

In 1947, Pope Pius XII beatified Maria. Because her death had been that of a martyr, no miracles were required for beatification but thereafter, those in need began to cry to her for help and such a shower of favours was received through her intercession that the two miracles necessary for canonisation were speedily and unquestionably certified. Maria Goretti's canonisation occurred on June 2, 1950, less than three years after her beatification.

Maria's own mother, by that time an old woman, was present and the crowd was so huge that the ceremony had to be held outside, in front of St. Peter's basilica. The interval between Maria's beatification and canonisation was one of the shortest of any cause recorded at the Vatican.

Instruction upon meditation

Meditation, or mental prayer, is a devout and fruitful consideration of Divine things, and of all that is conducive to the acquirement of virtue and of eternal salvation.

It is not a difficult exercise; it requires attention and reflection, a desire to know God better in order to love Him more. It should be done in the company of Our Lady, the saints and our guardian Angel.

Refer to the previous issues of this bulletin to learn how to make meditation properly. Remember that as Handmaid, you promised to meditate 15 minutes every day. St Teresa of Avila says that he who spends 15mn a day in mental prayer cannot be lost.

A man who is a lover of Jesus and of truth, a truly interior man who is free from uncontrolled affections, can turn to God at will and rise above himself to enjoy spiritual peace. He who tastes life as it really is, not as men say or think it is, is indeed wise with the wisdom of God rather than of men.

Imitation of Christ, Book 2, Chapter 1 "On Meditation"

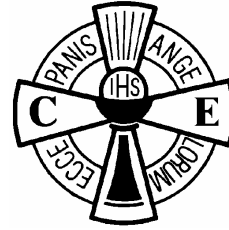
Meditation – On Venial Sin - 2 & 3

Consider the danger of venial sin. By it, the horror of mortal sin is lost or weakened in the soul. And moreover, as the distinction between mortal and venial sin is in some cases difficult to discern, we may, by custom and carelessness in avoiding those faults which we consider venial, be led into the dreadful evil of mortal sin.

The consequences and punishments of venial sin are also well worthy of our attention. The most usual effects of it are a disrelish for spiritual things, a disgust for prayer, and the withholding of the special graces which Almighty God bestows upon those who are faithful to Him. Whoever dies in venial sin must remain separated from God in penal fire, until the last debt be paid. What a thought is this for a soul that loves God.

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Handmaids of Christ and Children of Mary

Supplement to the Bulletin of the Eucharistic Crusade in Ireland

Summer 2008

Months of the Precious Blood and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

This leaflet is intended for high-school girls. Being part of the Eucharistic Crusade, you receive the bulletin of the Crusade and pray for the intentions of the Crusade. As girls, Our Lady is your special model. Therefore as well as being Crusaders and Handmaids of Christ, you are also Children of Mary. The purpose of these few pages is to help you in your spiritual life.

Saint Maria Teresa Goretti

Martyr For Purity - Italy
(1890-1902) Died Age 11
Feastday: July 6

To many, the story of Maria Goretti is already familiar as the story of a young girl who refused to acquiesce in a grave sin against chastity. Few realise that before the final dramatic refusal, Maria had also resisted blandishments and threats. The canonisation of Maria Goretti was not based on a single moment's struggle against sin but upon her practice of heroic virtue through her entire short life. To die rather than to sin was a far more natural choice for Maria than was the alternative - to sin in order to avoid death.

Maria's story begins with her home, where the moral basis of her heroic choice was nurtured. Her mother, Assunta, was an orphan who had never learned to read or write. Maria's father finished his military duty, returned to his home town of Corinaldo, married Assunta and began to farm for a living. This couple had little to sustain them other than their love for God, Our Lady and each other.

Although Assunta had never been to school for any formal lessons, she learned from the Church about the love of God and transmitted this great love, by words and actions, to her family. Luigi, her husband, also had a deep love and devotion to





God. Rather than feel bitter about their poverty and way of life, this valiant couple accepted all as God's Will and greeted the birth of each of their children as a great gift from God. The lesson of love was imparted to each child. After the death of their first son as an infant, Luigi and Assunta had another boy and on October 16, 1890, a girl was born. In thanksgiving, the child was named Maria, after Our Lady, and Teresa, after the great saint of Carmel. She was baptised the day after her birth. This was not because of any near danger of death but simply because Maria's mother had such a great hatred of original sin that she wished to lose no time in freeing her child from it at the first possible moment. Maria and her brother were also confirmed in Corinaldo according to the custom of the time.

The family grew to four children and the poverty that had never been absent became much more acute. In Corinaldo, the family had a small house and plot of land. Although Luigi managed the land well, it simply was not large enough to raise an adequate supply of food. The family had few possessions and a small image of Our Lady was considered their greatest treasure. The children had no toys, so an apple or rock often took the place of the ball another child might have played with. Maria never had a single doll. Because of their poverty, the children never attended school but in spite of this type of life, the entire family was happy, until the food shortage became so critical that something had to be done.

Luigi and Assunta loved their small home in this beautiful part of Italy. To better their fortune, however, they decided to become tenant farmers in a different part of the country. They realised that the needs of the children might be better met by this move. As Luigi explained it, "We must not think of ourselves but they (the children) are gifts from the Good God and we must show our gratitude by taking care of them."

And what of Maria? At the age of six, her father credited her mother with having taught her to be obedient, to pray well and to love God and His Blessed Mother. Like other six-year-old children, she played, running through the grass and picking flowers, laughing and smiling. Her mother tells us that even by this age, Maria seemed to have an understanding beyond her years. Maria was obedient but rather than waiting to be asked to help, she begged to be allowed this privilege. She enjoyed playing but most often she played with her younger brothers to amuse them and keep them from troubling their mother. Cheerfulness is the one thing that all who knew her mentioned when giving testimony for her beatification.

When Maria was eight, the family moved to the Pontine Marshes. Although much of this land has now been reclaimed through reforms, in Maria's day it was one of the grimmest parts of Italy. Because of the swamps, disease was rampant -

beside her at night. The hospital had a rule that no visitors could stay overnight and Assunta was forced to sleep in the back of the ambulance.

The priest was called soon after Maria's arrival at the hospital. Although the doctors performed surgery, none of the three doctors on the case had much hope for success. As the priest arrived, Dr. Bartoli assured him, "Father, you will have little to do. We are leaving a dying girl but you are finding an angel."

The same priest who had given Maria her First Communion came to bring her the last. Before he gave her Viaticum, he asked her if she forgave her murderer with all her heart. Maria replied with no hesitation, "Yes, I too, for the love of Jesus, forgive him ... and I want him to be with me in Paradise ... May God forgive him because I already have forgiven him." Maria died shortly after three o'clock.

Alessandro's trial began on Maria's birthday, October 16, 1902. In spite of the defense plea of insanity, Alessandro was found guilty. Because he was a minor, his sentence was thirty years in prison. He was sent to a prison in Sicily where he spent the first eight years with no sign of remorse or regret for his crime but, one night, after living with a dead soul for all those years, Alessandro had a dream. He saw Maria in a field of flowers, holding out some white lilies to him. Within a few days after this dream, the local bishop requested and obtained an interview with Alessandro. On November 10, 1910, Alessandro wrote a letter to the bishop begging God's pardon for the great sin he had committed.



Assunta took her children and returned to Corinaldo, in accordance with Luigi's last wishes. There she raised her family. She was able to obtain work as the housekeeper of the local priest and worked there for many years. Maria's heroic life and death were not forgotten. The Passionist priests asked Assunta's permission to move Maria's body to the sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace. This was accomplished in 1929. Pope Pius X had already held Maria up as an example of true devotion and an inspiration to youth. In this same year, Alessandro was asked to give testimony in Maria's process for beatification. By this time, he had been released from prison and was living a quiet life as a labourer. Alessandro willingly gave his testimony, taking total blame, repeating that Maria's thoughts had been for his soul even at the moment of the attack and relating the dream which had led to his conversion. On Christmas eve, 1937, Alessandro went to visit Assunta at the rectory to hear from her own lips the assurance of forgiveness. As he tearfully begged her pardon, she replied that she could hardly refuse when Maria had been so willing to extend this forgiveness. Assunta and Alessandro attended Midnight Mass together at Maria's shrine.

first noticed how beautiful Maria was while praying the family Rosary. He also noticed that when praying, this girl really prayed and did not simply mouth the words.

On Saturday morning, July 5, 1902, the Goretti's and the Serenelli's were working in the field about a hundred and thirty yards away from the house. After the noon meal, Signor Serenelli fell asleep under the stairs and the others returned to the field. Maria sat on the landing with her mending, watching over her sleeping baby sister. The other Goretti children were riding in the noisy threshing wagons with their mother. Alessandro exchanged his place behind the lead oxen with Assunta and returned to the house. He brushed past Maria, went to his room, then came past her again carrying a handkerchief and went to the storeroom downstairs. Later, it was learned that he had sharpened and tapered a nine-and-a-half-inch pointed blade. He returned again to the house and called Maria to come to him. When she called out to ask why, he repeated his demand. She told him she would not come unless she knew why she was needed. Alessandro came out to the landing and dragged her into the house. Any cry she made was drowned out by the steady hum of the thresher going round and round in the blazing sun. According to Alessandro, Maria's words were, "No! No! No! What are you doing? Do not touch me! It is a sin - you will go to Hell!" More than instinctively fighting to preserve her honour, Maria thought even at this time of the sin which would condemn Alessandro to Hell. Although she fought with all her strength, she could hardly expect to hold out long against the husky young man. He pushed a gagging handkerchief into her mouth but, confronted with a will stronger than his own, he could not touch her.

At this point, Alessandro picked up the knife and began stabbing Maria. Reports as to the number of wounds vary but fourteen major ones were treated at the hospital. Because of the threshing, those in the field did not hear Maria's cries for help. The baby on the landing awakened at the noise and began to cry; the baby's cries awakened Alessandro's father at the foot of the stairs and Assunta, glancing up, noticed that the baby was unattended and in danger of falling off the landing. Signor Serenelli and Assunta ran toward the house, where they discovered Maria who had begun to drag herself toward the door. When questioned, she answered in her direct way that Alessandro had stabbed her. "He wanted to make me do wrong and I would not."

The local doctor arrived and as he was binding her wounds, Maria did not cry out with pain. From time to time, however, she spoke: "Oh, Alessandro, how unhappy you are! You will go to Hell!" By the time the ambulance arrived, a crowd had gathered. Some dragged Alessandro from his room where he had shut himself up and would have harmed him if the local police had not taken him away. Many of the others followed the ambulance, on foot, to the hospital. During the trip to the hospital and the twenty hours of agony she spent before her death, Maria was conscious much of the time. She did not complain and rarely even moaned with the pain. After asking twice for a drink of water (which was refused because her injuries were internal and water would have caused further damage,) Maria gave up this comfort without complaint, as well as the comfort of having her mother

especially those diseases carried by mosquitoes. Even the air there was said to be unhealthy. Maria's father, along with his partner, Signor Serenelli and Signor Serenelli's sixteen-year-old son, Alessandro, became tenant farmers to Conte Mazzoleni.

At Ferriere di Conca, the Goretti's and the Serenelli's moved into housing above an old dairy barn. Previously, when the Goretti's had discussed the move to this area, the worst part of the Pontine Marshes, Luigi had expressed concern as to what effect the atmosphere would have on the children. Assunta had predicted that Maria would be their joy wherever she was. True to the prediction, Maria remained a happy, helpful child. Because of her exceptional goodness, Marietta, as she was called, was loved by all who knew her. She was a pretty child with long, light chestnut hair. Although she was always clean and neat, vanity had no part in her personality. Many of Maria's friends and playmates wore roses in their hair for decoration in the absence of jewellery or lace. The first landowner for whom Luigi worked in the Pontine Marshes was on a tour of inspection and noticed this young girl who wore no flower in her hair. He asked his foreman to introduce her and after a few remarks, Maria was sent back to her play with the other children. The foreman told him, "Everyone loves Marietta. She is as good as she is lovely and has the intelligence of a grown girl." The landowner realised that Maria's beauty needed no roses to enhance it.

By the time Maria was nine, she was sent to do the family marketing. She always took time to be friendly but did her errands and returned home where she was needed as soon as possible. Even in these brief contacts in town, the trades- people recognised something special about this child sent to do a woman's chore. They often gave her small gifts, for which Maria thanked them warmly. One day, in the grocery store, Maria had completed her small purchases. The grocer, Giovanni, said, "Here, little one, I have a nice red apple for you." Enthusiastically, Maria thanked him and slipped the apple into her bag of groceries. In surprise, the grocer asked her what she intended to do with it. Maria cheerfully replied that she would give it to her brother Allesandrino, as he was particularly fond of apples. Hearing this, the grocer then gave her a sugar cookie. Again, Maria thanked him warmly but made no move to eat the cookie. The grocer asked, "Marietta, what are you going to do with that cookie?" Almost apologetically, Maria explained that she would take the cookie home to her little sister, Ersilia. She thanked the grocer for being so good to her family and turned to go. The grocer, however, was determined to do something for Maria, so he told her that he would be very hurt if she did not accept a little gift from him. He handed her another cookie and said that this one must be for Maria herself. Not wishing to displease him, Maria ate the cookie there and thanked the grocer again.

Because of Maria's outstanding qualities - kindness, cheerfulness, obedience and friendliness - many of the people in the area began to notice and comment on her. Maria was totally unaware of these comments but her mother heard them. She would answer by saying, "She is only doing her duty," although from time to time she felt that Maria was truly a special child. Long after Maria's death, her mother was to state that she could never remember Maria voluntarily

displeasing or disobeying her. Financially, the Goretti family did not seem to prosper, even working in partnership with the Serenelli's. Luigi, tired and run-down from overwork, fell a victim to the familiar multiple diseases of the marsh - typhus, malaria, meningitis and pneumonia. During the ten days preceding his death, Assunta stayed by his bedside. Ten-year-old Maria did all the cooking, ran the errands and kept the children quiet. Constantly, too, Maria prayed. She often wore her rosary around her wrist so it would be at hand in the odd moments she could find for its use. Before his death in May of 1900, Luigi begged Assunta to take the children and return to Corinaldo.



Luigi's death forced Assunta to take upon herself the man's job of labourer in the fields. She felt it would not be possible to move, so the family continued to live in the Pontine Marshes. Maria assumed the position of 'mother,' doing the household chores necessary for the Goretti family and also for the Serenelli's. Maria was not a good cook but when rebuked for this fault, she simply begged pardon for not being able to cook as well as her mother. Unfortunately, the family seemed to descend into even deeper poverty, largely due to the stinginess of Signor Serenelli. At one point, he locked up the cupboard to keep the children from using any food other than that which he allotted for meals. Assunta had to resort to going to the landlord in order to straighten out this problem, a move which served as one more count against her in the eyes of Serenelli.

One of the duties that Maria assumed at this time was that of teaching the children as she herself had been taught. She taught them their prayers and told them stories. Although she had had no formal education, Maria would come home from Church and repeat practically word for word, the Bible stories she had learned there. Testimony from people who knew the family at this time contains many references to the fact that after her father's death, Maria accepted all her responsibilities and carried them out not only efficiently but with joy and cheerfulness. She never appeared tired. When Maria played now, it was never to amuse herself but only to please the younger children. A friend who had brought a pot of soup as a gift for the family noted that Maria served all the others first and kept very little for herself. When questioned about this, Maria gave the excuse that her mother and older brother had to do heavy work and needed the nourishment and the younger children were only babies and deserved the treat. In addition, Maria often comforted and cheered her mother, counseling total dependence on God and His Blessed Mother to provide and protect. The death of her father called forth reserves of strength from Maria.

Besides the loss of her father, the only other sadness which Maria mentioned was the long wait to receive First Communion. In Assunta's great respect for this Sacrament, she told Maria that because of her inability to read and because the family had no money for the proper clothes, she was afraid that Maria would have

to wait. Maria's reply was, "You'll see, Mama; God will provide." Maria herself thought of a person who would teach her Christian doctrine and she promised to discharge all her household duties before walking into Conca to these lessons. Throughout the spring of 1902, the eleven-year-old Maria seemed to grow spiritually as she prepared to receive her Lord. This love of God was translated into an even greater willingness to do her daily tasks lovingly for those around her.

In May, the local priest examined Maria and found her well prepared for the Sacrament. A white dress, lace and pearls were not possible for Maria. Instead, on the morning of May 29, 1902, she arose and dressed in the gifts which the poor of the neighbourhood had provided, gifts which the donors felt it a privilege to bring. Assunta had provided the dress, a wine-coloured dress with tiny white dots. One friend had brought a pair of new shoes, another a veil, a third a candle. Another friend had woven a wreath of real flowers. At the last minute, Assunta took the two treasures her husband had given her - a coral necklace and a pair of gold earrings and put them on her child.

Maria's sensitive conscience led her to make one final preparation. She went around the house and begged pardon of her family members and the Serenelli's for any wrong she might have done them. Then the entire family, for once, began the walk to Conca for the ceremony. The message the arch-priest gave these first communicants was 'PURITY AT ALL COSTS.' How well Maria had absorbed this lesson was shown less than two months later.

During the month of June, Maria received Communion four more times. Also during this month, Alessandro Serenelli twice made advances to her. On both occasions he had managed to be alone with her in the house. This young man, nearly twenty, had been accepted by Maria as another brother but suddenly, he was paying her compliments and attempting to come close and touch her. Instinctively, Maria recognised something of his intentions and the purity of her soul was revolted. On both occasions, he threatened to kill her if she mentioned the matter to anyone. Maria did keep silent but not through fear of harm to herself. Rather, she realised that exposing Alessandro would bring worry and grief to her mother and financial ruin to their family. During this month, she attempted to keep as far away from Alessandro as possible and to be in the company of her mother whenever she had to be in his presence. She hoped by this to avoid any further occasions for confrontations. And what of Alessandro, this brutal murderer? During part of his teenage years, he had lived alone, doing work on the docks and had been exposed to all sorts of vices. He had some education, although his family had lived most of the time in the same poverty as that of the Goretti's. Alessandro was quiet and fairly shy and Assunta later testified that he usually kept the door to his room closed at all times. In his room, he read all sorts of violent newspapers and unhealthy material.

On the other hand, from the time he and his father began living with the Goretti family, Alessandro exhibited many traits of goodness. He attended Mass and often joined in the saying of the family Rosary with the Goretti's. He was a hard worker in the fields and from time to time actually defended one or the other of the Goretti's against the verbal abuses of his father. By his own testimony, Alessandro