

League of

St. Gerard

WINTER 2001

NEWSLETTER

THE REDEMPTORISTS • ONE LIGUORI DRIVE • LIGUORI, MO 63057-9999

Most of us know the highlights from the story of St. Gerard Majella's life. He was raised fatherless by a very devout mother. He was always considered a weakling physically, and he suffered from tuberculosis during his short adult life. Beginning as a child he had a great personal devotion to both the Blessed Sacrament and to our Lady. He joined the Redemptorists amid great opposition from his mother and even from the Redemptorist missionaries themselves. He pronounced his vows as a Redemptorist at age twenty-six and the next three years (the *last* three years of his frail life) were filled with one adventurous missionary experience after another.

It is not an exaggeration to state that virtually every person who merely met Gerard, religious or lay, benefited from their encounter with him. He cared greatly for people's spiritual welfare, and was adept at persuading those alienated from God to turn from their

No
Greater
Love...

St. Gerard:
His
Deepest
Passion



BROTHER DAVID WERTHMANN, C.Ss.R.

sinful ways. Priests and nuns actively sought out Gerard for advice and spiritual direction. He encouraged young people to consider religious vocations to prevent them from falling into the worldly temptations of wealth and immorality.

Yet this saintly "boy-wonder" endured many

harsh trials during his life. There were long, rugged journeys with the missionaries accompanied by physical illness and collapse. He suffered inwardly from darkness of the soul and emptiness during prayer. And as we know, he was once accused of inappropriate behavior with a young lady, for which he was forbidden contact with all outsiders and even from receiving his precious Lord in Communion. What kept him going was his incredibly deep love for God and for our Lady. He desired only to do God's will and to give God praise.

His Friend in Prison

The Eucharist was the nourishment of Gerard's burning love for Christ. At age ten he made his first Communion, and his intention for the rest of his life was to receive our Lord in the Eucharist as frequently as possible—a practice not common in those days. He invented games for his childhood playmates: "Let's go visit our friend in

In Christ we were also chosen,
destined [by God] who accomplishes
all things according to his will,
so that we might exist
for the praise of his glory...
(Ephesians 1:11-12).

prison,” he would say. Then they would all follow him to the church and pray before our Lord locked up in the tabernacle.

As a religious his love for the prisoner in the tabernacle grew and grew. Sometimes he remained in the chapel all night praying. It was as if Gerard had become a prisoner of the Lord. He even got in trouble from his superior for spending so much time in the chapel rather than tending his chores. Passing by the chapel door Gerard felt himself drawn to enter so strongly that he had to shout out loud, “Please let go of me, Lord. I’ve got things to do.”

A young woman whom Gerard had helped enter the convent was unhappy there and decided to leave. But she felt so humiliated that she fabricated a story of Brother Gerard’s involvement in behavior unbecoming a celibate religious. As a result, the superior forbade him from receiving Communion. For Gerard, this punishment was *worse* than the accusation. Shortly

thereafter a priest invited him to serve at Mass. Gerard retorted, “Don’t tempt me. I might grab the host right out of your hand!” Someone else asked him how he was holding up without the

Eucharist. He responded that he got along through “the immensity of his beloved God.” In other words, if God did not wish to come to him in the sacrament, he would communicate as best he could through all of God’s vast creation.

His “Marriage”

Young Gerard also had strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin. On Marian feast days he would sing and dance through the streets, paying no attention to the scorn and mocking of the people watching him. Once, during the celebration of the Immaculate Conception in the cathedral, Gerard stepped forward and placed a ring on the finger of our Lady’s statue. He announced, “I have wedded the Virgin.” And he made that commitment seriously. Later, during a long trip, Brother Gerard and two other young men stopped overnight at an inn. When paying the bill the next morning, the innkeeper’s daughter confessed love at first sight for Gerard. But he responded to her gently,

“Too bad, I am already married to a bride even more beautiful than you...I have wedded the Virgin.”

Mary truly was one of his greatest loves. She reflected to Gerard the beauty of God, and he looked upon all other women as if they were her. He frequently told the Carmelite nuns “you remind me of the Mother of God.”

While in the sanctuary of Mary the Queen, he felt so weak with delirium for our Lady that he fell to the ground. Those with him asked if he was sick. “No,” he sighed. “It’s an illness I’ve suffered from for a long time.” And we know, love is an incurable illness!

God’s Will

On the door outside his room Gerard hung a sign bearing the phrase, “Here the will of God is done.” His greatest love of all was to fulfill God’s will whatever that required. Among his personal resolutions was, “Some strive to do this or that; my only preoccupation is to do the will of God.” For Gerard the total meaning of life was contained in loving God’s divine will. While seriously ill, Gerard received a letter from his superior describing tasks for which he was needed. Thereupon he announced to his doctor, “I cannot die yet because I have to do the will of my superior.” Even on his deathbed he told a confrere, “I imagine myself confined to this bed as if nailed to the will of God.”

Living Christ's Life

The Holy Spirit had been at work in Gerard since he was a child so that Gerard lived the life of Christ in many ways. Just as Christ was sacrificed for us, so Gerard strove to sacrifice himself in the service of others. His confreres nicknamed him "Let-me-do-it" because Gerard always volunteered for extra jobs and for the more difficult assignments, even though he was not as healthy, nor as strong as most of the others.

One of his desires was to die abandoned as Jesus had on the cross. Because his body was racked with tuberculosis, which was so contagious back then, most people, including his confreres, did indeed stay far away during Gerard's last days. His biographer reported that his final request to the Brother infirmarian was for water. How much like Christ's own lament from the cross, "I thirst" (John 19:28). These and other episodes are reported to us to indicate how closely his life was aligned with that of our Savior. They also prove the power of the great love between our God and those of us who love God so completely in return.

St. Gerard and Us

One might conclude that the life this humble, yet very holy lay Brother is nearly impossible to imitate. Yet, the plan of his whole life can be summarized very

simply: to always please God in whatever he did. And that is something any of us can do. We do not have to fret over what God's will is for us. Gerard did not do that. He simply did everything, no matter what it was, in a way he believed would be pleasing to God.

Gerard performed each task he was assigned joyfully. We might do well to examine our attitudes when we approach work, both at home and in our place of business. Do we carry out our responsibilities in a way that will please our Lord? *How* we perform our routine tasks can make all the difference.

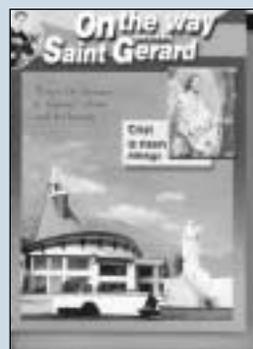
Gerard encouraged others to always be happy even in the midst of tribulations. Remember the song from a few years back: "Don't worry, be happy"? Those lyrics may sound trite, but they summarize Gerard's stance in life. He knew that God wants us to be happy. So even in his worst trials,

he accepted whatever came along as God's will (even if it didn't seem to be so) and he made something joy-filled out of it. Our approach toward life, the world, and others is what will be pleasing to God more than what we actually accomplish.

St. Gerard Majella came from an obviously disadvantaged background. There was no father in the home; his family was extremely poor; and he was sickly much of his life. Yet he held a deep, deep love for God and for Mary. He desired to please God alone, and to influence others to do so, as well. His passionate devotion to God's will exuded from his heart and touched all who encountered him. Today he still touches countless people, and his work continues among us through his intercession with God on our behalf.



Adapted from "Gerard Majella: Saint of the People" by Giustino D'Addezio in *Saint Gerard Majella: His Writings and Spirituality* edited by Noel Londoño B., C.Ss.R. Liguori Publications



On the way with Saint Gerard

On the way with Saint Gerard is a colorful, full-size magazine published by the Redemptorists of St. Gerard's hometown in Italy. It includes a variety of short articles, letters, and pictures of interest to devotees of our beloved saint. You can subscribe by writing to: Sanctuary of St. Gerard Majella; Via Santuario, 9-83040 Materdomini (AV) Italy. Annual subscription rates are United States \$25.00 or \$30.00 Canada.

Litany of St. Gerard

*St. Gerard,
endowed with
extraordinary graces
since early childhood,*

PRAY FOR US.

*St. Gerard,
adorer of the
Most Blessed Sacrament,*

PRAY FOR US.

*St. Gerard,
living image of the
crucified Savior,*

PRAY FOR US.

*St. Gerard,
devoted client
of the Immaculate
Virgin Mary,*

PRAY FOR US.

*St. Gerard,
solely desirous
of pleasing God,*

PRAY FOR US.

*St. Gerard,
zealous promoter
of the conversion
of sinners,*

PRAY FOR US.

*St. Gerard,
wise counselor in the
choice of vocation,*

PRAY FOR US.

*St. Gerard,
enlightened guide
in the direction of souls,*

PRAY FOR US.

The Heart of the Matter

From Michigan

Every time I get your newsletter, I feel compelled to write and tell my story.

Fifteen years ago, my husband and I were like many others trying to start a family. For six years we tried to get pregnant but couldn't find the reason we weren't successful. Several people prayed for us but still nothing happened.

Then the miracle happened, I was pregnant, and three days later I lost the baby. We were devastated. I was very angry with God. But not for long. We started to realize that maybe he had another plan for us. We prayed about adoption but our hearts really didn't feel that was in the plan either. We accepted the fact that we would be childless and we just spoiled the nieces and nephews a bit more.

Several years went by and in September of 2000 my mother was hit with cancer. She needed several surgeries and chemotherapy for several months. Guess who was able to take care of her? Me. Out of eight siblings, I'm the only one without kids who could be there as support for my dad and to drive my mom to the many doctors. That's when it hit us. This was our calling. To be there for my parents as well as my mother-in-law, who is a widow and needs help.

We have been happily married for sixteen years now and still on occasion miss not having a family but it wasn't our choice, so all you couples out there who don't get your prayers answered, don't be discouraged. God may have other plans for you in the future. It wasn't easy getting to this point and accepting our fate. There were many, many tears cried and prayers said, but God has truly blessed us and we are very thankful to him for the gifts he has given us. Look deep when prayers aren't answered and know that God still loves you.

Thank you for letting me express a different point of view.

From the Internet

I ask that you please pray for my husband and me, we have been trying to conceive for two years now. We are both from fairly large families and we had always intended to have a big family of our own. It's amazing how much we take for granted. We now realize how much a child of our own would mean to us. Please pray to St. Gerard and to Jesus for us that we are able to conceive a child in the near future.

From Texas

My mother faithfully prayed to St. Gerard when she contracted German measles while pregnant with my brother. Five doctors told her he would be mentally retarded, so she prayed to St. Gerard for him to be healthy. He was born happy, healthy, and normal.

Now I am calling upon his help. My husband and I have been trying to conceive a child for almost three years. Please help us pray to St. Gerard that God will bless our loving marriage by allowing us to conceive and bring into this world a healthy child. Thank you kindly and God bless you.