

# Drawn to Maria Goretti

FR. EDWARD LOONEY, NOVEMBER 4, 2015

**I love devotional Catholicism.** By this I mean making pilgrimages to shrines and praying at the tombs of saints. I frequented the tomb of St. Mariam of Jesus Crucified, the Palestinian Carmelite, while I was in Bethlehem for three weeks in 2014. In January 2015, I prayed for my (then) upcoming ordination to the priesthood at the tomb of St. Damien of Molokai in Leuven, Belgium. I find these spiritual practices and devotions to be beneficial.

With that being said, I must confess that when I heard about the [Pilgrimage of Mercy](#), in which the relics of St. Maria Goretti would travel throughout the United States, I thought it was weird. It struck me as Catholicism meets the *Antiques Roadshow*. Not only that, but my pessimism wondered whether or not the story of Maria Goretti would attract any interest among American Catholics.

My devotionalism and curiosity got the best of me. I was intrigued by St. Maria Goretti's Pilgrimage of Mercy, and so on October 16, 2015, after going back and forth interiorly whether or not I should make my own pilgrimage to venerate her relics, I buckled into the driver's seat of my Ford Fusion and hit the road toward Madison, to a parish named after the Church's youngest saint. It was at this parish that Bishop Robert Morlino presided over a Mass honoring St. Maria Goretti at 7pm. In a filled to capacity, standing room only church, Mass commenced and by the *Ite, Missa Est*, the entire congregation came to know the story of St. Maria Goretti.

I remained in the church following Mass for about an hour to pray. During that hour people kept coming. And as I exited the Church, I was amazed to see that the line extended outside, into the frigid cold. As I headed home, I could not help but ask myself: Why were so many people drawn to the relics of Maria Goretti? After all, this form of devotionalism, is not expressed all that often in the States. But there was something about this teenage saint that drew massive amounts of people. I realized that America needed the story of Maria Goretti, her witness, and her prayers.



## ***We Admire Her Chastity***

Why were people drawn to Maria Goretti? It's because we admire her chastity and purity. Maria Goretti's story challenges our American culture to a greater appreciation of these virtues. It was Maria's resistance against her attacker which brought about her death. She reminded Alessandro that what he was trying to do was a sin. Not only did she care about her purity, but she was concerned about the soul of her attacker.

We live in a time marked by sexual promiscuity. Why do thousands of people line up to see Maria Goretti? Because they want their hearts to be like the heart of Maria. They want to grow in chastity, and so they look to her story and ask for her prayers. They desire a pure heart.

All we have to do is turn on the television and our purity is assaulted. We watch television shows that glorify the very cause of Maria's death. Our entertainment, be it television or movies, highlight rape, its victims, and the quest to solve these crimes. We live in a sexually indulgent culture because of the easy accessibility of contraception. Teenage pregnancies are on the rise. People "hook-up" in our culture and search for one night stands. Many turn to pornography as a way to fill a void of love in their life. Sexuality is no longer valued as a gift from God,

mirroring the love of Christ and His Church, but rather as something to be taken advantage of, at any opportunity.

People form lines and pass by the relics of St. Maria Goretti because they are wounded by their sinfulness. Many are enslaved to sexual sins. They look to Maria Goretti and ask her to pray for them, so that they can turn to God, and like her, be a defender of that gift given to them by God.

## ***We Admire Her Ability to Forgive***

The story of Maria Goretti does not end with her defense of purity. After being stabbed fourteen times, Maria, while on her deathbed, forgave Alessandro. As an American people we admire Maria's ability to forgive.

We struggle to forgive in our American culture. Not only can we not forgive ourselves for things we have done in our life (*e.g.* impurity), but we find it extremely difficult to forgive other people. Many people, including myself, are holding grudges against those who have offended us. It is hard to forgive other people. Even more, it is difficult to forget what people have done; the memories of hurtful words are actions remain. But our God calls us to forgive those who have hurt us. We must forgive our family, coworkers, and friends.

People form lines and pass by the relics of St. Maria Goretti because they know there are people in their lives they need to forgive and need divine assistance in doing so. As they touch the glass case, they ask Maria Goretti, who forgave the one who hurt her, to help them forgive the people in their lives. And they ask for the grace to forgive themselves because in time, Alessandro was even able to forgive himself, after Maria came to him in a dream and gave him 14 lilies.

## ***A Saint for the Year of Mercy***

Maria Goretti is an appropriate saint for the Year of Mercy. Her story challenges all sinners in their struggles with the flesh. She is one of their patrons and intercessors in whatever struggle they face. Like Alessandro who turned to God for mercy, we must seek out Christ's mercy in the confessional. But even more so, Maria is a living witness of forgiving offences willingly, one of the spiritual works of mercy. Just as Maria forgave Alessandro, she inspires us to reach out and extend mercy, forgiveness to the people in our lives who have hurt us. After all, Jesus told us to petition the Father in this way, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." For whatever wrong the eleven year old Maria Goretti did, she surely experienced God's forgiveness, for she heroically forgave the one who trespassed against her, who ended her life too soon, taking her from her impoverished family, her friends, and the Church. Now, as one of the blessed in Heaven, she intercedes for us, praying that her story can inspire us to a greater love of purity in our lives and lead us to forgive our family and friends.

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