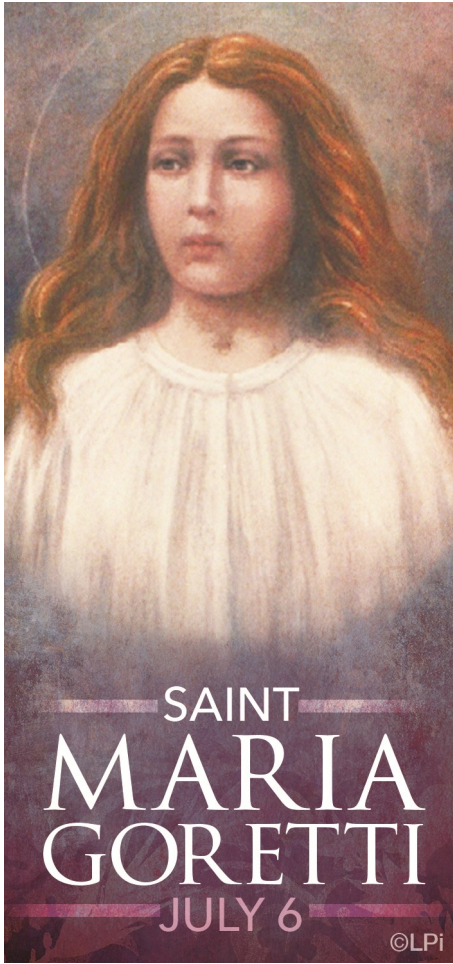


## FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On July 6 the Church celebrates the feast of St. Maria Goretti. On June 25, 1950, Pope Pius XII canonized Maria at a Mass which both her mother and Maria's murderer attended. The details are chilling of how this 11-year-old girl bravely thwarted her attempted assaulter's regular unwanted advances and then forgave him on her deathbed for his violent attack. But the details of her - and her murderer's - sad family life, the miracle that, after years of being belligerently unrepentant, led to her murderer's conversion and to her mother's acceptance of his apology, are truly amazing!

Born in Italy on October 16, 1890, into a farming family, Maria's father died when she was about 9, leaving her widowed mother, Assunta, with six children. With no social services or other means of support, Assunta 'hired' herself and her children out to a landowner, offering their crops for their rent. A neighbor, Giovanni Serenelli and his son, Alessandro, helped the Goretti family. But Giovanni was a drunkard who beat Alessandro and Alessandro, though many years older than Maria, lusted for her. Maria sought her mother's protection, but Alessandro had threatened to kill them both - setting the scene for a tragic 'ending.' The then 19-year-old, angry Alessandro forced himself on the 11-year-old child who rebuffed his attacks; so he stabbed her 14 times, leaving her for dead. After lingering in pain for 20 hours, enduring operations with no anesthesia, and being told she would die, she forgave her murderer. On July 6, 1902, Maria died after receiving the Anointing; the last image she saw in this

world was of our Blessed Mother. In art, St. Maria Goretti is often depicted with our Blessed Mother, holding lilies, a symbol of her virginal purity, and palm branches, a symbol of her triumph over death.

The police nabbed Alessandro as a mob sought to lynch him. With overwhelming evidence against him, he confessed his crime, but as a minor, was sentenced to 30 years of hard labor. He remained obstinate, refused visits from clergy, and seemed hopelessly lost - until after about 6 years in prison - he experienced what some consider St. Maria Goretti's first miracle. In a vision that melted his heart and changed his life, Maria appeared to Alessandro, offering him 14 white lilies - one for each stab wound - which turned into white flames. Over time, he became a model prisoner, sought sacramental forgiveness, and was released 3 years before his term was up. He immediately sought forgiveness from Maria's mother, who said, "If my daughter can forgive him, and God can forgive him, who am I to withhold forgiveness?" He testified to Maria's holiness in the hearings for her cause for sainthood. After leaving prison, he entered a Capuchin monastery, serving as a gardener, and remained a lay brother until his death on May 6, 1970.

The canonization Mass for St. Maria Goretti was so crowded, it was the first held outdoors, in St. Peter's Square. She still is our youngest canonized saint, and the only saint whose mother attended the canonization.

Peace,