

League of

# St. Gerard

WINTER 2002

## NEWSLETTER

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

**G**erard Majella came from the inland region of Italy. That part of the country was afflicted by endemic poverty. Everyday life was miserable. People there had nothing to rely on from their own resources. The only hope they held was in the promise of miracles. And they truly believed in miracles!

The first miracle-legend involving Gerard that has been passed on to us took place when he was a small boy. One morning he left his house and traveled about two kilometers across a stream to a little church dedicated to our Lady. Once inside, the child Jesus came down from the arms of the statue of the Virgin Mary to play with Gerard. After their games, Jesus gave Gerard a loaf of white bread and Gerard brought it to his mother. She was surprised by the whiteness of the bread because it was quite rare in that town.

The mystical significance of the Christ Child offering such pure white bread to young Gerard is obvious. It pre-figured his first holy Com-

## Holiness and Everyday Life

BROTHER DAVID WERTHMANN, C.S.S.R.

munion. Many years later, when his sister Brigitta visited him in the Redemptorist monastery, he told her, “Now I know that the boy who gave me the bread was Jesus. And all along I thought he was just a regular boy like me!”

### Always for the Poor

Gerard was the saint of peasants and workers—they called upon him most often when they were hungry or

sick. His miracles were never just for show. They were always for something useful—things people really needed.

In paintings and stories Gerard is frequently depicted distributing grain or bread to the poor. Once, when all the bread had been given out, Gerard learned that one poor gentleman had gotten none. Even though the supply of bread was gone, Gerard went up to the monastery kitchen. The oven was not working at that time of day, yet Gerard soon returned and gave the man a large round loaf that he pulled from within his cloak, still steaming.

Frequently he distributed grain to the poor from the monastery pantry without considering the needs of his fellow Redemptorists. When the superior protested, Gerard responded by invoking divine providence, and the pantry was instantly restocked.

As we know, Gerard often went into ecstasies during Mass. At those times people gathered under the place where he hovered begging for bread or flour.

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## A Christ-like Life

Once Gerard was walking through a field of grain. A farmer said to him, “Rats are ruining my crops. Put a curse on them.” So Gerard made the Sign of the Cross over the field and an immense number of rats immediately fell belly up on the ground. The farmer was so astonished that he ran ahead shouting to everyone that a saint was coming.

In another legend, a woman could not offer Gerard alms because of a meager harvest. She had only three measures of flour to feed her family for the remainder of the season. Gerard promised her that even though in previous years she had offered only half a measure of flour as alms, that particular year she should offer a full measure and trust in our Lady for the rest. Gerard fed hundreds of workers from the measure of flour she offered up, and just as he had predicted, the other two measures were enough to feed her whole family until the next harvest.

Notice how great are the similarities in these tales to stories told about our Lord in the Scriptures, especially the multiplication of the loaves. Some theologians say that the *real* miracle Jesus performed in that incident was getting all those people, each of

## A Prayer for Mothers

*O patient God,  
you never tire of waiting  
for each of us to grow into the  
person you created us to be.  
Bless mothers as they wait.  
Give them wisdom to know when  
to offer help and when to be silent.  
Help them to love as you do,  
willing always to  
forgive and encourage.  
Grace them with faith that sees  
their children not only as they are  
but also as the  
beautiful reflection of yourself  
that they are becoming.*

MARY VAN BALEN HOLT

whom had brought just a little bit of food with them, to share what they had. And guess what—in sharing, there was more than enough for everyone.

## A Doctor in Faith

We also know that Gerard protected women in labor. A physician once recalled that he knew of sick people who kept Gerard’s picture in their home and who invoked his help. He continued, “I have seen the great faith women in labor place in Brother Gerard, and the power of his protection during childbirth.”

Another doctor stated, “I no longer practice medicine

because Brother Gerard does it for me. There is no sick person, nor woman in labor, who does not find relief or get noticeably better after I give him or her a picture of the saint.”

People spoke of being healed by their beloved saint, even miraculously, as if there was nothing unusual about it at all. In rural Italy to this day, St. Gerard continues to be invoked for every sort of ailment.

## Among His Own People

Many so-called miracles are attributed to St. Gerard in his lifetime. But he was just an ordinary person. He lived close to the peasants who were very simple folks. In

their minds they transformed Gerard’s prayers and words of encouragement into the miracles and legends told about him today.

Though Gerard loved God dearly, and felt a special affection for the Blessed Sacrament, he was not the type of person who did nothing but sit in church all day. Nor did he sit around inside the monastery waiting for the needy to come to him. Instead, he went out to the peasants and met them in the fields. And he spoke their coarse rustic dialect.

He particularly sought out the lowliest. He felt comfortable among them, and they

felt equally as comfortable with him. They experienced the power of his closeness to God, and then they imagined that his spiritual support had provided for their material needs, as well. In reality, his humble encouragement probably inspired people to take action for themselves.

### He Belongs to the Poor

One might say that Gerard Majella was a saint imposed from the bottom up, a grassroots saint. After all, he was not a member of the Church hierarchy. Witnesses at his canonization spoke of a saint who belonged to *them*. Reading their testimonies, one gets the impression that Gerard absolutely *had* to be

## Prayer for a Special Intention

*St. Gerard, during your life you extended your help to the unfortunate and poor around you. Help me in my present need (state your intention). Give me the insight to recognize the presence of Jesus in the sufferings and troubles of others. Let not my urgent need for help cause me to think only of myself. Following your example, and uniting my prayers and sufferings with Jesus on the cross, may I be transformed into a person of love and compassion. St. Gerard, pray for me.*

*Amen.*

declared a saint by the Church simply because so many people believed that he was one.

It is said that when he died, people “fought to get a piece of his clothes or any other object belonging to the servant of God to keep for their devotion.” Everything he touched became sacred to the people.

Gerard was not a great educator. He never studied and was practically illiterate. Nor was he an organizer. He did not seek to transform society or its systems. But he accepted the material and spiritual conditions of the time as they were. Gerard was present to people whom Vatican docu-

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## Affirmations From St. Gerard

**One of Gerard’s contemporaries said of him, “Every word of his was an arrow that went straight to the heart.” Let his words touch our hearts as we read them.**

***“Life for me is faith. Everything we do for God is a prayer.”***

***“The poor are living images of Jesus Christ. It is we who have sinned and it is the innocent poor who suffer for it.”***

***“Mary, I wish to love you as much as Jesus Christ loves you.”***



ments and archbishops could not reach, and he made it easy for them to practice their religion.

For people who lived off the land—who struggled with drought, rats, poor crops, low salaries, traders who overcharged, and epidemics afflicting their fields—to all those people Gerard offered the miracle of faith. Because of Gerard, faith did not remain abstract but became real in their lives. These people could not distinguish science from mystery. Nor did they understand political economics any more than they understood the action of divine providence. For them, whatever happened in life—for whatever reason—must have been a miracle.



Adapted from “The Penitential Piety of Gerard Majella” by Gabriele De Rosa in *Saint Gerard Majella: His Writings and Spirituality*, edited by Noel Londoño, C.Ss.R., Liguori Publications.

*“Sometimes  
we find ourselves  
confused and weak.  
But there is no  
confusion with God,  
there is no weakness  
with God’s power,  
because it is certain  
that in our battles  
the divine majesty  
helps us with his  
powerful arm.”*

ST. GERARD MAJELLA—  
LETTER TO SISTER MARIA OF JESUS,  
JANUARY 22, 1752

The



## Heart of the Matter

### *From the Internet*

My five children born between 1950 and 1967 all have Gerard in their names in honor of the saint who helped me through the pregnancies. Since everyone has his name we always celebrated October 15 as a family birthday. Two of my children are ill, please pray for them and the rest of my family.



Please pray for my friend who has just been informed by her physicians that she will never be able to have children. A virtuous, devout person, she is devastated by this news. Please pray that through the intercession of St. Gerard Majella our Lord will bless her with the miracle of childbirth.



After my husband and I had been trying to conceive for a long time, my mother-in-law enrolled me in the League of St. Gerard. Upon receiving the enrollment, I prayed faithfully to St. Gerard every day. Shortly afterward we found out we were to be blessed with twins. I continued to pray to St. Gerard every day thanking him for my pregnancy and begging for healthy children.

I continue to pray to St. Gerard daily. I give him thanks and praise for my children and I pray for any friends of mine who are pregnant. Everyone I have prayed for has gotten pregnant and given birth to healthy children.

My husband and I have been trying to conceive again for some time now. I pray daily to St. Gerard and I would also ask you to remember me and my family in your prayers. Please pray to St. Gerard to bless us with another pregnancy and healthy baby or babies. I know all things are possible with God and I beg St. Gerard to intercede on my behalf. You will all be remembered in my prayers too.



### *From Texas*

Thank you for sending me your newsletter. I am typing this one-handed with our sixth blessing asleep in my arms.