

Life

St. Maria Goretti was born in Italy in 1890. Her family was poor, and she had no chance to go to school. Her father was a sharecropper. The family lived in the same house with another sharecropper and his son Alessandro. Her father died young, and her mother worked hard to support her six young children. She went to work in the fields with her other children, but due to weak physical strength, they needed help from Alessandro and his father with heavy farm work. Maria was responsible for housework of the two families and taking care of her younger sister. In July 1902, 20-year-old Alessandro tried to rape 11-year-old Maria. He had previously asked for intimacy and harassed Maria many times but was strongly rejected. Maria did not dare to tell others because Alessandro threatened to harm her family, and she was afraid that the family would not be able to survive without the help of the father and son, so she had no choice but to avoid opportunities to be alone with him. On the day of the incident, only Maria was at home with her sleeping little sister. Alessandro rushed into the house and grabbed Maria. Maria struggled hard and shouted: "No! It is a sin! God does not want it!" and said that she would rather die than surrender. Alessandro got really angry that he did not have his way and picked up a 10-inch awl and threatened her. When she refused again, he stabbed her 14 times and fled.

Maria was found lying in a pool of blood and was rushed to the hospital for surgery. However, her injuries were too serious that there was no hope of survival. When the pastor found out, he went to the hospital to accompany her and performed sacraments, and asked Maria if she could forgive the murderer. She said, "Yes, for the love of Jesus I forgive him...and I want him to be with me in Paradise." She prayed for him and after enduring a long period of pain, Maria passed away at the age of 11 as she looked at the portrait of the Virgin. Alessandro was quickly arrested and sentenced to 30 years in prison. He continued to keep a bad attitude, refused to repent, and was in a bad mental state. One night after eight years in prison, he dreamt that Maria gave him lilies (a symbol of chastity), which immediately burned in his hand. After he woke up, he was completely awakened; he regained peace of mind, repented in prison, and was willing to accept his punishment. After being released from prison, he found Maria's mother on Christmas Eve, knelt down and begged for her forgiveness. After that, he was allowed to enter a Capuchin monastery and spent the rest of his life working in the garden. St. Maria Goretti was a victim of sexual assault and the patron saint of chastity and rape victims.

Reflection

Alessandro's mother died in a mental hospital when he was a child, and his brother committed suicide. He lived with his alcoholic father and was described as a silent and shy person. What made him become so cruel? He left a letter after his death, stating that he was influenced by newspapers and the media at that time, which led to him committing a heinous crime. Maria was beatified in 1947. After the ceremony, Pope Pius XII not only praised her for sacrificing her life to defend her chastity, but also condemned the obscene newspapers, plays and movies of the time. Nowadays, mass media, social platforms and even online games have exaggerated more on pornography and violence than times back then. Alessandro's example reminds us that we cannot ignore this as the norm, because it may really affect the values of some young people which might lead them to make bad decisions, and may harm others and themselves.

Prayer

After being released from prison, Alessandro knelt down to Maria's mother on Christmas Eve and begged for forgiveness. If we were she, who had watched her daughter lying in a pool of blood, and accompanied her eleven-year-old daughter to wait for death in pain, could we still forgive the murderer of her beloved daughter? In fact, she really could. She said to Alessandro: "If Maria forgives you, and God forgives you, how can I not also forgive you?" Later, she accompanied him to attend midnight mass and received Holy Communion, in union with Christ together.

St. Maria Goretti's willingness to forgive her enemies transcends life and death. She not only allowed God's grace to flow into Alessandro's life and freed him from evil, but also freed her mother from hatred. When we say the Our Father that says, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," but yet feel unable to forgive others, let us learn from St. Maria Goretti to surrender ourselves and others to the Lord, allowing the sanctity of forgiveness to free everyone from the tangle of resentment and anger.

May we learn from St. Maria Goretti's holiness, who for the love of Jesus forgave her enemies and prayed for them. We pray especially for victims of sexual assault and those who have committed crimes. St. Maria Goretti, pray for us.