

For You Too Were Once Aliens...

A STATEMENT BY THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF NEW YORK STATE
November 13, 2025 | Memorial of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini



Leviticus 19:33-34

"When an alien resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt."



In September, a striking mural depicting immigrants of the past and present was dedicated at Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan. Among the multitude of those immigrants now gracing the narthex walls of our venerable metropolitan cathedral – nameless men and women who came to this land often "tired...poor...[and] yearning to be free" – stands a young Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini.

Mother Cabrini, a woman consecrated to the Lord, was an indefatigable advocate, protector, and educator of newly arrived immigrants to New York. A native of Italy, she overcame anti-Italian prejudice in her adopted country of America and established, with God's grace, numerous charitable institutions and schools to serve those finding their way in a new land.

Mother Cabrini reminds us of the Church's longstanding care and concern for immigrants, as the mural itself, stunning in its scope, illustrates an indisputable fact: New York was and is a land of immigrants whose contributions have enriched and transformed, indeed built, our society.

Contemplating this magnificent mural at a moment when our nation considers again the plight of the immigrant, we recall that Christian charity, as lived so powerfully by Mother Cabrini, demands we welcome the stranger and treat every individual with respect and dignity.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes this clear.

"The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him."

"Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants' duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens." (n. 2241)

Pope Leo XIV, like his predecessors, has already taught this truth and shown particular solicitude towards migrant refugees—those who leave their homes not simply to seek a better life abroad, but who are forced to take flight because of violence and oppression in their own nations. In his first apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, proclaimed on October 4, 2025, the Memorial of Saint Francis of Assisi, he wrote: