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Editorial

The vision of St. Scalabrini 125 years later

The year 1901 was a dramatic time in our country, and nowhere was this more visible than in the nation's capital. President William McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist in September of that year, leading Vice President Theodore Roosevelt to become president.

At the same time, masses of Italians were leaving home towns and villages to seek a better future abroad. Roughly 136,000 Italians entered the U.S. in 1901. Washington's Italian-born population numbered 2,750, more than 11 percent of D.C.'s foreign-born residents. New York City, Chicago, Boston and other large urban areas counted far more.

President Roosevelt was sworn in as president on September 14, 1901, in Buffalo, New York, where he was on travel, later arriving in the president's house, (he was the first to call it the "White House.")

Less than one month later, on October 10, 1901, President Roosevelt received at the White House, Bishop John Baptist Scalabrini, who was traveling the United States to examine the living and social conditions of Italian immigrants on behalf of Pope Leo XIII and to advocate for the rights and welfare of migrants. No transcript exists of that meeting, but it's significant to note that President Roosevelt did not call to close the borders to immigration. Rather, he focused his attention on the anarchists.

In his first address, to the nation on December 3, 1901 he asked Congress to pass legislation to keep "anarchists and persons professing principles hostile to all government" out of the country. He called for immigration reform, stating that we need "every honest and efficient immigrant fitted to become an American citizen, every immigrant who comes here to stay, who brings a strong body, a good ear, and a resolute purpose to his duty well in every way and to bring up his children as law-abiding and God-

fearing members of the community."

In his speech Roosevelt also rallied against the immense power of corporate monopolies and trusts, arguing that the government should have the authority to supervise and regulate corporations to protect the public interest.

Marking a major shift in federal policy, he strongly advocated for forest preservation and the creation of public works like water reclamation systems to protect natural resources.

After he returned to Italy from his visit to the United States, in 1904, Bishop Scalabrini traveled to Brazil to visit his Italian missionaries and their missions. The following year, he fell seriously ill and died on June 1, 1905, few weeks shy of his 66th birthday.

Bishop Scalabrini was beatified by John Paul II in 1997 and canonized as a Saint by Pope Francis on October 9, 2022. In his official Vatican

Homily, Pope Francis praised Scalabrini's prophetic forward-thinking nature. Pope Francis stated that "with great vision," Scalabrini "looked forward to a world and a Church without barriers, where no one was a foreigner." He noted that Scalabrini did not view migration merely as a crisis, but as a "providential plan" to bring different peoples together. "I am the son of migrants," and urged the world to follow the new saint's example by ensuring all migrants are welcomed, accompanied, promoted, and integrated.

The Scalabrinians have continued his mission of aiding and protecting migrants—whether they live in a nation-state, on disputed borders, or on merchant ships—wherever migrants need assistance, comfort, and dignified treatment.

Our community will commemorate Bishop Scalabrini's visit to Washington with a symposium at Casa Italiana on October 23, 2026, and with a solemn mass at Holy Rosary on October 25.



Guest Opinion

In Dubious Battle: The Supreme Court and the Catholic Church

by Neil Thomas Proto*

On July 3rd, in the Holy Rosary Church, I listened intently to Pastor Maurizio Maifredi's personally-crafted, moving homily. Directed to me and to you. The homily deliberately reflected the enduring Catholic and moral imperative of the Scalabrinian Missionaries, the Augustinian pope, Leo XIV, and the special message of the Archdiocese of Washington,

DC: to respect, love, support, protect, defend, and care for immigrants, with unyielding vehemence for the poor and newly arrived. And to do so within our own and their duty to preserve the idea most central to our Declaration of Independence, that all men and women are created equal; that to Jesus, we are all made in his likeness; and that the stories of the moral courage of these immigrants—of their striving within and toward citizenship in this nation of immigrants—must be told and retold daily. This duty, Pastor Maifredi explained, must be acted upon. Especially now.

Especially because the Supreme Court had decided [*In Mullin v. Doe* 609 U.S. ____ (2026)] — only days before Pastor Maifredi spoke with the empathy that stems from the Italian immigrant origins of the Scalabrinians, the Pope, and this church—the disquieting fate now imposed on people and families decidedly dark-skinned and whose native language is not English, people who are in this nation legally and are devoted to its principled means for attaining citizenship.

All of these immigrants were crudely, notoriously, incorrectly, and racially denigrated by our government through the words and actions of our president. Through its silence in choosing not to recite these words and actions, the Supreme Court only encouraged their legitimacy. These words and actions were dismissed, not with the Constitutional need for articulation and analysis essential in the law (to show prejudice), but with a simple declaration, a mere pronouncement of certainty that all these words and actions were not improperly or prejudicially motivated. These immigrants, no longer protected by the law, are now forced to return to the acknowledged danger of an unwelcoming nation.

That battle against prejudice is known, often acutely, to everyone reading this essay. From the moment of their arrival, southern Italian immigrants were racially denigrated by university scholars in writing and teaching, who also supported elected officials who sought the same outcome in law; lynched in the South with impunity from the law; and

formally designated by the Immigration Service as a distinct "race" at the moment of arrival. They were dark-skinned, did not speak English, and had no welcoming nation to return to. Some were here illegally. In the darkest of ways, they were considered "unfit" to be among Anglo-Saxon Americans or even among those men—decidedly conservative—who sought, in many forms, Anglo-

Saxon acceptance and identity.

They were subjected to the laws of institutionalization and sterilization, later to the law of immigration exclusion, and later still to the law of "urban renewal" and the destruction of their neighborhoods. The Supreme Court decision was an opportunity lost—to cite as comparable evidence government words and actions as menace, as prejudice, as real danger to families and made official in government's power to humiliate, denigrate, and harm immigrants.

Look again at the lives of Mother Francis Xavier Cabrini, and Pope Leo XIII, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and their undaunted challenge to the wrongness of the law's pronouncements against immigrants by men of elitism, prejudice, and exploitation. Pope Leo XIV, with the affirmation of his Augustinian roots, selected his name in that undaunted spirit and in that continued and now renewed challenge posed by the Supreme Court decision.

In the end, the moral, ethical, and legal disconnect between Pastor Maifredi on July 3rd and the author of the court decision in *Mullin v. Doe* is too profound to be ignored by politeness.

*Neil Proto is an author and prominent attorney, who practiced law in Washington for 50 years.

