

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Maria Goretti

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 6

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IN BRIEF

Saint Maria Goretti

Young Italian peasant girl, martyred at eleven, who forgave her murderer, patron saint of youth.

Feast day	July 6
Born	October 16, 1890, Corinaldo, Marche, Italy
Died	July 6, 1902, Nettuno, Lazio, Italy
Canonized	June 24, 1950, by Pope Pius XII
Era	20th century
Patron saint of	youth, young girls, victims of violence

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Maria Goretti for Purity and Forgiveness

Novena to Saint Maria Goretti

Shrine of Our Lady of Graces and Saint Maria Goretti in Nettuno

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Maria Goretti

Saint Maria Goretti was a young Italian peasant girl who died on July 6, 1902, at the age of eleven, after being stabbed by a twenty-year-old man who tried to rape her. Before she died, she forgave him. Her killer, converted in prison, lived to see her canonized. Pope Pius XII declared her a saint in 1950, and her feast day is July 6, the day of her death.

Who was Saint Maria Goretti?

Maria Goretti, whom her family called Marietta, was born on October 16, 1890, in Corinaldo, in the province of Ancona, into a family of poor farmers. Her parents, Luigi and Assunta, had several children and struggled to live from their land. Looking for work, they moved south, first to Paliano, then, around 1899, to Le Ferriere di Conca, in the marshy plain near Nettuno, south of Rome.

There they worked as sharecroppers and shared a farmhouse with another family, the Serenellis: the father, Giovanni, and his son Alessandro. Life was hard, the land was poor and malaria was common in the marshes.

In 1900, Luigi Goretti died of malaria. Assunta had to work in the fields, and Maria, the oldest of the girls, took charge of the house and of her younger brothers and sisters. She could neither read nor write, but she prayed a great deal and longed to receive Communion. She made her First Communion in 1901.

Key dates in the life of Saint Maria Goretti

- **October 16, 1890**: Born in Corinaldo, in the Marche region of Italy.
- **Around 1896**: The family leaves the Marche for Lazio.

- **Around 1899**: The family settles at Le Ferriere di Conca, near Nettuno, with the Serenelli family.
- **1900**: Death of her father, Luigi, from malaria.
- **1901**: First Communion.
- **July 5, 1902**: Alessandro Serenelli attacks her and stabs her many times with an awl.
- **July 6, 1902**: She dies in the hospital at Nettuno, after forgiving her attacker.
- **April 27, 1947**: Beatified by Pope Pius XII.
- **June 24, 1950**: Canonized by Pope Pius XII in Saint Peter's Square, in the presence of her mother.

The tragedy at Le Ferriere

Alessandro Serenelli, then twenty years old, had been harassing Maria for several weeks. She pushed him away and did not dare tell anyone. On July 5, 1902, while she was alone in the house, he tried to rape her. She resisted, telling him that it was a sin and that he would go to hell. In a rage, he stabbed her fourteen times with an awl and ran away.

Maria was taken to the hospital in Nettuno. The doctors operated on her without anesthesia, but her wounds were too serious. Before she died the next day, she received Communion and, when the priest asked her, said that she forgave Alessandro and wanted him with her in Paradise. She died on July 6, 1902, at about three in the afternoon.

The conversion of Alessandro

Alessandro was sentenced to thirty years in prison. For years he remained closed and showed no remorse. He later recounted that one night he saw Maria in a dream offering him flowers, and that this dream marked the beginning of

his conversion.

Released for good conduct after about twenty-seven years in prison, he went to ask forgiveness of Assunta Goretti, and she granted it. He spent the rest of his life as a lay worker and Franciscan tertiary in a Capuchin friary in the Marche, where he died in 1970.

This story of forgiveness given and received lies at the heart of Maria Goretti's message. It is not only about defending purity: it shows the power of mercy, which can transform even the heart of a murderer.

An extraordinary canonization

Maria's fame spread quickly in Italy. Pope Pius XII beatified her in 1947, then canonized her on June 24, 1950. The crowd was so large that the ceremony was held outdoors in Saint Peter's Square. In a rare event, the saint's mother, Assunta, was present. Several sources report that Alessandro Serenelli also followed the event.

Celebrated five years after the end of the Second World War, the canonization had an enormous impact. Maria Goretti became one of the most popular saints in Italy, and many churches, schools and youth movements took her name, in Italy and abroad, including parishes and schools in the United States, the Philippines and elsewhere in the English-speaking world.

Why is Saint Maria Goretti the patron saint of youth?

Maria Goretti is the patron saint of young people and especially of young girls. She was only eleven when she died, and her short life was that of an ordinary child: poor, without schooling, busy with housework and with caring for her siblings. Her courage in refusing what she knew to be wrong, and her forgiveness at the hour of death, speak directly to the young.

She is also invoked for victims of violence and sexual abuse, and for all who must forgive or be forgiven. Her story reminds us that the dignity of body and heart deserves to be defended, and that forgiveness remains possible even in the face of the gravest evil. Forgiveness does not deny the wrong that was done, nor does it replace justice: Alessandro served his sentence. But it opens a door that violence wanted to close.

What can we learn from her holiness?

Saint Maria Goretti was a poor child with a simple and solid faith. She did not leave writings or teachings: she could not write. What remains are her daily life of prayer, her joy at receiving the Eucharist, and a few words spoken in a hospital bed. That is enough to make her a witness for the whole Church.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Maria Goretti, or follow the novena to Saint Maria Goretti from June 27 to July 5, so that it ends on the eve of her feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Maria Goretti in art

Because she lived in the age of photography, Maria Goretti is often recognized from an old photograph and from devotional images based on it: a young Italian girl with dark hair, in a simple dress. In paintings, statues and stained glass she is usually shown holding white lilies, the symbol of purity, sometimes together with the palm of martyrs. Some images recall her forgiveness or show her offering flowers, a reference to the dream that began Alessandro's conversion.

Where to pray to Saint Maria Goretti

- **Nettuno** (Lazio): the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces and Saint Maria Goretti, entrusted to the Passionist Fathers, near the sea. Her remains rest

in the crypt, in an urn containing an effigy of the saint. Solemn celebrations are held there for her feast on July 6.

- **Le Ferriere** (near Latina): the house of her martyrdom, where she was attacked on July 5, 1902, now a place of prayer and pilgrimage.
- **Corinaldo** (Marche): her hometown, with a diocesan shrine dedicated to her and the places of her childhood.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Maria Goretti for Purity and Forgiveness

Saint Maria Goretti left no writings: she could neither read nor write. What remains of her are a few words reported by the witnesses of her last hours, in the hospital at Nettuno in July 1902. Below you will find the most famous of them, followed by an original prayer to Saint Maria Goretti.

The words of forgiveness

On July 6, 1902, before she died, Maria received Communion. The priest asked her whether she forgave the man who had attacked her. According to the testimonies gathered for her beatification process, she answered in substance:

> *"Yes, I forgive him, and I want him to be with me in Paradise."*

Source: testimonies gathered during the process for her beatification (beatified in 1947, canonized in 1950). The exact wording varies slightly between translations.

Prayer to Saint Maria Goretti for purity and forgiveness

Saint Maria Goretti, you were poor and had no schooling, but you were rich in faith: pray for me.

You defended your dignity with courage: help young people to respect their own bodies and the bodies of others, and to refuse whatever damages love. Protect children and all victims of violence; obtain for them peace, justice and healing.

You forgave the one who struck you: give me the strength to forgive in my turn, even when it seems impossible to me. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Your forgiveness converted a hardened heart: pray for those who have done evil, that they may turn to the mercy of God. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Maria Goretti's feast day is July 6. You can pray to her for young people, for a teenager going through a hard time, for someone who has suffered violence or abuse, or when a difficult forgiveness has to be given or received. Parents can pray it for their children, and young people can make it their own when they feel pressure to act against their conscience.

Forgiveness is rarely a single moment. If the words "I forgive" still seem out of reach, you can begin simply by asking God for the desire to forgive. Maria Goretti's example does not ask anyone to excuse evil or to remain in danger: it shows that the heart can be freed from hatred.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Maria Goretti, and discover the life of Saint Maria Goretti.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Maria Goretti

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Maria Goretti. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast on July 6, begin on June 27; it then ends on July 5, the anniversary of the attack she suffered.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day. The novena follows Maria's short life, from her poor childhood in Corinaldo to her death and forgiveness in Nettuno.

You can pray it alone, as a family or with a youth group. It is especially suited to intentions for young people, for victims of violence, and for any situation where forgiveness is needed. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off: the novena is a path of trust, not a test of performance. You may also pray it at any other time of the year, whenever you need Saint Maria Goretti's help.

Day 1: A poor childhood

Maria was born into a family of farmers who had to leave their land to find work. Poverty did not prevent her from growing up in trust in God. Her parents taught her to pray, and the faith of the home was her only wealth.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you poor families and those who must leave their homes far behind in order to live. Through the intercession of Saint Maria Goretti, give them work, bread and hope.

Today: Give concrete help to a family in need, or to an organization that supports migrant or struggling families.

Day 2: The death of a father

In 1900, Luigi Goretti died of malaria. Maria, still a child, supported her mother and cared for her brothers and sisters. She carried a heavy load very early, without complaining.

Prayer: Lord, comfort children who are grieving, and give strength to those who carry heavy responsibilities too soon.

Today: Pray for a child or young person who has lost a parent, and, if you can, offer them a sign of attention.

Day 3: The desire for the Eucharist

Maria could not read, but she wanted with all her heart to receive Jesus. She made her First Communion in 1901 with great joy. Her faith did not depend on learning, but on love.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the desire to receive you, and the simplicity of heart of a child.

Today: Go to a weekday Mass, or spend some time in Eucharistic adoration.

Day 4: The daily rosary

According to those who knew her, Maria loved to pray the rosary, even while doing her chores. Prayer accompanied her ordinary days, in the fields and in the house.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, teach me to pray in the middle of my occupations, with trust.

Today: Pray one decade of the rosary while doing an ordinary task.

Day 5: Saying no to evil

On July 5, 1902, Maria refused what Alessandro wanted to force on her. She knew it was a sin, and she told him so, at the risk of her life. Her no was also an act of love for him.

Prayer: Lord, give young people the courage to say no to whatever destroys love, and protect children from all violence.

Today: Pray for victims of abuse and violence, and for those who walk with them.

Day 6: Suffering offered

In the hospital at Nettuno, Maria suffered greatly from her wounds. The doctors operated without anesthesia. She did not rebel, and she united her suffering with that of Christ on the cross.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I entrust to you the sick and those who suffer without understanding why. Be their strength.

Today: Visit someone who is sick, or send them a message.

Day 7: Forgiveness

Before she died, Maria forgave Alessandro and said she wanted him with her in Paradise. Her forgiveness does not deny the evil; it goes beyond it.

Prayer: Lord, you know how hard it is for me to forgive. Give me the grace to begin, even with a small step.

Today: Name before God a person you find it hard to forgive, and pray for them.

Day 8: The conversion of a heart

Years later, Alessandro was converted and asked forgiveness of Maria's mother, who granted it. The mercy of God can reach those who seemed lost.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you prisoners and those who have committed grave wrongs. Open their hearts to your mercy.

Today: Pray for prisoners and for prison chaplains.

Day 9: The joy of heaven

Maria died on July 6, 1902, at eleven years old. In 1950 her mother saw her proclaimed a saint. The life of this child, brief and hidden, has borne immense fruit.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Maria Goretti, give me a pure heart that is able to forgive. Amen.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation, or receive the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Closing prayer

Saint Maria Goretti, you loved God more than your life and forgave the one who killed you. I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for young people, for victims of violence and for those who have done evil. Obtain for us purity of heart and the strength to forgive. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Maria Goretti and the prayer to Saint Maria Goretti.

PILGRIMAGE

Shrine of Our Lady of Graces and Saint Maria Goretti in Nettuno

The Shrine of Our Lady of Graces and Saint Maria Goretti, in Nettuno on the coast of Lazio south of Rome, houses the body of Saint Maria Goretti. It is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to the young martyr, a few miles from the hospital where she died on July 6, 1902, and from the house at Le Ferriere where she was attacked.

History of the shrine

Before it was associated with Maria Goretti, the shrine at Nettuno was already a place of Marian devotion, dedicated to Our Lady of Graces and entrusted to the Passionist religious, the congregation founded by Saint Paul of the Cross. Maria Goretti was first buried in the cemetery of Nettuno. Her remains were later transferred to the shrine, which has since borne her name together with that of the Virgin.



The Shrine of Our Lady of Graces and Saint Maria Goretti in Nettuno.

The crypt and the saint's urn

Maria Goretti's body rests in the crypt of the shrine, in an urn that holds an effigy of the saint containing her remains. Pilgrims come to pray in silence, leave intentions, and especially entrust young people, families, and people who need to forgive. On July 6, solemn celebrations are held for her feast.

Praying in Nettuno

Before your visit, you may reread the life of Saint Maria Goretti. In the crypt, a time of silence before the urn lets you entrust an intention, for example for a young person, for a victim of violence, or for a difficult reconciliation. The prayer to Saint Maria Goretti suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Maria Goretti

- **Le Ferriere** (municipality of Latina): the house of the martyrdom, where Maria was attacked on July 5, 1902, now a place of prayer.
- **Corinaldo** (Marche): her native town, where a diocesan shrine is dedicated to her and where you can see the places of her childhood.
- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Square, where Pius XII canonized her on June 24, 1950.

Practical information

Nettuno is served by train from Rome's Termini station. The shrine is near the seafront. Le Ferriere is about twelve miles inland, toward Latina; it is easier to get there by car. Check Mass and visiting times with the shrine before you come, especially around July 6.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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