

Why Maria Goretti?

Maria's example, of forgiveness of the one who harmed her, moved a victim of abuse to seek God's help to forgive in that way.

The Story of Saint Maria Goretti

*Patron Saint of Abused Children
and Rape Victims*

Maria Goretti was born a poor peasant child in Italy in 1890, the third of six children.

When she was nine, her family's situation grew even worse, when her father died of malaria.

Maria's mother dutifully took her husband's place in the fields, while little Maria took her mother's role in caring for her siblings.

The family was able to survive by working the fields of a Count, a job they shared with a man named Giovanni Serenelli and his teenager son Alessandro.

Mr. Serenelli kept most of the profits from the farming, leaving the Goretti family quite poor and frequently hungry.

Through all the difficulties, Maria did her best. When neighbors or kindly merchants would give Maria a treat, she would take it home to share with her brothers and sisters. Cheerful and intelligent, Maria was also beautiful, with chestnut hair complementing her delicate features.

On Maria's frequent trips into the nearby village to sell eggs and chickens and to buy supplies for her family, she would visit the shrine of Our Lady of Graces.

Her family being too poor to pay for Masses in her father's memory, every night Maria would recite the 5 Mysteries of the Rosary for the repose of her father's soul.

In June of 1902, 20-year-old Alessandro Serenelli began ordering 11-year-old Maria to perform various difficult chores, none of which could be completed to his satisfaction, and she was often reduced to tears.

Alessandro also began making advances on Maria. She rebuffed them all, but, unfortunately, said nothing to her mother, for fear of causing trouble.

On July 5, 1902, Alessandro ordered Maria to mend one of his shirts. As Maria sat mending, caring for her little sister Theresa, Alessandro burst in and motioned Maria into a bedroom.

As usual, she refused, but this time he grabbed her, pulled her into the bedroom, and closed the door. He demanded that she submit to him, but she told him that it would be a sin. Enraged, Alessandro stabbed her 14 times in her heart, lungs, and intestines, and then fled to his bedroom, where he pretended to be asleep.

When Theresa woke up and began to cry, the family discovered Maria lying on the floor.

She survived for 20 hours in the hospital, undergoing surgery without anesthesia. Asked if she forgave her murderer, she replied,

"Yes, for the love of Jesus I forgive him...and I want him to be with e in Paradise."

She died on July 6.

Unrepentant, Alessandro was convicted, and sentenced to 30 years in prison. In his eileventh year of imprisonment, he had a vision of Maria. He saw a garden. where a young girl, dressed in white, was gathering lilies. She smiled, and came near him, and encouraged him to accept an armful of the lilies.

As he accepted them, each lily transformed into a still white flame. Maria then disappeared.

Alessandro's conversion was complete. When he was released from prison after serving 28 years, his first act was to travel to Maria's mother to beg her forgiveness. He then found a job as a gardener in a Capuchin monastery, a job he held for the rest of his life.

Along with 30 other witnesses, Alessandro testified as to Maria's sanctity during her Cause of Beatification.

In 1950, she was canonized in a ceremony attended by a quarter million people, including her mother, the first mother ever to see her child canonized.