

ST. MARIA  
GORETTI



Saint Maria Goretti  
October 16, 1890 – July 6, 1902

# ST. MARIA GORETTI

IN GARMENTS ALL RED

Fr. Godfrey Poage, C.P.

Foreword by Fr. Carlos Martins, CC



*“Who is this that cometh . . . this beautiful one . . . Why then is thy apparel red, and thy garments like theirs that tread in the winepress?”*

—Isaiah 63:1–2

TAN Books  
Charlotte, North Carolina

NIHIL OBSTAT:      Kilian Dooley, C.P., Ph.D.  
                                 Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMI POTEST:    James Patrick White, C.P.  
                                 Provincial of Holy Cross Province  
                                 July 2, 1950

IMPRIMATUR:      ✠ Samuel Cardinal Stritch, D.D.  
                                 Archbishop of Chicago  
                                 July 6, 1950

First published in 1950 by Paluch Publications as a title in the “Lumen Books” series. Later editions published by St. Paul Editions, Boston, and Ave Maria Institute.

This edition with new typesetting and foreword, including revisions in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization copyright © 2015 by TAN Books. Typography and changes in this edition are the property of TAN Books and may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, without written permission of the publisher.

Pictures used with permission of the Director of the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace and St. Maria Goretti, Nettuno, Italy.

ISBN: 978-0-89555-615-8

Library of Congress Catalog Card No.: 97-62521

Cover illustration: *Maria Goretti* by Giuseppe Brovelli-Soffredini.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TAN Books  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)

2015

Dedicated to  
Mary,  
Queen of Martyrs

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

My sincere gratitude goes to my confreres, especially Frs. Pierre and Dominic, whose research, many suggestions, and constructive criticism played an extremely important part in this book.

## CONTENTS

Foreword .....	ix
Beatification Address .....	xv
Prologue .....	xxiii
1. Journey for Maria .....	1
2. Home in the Swampland .....	5
3. Coming of the Serenellis .....	10
4. Misunderstanding and Warning .....	14
5. Maria's Happiest Day .....	20
6. The Little Woman .....	25
7. The Angel of Darkness .....	29
8. Even to Blood .....	33
9. Hours of Pain .....	39
10. The Final Struggle .....	43
Epilogue .....	50
Pictures .....	51
Model of Youth .....	65
Novena to St. Maria Goretti .....	70





## FOREWORD

In 2012 Pope Benedict XVI made a statement that, on the surface, may leave one stunned. During his Holy Thursday homily for the Chrism Mass he remarked that the figure of Jesus Christ may be too difficult for us to follow. Though Christ provided the perfect model to please God, because that model is perfect, it can seem “too lofty and too great for us to dare to measure ourselves by him.” We are imperfect and can never perfectly achieve the kind of perfection that is present in the Eternal Son of God. The pope points out, however, that in His mercy, God has made provision for this. He has given us the saints who, as “translations” of the Word, provide us with a model “that is more accessible and closer to us.”

In his teaching, the Pontiff was merely quoting St. Augustine, the great Latin theologian of the fifth century, gloriously known as the Doctor of Grace. Both Benedict and Augustine recognize how effectively God uses even the imperfection and limitation of the saints as tools with which to shepherd His people. Indeed, Augustine is famously known for struggling with chastity, a fact he himself discloses in his writings. Such a struggle, faced

by a saint held in such incomparable regard, has given hope to countless souls who struggle with the same. Among other things, it informs them that their struggle with sin need not define them and that great heights of sanctity are possible even for those who struggle with sinfulness.

The example of the saints is effective precisely because it offers us consolation. They have walked the difficult paths we face—complete with their own falls and shortcomings—and, nevertheless, overcame them. What makes the saints great is that they spent their lives pointing to God as they walked that path. But God, in His mystery, also points to the saints as His masterpieces of creation. This is a property of God that relatively few people, no matter how intelligent, ever perceive. Often, it is only the simplest of the faithful to whom He bestows this precious insight.

Saint Maria Goretti was a simple, pious girl who lived her short life in terrible conditions and who died a wretched death. From a distance, there is nothing remarkable about her. She had no education, no way out of the grinding poverty that was all she knew, and no hope for a better future. To the world, she is a mere peasant living in poverty, an illiterate girl from an age that seemed to mass produce peasantry and tragedy. But even the world is startled when it learns of the astounding freedom she possessed that revealed itself when she forgave her assassin with the last strength she had. It was a forgiveness that was offered during the height of her agony, when the infection brought

on by the fourteen stab wounds inflicted upon her was snuffing the life out of her body as it ate her alive. Evidently, Maria is more than just a product of her poverty.

Even to faithful, believing Christians, St. Maria Goretti is someone that is often misunderstood at worst, and incomplete at best. Most who have heard of her believe they know her story because they are aware that that she died for her purity, a victim of a brute who desired to fornicate with her and whose plans were stopped—even when they evolved into rape—due to her resistance. She is thus often relegated to merely a saintly model in regards to sexual purity. I say merely because that is usually the only thing with which many people associate her.

To be clear, St. Maria Goretti is a model of chastity for the Universal Church. As someone who would rather die than offend God, she lived for her one Love. She is a fitting example of purity for all. But there is something much deeper within Maria from which her glory flows, a glory out of which her purity is a fruit: her identification with the Mercy of Christ. To miss sight of this is to miss out on the particular charism with which God blessed her, and to make her a much less useful witness of Christ than what she is.

Perhaps most startling about Maria was how easy it would have been for her to deny mercy to her attacker. While Maria did not have a “checkered past” like St. Augustine—a checkered past that would make it easy for those who struggle with sin

to relate to her, like those who struggle with chastity can relate to St. Augustine—nevertheless, a quality to which every human being can identify radiates from her: In Maria, there existed the very easy possibility of refusing mercy to her offender. In that sense, we can all relate to St. Maria and draw strength from her witness. Her story is so heartbreaking, so emotionally charged, that there is no soul alive who cannot connect with her enormously difficult task of forgiving her assassin. And, forgive him she did. Completely and unconditionally.

It is in this light that St. Maria's true model of sanctity emerges. Everyone finds it difficult to forgive. And yet, the strength shown by this wounded and dying eleven-year-old peasant girl gives strength to all who are challenged by the demand of Christ, "Unless you forgive you will not be forgiven" (Mt 6:15). To borrow a term used by Pope Benedict, she is indeed a fitting "translation of the Word."

Thus, while St. Maria is universally known as the Patroness of Purity, her greatest virtue was her unyielding forgiveness of her attacker even in the midst of horrendous physical suffering, a forgiveness that would completely convert him and set him on a path to personal holiness.

Within my ministry of promoting the saints, I have witnessed how touched people are by the forgiveness that St. Maria extended to her murderer, a forgiveness that gave her mother the strength to also forgive him. Time and again victims of rape, sexual abuse, injustice, and violence of all kinds

have approached me and shared how St. Maria's witness gave them the strength to do likewise to their abusers. The letters I have received that testify to the witness she has had on their lives occupies two large crates. While the world knows only the instinct and language of revenge and retaliation, St. Maria Goretti calls us to forgiveness that, as the very heart of God, brings healing to both victim and offender.

Let the reader be warned. Those who care enough to take the effort to study and learn of St. Maria Goretti, obtaining a complete picture of sanctity that is within her, can be certain that she will inaugurate extraordinary grace in their lives.

May the mercy and sweetness of St. Maria Goretti's intercession and companionship be the possession of all who read this book. And may God bless you all +

Fr. Carlos Martins, CC  
Director, *Treasures of the Church*  
[www.TreasuresOfTheChurch.com](http://www.TreasuresOfTheChurch.com)



## BEATIFICATION ADDRESS

The life story of Maria Goretti resembles very closely that of St. Agnes. The features of the Roman martyr and those of this little girl of Corinaldo shine with the same charm. The souls of both emit the same fragrance. Yet there is danger that a too superficial, too natural conception of their youthful beauty and candor will overshadow their characteristic virtue, which is *strength of soul*. Their youth sets off in a more living, more radiant light, the courage of the martyr and the courage of the virgin. Courage was both the result and safeguard of their virginity.

Those individuals err greatly who consider virginity as the effect of ignorance or the simplicity of small souls. They who smile with pity on virgins, thinking of them as passionless, ardorless, or inexperienced, misjudge their true worth. How can he or she who has ceded without struggle imagine the courage required to dominate through long years, without an instant of weakness, the secret excitations and troubles of sense and heart. Since original sin, human nature is in a ferment, troubled by a thousand curiosities to see, to hear, to taste, and to feel. Great courage is required to resist

those curiosities that present to the lips the intoxicating cup and exude the deadly scent of the flowers of evil. Great courage is required to live firmly, superior to every temptation, superior to every threat, superior to all seductive and taunting influences amidst the baseness of the world.

Agnes in the whirl of pagan society and Maria Goretti in the proximity of passionate, shameless men, were neither ignorant nor insensible. They had strong hearts, strong in that supernatural strength whose germ every Christian received in holy Baptism. Thanks to a diligent and sustained education, in affectionate collaboration of parents and children, that germ grew into manifold fruit of virtue and blessing.

In the humble family circle where Maria Goretti grew up, her education was simple but careful, and she corresponded to it perfectly. The testimony of her mother that this little girl never caused her the least voluntary displeasure is proof enough. And who can read without emotion the declaration of her murderer that he never ascertained in Maria Goretti a failing in the law of God!

Our saint was a valiant girl. She knew, she understood, and that is why she preferred to die. Her twelfth year was not completed when she fell martyred. Yet, what discernment, what prudence, what energy she displayed! Though but a girl, conscious of danger, she watched night and day in defense of her honor, and in persevering prayer, recommended the lily of her purity to the Virgin of virgins. No, hers was not a small, weak soul!



She is a heroine who in the clutch of a murderer and under the knife of an assassin thought not of her suffering, but resolutely repelled sin with horror.

Thank God there are still many more like her. They are more numerous than is thought or mentioned because they make no display of their seriousness and virtue, as other girls do of their levity and disorders. Raised by Christian parents, they modestly pass happy and joyful down the streets of our cities and in the byways of our countrysides. They pursue domestic, professional, scholarly, and charitable duties. They know how to make their pleasing manner loved and their unbending dignity respected.

Beyond all doubt there are still very many of these girls. They would be still more numerous if there were more devoted interest and true kindness in parents, and more confident docility in children.

How many concessions are made, how many capitulations are undergone! Passing whims they are, and heedlessness quickly obliterates them at first. But their humiliating remembrance reappears later with torturing remorse, like gas bubbles coming to the surface of a stagnant pond. Their bitterness, even after pardon, is never completely assuaged. Worse still are those misfortunes that cast so many girls into the bottom of the abyss, tragedies that terminate in hopeless death, progressive falls that end in a final fall, humanly irreparable.

In view of such lamentable weaknesses, so many miserable falls, we must admire the strength of pure

hearts. It is a mysterious power. It is a strength that outstrips the limits of human nature, and often enough the limits of ordinary Christian virtue. It is the bond of love for the Divine Spouse. It is the strength of the soul that spurns whoever dares test its fidelity or threatens the purity of its affections.

Maria Goretti showed herself to be such a one no less in her life than in her martyrdom. Shall we then class her with Agnes and Cecilia, Catherine of Siena and Therese of the Child Jesus, and many others who, with heroic abnegation and the blessings of their virginity, wore the nuptial ring that bound them to their heavenly Spouse? But Maria Goretti was only a child and there is no reason for asserting that she would have consecrated herself to the Lord by the vow of virginity. There is nothing to indicate that as she advanced in years she would not have followed the path of so many other young women who bring the flower of their integrity to the altar in order to give God new adorers through holy Matrimony—chosen members to the human family, devoted children to the Church, future saints to heaven. Yet Christ knew well that He had chosen her for His Own. Without thought of the future, she had given herself entirely to Him in her heart. She desired but one thing: fidelity to Christ at any price, even at the cost of her life. Never for anything in the world would she violate the Divine Law.

She was not merely an ingenuous, candid girl, instinctively frightened at the menace of sin as at the sight of a snake (cf. Sir 21:2). She may not be

compared to the legendary ermine that permitted itself to be killed rather than soil its paw on the muddy road. She was not guided simply by natural sentiment of reserve. Though still very young, we can catch a glimpse in her of a deep, intense love for Our Divine Redeemer. She had not yet learned to read. Poverty and a distance kept her from school. But her love knew neither difficulty nor distance. She set about her household tasks more courageously and hurried off to attend catechism lessons far away. In order to receive her Eucharistic Jesus, she did not hesitate to travel a long dusty road in midsummer under a scorching sun. "I don't know at what time tomorrow I will receive Holy Communion," she said one day. That tomorrow was to come, and that Holy Communion. But what a tomorrow! and what a Communion! The very afternoon of that day on which she spoke those words, she shed her blood in order to remain faithful to the Spouse of virgins.

It is not yet a half-century since the pathetic death of Maria Goretti. The period has been one seething with stormy vicissitudes and sudden revolts. Radical transformations have upset the life of our young girls and women. We have fully pointed out on other occasions how within the past fifty years, woman has departed from the retirement and reserve that formerly characterized her life and has launched out into the domain of public life, including military service. That transformation has taken place with pitiless speed.

Lest such deep and speedy alternation effect

most grave consequences to the religion and morals of woman, it is necessary at the same time and in equal degree to strengthen in her those deep personal and supernatural values that shone in our saint. There must be a spirit of faith and modesty—not mere natural modesty and decency—but a carefully cultivated Christian virtue. Those who have at heart the welfare of human society, as well as the temporal and eternal salvation of woman, must resolutely demand that public morality protect the honor and dignity of woman. What is the present situation? Are we wrong in affirming that in this regard perhaps no epoch has failed as ours in its duty toward woman?

Thus the cry of our Savior rises to our lips: “Woe to the world because of scandals” (Mt 18:7). Woe to those guilty perverters—authors of corrupt novels, newspapers, periodicals, theatres, films, indecent styles! Woe to those young men who, with artful and thoughtless cruelty, introduce deadly infection into a virgin heart! Woe to those fathers and mothers lacking in energy and prudence, who cede to the caprices of their children and surrender that paternal authority written on the brow of man and wife as a reflection of the Divine Majesty.

Woe also to that multitude of Christians in name only, who could take a stand and would see legions of upright and virtuous followers mass behind them ready to battle scandal by every means! Legal justice punishes the slayer of a child, and it has a duty to do so. But what human legislation could or would dare, if it chose to do so, punish those

who furnished the weapon to the slayer's hand, those who encouraged him therein, or were indifferent, or even, with indulgent smile, let him be? And yet they are really the more guilty. The terrible justice of God weighs heavily on them, those willful perverters or indolent accomplices!

Has human power, then, no strength to move and convert those corrupt and corrupting hearts? Has it no strength to open the eyes and arouse those many careless, timid Christians from their torpor? We hope this martyr's blood and the tears of her repentant and penitent murderer will perform that miracle!

Our hope is not in vain. Thus, we do not hesitate to repeat here the words of the Apostle Paul: "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound" (Rom 5:20). Behold the Church! Now the ranks of those who believe, who pray, who impose heavy sacrifices on themselves grow and form even among the youth! They squarely reject what God wills not to be. They are restless until they have brought back to Christ and His law their friends and associates who have become estranged from God. They are Our comfort and Our joy.

Full of such confidence, let us raise up our eyes to heaven and consider the resplendent host of those who have washed their robes in the Blood of the Lamb, that host led by the Virgin of virgins. Let us call upon their intercession. Let us unite our humble prayers to theirs in order to bring down upon the earth the abundant shower of grace that cleanses and strengthens.

As a pledge of that grace We accord you with  
all Our heart Our Apostolic Blessing.

—Pope Pius XII  
April 27, 1947  
Beatification of Maria Goretti

## PROLOGUE

They say that if you go from Rome to Nettuno by way of Campo Morto and Ferriere, you will hear everybody along the way speaking of Maria Goretti. Through that countryside she has become legendary. The old people remember her; the young have learned to love her.

One old lady tells us proudly that she made her first communion with Maria. Another met the saint many times on market day. A farmer claims she came to him, a few days before her death, to return a sickle that Alessandro Serenelli had borrowed. A seamstress remembers Maria coming to her mother's shop to try on a dress the very morning of the day Alessandro attacked her. Not yet a half century after her death, Maria Goretti lives in the hearts of her people.

When I asked her neighbor, Theresa Cimorelli, about her, she exclaimed: "Madonna mia! I used to see her every day as she passed by the door to get water from the well. But she never stopped. She was a serious girl. She came and went quickly and busily, and there was no reproach when we nicknamed her *the little old lady*.

"Maria was always modest and reserved. We all

liked her, and deep down we admired her. She was more religious than the rest of us. I was just a girl then, and would that I had followed her example! But at that age most of us are senseless. We scarcely know what we are doing. We seek pleasure and popularity. We permit ourselves to be distracted from better things."

She hesitated a moment and sighed. She seemed to have more to say, but refrained.

"Come in," she invited, "and meet Domenico." I needed no urging, for Theresa Cimarelli and her brother had lived through the events of our story and were witnesses of many of its details.

I sat down at the simple wooden table and looked about the plainly furnished room. Theresa went to the back door and called: "Domenico . . . Domenico!"

There was no reply, but the wood chopping in a nearby shed ceased. The old lady then drew out a jug of wine and set glasses on the table. In a moment Domenico entered.

Domenico was up in years and walked with a stoop. The sun had tanned his skin. His blue work-clothes gave off the pungent odor of sheep. He offered me his hand in honest welcome, drew up a chair, and filled the glasses with the cool, sparkling wine. Theresa then explained to him my interest in the life of Maria Goretti and urged him to help her retell the story.

The pleasure of these two friends of Maria having a foreigner in their home and being able to retell the drama they had witnessed was all too evi-



dent. They seemed to relive those tragic scenes. No detail was omitted.

Theresa and Domenico have not left Ferriere since Maria's death, and I can only guess the hundreds of times they have gone over the terrible story together in the past forty-five years. All I did was listen. They told the tale from beginning to end and concluded with these words:

"The day of the burial of Maria—and it was a real triumph—the whole populace of Nettuno accompanied the body to the cemetery. Her mother, Assunta, came back to Ferriere. She did not stay long. You understand. She could no longer live in the house that recalled such sad memories. So she left this region and returned to Corinaldo with her children. Old Serenelli disappeared, too. No one ever heard of him again. The Ferriere farm was once more abandoned and once more known as 'the old cheese factory.'"

"What about Alessandro?" I asked. I was eager to know how he had paid for his crime.

"Alessandro!" said Domenico. "That is a whole story in itself! First of all, he was imprisoned at Nettuno. They then transferred him to the Regina Coeli at Rome, where his trial began. I was called in as witness. Alessandro was arrogant and cynical before his judges. He denied up and down that he had anything to do with the crime. He pretended that he was the object of grave injustice and was highly indignant that anyone should accuse him of such a transgression. But the evidence was overwhelming. Though he put on a brave front, he was

not able to escape, and finally made an avowal of guilt. Then, to influence the judges, he tried to hide behind the curtain of insanity, calling in the cases of his mother and brother. Doctors examined him and declared he was responsible for his own actions. But since he was a minor, he was sentenced to only thirty years of hard labor.

“I heard that he was sent first to the penitentiary of Noto in Sicily. It was said that in the beginning of his term he seemed happy as a bird in its cage. He even composed a song with the refrain:

‘Take courage, Serenelli,  
Banish your fears,  
You’ll be welcomed home with cheers.’

“His conscience did not seem to be troubled with remorse, until one day a priest came to see him. As the guards brought Alessandro in for the talk, fierce anger seized hold of him and he yelled wildly: ‘It was all your fault that I lost her! You and your teachings!’

“The priest tried to reason with him, appealing to God’s infinite mercy and Maria’s own generous pardon. But Alessandro only howled like a maniac and lunged at the priest. As the guards pulled him away, the priest said, ‘Soon, Alessandro, you will want me. Maria will see to that.’

“ ‘Never,’ the prisoner screamed. ‘I’ll never want you, never!’

“In the days that followed Alessandro could not sleep. He grew nervous and lost his appetite. Then one night, in the solitude of Alessandro’s cell,

Maria appeared to him. Terrified, he screamed for the guards. When they arrived, he was almost incoherent.

“ ‘I saw her! I saw her!’ he gasped in great excitement. ‘I saw Maria dressed in dazzling white, gathering beautiful lilies in a garden and handing them to me. As I took them from her outstretched hands, they were transformed into small lights that glowed like candles. Call the priest! Bring me the priest!’

“It was now the jailers’ turn to laugh. ‘Write to the priest if you have something to say,’ they answered callously. So Alessandro knelt on the floor of his cell and scrawled the following note:

‘I am deeply sorry for what has happened. I have taken the life of an innocent girl whose one aim was to save her purity, shedding her blood rather than give in to my sinful desires. I publicly retract the evil I have done and beg pardon of God and of the stricken family. One hope encourages me—that I also may one day obtain God’s pardon, as so many others have.

Alessandro Serenelli  
November 10, 1910’

“This note from Alessandro only confirmed our belief that Maria was a saint, a real martyr. The word of how she had died passed throughout the country, and people started making pilgrimages to her tomb. We prayed to her and asked for cures . . . and miracles were performed.”

I looked skeptical. Domenico noted my astonishment and continued.

“I saw a boy of Nettuno brought to the cemetery by his mother. He was eaten away by consumption, a wasted child, Hermano by name. They prayed at Maria’s grave, and the boy left the cemetery cured. From that day forward he grew strong and healthy, and when he was twenty, he was drafted for military service.

“I heard also of a man in Rome who was instantly cured of an internal abscess by calling on Maria. His doctor attested to the fact. I could tell you of many other incidents equally as marvelous; for instance, the Lady Miscetti, who was to undergo an operation, was cured of a cyst in her thyroid gland after praying to Maria. Then, too, a Sicilian priest was freed of a serious kidney condition by the same prayer. But what does it matter after all? Miracles don’t change anything. When one has chosen to die rather than to offend God, one is a martyr and that’s that! That’s why our little Maria is a saint today.”

I was going from one surprise to another. The good Domenico seemed to know his history. He was full of his theme. He was not just talking. He was expatiating with remarkable ease. I began to perceive that he had been more closely involved in the affair, though I did not know where he was leading: “Did you say she has been canonized?” I asked innocently.

He was more astonished than I. “You mean you think she doesn’t deserve it?” he asked.

“No,” I replied, “but why has it taken so long?”

“Rome,” he answered, “moves slowly in canonizing saints. There are inquiries, depositions, discussions . . . and then all the data is put away in the archives. Then some fine day, the case is taken up again. New inquests, new depositions, new discussions are brought forth. This time it seems we have something. It is going to succeed. And then . . . disappointment! The devil’s advocate finds an objection: Maria should have disclosed her secret . . . she hesitated before pardoning her assassin . . . she may have provoked him. Such false reasons hold up the process. Thus we have to be patient for years. But the Church knows best.

“I was called in several times,” Domenico continued, “to testify. Police, doctors, nurses were also called in—everyone, in fact, who had something to say. Assunta, naturally, was the first defendant of her daughter. We were all of one mind. Maria was innocent; she had given proof of her heroic courage. But that was not enough. One witness was wanting—the only one able to settle the question, her murderer, Alessandro!

“After thirty-five years, he came back to Corinaldo, a changed man. Maria’s prayers had won him completely. His prison sentence had been served, and he wanted to repair the evil of his crime. He who formerly had taken every means to exonerate himself now humbly admitted his guilt. It is no small thing when a criminal rises to the defense of his victim. He affirmed that she had been altogether innocent. She had opposed his brutal pas-

sion with all her strength. Finally, he obtained what he sought—her vindication.

“He even went further than that, and on Christmas Eve of 1937 begged pardon of Assunta. The old mother’s voice broke as she fought back the tears: ‘Maria forgave you, Alessandro,’ she answered, ‘so how could I possibly refuse?’

“The following morning, Christmas Day, the parish church at Corinaldo was filled to overflowing as Assunta and Alessandro entered side by side. A hush fell on everyone. At the Communion rail, Alessandro turned and all eyes were upon him.

“‘I have sinned deeply,’ he said. ‘I have murdered an innocent girl who loved virtue more than life. May God forgive me! I beg your pardon!’

“After this, I heard that Alessandro had retired to a Capuchin Monastery of Ascoli, where he put on the habit of a tertiary. He’s working there now as gardener, tending the flowers. Lilies are his favorites . . .”

Domenico seemed to have finished his tale. I had listened with intense interest. What a story! And yet, all so true.

I knew from a friend of mine who had been present what popular enthusiasm accompanied the Canonization on June 24, 1950. In front of that great throng, an old lady, Assunta, had the place of honor. She raised her head with tear-filled eyes and saw the veil removed from the picture of Maria just as His Holiness Pope Pius XII proclaimed her to be a saint.

The excited Holy Year throng behind expressed her thoughts. "There she is . . . Maria Goretti . . . St. Maria Goretti!" Thus the drama of Ferriere has terminated in the glory of the Vatican!

"For me," mused Domenico, "she will always be our little Maria. I wouldn't know how to call her otherwise. You understand, we were her neighbors. We lived in the house next to hers. I was twenty years old when she died."

Domenico fell to silent musing. He was tired reminiscing. The village clock struck eleven. I was about to leave when the door opened. A little girl looked in. At the sight of me, she hesitated, doubtful as to whether she should enter or withdraw. A great straw hat haloed her head. She wore a blue and white summer dress, which scarcely reached her knees. Her bare arms were tanned with the sun.

"Angelina, come in and speak to Father," said Domenico. "Don't stand there gaping."

"This is my granddaughter," he explained. The little girl seemed timid, frightened at my presence. But she came over and shook hands with smiling grace. Then she went out by the back door.

I rose and thanked Domenico and Theresa for their kindness and hospitality. But for them, my story would have been incomplete. I paused a moment on the threshold to adjust my eyes to the burning sunlight, and then set off resolutely for the long, hot walk to Nettuno. Maria had made the journey before me, and it seemed I was following her. No one else was on the road at that time of day, and I walked alone with my thoughts.

Maria . . . Angelina . . . girl of yesterday . . . youngster of today.

Styles have changed. The light dress and straw hat have replaced the heavy skirts and shawls. Long braided hair has given place to a simple cut and combing. Adornments and mannerisms have altered. But deep down there has been no transformation. A girl's real beauty is still within. It is a thing of her soul, shining through her pure eyes and radiating her whole body. It is something by which she makes men aware of the truth and beauty and goodness of God by reflecting that beauty and goodness in herself.

At Nettuno, in the Basilica of Our Lady of Grace, I visited the shrine where the body of Maria Goretti is preserved. A young man was there, kneeling in prayer. He thought he was alone, and I saw him lean over reverently to kiss the marble in front of her reliquary. Then he blessed himself and left, buoyed up with the confidence that Maria, the new patroness of Catholic youth, would help him gain a victory over himself.

This is more than enough for the triumphs of today! Let us go back some fifty years to the more important story of how Maria actually won her victory over sin . . .