



# League of St. Gerard

## SUMMER 2002

### NEWSLETTER

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

## The Deep Piety of St. Gerard

≈ BROTHER DAVID WERTHMANN, C.S.S.R. ≈

The Church teaches that parents are the primary educators of the faith for their children. For a young boy, this may be even more true about his mother. Faith is transmitted and nourished by maternal communication. St. Gerard's inclination to the sacred and his desire for God were certainly imparted to him by his family. For simple folks in those days, their faith was what they breathed. They may have been ignorant of complex theological ideas, but even still, they were wise and upright people.

We know very little about Gerard's parents. His father died when Gerard was quite young. His mother was a pious and obliging woman. She died in 1752 while Gerard was in formation to become a Brother. It was from her that Gerard inherited his sensitive soul. He must have been very

close to her. This is evident from the intensity with which he loved the Blessed Virgin, whom he called "Mamma Maria." In fact, he held all women in high regard and treated them with great respect and purity of heart. Whenever he saw a woman he broke into a Hail Mary, not to avoid temptation, but to praise God.

Gerard loved to participate in pilgrimages to shrines and holy places. As a young man in Muro, Italy, he frequented a chapel on the outskirts of town. He would go for three or four days without returning home, spending all his time in prayer. What limited sleep he allowed himself would be on the bare ground. Sometimes he

brought along a little bread and a bottle of wine and stayed several days. This simple feast gave him a bit of joy, and allowed a brief respite from the poverty of his daily home life.

As a Brother he made nine-day journeys with the Redemptorist students to various sanctuaries throughout the country. He also made pilgrimages on his own and spent whole nights in church, far from all sounds, in order to dedicate himself to conversation with God.

It is very possible that as a young boy he went with his mother to the shrine at Materdomini where one day he would live as a Redemptorist. We do not know his mother's reaction when he joined the Redemptorists, but being very poor we know that

she depended upon Gerard for support. Although he had an intense desire to become a religious,

leaving his mother behind must have been one of the most difficult choices of his life. Should he give his life totally to God when the

"I trust and hope  
in God alone."

chance came, or should he stay a little longer by the side of his elderly mother?

Gerard's popularity among families today and his constant protection of mothers and children speak of the love and devotion between him and his mother.

### Other Sources of Gerard's Piety

Many young men of the time belonged to various confraternities and pious associations with excellent spiritual directors. Gerard belonged to none of those, however, as he was too poor. Lacking such spiritual discipline, his religiosity came from nature and was much more carefree. As he grew in his desire to become a saint, some ridiculed him as a lunatic because of his simplicity and religious spontaneity. Others found it a pleasure just listening to him. Speaking like an angel, Gerard described the "immensity of the good Lord" explaining with expressive examples how we live in God.

He met God everywhere. Once he said, "If God were to remove this veil from our eyes, we would see paradise everywhere; God is there, even beneath these rocks." And he found God within himself as he sang, "If you want to see God / seek him wherever you wish / and you have to return / for he is in your heart."

Gerard also liked to read. In the afternoons, while others in the community were taking siestas, Gerard spent

**"Take away God's will from me and you will see that nothing is left."**

those times in prayer or in reading holy books. And while traveling he carried a packet of books, many of them on the passion of Christ.

Normal practice for devout families in those days was to get to church early, while it was still dark, to hear the parish priest read aloud meditations from some great religious writer. The women would be in one section of the church, the men in another, and the children would be with their parents, still half asleep. But everyone who heard the words of the meditations, came to know them practically by heart.

It was at times like these when Gerard wrote, "I choose the Holy Spirit as my only consoler and protector in all things....And you, my only joy, Immaculate Virgin Mary, you will be my second protectress and consolatrix."

Gerard received his devotion to the Blessed Virgin with his mother's milk. Probably his favorite Marian devotion was to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. In 1752 her feast under that title fell on the same day as the Feast of the Most Holy Redeemer—the day Gerard professed his vows as a Redemptorist. Three years later, on his deathbed, he pointed out to Brother Andrea, the

**"I have resolved to live and die inundated with faith; for faith is life, and life is faith."**

infirmarian, "Look, look how many scapulars there are in the room."

### The Influence of Folklore

Typical piety in eighteenth-century Italy borrowed traditions from various practices of folklore prevalent in the region for a long time. Thus, religion could become quite sentimental, and was frequently displayed with great spectacle. Often it crossed the boundaries of superstition. Yet Gerard's spirituality was purer; it had a true intimacy with God that was loving and sacrificial.

There is a story about a young man looking for a treasure in the forest. Suddenly Gerard appeared to him, and the young man felt his luck was certain because part of the legend for finding the treasure included the presence of a curate or a monk. Well, Gerard played along with the game, but on

the way he converted the young man to seek his treasure only in Christ. Fantasies like this were common and broke up the monotony of life for poor people in those small towns and villages.

### Gerard's Spirituality for Us

Modern Christians might find the pietistic practices of the past too extreme. But consider this—spending five hours a day in prayer, as was common in religious houses back then, sounds difficult to us, yet it is about the same

amount of time we, on average, sit before a television.

Gerard's piety was characterized by a profound sense of transcendence; unlimited confidence in a provident God; perceiving God through one's own heart; experience of the mystery of the cross in all its drama and salvific power; affectionate attachment to the Blessed Virgin; and a great trust in the intercession of the saints.

The highways of Europe were plagued with drifters, crazies, troublemakers, beggars, pilgrims, gypsies, and adventurers. Gerard was completely comfortable among these people, often mistaken as one of them. In imitating Christ, Gerard could not pass from being rich to becoming poor as St. Francis had done, because, like many of us, Gerard was poor from his first breath to his last. Instead, imitation of Christ for Gerard had to be the imitation of his "madness," that is, the lunacy of Christ in accepting the folly of the cross. This lunacy was not a mental disturbance, but foolishness for the sake of love. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

May we always be foolish enough to love God, and to act on that love, in spite of what those around us think.



Adapted from "Saint Gerard and the Popular Piety of His Time," by Angelomichele de Spirito in *Saint Gerard Majella: His Writings and Spirituality*, edited by Noel Londoño B., C.Ss.R., Liguori Publications

## LITANY OF SAINT GERARD MAJELLA

**Brother Gerard,**

*you spent your life in union with Jesus Christ,  
help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.*

**Brother Gerard,**

*you desired to give yourself to Christ in the religious life, obtain  
for us the grace to follow our vocation in life.*

**Brother Gerard,**

*you were filled with empathy for the poor and suffering,  
obtain for us the gift of compassion for those in need.*

**Brother Gerard,**

*your prayers to the Lord brought healing to the sick,  
obtain for us the power to bring the healing  
presence of Jesus to those in need.*

**Brother Gerard,**

*the passion of Jesus moved you to imitate his redemptive love,  
obtain for us the grace to accept our sufferings  
for the salvation of the world.*

**Brother Gerard,**

*you brought back to the Church those who were abandoned,  
obtain for us the zeal to welcome people back  
to the community of faith.*

**Brother Gerard,**

*you were devoted to the Blessed Sacrament,  
obtain for us a vibrant love for the holy Eucharist.*

**Saint Gerard,**

*your intercession is felt in the lives of many who  
call upon you in their need.*

*Hear us as we lift our voice in prayer.*

*Obtain for us a greater love for Jesus Christ.*

*Help us to imitate your generous love for the poor and suffering.*

*Assist us with your prayers and obtain for us the help we need.*

**Amen.**



*In Thanksgiving for  
Mothers' Prayers*

***We thank you, Lord, for  
the prayer of mothers.  
Sometimes it is whispered  
in church or  
counted out on beads.  
It may echo ancient words  
or rise from her heart  
while she rocks a  
tired infant to sleep.  
Sometimes her work  
becomes her prayer as  
she cooks dinner,  
praying that the meal  
will lift her family's spirits  
as well as  
nourish their bodies.  
Sometimes prayer wells  
silently within as she  
works away from home.  
It slips quietly from  
weary lips as she sits on  
the edge of a bed,  
chasing away fears or  
cooling a fever.  
Thank you for a  
mother's prayer.  
More than we know,  
this world is  
sustained by the  
prayers  
of its mothers.***

*From Celebrate Mother's Day  
by Mary van Balen Holt*



# The Heart of the Matter

*From the Internet*

I would like to request prayers for me and my family. I was enrolled in the League of St. Gerard by family and friends after two pregnancy losses. I have read many of your publications and have enjoyed all of them.

We recently found out that I am now pregnant for the third time. My husband and I are scared and worried, especially after losing the first two. I was hoping to be added to your prayer list.

*From Montana*

I would like to tell you about a little baby saved through the intercession of St. Gerard. My grandniece was pregnant and the little baby was getting fluid on his lungs. So from the fifth month on, her baby had to be aspirated twice a week, while he was still in the womb. When the time came for the baby to be born, the doctors took it by Cesarean section. The baby boy is beautiful and healthy. I had sent her a St. Gerard pamphlet and medal. I know all her friends and family were praying. We are so grateful.

*From Iowa*

My husband and I have been married nearly twelve years and had many problems conceiving children. To summarize a very long story, my mother enrolled me in the League of St. Gerard and I gave birth to beautiful twin girls this June. There is no question that our children were prayed here. My husband and I have been incredibly blessed.

*From the Internet*

Please pray for my unborn child that delivery will go well. I have been having trouble getting my sugar levels under control due to gestational diabetes. The baby is big and may have to be delivered two weeks early. We have been married for fourteen years and had five miscarriages, so we are maybe more anxious than we need to be. Please pray that I have the faith and physical strength needed to deliver this child.

Thank you for your kind prayers and know that your community will continue to be in our prayers.

*From Oregon*

When my husband and I found out we were expecting our first child, my mother-in-law enrolled us in the League of St. Gerard. Though my pregnancy had many complications, St. Gerard blessed us with the safe delivery of a healthy baby boy. We are praying to St. Gerard to help us become pregnant again and bless us with another healthy baby. Please pray with us.