



**ST. MARIA
GORETTI
NOVENA**

BY MSGR. JOHN DUNCAN

FIRST DAY

Reflection on Family Life: St. Maria Goretti was born into a poor Italian family where life was marked by constant hard labor. Maria's Father, Luigi, worked the soil of northern Italy for only a very marginal return in terms of this world's goods. His Wife, Assunta, helped with the farm labor and gave as much as she could, as much as she had actually, to their five children. This little family not only worked together, but loved one another, shared with one another, supported one another and, always, prayed together. They were very rich in their relationships with one another and with God.

Prayer: Loving and dependable St. Maria Goretti! We honor you for the love which you both accepted from your family and which you shared with your parents and your three brothers and your sister. By your prayer for us, help us to imitate your family's love and support, as well as that of the Holy Family of Nazareth where Jesus, Mary and Joseph also gave us an example of family living. In our time of so many unhappy families where God is absent, relationships are weak and members are isolated by selfishness, help us to see good in one another and to recognize the Church as God's family of which we are also members. By your prayers and example, help us to recognize that both in our natural and supernatural families, we need to accept and also to share God's love. May we see our families as preparing us with love and happiness for the great family of God in heaven.

SECOND DAY

Reflection on Childhood: Despite the hardships of poverty and difficult work, St. Maria Goretti knew delights of a happy childhood. Her family was close. In their relationships they came to know one another very deeply and out of this knowledge grew strong bonds of love. This was their wealth. Their family love was deepened even further by the realization that God cared for all of them and held them close. Today many children are lonely, given many material things but know little of genuine love or closeness. Many children also don't experience the security of a stable or an enduring home life with its sense of solidarity and genuine freedom.

Prayer: Loving and outgoing St. Maria Goretti! In your family home at Corinaldo, Colle Gianurco and Ferriere di Conca, you knew and experienced the love of Jesus in your parents, your brothers and your sister. Help us by your prayers and example to realize that the love and fidelity of Jesus are manifested constantly in the bonds and experiences of Catholic family life. Help us to believe more and more resolutely that, as parents live the sacrament of marriage, their baptismal share in the life of God is deepened and intensified. Help us to recognize that children are sacred gifts from God in whose image they were created and that they proceed from the love of their parents even as the Holy Spirit proceeds from the love of God the Father and Jesus. Help us to treasure human life in children and to see their joy and happiness as a reflection of God.

THIRD DAY

Reflection on Labor: St. Maria Goretti during her life certainly experienced work. She labored long hours and never knew the labor saving conveniences of our day. She assumed very hard work as soon as her tender years permitted. She offered to do laundry for her own family and the two men in whose house they lived. In addition, she cleaned the house and cooked meals for eight people in the household. She would clean out the barn which was the first floor of their dwelling. She never complained and worked cheerfully and well.

Prayer: Loving and hard working St. Maria Goretti! By your prayers, the example of your life and the grace which you merited by your long hours of loving labor, help us to see the value of work in our own lives. Keep us from complaining about the work which we must do, even though it is far shorter and less tiring than your own. Help us to see it as a service of God and neighbor and not merely as fulfilling tasks to which we are obliged. As you did, assist us to join our work with Jesus, the humble and hard working Carpenter of Nazareth. We need to recognize our work as a source of grace from God and an assistance which will aid us and our neighbors as we continue our journey to the Kingdom of Jesus where we will enjoy eternal rest.

FOURTH DAY

Reflection on Purity: When St. Maria Goretti was eleven years of age, Allesandro Serenelli, the nineteen year old youth who lived with his Father and the Goretti family in the same farm house, approached her with impure intentions. Maria's life had been filled with prayer, respect for purity and the desire not to offend God by sinning. Allesandro seldom prayed, certainly he had never prayed for purity of mind or body. Instead he read pornography and filled his imagination with lewd pictures. He had no control over his desires. When Maria refused to cooperate with his intentions, instead reminding him that impurity is a serious sin against the will of God, he became infuriated. But Maria's love of holy purity was greater than her fear of Allesandro.

Prayer: Loving and pure St. Maria Goretti! Even at a very early age you recognized and admired the marital purity of your parents. You saw human sexuality as a gift from God which should not be abused or rendered trivial. You honored deeply the purity of the holy Virgin, Mother of God. With wisdom far beyond your years, you saw impurity as the degrading and unloving problem which it truly is. You sided with God, the Creator of our human nature, and would not consent to a violation of his precious gift of our bodies. You willed to live according to the will of God and your own convictions even in the face of rejection and contempt from others. By your prayers and the strength of your marvelous example, please help us to see purity as the great value which it truly is. Even though the world around us, like Allesandro, holds purity in contempt and destroys spiritual realities for the passing physical pleasure of only a moment, help us to retain the value of eternal joy and the integrity of our bodies and souls.

FIFTH DAY

Reflection on Suffering with Jesus: From her earliest days, St. Maria Goretti well understood what suffering can be. She experienced the pain of hardship on an almost daily basis. Often her family had little to eat and she knew hunger. She suffered the harsh extremes of inclement weather with little in the way of modern conveniences to ward off the winter cold and summer heat. She endured the humiliation of poverty which condemned her to dependence upon the good will and generosity of those who were financially more secure and to the ridicule of those who looked down upon the poor of the land. She suffered with her Father, Luigi, when he contracted typhus and malaria from the swampy land which he farmed as well as the long hours of hard labor which her Mother spent for the family after the death of her Husband. Maria's own body many times ached from the rigors of labor and the lack of comfort. Her body was to suffer sharper pains yet, as did the Sacred Body of Jesus at the end of His earthly life, when she chose pain rather than sin.

Prayer: Loving and Suffering St. Maria Goretti! Help us in our time of sufferings. We so often fear to suffer and many times would rather sin than experience pain in our body or even a feared deprivation of temporary pleasure. Help us to avoid anger and resentment in time of suffering and pray for us that we also may recognize our sufferings as ways of becoming one with Jesus Crucified and offer our pains to Him so that sinners may avoid evil and unbelievers may come to faith. Finally, help us to concentrate not upon our sufferings but rather upon our joys as you did, permit us to recognize that our heartaches are trivial when compared to those of Jesus and of your own life as well as the lives of many other people around us.

SIXTH DAY

Reflection on Violence: St. Maria Goretti, like Jesus, died a violent death. She left this world, as He did, with that unique and humiliating pain which violence from others causes. What is it in our fallen human nature, weakened by original sin and the example of centuries of history, which cause us to wreak violence upon others? We not only use violence against those who are weaker for our own advantage and material advancement, we even enjoy it! St. Maria Goretti never raised her voice in anger or her hand in violence. Like Jesus, she was as a lamb led to slaughter and did not even attempt to defend herself either physically or in words. She truly offered herself as a victim when she permitted herself to be stabbed fourteen times with a dagger rather than to commit impure actions. There is so much violence in our streets, our homes - our hearts. The weak, the elderly, the terminally ill, the unwanted baby are all subject to death by violence. We need to use our advantages for the benefit of those who have disadvantages.

Prayer: Loving and Gentle St. Maria Goretti! You have offered yourself as a victim to violence as did Jesus Who died for the redemption of our eternal souls. By your prayers for us now and the example of your gentleness and forgiveness in the face of fury, help us to curb our own tendencies to savagery. Grant that we may use our strength not to hurt others or bring them to submission, but rather let us recognize our strengths as gifts from God to help others and lead them to better and happier lives. Permit us to realize that we need to share freedom of the spirit and not restrict it. Help us to protect and never to offend. May our strength of body, mind, personality, influence or material wealth, always benefit others and never harm them.

SEVENTH DAY

Reflection on Trust in God: St. Maria Goretti and her family suffered much and endured multiple hardships which are the common lot of the poor and the defenseless. St. Maria Goretti always saw through these difficulties to the loving help of God. From her very earliest years after she had learned to speak, she would frequently repeat, "We must trust in God." She did not view herself as poor since she depended directly upon God, the Source of all power and wealth. She did not rely upon worldly guarantees or savings, or even the strength of the body and will, but upon the hand of God. She deeply and sincerely believed that God would see her and her family through every difficulty and would bring good out of evil.

Prayer: Loving and Trusting St. Maria Goretti! United with Jesus in the Kingdom of Heaven, you know our weaknesses. You understand how foolishly we place our trust in our own dexterity and cleverness or upon our physical strength or intellectual capacities. You recognize only too well that ultimately we wish to depend upon our selves. By your prayers and your own trust in God, help us to avoid the sin of Adam and Eve in their attempt to be independent of our Creator. Permit us to see that our own help will come not from ourselves but from Him Who is the Creator of the heavens and of the earth. Pray that we may have the child like confidence in God which marked your life and brought you to heaven.

EIGHTH DAY

Reflection on Closeness to the Sacraments: St. Maria Goretti almost did not receive her First Holy Communion. She was illiterate and so had to memorize all of her catechism lessons. There was no one to teach her catechism in her farm area and so for eleven months she and her Brother, Angelo, had to walk three miles to the home of a kind lady who had agreed to prepare the children for First Communion. After their parish priest, Don Signori, tested the children in preparation for this holy Sacrament, he advised them to pray always, to obey God and always to remain pure, even in the face of death. After her First Communion, Maria approached this Holy Banquet as often as she could and spoke in the depths of her soul with Jesus. Jesus present in His sacraments was very important to her.

Prayer: Loving and grace-filled St. Maria Goretti! So very often we take the sacraments for granted, receive them half heartedly without remembering that Jesus comes to us in them or we simply avoid receiving them. By your own prayers and love of the Blessed Sacrament, help us to love Jesus more than anyone else or any material thing. Please remind us in your own love for the sacraments to remember that Jesus comes to us in the Sacraments and that we need to receive them in order to be close to Him. Do not let us grow indifferent to Jesus in His sacramental presence. In flame us with the same fire of love for Jesus which warmed your heart and burnt out anything else that would replace Him. By your constant prayers for us, help to remain close to the sacraments of Jesus in His Church as you did. In this way we can continue on earth your loving devotion to Jesus in heaven.

NINTH DAY

Reflection Upon Love of Jesus and Mary: St. Maria Goretti loved Jesus and His Mother beyond any description which words can weave. On the day of her First Communion, the most important event in her short life of eleven years, Maria dedicated herself to the Virgin, after whom she was named, under the title of Our Lady of Sorrows. She also prayed to the Virgin Mary every morning and night and prayed the rosary daily. Her love of Jesus was the most important single reality in her life. She saw her love for her family, for her friends and for the Church as flowing into her from Jesus. Like Jesus she was always pure, always kind, always helpful and thoughtful of others. She never committed a sin of impurity, permitted her life to be taken by violence and died of wounds inflicted by another rather than permit her purity to be violated.

Prayer: Loving St. Maria Goretti! We honor you for your enduring bravery and ask for your prayers. Teach us a deep love for the sacraments and laws of our Holy Church, even though many ignore them. Pray that we may have the self sacrificing love of Jesus and the purity of Mary. Help us to see in the laws of the Church the voice of God calling us to salvation. Pray that we may preserve our baptismal innocence from this day onward. If we have lost this innocence, pray that we may have the grace of repentance to approach the sacrament of reconciliation where the Blood of Jesus will cleanse us of our sins. Help us to share your courage in avoiding sin, assist us in carrying the bright torch of Jesus' love along the dangerous highways of this life until Jesus our King shall call us to the courts of heaven.