



# St. Maria Goretti

BORN 1890; DIED 1902

VIRGIN AND MARTYR

FEAST DAY: JULY 6

**T**ODAY'S PAGAN CULTURE glorifies sexual license. The message beamed out to young and old is that sex is fun, not sacred and holy. The Christian worldview is very different. Each person, made in the divine image of God, has a mind to know what is true and a will to choose what is good. Faith and reason used properly identify what is true and good. Chastity is the virtue that controls an extremely unruly part of human nature, the virtue that brings the desire for sexual pleasure into right order. It is a thoroughly Christian virtue. St. Maria Goretti is a model of purity and heroic commitment to the virtue of chastity.

Maria was born to Luigi Goretti and his wife

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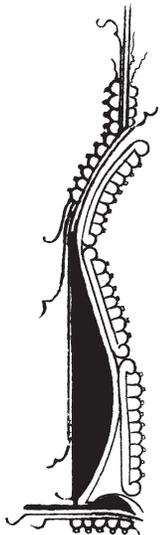
Assunta Carlini in the small town of Corinaldo in the Marche region of east-central Italy, west of Ancona. The family eventually moved near Anzio on the coast south of Rome in the hope of improving their life, a hope that proved futile. Maria's father, a farmer, died when she was ten, leaving her mother to raise four children on her own. Her mother took odd jobs, and Maria as the oldest girl took care of the home, her younger siblings, and the children of neighbors as well. The family was extremely poor, and Maria was illiterate. Yet the parents were deeply devout and the children were happy and schooled in their faith. Even as a young child, Maria was obedient and wished to help her mother. After her father's death, as the family slipped ever deeper into poverty, Maria ate the least of anyone in the family, for she felt that her mother and older brother needed strength to work in the fields and her younger siblings were too young to be asked to go hungry. She was beloved by neighbors and the merchants with whom she did the family's shopping. She care-



DAVID CHARLES PHOTOGRAPHY

fully and conscientiously prepared for her First Communion, at that time usually received at the age of eleven — and she was thus spiritually armored and ready for the trial that awaited her.

Alessandro Serenelli, the nineteen-year-old son of Maria's father's business partner and neighbor, had been watching eleven-year-old Maria. He had already tried to seduce her more





than once, and had threatened to kill her if she told anyone of what he had attempted to do. One day during the harvest season, when everyone was out in the fields, Alessandro returned while Maria was outside on the landing with her sleeping baby sister. He entered the house, and called for Maria to come in. She yelled back that she would not come until he told her why he needed her. Alessandro then came out, grabbed her, and dragged her into the house, and locked the door. Her screams went unheard over the sound of a threshing machine in use nearby. She begged him not to do what he intended be-

cause it was sinful and he would go to Hell. He gagged her with a handkerchief and attempted to rape her. Enraged that she would not cooperate, he drew a knife, stabbed her fourteen times, and left her for dead. When her mother Assunta found Maria, she was barely alive but was able to relate what had happened, expressing her anguish for the state of her attacker's soul. She remained conscious but died in agony twenty hours later, having not only forgiven her attacker but also saying with heartfelt love that she hoped that he would join her in Heaven. Thus to her heroic defense of her chastity was joined a perhaps even more heroic forgiveness of Alessandro and a thirst for the salvation of his soul. In resisting his attack, she was seeking his salva-

tion perhaps even more than she was maintaining her bodily integrity.

Alessandro was captured and found guilty of murder. He was sentenced to thirty years in prison. Several years later, still unrepentant, he had a dream about Maria. In it, she was standing in a field of flowers, holding out to him fourteen lilies, a symbol of purity, one for each of the times he had stabbed her. The power of this dream changed his life. He repented of his sins and wrote a letter to the bishop asking for pardon and reconciliation. After his release nineteen years later, he began living a life of repentance.

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Years later, he visited Maria's mother and asked for her forgiveness, which she gave him. That night, they attended Christmas Midnight Mass together at Maria's shrine. He also gave testimony as part of the cause for Maria's canonization. Assunta and Alessandro were both present at Maria's canonization Mass.

Maria protected her chastity over a period of many weeks, perhaps months, and eventually had to fight for it and die rather than compromise it. She was not even twelve years old at her death, and yet that young girl had within her divine wisdom and divine strength. During her final hours she prayed earnestly for the conversion of her murderer. Maria Goretti is a miracle of grace.

