as she was prayerful, finding people who would donate what she needed in money, time, labour and support. She and her sisters wanted to be missionaries in China; she visited Rome to obtain an audience with Pope Leo XIII. The Pope told Frances to go "not to the East, but to the West" to New York rather than to China as she had expected. She was to help the thousands of Italian immigrants already in the United States.

In 1889, New York seemed to be filled with chaos and poverty, and into this

new world stepped Mother Frances Cabrini and her sister companions. Cabrini organized catechism and education classes for the Italian immigrants and provided for the needs of the many orphans. She established schools and orphanages despite tremendous odds.

Soon, requests for her to open schools came to Frances Cabrini from all over the world. She travelled to Europe, Central and South America and throughout the United States. She made 23 transatlantic crossings and established 67 institutions: schools, hospitals and orphanages.

Her activity was relentless until her death. On December 22, 1917, in Chicago, she died. In 1946, she was canonised by Pope Pius XII in recognition of her holiness and service to mankind and was named Patroness of Immigrants in 1950.





A powerful and inspiring film about the life of Sister Frances Saverio Cabrini has been a great success in the United States, including among atheists and those of other faiths.

By Fr. Paweł Rytel-Andrianik

A film about a religious sister, Francesca Cabrini, who embodied sensitivity to migrants, faith, and a “never give up” attitude, has reached fourth place in the American box office.

“Muslims, atheists, and Christians saw the film, and they all say one thing: that they want to be like Cabrini,” says Executive Producer Eustace Wolfington.

The film was produced by Angel Studios, a company that also made the internationally successful series *The Chosen* about Jesus of Nazareth.

The film is directed by Alejandro Gómez Monteverde, who directed and co-wrote *Sound of Freedom*, one of the most successful movies in America in 2023.

Cabrini opened in American cinemas on Women’s Day, March 8, and will soon hit screens in Italy and many countries worldwide. Pope Francis had the opportunity to watch some scenes from the film, which tells, in a Hollywood style, the story of Sister Frances Saverio Cabrini, who

lived from 1850 to 1917.

Sister Frances Cabrini is played by Cristiana Dell’Anna, known for her role in the *Gomorra* series. Giancarlo Giannini plays Leo XIII, and John Lithgow, winner of two Golden Globes, also has a role. Andrea Bocelli and his 12-year-old daughter Virginia sing a beautiful duet, with Virginia making her acting debut.

“The movie is hitting people’s hearts. And they’re saying that they came to a movie, upset about the broken world, and they are walking out of here on fire with the hope that they want to do something. And this created all kinds of lifting up for so many people, especially young people,” Eustace Wolfington concludes.

Today the Missionary Sisters, their lay collaborators and volunteers work as teachers, nurses, social workers, administrators and members of institutional boards of trustees. They can be found on six continents and fifteen countries throughout the world – wherever there is a need.



Christmas

➤ **We know so little about St Joseph, we don't even have a record of what he said. Yet though his role was quiet and in the background, we can be sure that he played an important role as the foster-father of Jesus and the spouse of Our Lady. Here is what we know about his marriage to Mary, his role in the birth of Jesus and in the life of his Foster Son.**

through the eyes of St Joseph

What we know of St Joseph in historical terms is found in the opening chapters of the Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke. Other information has come down to us via the apocryphal writings – that is, writings that were ultimately not accepted by the Church – which were in circulation during the early centuries. But while some of what they contain about him may be true, it is only in the Gospels that we have absolute certainty, since the Church has accepted only them as canonical.

And what is in the Gospels about him is so little! We would love to know more. But we do not even have any record of what he said. St Joseph played a very important role as the foster-father of Jesus and the spouse of Our Lady, but he did so quietly, remaining in the background.

Joseph was of the House of David, and the tribe of Judah, and from the Gospels we learn that he was born in Bethlehem, the City of David near Jerusalem. His genealogy is given in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. At the time when he entered into his great role as head and protector of the Holy Family, he was living in Nazareth in Galilee, far to the north of Bethlehem. The reason for this move is uncertain, but perhaps it was due to the necessity of finding work there as a carpenter. It was probably in Nazareth that Joseph became betrothed to Mary, and then their marriage ceremony would have taken place after the Annunciation, about a year later. In the Jewish culture of the time, betrothal was

considered to be the equivalent of marriage in everything but name.

It is from the apocryphal writings that the idea of Joseph being an old man originated, and these also give details of the story that Joseph was chosen to be Our Lady's spouse in a miraculous way. But given the difficulties he had to endure, it is unlikely that he was very old, and it is more probable that he was in his thirties or perhaps his forties when Jesus was born.

The marriage of St Joseph and Our Lady

According to St Augustine (354-430) and St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who have been regarded as amongst the foremost Catholic thinkers, although the marriage of Our Lady and St Joseph was a true marriage, it was a chaste and virginal one.

The distress of St Joseph on finding out that Our Lady was with child, following the Annunciation of the birth of the Christ Child to her by the Angel Gabriel, was thus considerable, and his faith in her was certainly put to the test. From this we can already gain an idea of Joseph's holiness and greatness, in that his reaction was very different from what might have been expected. Instead of reacting angrily, to spare Our Lady any embarrassment he resolved to send her away quietly. For this reason St Matthew described him as a "just man". Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife,

for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:20-21).

The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem

St Joseph did not delay, but when he awoke he firmly resolved to make Mary his wife, and then, some time later, when the baby was due, it became necessary for them to go to Bethlehem in order to comply with the order from the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, for a census. This must have been a difficult journey for both of them, but their distress was compounded when, on arriving in Bethlehem, they could find nowhere to stay, even though the birth was imminent. Here, too, was a strong test of Joseph's faith. The holy couple eventually found some lodging, traditionally located in caves outside Bethlehem, and it was here that Our Lady gave birth to Jesus without the usual pains of childbirth. What a mysterious and wonderful event that must have been for Joseph to be part of such a marvel.

The Gospel of Luke then outlines how local shepherds, alerted to the miraculous birth by hosts of angels, came to reverence the child, and also how Mary pondered on all these things in her heart, an attitude of awe and contemplation surely shared by her silent spouse. St Joseph was also with Our Lady when she went to the Temple for the Presentation of the baby Jesus, but he remained in the background as the aged Simeon spoke to Mary and prophesied how her child was destined to be a sign of contradiction for many in Israel, and spoke about how a sword of sorrow – the crucifixion – would pierce her soul (Lk 2:34-35).

St Joseph and the Holy Family

Joseph had an important role to play following the visit of the Wise Men, and the hurried departure of the Holy Family to avoid the wrath of King Herod. Once again,

an angel appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to flee to Egypt with Mary and the child, because Herod wanted to kill him. Joseph arose that same night in obedience to this command and the Holy Family departed for Egypt, where they stayed until Herod was dead.

Joseph was told about this event through another dream in which God's angel told him to go back to his own country. But on their return, following another dream they went to live in Nazareth in Galilee (Mt 2).

We hear nothing about the everyday life of the Holy Family in Nazareth, and must assume that St Joseph's life henceforth was entirely focused on providing for Mary and Jesus, living a simple life with them, and supporting them by means of his work as a carpenter while remaining faithful to the religious practices of his ancestors.

The last time Joseph is mentioned in the Bible, though not by name, occurs during the narration of the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple when he was twelve, after he had been lost for three days. But once again the focus of this account is on Mary, although she does refer to St Joseph touchingly as Jesus's father (Lk 2:41-52).

We are not told anything about Joseph's death, but presumably this happened before the beginning of the public life of Christ, since further on in the Gospels we hear of Jesus's mother and brothers (Mt 12:46), but never of Joseph, although Jesus was known as the son of Joseph (Jn 1:45). And it is certain that if Joseph had still been alive at the time of the crucifixion, then Jesus would have entrusted Mary to him while on the cross, rather than to St John. We do not know where he was buried, and no cultus has been attached to any bodily relics of his. Given the fact that St Joseph surely died in the arms of Jesus and Mary, and surrounded by their love, he has come to be recognised as the patron of a happy death.



Stella Maris is the largest ship-visiting network in the world. We improve the lives of seafarers and fishers through our network of local chaplains and seafarer centres, expert information, advocacy and spiritual support.



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