

The Life of Saint Gerard

Gerard was born in 1726 in Muro, a little town in Southern Italy. He was blessed with a mother, Benedetta, who showed him the overwhelming love of God which knows no bounds. He was happy because he was close to God.

Gerard was twelve years old when his father died and he became the family breadwinner. He was apprenticed to a local tailor and was bullied and beaten by the foreman. After four years apprenticeship, and just when he might set up as a tailor on his own, he announced he was going as a servant to work for the local Bishop of Lacedonia. He was advised by his friends not to take the job. However, the angry outbursts and endless nagging which prevented other servants from staying more than a few weeks were nothing to Gerard. He was able to turn his hand to anything and worked for the bishop for three years until he died. As long as Gerard believed he was doing the will of God he would accept anything. Whether he was being bullied at the tailors or taken for granted by the bishop didn't matter; he saw suffering as part of his following of Christ. "His Lordship wished me well," he would say. And already, Gerard was spending hours with Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament, the sign of his crucified and risen Lord.

In 1745, aged 19, he returned to Muro where he established himself as a tailor in his own right. His business prospered but he didn't make much money. He gave practically everything away. He would set aside what was needed for his mother and sisters and then give the rest to the poor or as Mass offerings for the souls in purgatory. There was no sudden startling conversion for Gerard. It was just a steady growth in the love of God. Then during Lent of 1747 he resolved to be as completely like Christ as it was possible to be. He undertook most severe penances and actually sought out humiliation, pretending to be mad and happy to be laughed at in the streets.

Redemptorist Life

In 1749, the Redemptorists came to Muro. There were fifteen missionaries and they took the three parishes of the little town by storm. Gerard followed every detail of the mission and decided this was the life for him. He applied to join the mission team but Father Cafaro, the superior, turned him down on account of his health. He so pestered the missionaries that when they were leaving the town, Father Cafaro suggested to his family that he be locked in his room.

In an incident that has found an echo in the hearts of young people ever since, Gerard knotted the sheets off his bed and, climbing out of the window, followed the band of missionaries. It needed a rigorous march of twelve miles for him to catch up with them. "Take me on, give me a try, then send me away if I'm no good," said Gerard. Father Cafaro couldn't do much about such persistence but give him a try. He sent Gerard to the Redemptorist community in Deliceto with a letter that read: "I'm sending you another Brother, who will be useless as far as work is concerned...."

Gerard fell absolutely and totally in love with the way of life Alphonsus, the founder of the Redemptorists, had mapped out. He was thrilled to find the love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was central and the love of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was also considered essential.

He took his first vows on July 16, 1752, which he was delighted to learn was the feast of the most Holy Redeemer as well as the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. From that day, except for a couple of visits to Naples, and his time in Caposele where he died, most of Gerard's life was spent in the Redemptorist community of Illiceto.

The "useless" tag didn't last long. Gerard was an excellent worker and during the next few years he was at different times, gardener, sacristan, tailor, porter, cook, carpenter, and clerk of works of the new buildings in Caposele. He learned fast--visiting the workshop of a woodcarver he soon became adept at carving crucifixes. He was a treasure in the community but he had only one ambition--to do the will of God in everything.

In 1754 his spiritual director asked him to write down what he longed for more than anything else. He wrote: "to love God much; always to be united with God; to do all things for the sake of God; to love everything for God's sake; to suffer much for God. My only business is to do the will of God."

The Great Trial

True sanctity must always be tested by the cross, and it was in 1754 that Gerard had to undergo a great trial, one that may well have merited for him the special power to assist mothers and their children. One of his works of zeal was that of encouraging and assisting girls who wanted to enter the convent. Often he would even secure the necessary dowry for some poor girl who could not otherwise be admitted into a religious order.

Neria Caggiano was one of the girls thus assisted by Gerard. However, she found convent life distasteful and within three weeks had returned home. To explain her action, Neria began to circulate falsehoods about the lives of the nuns, and when the good people of Muro refused to believe such stories about a convent recommended by Gerard, she determined to save her reputation by destroying the good name of her benefactor. Accordingly, in a letter to Saint Alphonsus, the superior of Gerard, she accused the latter of sins of impurity with the young daughter of a family at whose house Gerard often stayed on his missionary journeys.

Gerard was called by Saint Alphonsus to answer the accusation. Instead of defending himself, however, he remained silent, following the example of his divine Master. In the face of his silence, Saint Alphonsus could do nothing but impose a severe penance on the young religious. Gerard was denied the privilege of receiving holy Communion, and forbidden all contact with outsiders.

It was not easy for Gerard to give up his labors in behalf of souls, but this was a small penance compared with being deprived of holy Communion. He felt this so keenly that he even asked to be freed from the privilege of serving Mass for fear that the vehemence of his desire to receive would make him seize the consecrated host from the very hands of the priest at the altar.

Some time later Neria fell dangerously ill and wrote a letter to Saint Alphonsus confessing that her charges against Gerard had been sheer fabrication and calumny. The saint was filled with joy by the news of the innocence of his son. But Gerard, who had not been depressed in the time of his trial, was not unduly elated in the hour of his vindication. In both cases he felt that the will of God had been fulfilled, and that was sufficient for him.

The Miracle Worker

He frequently fell into ecstasy while meditating on God or his holy will, and at such times his body was seen raised several feet above the ground. There are authentic records to prove that on more than one occasion he was granted the unusual miracle of being seen and spoken to in two places at the same time.

His miraculous apostolate for mothers began during his lifetime. Once, as he was leaving the home of his friends, the Pirofalo family, one of the daughters called after him that he had forgotten his handkerchief. In a moment of prophetic insight Gerard said: "Keep it. It

will be useful to you some day." The handkerchief was treasured as a precious souvenir of Gerard. Years later the girl to whom he had given it was in danger of death in childbirth. She remembered the words of Gerard, and called for the handkerchief. Almost immediately the danger passed and she delivered a healthy child. On another occasion the prayers of Gerard were asked by a mother when both she and her unborn child were in danger. Both she and the child came through the ordeal safely.

Always frail in health, it was evident that Gerard was not to live long. In 1755 he was seized by violent hemorrhages and dysentery and his death was expected at any moment. However, he had yet to teach a great lesson on the power of obedience. His director commanded him to get well, if it were God's will, and immediately his illness seemed to disappear and he left his bed to rejoin the community. He knew, however, that this cure was only temporary and that he had only a little over a month to live.

Before long he did have to return to his bed, and he began to prepare himself for death. He was absolutely abandoned to the will of God and had this sign placed on his door: "The will of God is done here, as God wills it and as long as he wills it." Often he was heard to say this prayer: "My God, I wish to die in order to do thy most holy will." A little before midnight on October 15, 1755, his innocent soul went back to God.

At the death of Gerard, the Brother sacristan, in his excitement, rang the bell as if for a feast, instead of tolling it for a death. Thousands came to view the body of "their saint" and to try to find a last souvenir of the one who had helped them so often. After his death miracles began to be reported from almost all parts of Italy, attributed to the intercession of Gerard. In 1893, Pope Leo XIII beatified him, and December 11, 1904, Pope Pius X canonized him as a saint.

The Mothers' Saint

Because of the miracles God worked through Gerard's prayers with mothers, the mothers of Italy took Gerard to their hearts and made him their patron. At the process of his beatification one witness testified that he was known as "il santo dei felice parti"--the saint of happy childbirth. This devotion has become very popular in North America, both in the United States and Canada.

<http://mission.liguori.org/redemptorists/saints/majella/bio.htm>

State your intention each day. Pray once a day for 9 days. If possible, begin on October 7 and finish on October 15, the eve of the Feast of St. Gerard.

First Day:

Saint Gerard, ever full of faith obtain for me that, believing firmly all that the Church of God proposes to my belief, I may strive to secure through a holy life the joys of eternal happiness.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us Pray. O Almighty and everlasting God, who didst draw to thyself Saint Gerard, even from his tenderest years, making him conformable to the Image of Thy Crucified Son, grant we beseech Thee, that imitating his example, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Second Day:

Saint Gerard, most generous saint, who from thy tenderest years didst care so little for the goods of earth, grant that I may place all my confidence in Jesus Christ alone, my true Treasure, who alone can make me happy in time and in eternity.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Third Day:

Saint Gerard, bright seraph of love, who despising all earthly love, didst consecrate thy life to the service of God and thy neighbor, promoting God's glory in thy lowly state, and ever ready to assist the distressed and console the sorrowful, obtain for me, I beseech thee, that loving God the only God and my neighbor for His sake, I may be hereafter united to Him for ever in glory.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Fourth Day:

Saint Gerard, spotless lily of purity, by the angelic virtue and thy wonderful innocence of life thou didst receive from the Infant Jesus and His Immaculate Mother, sweet pledges of tenderest love, grant, I beseech thee, that I may ever strive in my life-long fight, and thus win the crown that awaits the brave and the true.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Fifth Day:

Saint Gerard, model of holy obedience, who through thy life didst heroically submit the judgment to those who represent Jesus Christ to thee, thus sanctifying thy lowliest actions, obtain for me from God cheerful admission to His Holy Will and the virtue of perfect obedience, that I may be made comfortable to Jesus, my Model, who was obedient even to death.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Sixth Day:

Saint Gerard, most perfect imitator of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, do thou whose greatest glory was to be humble and lowly, obtain that I too, knowing my littleness in God's sight, may be found worthy to enter the kingdom that is promised to the humble and lowly of heart.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Seventh Day:

Saint Gerard, unconquered hero, most patient in suffering, do thou who didst glory in infirmity, and under slander and most cruel ignominy didst rejoice to suffer with Christ, obtain for me patience

and resignation in my sorrows, that I may bravely bear the cross that is to gain for me the crown of everlasting glory.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Eighth Day:

Saint Gerard, true lover of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, do thou who didst kneel long hours before the Tabernacle, and there didst taste the joys of the Paradise. Obtain for me, I beseech thee, the spirit of prayer and an undying love for the Most Holy Sacrament, that thus receiving frequently the Body and Blood of Jesus, I may daily grow in His holy love and merit the priceless grace of loving Him even to the end.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Ninth Day:

Saint Gerard, most favorite child of heaven, to whom Mary gave the Infant Jesus in the day of thy childhood, to whom she sweetly came before thou didst close thine eyes in death, obtain for me I beseech thee, so to seek and love my Blessed Mother during life, that she may be my joy and consolation in this valley of tears, until with thee, before the throne of God, I may praise her goodness for all eternity. Amen.

Say nine Hail Marys

V. Pray for us, O Saint Gerard.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Novena to Saint Gerard Majella

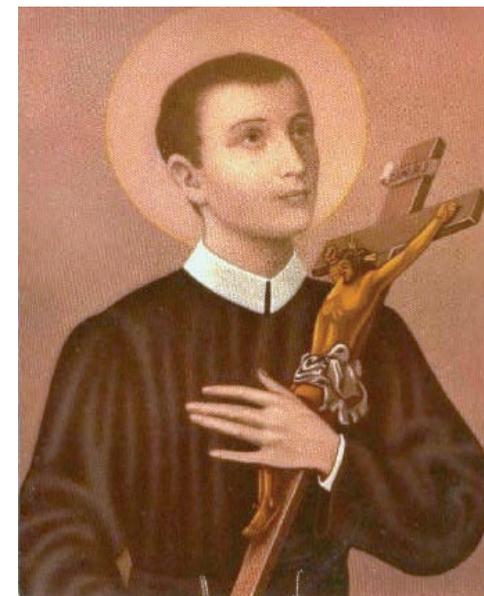


Image from: <http://www.stgerardla.com/old/en/shrine.html>

As the patron saint of pregnant women, Saint Gerard prays for those desiring to conceive a child, those experiencing a difficult pregnancy, and those hoping for a safe childbirth. Please ask for his intercession for couples/women in these situations.