



St. Maria Goretti
July 6

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1890–1902 • Italy

Maria Goretti was born into a farming family. The Gorettis were poor and had to share a house with another family, the Serenellis. Maria's father died of malaria when she was only nine, so her mother and older siblings all worked in the fields.

Maria did everything she could to help her family. She did all the chores—the laundry and the cooking—and looked after her baby sister. The Gorettis' life was hard, but the family was happy because they loved each other and they loved Christ.

One day, when Maria was only eleven years old, Alessandro Serenelli came home from the fields because he knew that Maria was home all by herself. He tried to force her to sin impurely with him. She said no and told him that she would rather die, since what he wanted to do was a mortal sin. Because Maria refused to sin, Alessandro did an evil and terrible thing. He stabbed Maria fourteen times. Maria's cries woke her baby sister. When her family came home, they found Maria alive on the floor and rushed her to the hospital.

The doctor saw that Maria's wounds were too deep for him to heal. He asked her to think of him in Paradise. He said this because he knew she would die soon. The next day, Maria forgave Alessandro for what he had done. She hoped that he would be in heaven like her someday. She died gazing on an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary and holding a cross to her chest.

Alessandro went to prison, but he refused to be sorry for what he had done. Then one night, he had a dream. Maria appeared to him and gave him a white lily. But he could not hold the flower. The pure white lily burned his hands. When he awoke, he repented of his sins. Released twenty-seven years later, he visited Maria's mother and begged forgiveness. She forgave him, saying, "If my daughter can forgive him, who am I to withhold forgiveness?"

Maria Goretti was canonized a saint by Pope Pius XII. Her mother and her four remaining brothers and sisters attended the canonization. So did Alessandro. He lived a reformed life and became a lay brother in the Order of Friars Minor. He prayed to Maria every day and called her "my little saint."

St. Maria Goretti, help me to have a forgiving heart!