



Catholic English
Learn English with the Saints

CE5 – Mother Cabrini

Introduction

Hello, and a very warm welcome to the fifth episode of the Catholic English Podcast, where you can learn English with the saints. I'm your host, Henry, and I'm very happy to be here with you again.

Today for the first time we're going to be hearing the story of a saint who actually learned English, among other things. Her method, in the New York of the 1890s, was to read news reports in Italian and English language newspapers and compare them. Luckily we have more convenient and easy ways of learning foreign languages today.

Soon after I started learning Polish, I found the Real Polish podcast and started listening to stories of other immigrants to the USA. For example Sylvester Stallone and Og Mandino (who were born in the USA, to Italian immigrant families). If I didn't need to learn Polish, I would never have been interested in these people or their stories, but I listened again and again until I understood.

The reason these stories were shared on the Real Polish podcast was for motivation. This is one of the big challenges for anyone trying to learn a foreign language. Many people simply feel like it would be a good idea to learn another language – to 'broaden our horizons' as we sometimes say, meaning to have a wider, broader, perspective on life. Some people think that it will help them to find a better job, to earn more money.

Most people who achieve some success in the world have a pretty hard time of it at the beginning, and so do language learners. There are always challenges, failures, defeats. How do we motivate ourselves in the face of these difficulties, especially when our friends are calling us to come to a party, have a coffee, take a break from the stress and hard work.

Learning a language isn't in the same league, which means it's not in the same order of difficulty. It's much easier than becoming a millionaire, but still we need to constantly find our motivation to keep on learning despite the boredom, the difficulty, and the lack of visible results. How do we go on, day after day, week after week, year after year? How do we even get to the end of the first year for that matter!?

Motivation is a popular subject these days. There are many best-selling books on the subject, podcasts, courses, life coaches. It's a serious issue which affects us all, and if we find it difficult to motivate ourselves, our life might turn out to be quite difficult, and it may have a negative impact on people around us.

I'm not going to get into the psychology of motivation in this podcast, but there is a little clue in what I've just said: 'if we find it difficult to motivate ourselves.' The thing is, the world puts the responsibility for motivation onto the individual. OK, if you're a child, it's your parents' responsibility to motivate you – but how well does that work? Then we grow up and our parents hope we can somehow start motivating ourselves. The question the world doesn't really like to ask is 'who is this self?' Who is the self that has to motivate itself, look after itself, discipline itself. And if this doesn't work, the world is ready to condemn you: if you end up homeless, it's your fault; if



you commit a crime, you did it yourself, and you, your ‘self,’ will have to accept the consequences (e.g. prison.)

I can’t help asking, if this motivation business is such a big issue, where does Jesus talk about it in the Bible? What do the saints say about it? As far as I can tell, nothing. It seems like the concept of motivation only started being talked about 200 years ago, by scientists, and really started being an object of research by psychologists, mainly in the 20th Century.

As Catholics, or at least people with a certain interest in Catholicism and the Catholic way of learning English, maybe this should make us sit up and think. We’re so surrounded by talk of motivation, we don’t even consider questioning it.

Anyway, one fairly good method of thinking about this issue, is to consider the lives of the saints. So let’s look at the life of Mother Cabrini, and see if her example or her words can give us some clues about this question. I also hope that her story might inspire you to action.

A fragile beginning

Francesca Cabrini was born on 15 July 1850. She was a surprise child, as her mother was 52 years old at the time of her birth. She ‘came into the world,’ she was born, 2 months premature. We mainly use this word premature to talk about babies who are born before the end of nine months. If they’re born a week or two before, they’re just early, but a month or two is certainly premature. Sometimes we also talk about premature ideas, for example ‘Don’t you think it’s a bit premature to think about getting married? You’ve only known each other for a few weeks.’

Anyway, Francesca was premature. She was tiny and weak, fragile – easily damaged or broken. Nine of her brothers and sisters had already died, leaving only one brother and two sisters. Not wanting to take any risks, her parents took her to be baptised the same day.

In the book I’m using as a source for this podcast, [Immigrant Saint: The Life of Mother Cabrini](#) by Pietro Di Donato, there are two things I would like to share from the story of her birth. The first quote is this:

The sagacious [sage, or wise] midwife shook her head. “The little angel is like a lily, and just as frail. She is almost transparent, and has not the strength for this world. If she lives, I tell you now, it will be a miracle.”

The midwife, the experienced woman who helps other women give birth, these days a professional role, said that baby Francesca was frail. We usually talk about people or other living things as frail if they haven’t got much strength. If we talk about objects, for example a glass, or about more abstract ideas, such as a desert ecosystem, then we describe them as fragile, rather than frail. Other examples of what we might call concepts, or ideas – more abstract than concrete – are beginnings, or lives. So we say a fragile beginning, or we say, her life was very fragile – although she herself was frail.

The other note here, we see this many times, is this old way of speaking/writing in English: ‘She ... *has not* the strength...’ In British English we’d rather say these days, ‘She *hasn’t got* the strength...’ In a way, we can see that the verb and the tense have changed. In the old way of speaking the verb is *has* (to have), and the word *not* simply negates this verb. Modern US usage is slightly similar I



believe: we might say ‘she doesn’t have the strength...’ All of this is using the present simple tense, which is all fine – we’re talking about facts or opinions. The modern British English speaker would usually use the present perfect, so the verb ‘has’ becomes an auxiliary verb to the main verb ‘get’ or in this case ‘got’ because we use the past participle in the present perfect: ‘she hasn’t got the strength...’ For the British person, in order to have, you first need to get (‘I’ve got a pen.’) whereas for the American, simply, ‘I have a pen’ or ‘I don’t have a pen.’

If you’re not interested in grammar, I apologise, and don’t worry about this. You don’t have to learn it, at least in the beginning. But if you want to be able to read these old texts, it’s useful sometimes to understand some of the traps the grammar can create for us, traps that can make it more difficult to understand what we’re reading.

The second quotation from Francesca’s birth is this:

From the east high above the Lombard plain appeared a swift moving cloud of white. It was a flock of doves. Other farmers saw them, and ran to their fields with pitchforks and shotguns to protect their rice and wheat, but the doves did not come to plunder [steal]. They [flew] ... to the Cabrini cottage... The white feathery multitude whirled in a circle above the cottage and courtyard.

Agostino [Francesca’s father] looked at them curiously. In his lifetime doves had never come to Sant’Angelo. Where had they come from? Why? ... [One of the doves] flew to the bedroom window. As it perched upon the sill and cooed, the sunlight seemed to flash more brightly, and the cries of the newborn baby sang forth.

I’m going to resist the temptation to explain too much from this passage. The few words which you might not understand aren’t really that necessary for understanding the whole. It’s another miracle. If Francesca lives, it will be a miracle, and here we have the miracle of the white doves. It reminds me of the miracle of the white bees that swarmed around St Rita on the day of her baptism when she was 5 days old.

The ‘white feathery multitude’ immediately makes us think of those other heavenly multitudes of angels. A multitude is basically a large number, a very large number. After the angel had announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, ‘suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host’ or a multitude of angels, ‘praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

The thing is, here we have a question. As Catholics we believe what is written in Holy Scripture. We must believe – we don’t have a choice. When we read the stories of the saints, we do have a choice. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that, for most people, the default option with things like these miracles around Francesca’s and Rita’s births, is to assume that it’s just a bit too much poetic licence, that of course it can’t really have happened, that people are just projecting their dreams into the past.

The opposite extreme is to believe in every reported miracle, to see and to experience miracles and to ‘suspend all disbelief’ as we say (to not disbelieve anything).

It seems to me that the healthy ground lies somewhere in the middle. I’d like to believe the story of the doves. It seems possible for me, especially given what happened later in Francesca’s life, and



for many other reasons too. And if it's not true, not real, then I lose nothing by believing. On the other hand, if I'm too quick to disbelieve in these and similar stories, then I might lose out on something. If I disbelieve everything that doesn't seem scientifically provable, acceptable to our modern rational way of thinking, then maybe I do miss out on something, maybe this attitude makes me blind to something important in the world – but I want to see. I want to be one of those people about whom Jesus could say, you have eyes to see, rather than one of the blind masses. So I keep on questioning, and reading the saints.

Fortunately, despite this fragile start, Francesca lived. She went to school, she worked hard. At 13 she finished primary school and was able to go to 'higher education' at the Daughters of the Sacred Heart School in a nearby town. Nowadays higher education refers to university studies, but in this case it simply means higher than usual for a village girl. She passed all her exams there with highest honours, or in other words, with excellent results, according to the book I read, and became a qualified schoolteacher at the age of 18, but she had been dreaming for years of becoming a missionary. She was in love with Jesus. She had grown up with stories about him and the saints, and she wanted to be his bride, to dedicate her life to him.

Unfortunately, it seemed for now at least that this wasn't going to be possible. Despite the successes she achieved in school, she had missed a lot of time due to illness, her lungs were weak and she coughed blood (a sign of tuberculosis) and she never left behind the frailty of her beginning. She was a slight girl, meaning small and thin. The opposite of slight is sturdy, meaning big and strong, having stamina. If you have stamina, you can keep on going for a long time. These days we rarely describe a person as slight, but we often use the word slight in a similar context: 'I'm OK thanks, just a slight cold,' just a little cold, or 'I've just got a slight problem with this document, could you check it for me?' Not a serious problem, just a slight problem. In this case the opposite of slight isn't sturdy (that's only for people) but big, or major, or serious.

After she finished school at 18, Francesca went to the mother superior of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart convent and asked to join the sisters. Mother Grassi

gently shook her head and said, "Bless you, enlightened child, but the way of His brides is most arduous [very tiring], and our community may bring in only the physically strong. It is with regret that I refuse you.

Francesca went home and devoted herself to caring for her elderly parents, and her sister who had become disabled by polio, a childhood disease that sometimes causes paralysis.

Despite her frailty, she worked on the farm, cooked and cleaned, looked after her sister and her parents, and went into the village caring for the sick and needy.

A strange start

At some point a local priest asked Francesca to help out teaching in a school for a while, just a few weeks. I'm not a historian, so the exact date and sequence of events don't concern me. You can find out if you want. A few weeks turned into two years. Francesca walked a couple of kilometres to school in the morning and back each evening, whatever the weather, after voluntarily giving religious education lessons after school.



Later, the same priest, now Monseigneur Serrati, had a problem with an orphanage, a home for children whose parents had died. He didn't know what to do. He thought the owner of the orphanage was dishonest with the money she was paid to look after the orphans, and abusive to the children, but he saw no way to change the situation. He called again on Francesca for help, probably knowing that she wouldn't refuse.

The description of the orphanage in Di Donato's book is lurid. The definition of [lurid](#) in the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries is 'presented in a way that is intended to shock.' It's hard to think about these things today, but the details are probably quite accurate. Walking into the House of Providence (as the orphanage was called) was a bit like walking into hell. The owner of the house, Antonia Tondini, really didn't know what to do with the girls in her care, and she and her friend who lived in the house with her responded with violence, abuse and neglect. Francesca was a threat to them and to the money they received for the orphans, and the only way they knew how to deal with her was more abuse. Abuse, ab-use, literally means 'wrong use.' Certainly if we think of the abuse of funds, money, for the orphans, it was a wrong use – it was used by Tondini for whatever she wanted, not to feeding or clothing the girls, not for keeping them warm, and not for keeping the building clean and in good repair.

But abuse these days is much more deeply understood: thanks to our long Christian heritage, we are gradually seeing things more and more clearly. So now neglect, not looking after someone or something, is understood as a form of abuse. If you don't care about a child, and you don't feed it or clothe it properly, this is neglect, but it's also abuse. If you hit a child, it's certainly classed as abuse, but if you shout at him or her, the emotional damage can be just as great, and we now call this emotional abuse. If you prevent someone from going to church, it's spiritual abuse.

Francesca responded with love for the girls in the House of Providence. She cleaned them, she clothed them, she made mattresses for them to sleep on, she cleaned the whole place, she taught them about mathematics and geography and history, and most importantly she kept on telling the girls about Jesus and about his message and his promise. In the face of the abuse that she and the girls suffered, she felt powerless, but Jesus, her love, was always with her and he gave her the strength to keep on going and to support the girls in her care. Di Donato writes:

For Francesca, who could never find enough time to devote to undistracted adoration, constructive action became itself a form of prayer.

She conveyed [passed on, gave a message] to the girls in her care her conviction [her strong belief] that work, undertaken [done, carried out] in love of Him, was a kind of worship. She revealed to [showed, uncovered for] them how priceless was time, and told them that each moment must be the song of cleanliness and well-being and learning.

One day, after three years in the House of Providence, sharing her faith, her love, hard work, and her dreams of one day becoming a missionary, seven of the girls came to her, and said that they too wanted to become missionaries – please would Francesca take them with her.

Francesca went again to Monseigneur Serrati, and again told him that she wanted to become a nun, and she had seven girls who wanted to join her. In fact it was Serrati who had advised the various convents that Francesca had applied to, that she was too weak, too ill, and she couldn't manage. But after watching her hard work and successes for two years in the school and another three in the orphanage, he had to admit that, as quoted by Di Donato, 'Long before this moment I should have



known that the Bridegroom of Heaven had already betrothed thee [promised to marry you, or, taken you as his bride].’

Not long after, Francesca and her seven daughters made their perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. She was at last a nun. After all those years of trying, hoping and praying, she was a nun.

She and her seven daughters went back home to the only home they knew, the House of Providence. Their new status as nuns didn’t change the abusive attitude or actions of the house’s owner, but many more orphans were now sent to the house, and the new nuns were kept busy. Finally, after another three years, Sister Francesca realised ‘that she now had to grow to the true strength of a mother and look after His children’ as Di Donato put it. She went to the bishop and told him everything.

To cut a long story short, as we say, the Bishop was relieved that he could finally take action, and delighted with Sister Francesca. Together with Monseigneur Serrati, he said they would dissolve the orphanage, and suggested that Francesca should finally fulfil her dream of becoming a missionary. With her seven daughters she should form a new religious order of missionary nuns. Francesca, soon to become the first Mother Superior of the new order, set out to find a house straight away. Early the next morning, she has a vision, Jesus is pointing to her: beyond the Franciscan church, beyond St Peter’s, further towards the ocean. She goes to the place indicated and among the trees finds an old abandoned monastery, full of fresh air and light. It will be a perfect start, and all the orphans from the old house can move there too.

So, times were crazy. The church at the time was under attack from the new Liberal movements built on the French revolution and the new philosophies, the new sciences, and the industrial revolution with its factories and machines. The craziness produced more craziness. Sometimes it meant that corrupt orphanages couldn’t be properly managed, and sometimes it meant that a young nun, never even going through the novitiate, the usual process of religious formation, could suddenly become Mother Cabrini, superior of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

Building

It was 1880 and Mother Cabrini was now 30. She was still coughing blood, but inside her frail body was ... Was what? Do we have words to say? Maybe we should say she was moved. She was moved by her love for Christ, her betrothed, and by the love for his children. There was work to be done, and she started without delay, together with her Sisters and all the girls from the orphanage. They had no money, but they worked, they built, they found solutions, she went from door to door around the town asking for donations. They always believed that God would provide, and he did.

The organisation, devotion and success of the first convent, orphanage and school of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart were well appreciated. Calls came for her to open new branches of the order. By 1887 she had seven houses, and she wanted to expand to Rome. Despite all barriers, with practical humility, she went to Rome. There was no chance of her being listened to, but she persisted, and eventually she was asked to open two small homes: a free school in Porta Pia, and a nursery in Aspra. The church could offer some equipment, but no money for food or rent. Mother Cabrini called for five sisters to be sent from the mother house in Codogno, and started looking for buildings.



Cardinal-Vicar Parocchi, who had finally given her these ‘two little crosses’ which he half expected to be impossible,

observed her almost incredible wisdom and industry in successfully establishing the schools in Porta Pia and Aspra with little funds. The cardinal saw that she instinctively put into practice the new tenets [guiding principles] for Catholic education that the Pope wished to promote, and that she was the kind of woman religious the church needed for the challenging future. She brought a vivid [bright] new torch to illumine [light up] His camp. Her passion for Christ burned new life into cautiously tired, static [not moving, not changing], and complacent [content with the status quo] clerics.

This started to put her in a good position to go to the Pope, to seek his blessing for her dreamed of missionary work in China.

She continued to work, with her two missionary houses, schools, in Rome, and her seven in Lombardy. There were always requests for more capacity, more schools, more places for orphans. More young women were inspired to join the congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Mother Cabrini didn’t refuse anyone due to lack of bodily strength or health, but she was demanding:

Faith demanded detachment [letting go, the opposite of attachment] from people and things, for the inclinations [attractions, desires] of such personal attachment limited that universal love exemplified by the Spouse.

Each new house would be independent of other houses and would support itself, by begging, subscription [people promising monthly donations], soliciting [asking for] donations [gifts of money], taking in paying pupils, whatever means [methods] the locality suggested. The mother superior of each house would be chosen by her without sentiment [emotion] and strictly for the most capable administrative abilities.

The candidates admitted as postulants [women who wanted to become nuns] ... were to be won only by their voluntary love of Christ and by no other means. None were to be coaxed [strongly encouraged, often with promises of rewards] or forced under the standard “Imitation of Christ,” but each should take up with her entire body, mind, and soul her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to the Spouse.

Goodness must pour from her daughters without calculation or demonstration. Goodness must be a pure giving, and sacrifices for the Spouse would not be defined as such but as privileged treasures.

She knew that the purity of love and its works were beyond human recording. She knew that love not loved and lived was but a dead word. Her daughters would seek identity in the Sacred Heart, and by passionately longing for Christ, become their true selves.

I could talk a lot more about this, try to explain more the meanings of some of the words, but really it’s best if they speak for themselves. While we’re learning a new language, it’s great if we can listen and read to passages that interest us at the same time. By listening, we understand. By reading at the same time, we see all the words and hear them better. By listening and reading together we can easily understand 80% of what we’re listening to, or even believe that we understand it all.



Eventually, if we have time, we might read the text without listening. This is the slowest way, and it opens our eyes to things our ears didn't notice, and we see more words that we now realise we don't know the meanings of.

Really, as Catholics, Christians, just exposing ourselves to the words of the saints or the Bible is enough. The Holy Spirit then acts in us, sparks love in our hearts, and takes us along the narrow way of becoming our true selves. Of course this way is long – our whole life – but we must know that it keeps on working, and we need to keep on walking it, keep on listening, reading, looking, loving, praying, and each little step takes us towards the experience of the Kingdom of Heaven.

At the opening of a college in Piacenza [I apologise for my pronunciation to anyone who knows Italian – please forgive me] she became friends with Bishop Scalabrini of Piacenza. Bishop Scalabrini was very concerned, worried, about the problems being faced by Italian immigrants in the US. If someone has a problem, we often say that they 'face' a problem: the problem is metaphorically 'in front of them,' they're looking at it, facing it. In the late 1880s tens of thousands of Italians were emigrating, leaving the troubled Italian economy, hoping to find better opportunities in the US. Unfortunately they found different kinds of poverty. They became victims of discrimination – many employers treated them unfairly, they lived in very bad conditions, and they had none of the support networks that might have existed for them in Italy – for example the church.

Di Donato paints a lurid picture of the conditions of Italian immigrants in New York, Chicago, New Orleans at the time. I've read similar descriptions of conditions of the English miners and cotton mill workers, child labourers in the time of St John Bosco in Italy, Irish and African immigrants, Jewish people in the ghettos in Russia. I'll leave these stories for other writers.

Of course Mother Cabrini was eventually to meet the Pope. Leo XIII had already heard many good things about her, and if it's possible for a Pope to make friends, they kind of did. Leo certainly had a warm place in his heart for Mother Cabrini, and she for him (we speak like this, it's short for 'and she had a warm place in her heart for him' which is maybe obvious.) They wrote to each other and met several more times. Mother Cabrini was naturally doing what the Pope was trying to promote, so they provided each other with mutual support. And the Pope was to bless her dreams of missionary work over the ocean, not to China however, but to America. The Pope said, as quoted by Di Donato (I don't know if this is an actual citation, or poetic licence):

"Hundreds of thousands of our Italian souls in America have become lost and battered [beaten, the land can be battered by a storm for example] sheep, isolated from Christ, understandings, and ordinary decency [good manners]. The New World cries for the warmth and compassion of a mother's heart, a heart tempered [transformed] by love and sacrifice, the heart of the apostle. Francesca Cabrini, you have that very heart."

Arriving in New York on 31 March 1889, Mother Cabrini and her sisters found no one waiting for them, arrangements fallen through (failed, disappeared), nowhere to stay. Conditions were awful. Mother Cabrini was delighted that a true challenge faced her, and not something too easy. She got to work straight away of course. She said to her daughters:

"We must beware of two temptations, that of failure and that of success; and often prosperity [comfort, wealth] will be more dangerous than adversity [difficulty, hardship]."



People in positions of power and responsibility are always worried about money. If they open an orphanage, they must be sure that they can provide for the essential needs of the children, the building, the staff. There was a donation of \$5,000 for an orphanage, and a building had been found, but how could it be sustainable, the Archbishop asked. Mother Cabrini had no such worries, and she inspired trust in God in everyone around her – firstly by her hope and belief, and then by her success. The orphanage was started, and a school.

In May 1889 a New York newspaper published a report of the work of the new missionary sisters, going around the poor begging for alms, going to places where even the police were scared to go. They wrote of Mother Cabrini:

She does not know the English language, but she knows the universal language of the human spirit.

Soon she realized that in fact the Archbishop had been right in at least one of his worries – the orphanage was badly located (in the wrong place). She went looking and found a 450 acre, 225 ha site up the Hudson River. It turned out (she discovered) that it was owned by the Jesuits, and was a private school and monastery, perfect for her needs - but they were moving out because there was no water source, and selling it. Of course she had no money, but she said

Our Lord is my banker and will not fail to help me find the money. These problems overcome my naturally weak condition and make me strong! The bigger the problem, the stronger I become!

In July, she returned to Italy to check on the older houses and to bring more sisters to New York. On her return, she bought the new estate and prayed to Our Lady of Graces to help her find water, and in a dream was shown the location of a spring which was to provide plenty of water for all the site's future water needs.

She was asked by a wealthy Nicaraguan woman to open a school there. She knew that it wouldn't be for the poor, but the wealthy were often sorely in need, very much in need, or spiritual guidance, and the school could be a launching place for other missions in the country. She and 14 daughters set sail for Nicaragua in November 1891.

On Holy Tuesday 1892, after setting up the school in Nicaragua, she arrived in New Orleans. She was tired and ill and her daughters implored her, pleaded with her, begged her, not to walk around the city begging for donations in the suffocating heat [so hot that it was hard to breathe]. She replied

I also shall beg with you from door to door. Would you know the truth? [Would you like to know the truth?] Begging is disgusting to me! But I must conquer [defeat, get past] that disgust. I will not ask my daughters to attempt any duty that their mother cannot perform.

Within a matter a weeks they had a building which was used as a church, a convent, an orphanage and a school, and so many Italian immigrants came to the little church that they had to celebrate Mass under a canopy (like a tent) in the courtyard.

Thus her work continued. Soon she was persuaded to open her first hospital. It was set up and financed in a similar manner. Around her houses, schools, hospitals, problems continued to happen. Not all the time, and not everywhere, but there are always problems to occupy people in the world.



Mother Cabrini remained calm, and her daughters remained calm too, even when soldiers removed them from the school in Nicaragua and they had to hastily find some sort of home and work in Panama. During a storm at sea, on a ship back to South America one day, she wrote:

The winds roar [they sound like a lion], heavens darken, the waves arise and threaten to turn the steamer topsy-turvy [upside down]. All this matters nothing. I have given my trust, I must keep my word of honour, and with faith and confidence. Difficulties! What are they daughters? They are the mere playthings of children enlarged by our imagination, not yet accustomed to focus itself on the omnipotent.

‘But I am weak!’ Who is not weak? But with God’s help you can do everything. He never fails the humble and faithful. ‘Yes, but I am so fragile!’ We are all fragile, yet, when Christ is our strength, what shall we fear?

‘I have failed in generosity, I have fallen at the first temptation, now I shall not be able to do anything well.’ Who has not been tempted? Who has not somewhere fallen? Have you fallen? Then, humble yourself, and, with a lively act of contrition [feeling very sorry] from the depths of your heart, ask pardon, renew your promises to God, Then get on your feet and be doing with more courage than ever to repair your defects.

It wasn’t always stormy however. Mother Cabrini could see what she was doing, and she observed again and again the response to her initiatives. People would ask for help because they were too timid to start projects themselves. She would set a project in motion, and she found that motion begets motion, motion brings motion into being, motion supports motion, or movement. Once in Newark, New York, after paying the first months rent, the sisters were left with only 60 cents to face the future. But when a school was up and running, all the community were so happy that they would do whatever they could to support it.

What is motivation?

We’ve reached the point in the story where it’s about 20 years since Francesca became a nun, and she has another 20 years of work ahead of her. The stories continue to be just as beautiful, and the words that have come down to us, as we say, the words that history has saved for us to be able to see in her letters and other writings, are also beautiful. She didn’t believe in the arts of rhetoric, like St Francis of Sales, but despite her focus on practical truth for inspiring practical action, somehow her words never come across as utilitarian (the philosophy that only the use of things is important) or boring, but always penetrate us right to our hearts.

After just 25 years, she had over 1000 daughters in 50 houses, they looked after 5000 orphans, thousands of schoolchildren, and over 100,000 patients had already been treated in the hospitals she had founded.

As always, I’d love to go on quoting her, telling her story, but I must leave the end for anyone who’s interested to discover for themselves.

For now I’d like to return to the question I started thinking about at the beginning: what is motivation? And how can we see the question in the light that the saints give us? Or in other words, since the saints show us how to live, and they show us how to make our way to the Kingdom of



Heaven – they light our path with the light of truth – how can Saint Francesca Cabrini cast light, throw light, on the question of motivation?

Surely her motivation was love. Love for Jesus Christ, love of Jesus' love of us, his loving giving of himself for us on the cross, and love for all his children – especially the poorest and most needy.

It seems to me from what I've read (and I admit I haven't done a careful study) that the meaning of motivation is basically a euphemism for 'desire.' A euphemism is a word that we use in place of an offensive or difficult word. Euphemisms often sound similar to the words that we're not allowed to say in polite company. You know what I mean.

What sorts of motivation are there in the modern world? First and foremost, money. If we think we can get money for something, that's the biggest motivation (desire) for most people. What are the other big motivators (centres of desire)? Success, fame, beauty; anger, competition; sex, lust. It's almost a list of the seven deadly sins. The world has rejected God, decided that it can happily make money out of sin, repackaged and rebranded those old negative concepts, and come up with motivation.

I don't want to come across as a prude or puritan, as someone who rejects all kinds of fun, or some kind of throwback to a past age. I just want to ask, haven't we Catholics missed something?

We learn our catechism, we go to church on Sunday, we say our prayers. We know that there's good and evil in the world, but we often don't notice how insidious the world around us is. Insidious means 'spreading gradually or without being noticed, but causing serious harm.' Simple ideas like motivation, everyday things that we're taught at school, at work, things that really help us to get on in life, can sometimes hide a not so simple secret.

Now I need to confirm at this point, that I'm a fan of motivational techniques. I've learned about them, I've used them, and I've taught them. I will also continue to teach them. They really do help us to get on in life. They really do help us to learn English, to do the jobs that lie before us, to meet our obligations in life.

But I'm also on another path of learning and practice, a path which offers far more powerful tools, and far more beneficial results.

I choose to learn about motivation from the saints, and to follow their examples. I choose Mother Cabrini over Sly Stallone or Og Mandino any day, and I think that you will agree that she achieved amazing things.

One question that we might ask is whether the stories of the saints aren't just too 'superhuman?' Is it really possible for ordinary people like us to follow in their footsteps? Again, I think the church and the saints teach that we have been confused by a modern definition of the word human, which takes all the strength out of the reality that it really is to be a person made in the image and likeness of God.

We are made to follow in the footsteps of the saints – let that idea motivate us.



Conclusion

So we find ourselves at the end of another podcast. Thank you for listening. Well done for all your hard work. I know from experience the effort that's required to listen to podcasts like this in a foreign language. I encourage you as always to listen a few times if you can, and especially to listen and read at the same time – you will certainly learn more, and learn more easily if you can do this. Also, don't forget the advice of St Francis of Sales to pick a little spiritual bouquet from the podcast, or even a bouquet of English words or phrases, to keep with you, to reflect on.

I hope that you found the story interesting. We're motivated to listen and to learn English when we have material that somehow draws us in, material which is somehow understandable, but also somehow new. If it's too easy, it's boring. If it's too difficult, we can't last to the end. I'm trying to find a balance.

Please leave me a comment, or send me a message using the contact form on the website. I love to hear from you. What am I doing well, or what am I doing wrong? How can I make better podcasts in your opinion?

For the few people who are already following me, I'm a little late again. I'm struggling to find time for the podcast among my other commitments, but as Mother Cabrini often said, we need to have some challenges in our lives and I'm committed to carrying on. I'm about to go away for almost two weeks and I won't have access to a computer or recording equipment, but I have a plan for the next podcast, and I'm already preparing for Lent and Easter.

For now, I wish you good learning, good living, good relationships and good motivation.

Goodbye for now, and God bless.

Henry