



Maria Goretti, Virgin and Martyr, 1890-1902

Saints don't necessarily have to have lived a long, sanctified life. This saint was only twelve years old when she was martyred. Born the third of seven children to a poor farmer near Ancona, Italy, Maria was described by her mother as "happy, good, openhearted, without whim, but with a sense and seriousness far beyond her years, and never disobedient." The family's circumstances meant that even

the children had to work as farmhands for other people. Because of this, Maria and the other children received no schooling. When Maria was nine, her father died. Maria's mother, sisters, and brother continued to work the fields while Maria cooked, sewed, and kept house for the family. At the age of eleven, Maria received her first communion, but the strongest test of her faith was yet to come. The Gorettis were forced to take another family in to room with them. The son, an eighteen-year-old named Alessandro, soon began making indecent proposals to Maria. While she turned him down time and again, she never told anyone about them since Alessandro had threatened her and her mother if she told. One day when Maria was home mending clothes and the others were working in the fields, Alessandro came home and tried to force himself on Maria. When she again resisted, the enraged youth stabbed her several times with a knife. Maria was rushed to a hospital where doctors tried in vain to save her, but, before she died on June 6, 1902, she forgave Alessandro and said that she wished to see him in heaven. Alessandro was tried for Maria's murder and sent to prison. At first, Alessandro showed no remorse for his crime. But, after eight years, Maria appeared to him in a dream and his life changed completely. When his sentence was complete, Alessandro went to Maria's mother to beg forgiveness, which he received. He then became a Capuchin lay brother. St. Maria Goretti was canonized by Pope Pius XII on July 25, 1950. Present at the canonization were her mother, her siblings, and Alessandro, her attacker. This saint is the patron of youth and of teenage girls. She is honored by a memorial on **July 6**.

Maria's message today: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We say these words daily, but do we pay attention to what we are saying? Maria, mortally wounded, could forgive and pray for her attacker.

- *If Maria could forgive (and pray for) her killer, can you forgive someone who has done much less harm to you?*