



League of St. Gerard

FALL 2003

NEWSLETTER

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

St. Gerard's Youthful Years

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As a boy, Gerard did the normal “church things” most kids do. He hung pictures of saints in his room and he “played Mass” by dressing up as a priest. When he was about seven years old he approached the sanctuary along with everyone else to receive holy Communion but was refused by the priest because he was too young. (In those days children did not make their first Communion until age ten or twelve.) The story is told that St. Michael the Archangel appeared to him with a Communion host later that day. Another tale, also very familiar to us, is that a certain statue of the Christ Child frequently came to life, played with little Gerard, and gave him a beautiful white loaf of bread to take home to his poor family.

These stories tell us that Gerard knew Jesus through more than just the words his

mother taught him or the priests at church preached. Gerard knew Christ in a very real, personal, and concrete way. He had met *in person* the Jesus who becomes present on the altar during Mass. And finally at age ten, he received Jesus into his own heart at his *official* first Communion. From then on Jesus in the Eucharist was the center of his personal spirituality—not just in receiving Communion as often as he could, but also in praying before the Blessed Sacrament.

Early each morning he attended Mass before break-

fast. The sacristan of the church was a relative of Gerard and had given him a key so that he could get in before anyone else and spend quiet time in prayer. Then he would return to church later in the afternoon to perform other works of piety, as well. Sometimes he would spend three or four days in church without going home at night, and slept on the hard floor.

It seems that our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament had established a very personal dialogue with Gerard, and called him his “little madman.” A priest from the cathedral in Gerard’s hometown testified that whenever Gerard passed in front of the tabernacle he heard a voice calling him, “You are a madman!” And Gerard would

One thing is necessary: suffer everything with resignation to the divine will, since that will help you for your eternal salvation.

from a letter of St. Gerard

answer back to God, “You are even more insane because you have deliberately imprisoned yourself in that tabernacle.”

Have patience if you do not come across what you are looking for. Perhaps our Lord is blocking the path in order to keep you mortified...Be of good heart and trust in God, for he will give you the strength to overcome everything.

from a letter of St. Gerard

Following the Suffering Jesus

Gerard also dearly loved the crucified Christ. There was a book popular at the time that described Jesus as having been declared insane since he was willing to face the sufferings of his passion and death. Gerard delighted in the fact that people considered Jesus to be insane, and he wanted to be treated in the same way. That was because Gerard wanted his own life to be transformed into the life of Christ for others.

In Gerard's day, spiritual people would perform all sorts of penances and used various forms of mortification on their bodies to imitate the sufferings of Christ. Modern psychology would consider many of those practices as bordering on the psychotic or pathological. And indeed they were. No spiritual director today would tolerate such practices among his or her devotees.

Yet, when my mother lay dying in a cardiac intensive

care unit, I learned a lot about suffering and how it can be redemptive. I realized that there are several ways in which we imitate Christ. For example, he frequently went off to deserted places to pray to his Abba. We can do that whenever we take a quiet moment to reflect on God and listen for his voice. Jesus taught the crowds about God on the mountainsides and in the synagogue. We can teach about God's love through the good example of our lives. Jesus also healed people and performed other miracles. While we might not do something as spectacular as that, we can help make life easier and better for others by our various works of charity. And finally, Jesus obviously suffered even though he was innocent of any crime. We do not need to go around looking for opportunities to suffer (as we do to pray, to teach, or to be charitable), because life itself presents enough pain, sorrow, and heartache. But when any type of suffering

does come our way, we can try to accept it serenely as another opportunity to be like Christ.

St. Paul said the same thing, "We are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:10). Using the word *body* here, Paul does not mean the body as opposed to the soul. Rather, he was referring to the whole person. And so all the anxieties, temptations, and emotional stresses we endure are sufficient sufferings to be like the "mortified" Christ. Paul was also saying that Christ continues to suffer through the pains and sufferings that we experience. So, one of the ways Christ is present in today's world is through our lives of pain and anguish.

And that's exactly what Gerard was trying to get at. The penances he performed were not to punish himself or his body, but to be united to Christ who suffered so greatly while here on earth. Gerard's internal assimilation to the Eucharist and to the crucified Jesus was because of his incredible love for God. He was filled with Christ's Holy Spirit and he couldn't help himself. In fact, after receiving the sacrament of confirmation he would often speak of "my Holy Spirit."

Simple, God-like Values

Gerard's family was poor—he lived the same life as the peasants and craftsmen of the time. As such, Gerard experi-

enced discrimination from those higher up in the feudal society of the culture who regularly snubbed the lower classes. But this helped him retain simple values and not seek personal adulation. The primary value poor people hold onto is compassion for one another. Gerard was extraordinary in his compassion for people.

Gerard also seemed to have been free from temptations against purity. That certainly was a special grace from God. In Gerard's simplicity, he saw things, including other people, as God sees them. Thus, he recognized in each person, man or woman, the face of God. And for him, another human being was not an object to lust after.

In everything Gerard did,

and in every relationship he encountered, he acted freely as a child of God. He was not a slave to worldliness or to his passions. His heart was the heart of Jesus. Throughout his youth he lived and grew in these ways, both in his humanity and in his holiness.

The Holy Spirit's gifts of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom help us, also, to see things in the world as God sees them. Let us pray that God's Holy Spirit may enter our lives, and help us to live in simplicity, so that we may grow in God's love and in holiness—like young Gerard did.

Adapted from "The Christocentrism of Saint Gerard" by Domenico Capone, C.Ss.R., in *Saint Gerard Majella, His Writings and Spirituality*, Noel Londoño, C.Ss.R., editor. Liguori Publications.

Feast of St. Gerard Majella

October 16

Novena to St. Gerard

Prayer for Motherhood

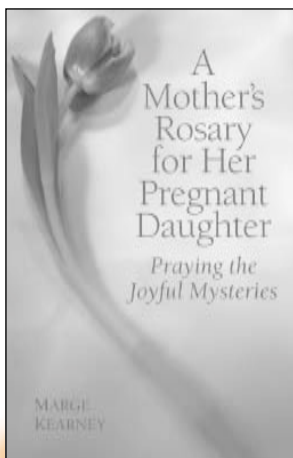
Good St. Gerard, powerful intercessor before the throne of God, wonder-worker of our day, I call upon you and seek your aid. You know that our marriage has not yet been blessed with a child and how much we desire this gift. Please present our fervent pleas to the Creator of life, from whom all parenthood proceeds, and beseech Him to bless us with a child whom we may raise as his child and heir of heaven. Amen.

Prayer for a Sick Child

St. Gerard, who, like the Savior, loved children so tenderly and by your prayers freed many from disease and even death, listen to us who are pleading for our sick child. We thank God for the great gift of our son/daughter and ask him to restore our child to health if such be his holy will. This favor, we beg of you through your love for all children and mothers. Amen.

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, 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.



A MOTHER'S ROSARY FOR HER PREGNANT DAUGHTER

When the author's daughter became pregnant, she wanted to do something special to make the nine month wait and the baby's delivery a time of joy and spiritual growth. This pamphlet is for any woman involved in another woman's pregnancy. Meditating on the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary, one forges a bond with Mary and with all mothers, especially the one for whom you are praying. Each reflection will enhance your personal prayer, and will bring "good news of great joy" into your life.

If you would like a copy of this pamphlet please send \$1.00 and a self-addressed stamped envelope for each copy you want to: "A Mother's Rosary," Redemptorist Resources, Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057.

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Sharing God's Love

Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ,
I rejoice that you sent
your Son to us.

As we wait for his return
at the end of time,
we live in hope.

May our hearts
be filled with the joy
you promised when we
live this life you gave us.

As a caring follower
of Jesus, help me to
bring a sign of your love
to others in my life,
not that they may praise
me, but that they, too,
may taste the joy
of the One who is to
come in glory.

I ask these things
through Jesus in the
Holy Spirit.

Amen.

From *The People's Prayer Book*
Edited by Carole Garibaldi Rogers
and Mary Ann Jeselson
Liguori Publications, 2003

The Heart of the Matter

From the Internet

My prayer request is for my daughter-in-law, who is married to my eldest son. She has medical problems and has been unsuccessful in becoming pregnant. Physicians have told her the possibility of becoming pregnant is very, very low. I deeply feel their hurt and we are trying to accept that perhaps it is God's will, but it still dwells in their hearts.

I sent them a devotional prayer to St. Gerard in hopes they will use it. I discovered St. Gerard on Mother's Day. I truly believe in St. Gerard and I have received numerous blessings and miracles.

Please pray for them, and if it be God's will, with the intercession of St. Gerard, restore their hope, faith, and trust in God. Please pray also that they will be blessed from the Creator of Life with a gift of a healthy pregnancy and continued physical, emotional, and spiritual blessings.

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I wanted to share my story. After several miscarriages we were close to giving up our hope for a second child when some women in a mothers group at my church enrolled me in the League of St. Gerard. That same month I conceived my daughter who was born in May. She was born and remains in excellent health after a pregnancy complicated by pregnancy-induced hypertension. One of our relatives said that our baby was prayed into this world and I believe that is true. I feel quite blessed and am very grateful.

From Nebraska

This letter is in gratitude to St. Gerard for the safe birth of our grandson.

A while back, I enrolled my daughter in the League of St. Gerard. At that time high blood pressure was complicating her pregnancy, and the baby was in breech position. He later turned himself, and she had an uneventful birth. Both mother and child are in good condition, and I'm very grateful to St. Gerard for answering my prayers for them.

Incidentally, I have three sons with the middle name Gerard.