



# Bl. Margaret of Castello

BORN 1287; DIED 1320

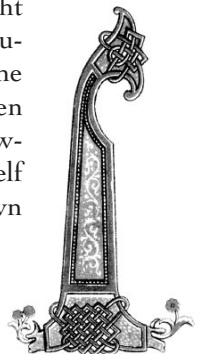
VIRGIN

FEAST DAY: APRIL 13

**I**N A WORLD that devalues human life and treats so many people as disposable, the life of Bl. Margaret of Castello is testimony that every life is valuable and necessary.

Margaret was born in Metola, an isolated castle in the Italian Apennine Mountains not far from the eastern coast of Italy. Her parents, Parisio and Emilia, were of a wealthy noble family. Parisio, a powerful military leader, was a proud, selfish, and ruthless man, and Emilia was incapable of standing up to her husband. To this unlovely couple was born a daughter with one leg shorter than the other and blind. The planned great celebration of the birth of a son and heir never happened. Instead, Margaret's father ordered that she be hidden away in the

castle. She soon developed a hunchback, and remained very short. Friendly and loving, she was allowed to find her way about the castle, but at about age six she encountered a guest and, had not a servant stopped her, would innocently have identified herself as the daughter of their host. Her father, afraid that his secret would be made known, imprisoned her in a hut he had built onto the side of a chapel about a quarter-mile from the castle, defensively claiming that she was already a prayerful child. His power over Metola was total, so there Margaret stayed, visited only by the servant who brought her food and the priest who brought her the Eucharist. Her loneliness was nearly complete; the winter cold, intense. Yet in the next fourteen years she developed a deep life of prayer, viewing her imprisonment as a call to model herself after Jesus, who had been rejected by his own people.





*“They left her to pray at the tomb alone. Day wore into evening, and nothing happened. And so they abandoned their blind, crippled daughter there.”*

When Margaret was twenty, her parents took her on pilgrimage south to Castello, a town in the province of Umbria, to seek a cure at the tomb of a holy man at which miraculous healings were said to occur. They left her to pray at the tomb alone. Day wore into evening, and nothing happened. And so they abandoned their blind, crippled daughter there, telling her nothing. When the townspeople learned of this, they were appalled and angry on her behalf, but she, amazingly, defended her parents.

Margaret became a beggar and was taken in by the poor of the town, who shifted her from one family to another as their meager means permitted. She was cheerful, kind, and willing to help with chores. She taught the children psalms and prayers, listened to them recite answers to their catechism, told them stories, and cared for them when they were sick. Peace descended on every home she visited. She was a blessing wherever she went.

Hearing of Margaret, a local convent offered her a home. However, these nuns lived more for comfort than for prayer. Her devotion and sanctity was a reproach to them. They resented her desire to live by the rule of the order, labeled her disruptive, and told her to leave. She returned to a family that had sheltered her before. At first, her rejection by the convent led to name-calling and slander by the townspeople, but this did not last, as her goodness was evident to all.

Margaret then came to the attention of Castello’s Mantellates, who invited her to join them. The Mantellates were laywomen, mostly wid-

ows, who lived according to the Dominican rule and devoted themselves to charity. Young unmarried women, considered a risk for scandal, were not invited to become Mantellates, but Margaret’s reputation was by then well-established and the Dominican Prior permitted her to wear the Dominican habit. She was invited to live with a wealthy family, and made only one other move during the remainder of her life. People sought her prayers for their needs, and miracles of healing began to take place. She focused her charitable work on the sick, the dying, and the imprisoned.

By this time, Margaret had become a mystic, experiencing ecstasies and being seen to levitate by the prisoners for whom she was caring. Despite her physical blindness, she experienced visions, and would say to others, “If you only knew what I have in my heart!” She would become radiant in describing a scene from one of the mysteries of the rosary. She also suffered great trials of the soul and great desolation and, from time to time, was assailed by Satan. Her physical deformities hid a young woman who had all the normal desires of her age. She fought these with physical mortifications and did mortification, as well, for sinners. She died at thirty-three and was buried in the parish church, a privilege usually reserved to canonized saints and clergy, at the insistence of the townspeople after a miraculous cure at her funeral. Lacking any outward evidence of beauty, she had instead given witness to the true beauty of a soul unshrivelled by bitterness, and a humble heart that offered only love.

