

morning, several hundred peasants came to the monastery for clothing and warm food. No matter how many came, there was always plenty. Food seemed to double and triple in his hands.

However, to the brother who baked the bread, this lavish charity of Gerard seemed imprudent. He had filled the pantry with fresh loaves that very morning . . . and there was not a loaf left. Hearing of this, the Rector reprimanded Gerard. There was nothing left for the community! Nothing for dinner! Gerard looked so dumbfounded that Rector and baker went down to the pantry to show him his folly. The baker threw open the cupboard, and . . . it was loaded with fresh baked bread.

When spring came in 1755, Gerard was extremely frail. Several times he had to take to his bed. But he recovered and accompanied a group of missionaries to Calitri, where his presence brought many back to the practice of the Faith. The mission was an outstanding success. That summer he made his last trip on business for the monastery, visiting a dozen towns and in many working wonders.

At the town of Senarchia, they were repairing the church roof. Workmen had felled great trees in the nearby woods. They were so heavy that a whole gang could not pull a single tree over the rough terrain to the church. Gerard heard of the problem and promised to help. The workmen followed him into the woods where he tied a stout rope to the largest log. "I command you to follow me." He then pulled the huge trunk as though it were a child's sled. The workmen, at his bidding did likewise, and the logs slid along at the slightest tug.

In the same town, a young mother was in danger of death after an extremely difficult birth. Gerard assured her friends that he would pray for her. Later, he told them the woman would recover. Both mother and child survived as he had predicted.

Auletta, Vietri da Potenza, San Gregorio, Buccino . . . Gerard visited town after town. At Buccino, he fell ill and the doctor advised that he go to Oliveto where the climate would be better for his lungs. Here he wrote to his Rector at Caposele, "Tell me what to do, I beg your Reverence. If you wish me home, I shall come at once. If you wish me to continue the tour, send me an emphatic obedience, and all will be well . . ." His superior wrote him to wait at Oliveto until he had strength enough to come home.

Materdomini

But Gerard's strength was waning. He must set out for Caposele to spend his last days at Materdomini. On the way, he paid a brief visit to the Pirofalo family, telling them to watch for a white flag flying from the house at Materdomini. As long as they saw the flag, he would be alive. As a matter of fact, even on a clear day it was all but impossible to see that distance. But the family could see the monastery plainly, and the white flag flew all the days of September, and for half the following month.

Gerard had already left the house, when one of the Pirofalo girls called after him, telling him he had left his handkerchief. "Keep it," he told her. "You may need it someday." Long years after, when married and all but dying in childbirth, she remembered the words of Brother Gerard. She asked that the handkerchief be applied to her. Almost at once, her pain abated and she gave birth to her child.

Home at Last

The Rector of Materdomini was heartbroken that last day of August when Brother Gerard came back. He was so worn and emaciated! "Cheer up, Father. It is God's Will," said Gerard with a smile. "We must do His Will with gladness." He scarcely stopped speaking of union with the Will of God. When Doctor Santorelli, the house physician, asked him if he wished to get well or to die, Gerard looked up from bed and answered simply, "I wish only what God wants." His one last request was that a small white placard be tacked to his door with the inscription:

Here the Will of God is done, as God wills, and as long as God wills.

On September fifth, the acting Rector gave Gerard an obedience to get well. The Will of God! At once all trace of his malady vanished. He got out of bed, ate with the community, walked in the garden, and was present at all the religious exercises. For a full month, he was well again. Then on October fourth, he said to the doctor, "I should have died a month ago, but for obedience. Now my time is near. Tomorrow, I go to bed." And so it was. For the next ten days, he grew steadily worse. The afternoon of October fifteenth, he tried to sit up, crying to his confreres, "Look! Look! It is the Madonna!" and fell into a sudden ecstasy of love. That evening at seven-thirty, he died. He was twenty-nine years, six months, and nine days old. For six years, he had been in religious life.

To recount the happening after his death in 1755 would demand a large book. Because of the numerous miracles performed through the saint's intercession, proceedings for his canonization were instituted shortly after his death. In 1893, he was beatified. Eleven years later on December the eleventh, 1904, Pope Pius X proclaimed his solemn canonization at St. Peter's in eternal Rome. Brother Gerard of Muro and Materdomini was now Saint Gerard of heaven and the whole world.

Saint Gerard Majella - Feast Day: October 16th - Latin Calendar



Patron of Mothers

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Introduction

The life of St. Gerard Majella reads like a fairy tale for children: full of surprises, full of impossible things that happen anyway because of him. An archangel brings him Communion! A statue comes to life! Empty pantries suddenly bulge with bread! A bird bolts out of the air to perch on his finger and sing for a crying child! The life of St. Gerard teems with such things. If you are one who finds wonders hard to stomach, if dozens of “commonplace” miracles tax your forbearance . . . this booklet is not for you. Lay it aside.

Children will love this story . . . and their mothers, too. That is only as it should be. For today, for some secret reason of Divine Providence, little ones and their mothers are St. Gerard’s favorite beneficiaries. Thousands of children in the United States bear the name “Gerard” because of his powerful intercession. He is commonly called the Patron of Mothers.

The Beginning

Annibale Rosso! It was incredible. He had suddenly given up membership in the Communist Party. Even more surprising, he was seen at mass. People naturally talked in the small town south of Naples. Communism was on every lip just then, for it was the month of April 1948. On the third Sunday of the month all Italy would vote and Communism might well take over the government. But one thing was certain. The vote of Annibale Rosso would be against the Hammer and Sickle. He said so himself. He swore a solemn oath, he would have no more truck or traffic with the Party . . . not after last night.

Last night he had been ranting in his usual fashion against the “duplicity and trickery of the Church.” If anything he was more boisterous, more caustic than ever. The occasion was a candlelight procession that had come to town. People singing. Little children in white carrying spring flowers, and priests in the black cassock and rosary of the “Liguorini” – the Redemptorists. Annibale cursed the “tomfoolery.” He was all for stoning the priest preaching in the public square before the church. “What new-fangled sort of nonsense is this?” he muttered . . . “digging up a saint two hundred years dead and carrying him round the countryside! It’s a trick. The whole thing is a trick of these priests.”

At the wish of the Archbishop of Conza, the remains of St. Gerard Majella had been traveling through the Archdiocese since the first of April. They would continue visiting town after town until April 15th. It was an attempt at waking the towns of the Archdiocese to the practice of their Faith; to warn them of their duty as Catholics to vote on April eighteenth and avert the red menace. Gerard Majella had come from

There was nothing to do but impose a severe penalty until the matter could be further resolved. Expulsion was the normal penalty for such a misdemeanor, but Alphonsus had not been a lawyer for naught. He prudently bided his time. Gerard was to have no further communication with the world beyond the monastery. He was not to receive Communion until further notice. That was his penance. He accepted it in silence, quietly leaving the superior’s room.

April, May and most of June, Gerard remained at Nocera under the surveillance of Alphonsus de Liguori. For all practical purposes he was in disgrace. The community, when they noticed his abstention from Communion, suspected a calumny of some sort. Several of them urged him to clear his name – to speak. But, “It is in God’s hands,” Gerard would always say.

“If He wills that my innocence be proven, who can accomplish it more easily than He?”

Trial

Meanwhile, the damp climate brought on a recurrence of his malady. Gerard was confined to bed. Though still deprived of Communion, God was with him. His miraculous faculty continued as before. One of the Fathers, making the evening meditation with the patient, saw him fall into an ecstasy that lasted for hours. The Superior General himself experienced Gerard’s gift of Obedience to the unspoken wish. One morning Brother Gerard rose up from bed and went straight to Alphonsus Liguori. “Why are you not in bed, Brother?” the superior asked. “I came because you desired to see me.” It was true. Just at that moment the thought had passed through the mind of Alphonsus. Thus, Gerard left his case in God’s hands, and the Lord took care of it. That he burned to receive Communion can be imagined. One morning when a priest asked him to serve his Mass, Gerard begged off . . . “Please do not tempt me,” he pleaded. “lest I snatch the Sacred Host from your hands.”

In June, Brother Gerard was transferred to the house of Materdomini at Caposele. The climate there would benefit his failing health. Here too on the last Sunday of June, he was again permitted to receive Communion. The clouds were lifting from his life.

A few days later, a letter sped from Lacedonia to Nocera. Neria Caggiano, gravely ill, now admitted that he previous letter was a tissue of lies. The innocence of Brother Gerard was at long last confirmed. Alphonsus Liguori was overjoyed. It was not long before the two saints met again.

“You were innocent all the time, my son, and yet you said nothing,” Alphonsus Liguori’s face was radiant with solicitude. “How could I, my Father,” said Gerard simply, “when our Rule forbids that we make excuses.” It seemed the warm Nocera sun poured in more brightly through the window!

A Mother Pleads

The last brief year of Gerard’s life was spent a Caposele, with a few short sojourns to Naples where he assisted the Procurator General of the Order. He also began a tour of the Archdiocese of Conza at the request of the Archbishop, but illness brought him back to Materdomini – to die.

Caposele and Naples won the favor of his wonders, as did Illiceto a year before. At Naples, great scholars came to him seeking advice. People begged his blessing in the streets. One morning, the Duchess of Maddaloni approached him as he entered the Cathedral, begging him to cure her little daughter who was ill. Gerard pointed to the altar, saying it was not he but God who wrought such miracles. But the mother persisted until Gerard promised to pray for her little one. An hour later, a liveried footman came to fetch the Duchess, bringing news that the little girl had suddenly recovered.

One day when Gerard was in Naples, one of those summer storms blew up, bringing lowering clouds and a chill wind from the Appenines. At once the fishing fleet hauled in traps and sail and made for shore. They well knew the damage a squall wrought. Off the rocks of Pietra del pesce the sea was leaping in huge bursts of spray, tossing a hapless boat like a stick. Fearing shipwreck, the panicky rowers signaled shore, but not a soul would dare put out to their rescue.

At the moment, Brother Gerard happened along and saw the little fishing smack pitching helplessly among the whitecaps. Walking down to the shore, he made the sign of the cross, threw his cloak back over his shoulder and without more ado, began to walk across the churning breakers till he came alongside the boat. Then while the crowds on shore shielded their eyes to watch, he grasped the prow and pulled the boatload of fishermen in the harbor. “Santo! Santo!” screamed the people. They mobbed around him . . . so that he had to dart away and hide in a shop, as though hunted by the police. By evening, all Naples was talking of Brother Gerard.

The crops had been meager that fall, and by winter famine stalked the hills round Caposele. Gerard had been appointed porter there in November and was delighted: he had thus to care for the poor. Every

The Plague

In late November of that year word came to Iliceto that an epidemic had broken out in Lacedonia. Doctors were powerless to check it. People were dying off by the hundreds. Finally, a letter came from Bishop Amato; an urgent request for the presence of Brother Gerard in the stricken town. Gerard was shortly on his way.

Death hung like a mist over Lacedonia. As Gerard approached, he saw the hills were a patchwork of new dug graves. Church bells were constantly tolling – funerals wending through the streets and out to the cemetery. Scarcely a home in the city had escaped the plague. At once he commenced his rounds of mercy. Here he prepared one for the end. Another he assured that the illness would pass. But he wrought many miracles, too – with a simple sign of the cross. Doctors stood helplessly by. Not so Gerard! Patients got well as he touched them – all trace of their fevers gone.

During the seven weeks in plague-ridden Lacedonia, Gerard stayed at the home of Don Constantino Capucci, a brother of the archpriest, in the cathedral. Two of the gentleman's daughters had already entered the convent. Two more were still at home. Here Gerard often delivered short discourses to the people crowding round the house. Some came for counsel. Some for solace or encouragement. He found time to give instructions to anyone seeking information on matters religious. His nights and days were spent in an endless activity for God and souls. Towards the end of February, the epidemic had run its course, and Gerard left for Iliceto. His own health was none too good.

A Wagging Tongue

One girl in Lacedonia escaped the plague, though it might have been better had she succumbed! Neria Caggiano with several other girls of the neighborhood had gone to the conservatory at Foggia. They had been admitted through the efforts of Brother Gerard and were happy in the convent. Then Neria came home. Soon, she was slandering the nuns, and the whole way of life at Foggia. However, as many families in Lacedonia had daughters in that very convent, they turned a deaf ear to Neria's gossip. People avoided her. They feared her tongue.

Resenting this, she turned her spite on Gerard who had helped her to enter the convent. She belittled his "so-called sanctity"; blamed him for all her troubles. The good people of Lacedonia turned from her in horror.

Now she tried a new tack. Very demurely she confided to one of the priests of the town that she had been highly disedified by Gerard's love for Nicoletta Capucci at the house where he had spent his stay in Lacedonia. She feigned to know of secret meetings between them! The priest was perturbed at such a confidence. If it were true then by all means Neria must write to Father Alphonsus Liguori at Nocera, the Superior General of the Order. She must inform him of the fact that he might dismiss Gerard from the Redemptorists before it were too late. Neria Caggiano took up pen and wrote.

Dilemma

When Alphonsus de Liguori read the letter from Lacedonia, he could not believe it. At once he ordered an investigation of the girl's allegation. No evidence was forthcoming to prove the Brother's guilt. But none could be found either to prove his innocence. The word of Neria Caggiano stood alone. She had sworn to the truth of her statement, and the priest of Lacedonia had given her credence. Alphonsus summoned Brother Gerard to his headquarters at Nocera de Pagani. Reports on this lay brother had always been the best. On all sides Alphonsus had heard of wonders wrought by Gerard. He had been seen in an ecstasy on Good Friday by the people of Corato. His confreres at Iliceto could vouch for his punctilious obedience . . . even to reading his Rector's unspoken wish. He fasted much. He prayed long into the night. They even called him saint! Alphonsus had never met Brother Gerard face to face. Not until today . . .

Sitting at his desk, Alphonsus read the letter aloud to the young man standing before him. He folded it slowly, awaiting Gerard's denial of so preposterous a charge. But Gerard just stood there looking at the floor. Baffled beyond words, Alphonsus sat studying the lean face . . . quietly waiting . . . affording him every chance to clear his name. Gerard said nothing. He would not deny his guilt. He would not affirm it. He simply stood there in silence.

that neighborhood. He had visited these very towns as a Redemptorist laybrother two centuries ago. He had died at Materdomini in 1755 at the age of twenty-nine. Wonders were his specialty. Stories of his miracles were still handed down from father to son all through that countryside.

During the fifteen-day tour of his native diocese of Conza, St. Gerard continued his wonders. All spring the skies had been clear. The fields were parched and dry. Farmers, among them Annibale Rosso, were hoping for rain for their crops. The evening the procession came to the town, it rained for the first time in weeks. The same thing had happened in many other places. Then there was a little thirteen-year-old girl suffering from an incurable malady – tuberculosis of the bone. The afternoon St. Gerard passed through the village, she was cured instantaneously.

The rumor of all these happenings ran like wildfire. By the time the procession came to the town of Annibale Rosso, new wonders were already passing from lip to lip. It was too much for Annibale. The peasants with their beads and shawls, the smoking candles, the church bells, the sermon, the flower-decked statue of Our Lady of Materdomini. People stood in queues waiting to confess their sins. Eight Redemptorists were constantly busy. And there was to be a Mass at midnight! Annibale Rosso swore a withering oath and went home to bed.

Then it happened. In his sleep he saw St. Gerard Majella accompanied by a group of priests. "Annibale Rosso, have I not helped you often before this?" The saint's face was stern. His dark eyes flashed disapproval. "Have all my graces been fruitless? Do you think you can make sport of the Saints of God and come off unscathed? It is not as you say, a "trick" of these good priests, that I am carried through the countryside. I am visiting my friends . . ." Annibale Rosso sat up in bed. He was trembling. Dressing at once, he hurried down to the church, waiting with his townsmen to confess his sins and receive the absolution of the missionary.

In 1948, just as in 1755, Brother Gerard Majella of the Redemptorists was busy – not only battling with Communists in Italy, but leading the counterattack in America on the forces of Anti-life, pouring favors on countless mothers, and blessing the unborn.

A Pretty Lady

He was born in the South of Italy in a small town called Muro on the sixth of April. It was in the year 1726. His father, Domenico, was a tailor. His mother, Benedetta, had already borne three daughters. Gerard was the youngest – the only son. They were an ordinary hard-working Italian family. Pious too. Donna Benedetta often brought her three youngest to Mass with her at the shrine of Our Lady of Graces at nearby Capotignano. And, like thousands of other small boys, then and now, Gerard was all eyes for the

strange new things he saw. Not quite four, he was too young to know what was going on. But he did know this: he liked the “pretty lady with the baby.”

“Mama, Mama, see what I got from the little boy.” In his hand he clutched a small roll of bread. Nobody paid him a bit of attention as he chattered about a pretty lady and her baby who had given him the bread. Small boys love to make up stories! But the next day he brought back another white roll, and again the next day, and the next. His mother decided to investigate. Next morning she followed her son. Off he ran the two miles to Capotignano, making straight for the chapel. Benedetta followed. It was then she saw who his playmate was – the Christ-Child himself. The statue of Our Lady of Graces had come to life. The infant climbed down from his Mother’s arms to romp with Gerard. A bewildered Benedetta ran home to Muro. At mealtime, little Gerard came back with another roll of bread.

In after life this childhood attraction for the “pretty lady with the baby” ran over into a love for all children and their mothers. This can be seen in the most cursory glance at his life. There are so many wonders wrought for little children . . . and for mothers. The “Mother’s Saint” has earned even greater claim to the title in the nineteen decades since his death.

His Lordship’s Latch-Key

Ten years later when he was houseboy for Bishop Albin at Lacedonia, children went home to their mothers with all sorts of stories told them by Gerard Majella. But the townsfolk had learned about the new houseboy themselves. Everyone had tales of his kindness, his visits to the poor in the clinic, his compassion. How he bandaged the wounds of the sick and brought them leftovers from the bishop’s table. Anyone who noticed him at prayer in the cathedral knew Gerard for what he was.

But the morning they saw him running down the cathedral steps with the Bambino, they didn’t know what to say! It was the last week in December in 1743. People stopped and stared at Gerard racing down the street with the statue of the Infant from the crib. A crowd followed after him. He paid no attention. On he ran to the public well.

What happened? What’s the matter?” Someone explained how His Lordship had gone for his morning walk, and the house-boy had locked the door and come down to the well for water: but as he leaned down to haul up the bucket, the bishop’s key had dropped into the well.

Gerard had by now tied a rope around the Bambino, and was lowering it gently into the well. “Gesu, Gesu Bambino” he prayed aloud, “find me my key. It’s the key to His Lordship’s house . . . and he’ll be back in half an hour . . .” Bystanders craned their necks to peer into the well. Others shook their heads and walked off. Some smiled a little smugly at the antics of the frightened houseboy. But when he pulled up the rope from the well and the dripping statue of the Infant came into view, there in Bambino’s tiny hand was the Bishop’s key.

Monte Gargano. It was in September and Brother Gerard accompanied them. The Rector put Gerard in charge of the pilgrimage, entrusting him with the money for the trip – thirty silver carlins. In our money, it amounted to \$2.00 . . . hardly enough to defray the expense of food and lodging of ten young men for a fortnight, even in 1753! The students were all for abandoning the trip but Gerard calmed them. “Money isn’t everything,” he said. “God will provide.” So they set out.

However, by the time they reached Manfredonia at the foot of the mountain, all Gerard had in his purse was twenty cents . . . and they had twelve more days and nights to go. Being a thoroughly practical saint, he spent the twenty cents on a spray of flowers and took them into the chapel at the castle of Manfredonia. After praying awhile with the students, he walked up to the altar. “See, Lord, we’ve thought of You. Now you must think of us.” With that, he laid the bouquet in front of the tabernacle.

The chaplain of the castle was spectator to this little scene, and after greeting the group, invited them to spend the night there. Next day they climbed the mountain to St. Michele’s shrine and spent the night at a nearby inn. By this time, the students were thoroughly worried. How would they pay for their lodging? They were whispering among themselves when a well-dressed Signore came up to Brother Gerard and without further ado, he presented him with a purse of silver.

Exorbitant

The inn near Monte Gargano did a brisk trade. Long lines of pack mules brought provisions up the steep slopes each day. There was always good food to be had there, but prices were high. When it came time for Gerard and his party to leave, he asked the inn-keeper for the bill. Exorbitant! Gerard questioned this item and that to no avail. The inn-keeper could not be swayed. “Very well, my good man, I’ll pay you.” Gerard counted out his silver coins . . . “But if you are over-charging us, you will suffer. All your pack mules will die.” The inn-keeper reached for the money, chuckling to himself, when the door burst open and his son rushed in. “The mules, Dad! They’ve got the plague! They’re all lying down half dead.” The inn-keeper crossed himself in terror. Clutching Gerard by the sleeve, he admitted he had added this item and that to the bill. “Your lodging will be on the house,” he pleaded. “I will give you food for your trip home,” he cajoled. “Only keep my mules from dying!”

Gerard paid the amended bill. “Signore,” he said. “I gladly forgive you; but never forget that God is with the poor.” As the ten pilgrims trooped into the inn-yard, the mules were again on their feet.

Summer had been all sunshine and no rain. By mid-September, the roads were a powder of dust and the rivers low. Along the way from the shrine to Manfredonia, Gerard asked a farmer for water as the students were parched with thirst. “But if I let every passerby take a drink from my well, I’ll soon have no water at all.” The man was reluctant. “Look out, Signore,” Gerard was angered at his selfishness. “Your well may refuse water even to you!” As he spoke, the well ran dry. Panic-stricken, the farmer promised them all the water they wanted. So Gerard dropped the bucket into the dry well. It landed with a splash and came up filled with cold water. The nine young men had plenty to talk about when they got home to Iliceto.

Redemptorists, but a retreat. A large group are planning to go to Iliceto around the twentieth of next month . . . There are so many wonderful things (about Brother Gerard) I can recount for you, when I see you in person . . .”

While at Corato, Gerard paid a call at the Benedictine convent where Mother Abbess begged him to pray that she be relieved of her duties, as the responsibility weighed too heavily on her heart. Gerard assured her, she would soon be relieved of her cross, but that the Lord would give her another cross that she must carry to the grave. Shortly after Gerard’s departure, the good woman was relieved of her office, and as Gerard has predicted, she had developed a cancer of the foot, which remained incurable to the day of her death.

He often foretold that persons were to die. In June of 1753 while in Muro at the home of his old friend Piccolo, the watch-maker, he called the wife aside one day and told her a secret sin that had been troubling her for quite some time. “Make your peace with God,” he urged, “as you have but a short while to live.” At the time, she was in the pink of health. But a few days later she fell ill and died so unexpectedly that could not even have the priest. Later Gerard met Piccolo and told him that his wife had passed away with the name of Jesus on her lips.

Everywhere he went, he visited the sick. Some he cured; others he passed by, and often he gave his reasons. At Castelgrande he paid a call on the mother of a three-year-old boy whose little hands were crippled from violent convulsions. “The child will suffer no more,” said Gerard, and made a cross on the boy’s head. Long years later, the mother attested to the truth of his prediction. Her boy had been well ever since. Little Judith, the daughter of the mayor of Castelgrande, was blind. Her mother begged Gerard to pray that Judith regain her sight. Gerard said, “No. If Judith were to see, she would lose her soul.”

The Man Who Disliked Redemptorists

Sometimes there is a touch of irony in the stories recounted of Gerard Majella. One of these concerns a young Michele de Michele. For some reason, he bore a grudge against religious, and he particularly disliked Redemptorists. He lay ill of fever at Melfi and Gerard cured him instantly with a little sign of the cross. Awed at such power, Michele spread the story all through Melfi.

A few days later, he met Gerard in the street and stopped to speak. Before long, however, he saw that all dissembling was useless. Gerard could read his inmost thoughts . . . even his antipathy for religious. “Michele,” Gerard said to him as they parted company. “The day will come when you will be one of us.” That was a little too much. “I’ll join the Redemptorists the day I can touch the sky with my thumb,” quipped Michele. In less than six months, Michele de Michele was a Redemptorist novice at Ciorani.

Michele had not come to Ciorani as yet when nine young Redemptorist scholastics made their memorable pilgrimage to his patron’s shrine, St. Michael the Archangel at

In June of 1744, Bishop Albini died at Lacedonia and Gerard returned to his hometown of Muro. He had been apprenticed to a master-tailor before going to Lacedonia to work for the bishop and knew the trade quite well. Now after a short apprenticeship with a second tailor, he set up his own business in his mother’s house.

There’s magic in an established name. And the sign “Majella the Tailor” hanging over the shop brought many of his father’s old customers to the door. His growing reputation for faultless workmanship won him patrons from all walks of life. His prices were always fair. He was scrupulously honest. From the poor, he took no payment at all.

One day, a man came in with some goods for a suit. Gerard spread it on the table, and laid his tape measure along its length. “Mmmmm!” He shook his head. The cloth was much too short. The poor man could not hide his chagrin, as he had no money for more. “It is nothing,” said Gerard, running his fingers along the edge of the cloth. He measured it once more. Three yards . . . four . . . five! More than enough for a fine substantial suit! As a matter of fact, when the garment was finished, the man received a good extra piece of material. The cloth had grown longer under Gerard’s miraculous touch.

One and Twenty

April 6, 1747. How the years fly! Gerard was twenty-one and as yet had not found his heart’s desire. He had a fair business: at least he could support his mother. He gave her a third of all his earnings. Another third went to the poor of Muro. The rest was for Masses for the Poor Souls. As for himself . . . God would provide. Not too practical to a hard-headed businessman, but he was more than just a small town tailor. He wanted to be a saint.

His mother was driven to distraction by her son. He would not eat her meals. He was lean from fasting and penance, pale from long vigils of prayer in the nearby cathedral. But if his constitution was frail, his disposition was always on a holiday: gay as a lark, merry as a little child.

Hope Deferred

Twice he had applied for admission to the Capuchin monastery at Muro. But a glance at his sunken chest and thin white hands, and the Capuchins turned him down. Candidly, they told him, he had not the health nor stamina for so strenuous a life. Perhaps he should go off into the hills to live as a hermit in seclusion and holy meditation! He tried it but his confessor firmly forbade it. So Gerard went back to his needles and tape. He understood that a man can achieve holiness in any walk of life, in the faithful discharge of his duties. If it were God’s will that he be a tailor, then he would be a good one.

And God showed evident approval. The whole countryside spoke openly of his supernatural powers. Had he not cured little Amata Giuliani! The little girl had tumbled into a vat of boiling water and for all the medications of oil and wax, the child whimpered in her mother's arms all day. As Gerard was passing the house he heard the child and went in. "It is nothing," he said, laying his hand on the scalded skin. Suddenly, little Amata Giuliani was smiling. The next morning all trace of the burn was gone.

Walking down a side street of Muro another day, Gerard noticed a new house abuilding. Work was at a standstill. The carpenters stood awkwardly by while the foreman ran his fingers through his hair in a helpless rage. The rafters had been sawed too short. "Pull them with ropes," suggested the onlooker. Practical men though they were, they took the suggestion. The rafters fitted snugly from wall to wall, and work was resumed.

Always in Church

No matter what was ado about the cathedral, Gerard was there. He attended all the Sunday Masses, the May devotions, the tridua. In fact, he often spent the whole night locked up in church. One of his relatives happened to be sacristan. The rest was easy. One evening while deep in prayer, Gerard heard a voice . . . "Pazzarello . . . My little fool, what are you doing?" looking up at the altar, he answered. "Ah, but you are more a fool than I, a prisoner for me in your tabernacle." When the bells rang for Mass the next morning, Gerard was still in church.

He was there the afternoon of Low Sunday, April 13, 1749, for the start of the parish retreat. A newly founded congregation of missionaries were to preach in all three churches of Muro. Their founder had been a well-known lawyer at Naples, Alphonsus de Liguori. Wherever these missionaries went, they moved all hearts with their fervent words. It was the same in Muro.

One of the missionaries, Father Paul Cafaro, made a deep impression on Gerard Majella. "I must join these men as a lay brother," he decided. Each day the resolution grew more insistent in his heart. He even gave away all his worldly goods – one extra shirt and a pair of linen breeches! Finally, he went to see Father Cafaro.

No Encouragement

But like the Capuchin superior a few years before, Father Cafaro gave him no encouragement. He was too frail for the rigorous tasks of a lay brother. Despite the rebuff Gerard was not disheartened. He was convinced that God wanted him to join his new Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. He went on making preparations for departure.

When his mother discovered the plan she was frantic. His three sisters wept aloud, pleading with him to stay. "Mother needs you at home," they insisted. But Gerard stood firm. He was going to Illiceto to become a Redemptorist! They ran to the

And always there were the children. They flocked to him from all over Muro. He told them stories, taught them to pray. One little fellow tumbled from a cliff and was found, to all appearances, dead. He was the son of Piccolo, the watchmaker, with whom Gerard was staying. "It is nothing," he told the distracted father. He traced a little cross on the boy's forehead and the child awoke.

Mind Reader

Back at Illiceto that winter, there were the usual retreats for men, held at regular intervals. During several of these, Gerard was instrumental in regaining souls to Christ. There was one man, especially, who, despite all the urging of the lay brother, refused to make a good confession. One evening Gerard obtained permission to go up to the man's room. He carried a large crucifix, and before the man could open his mouth, "Look at these wounds!" he told him. "Your evil deeds have made the blood to flow." Red blood began oozing from the nails of the crucifix. "For you, He was born in a stable," Gerard continued. Suddenly the trembling man beheld the Infant Jesus in Gerard's arms! "If you persist in your sins, you will be damned . . ." The brother made a gesture and a soul from hell appeared in the room writhing in torment! After that there was no need for words. At once, the man ran down the stairs two at a time to one of the confessors. He told what he had seen and asked that the whole incident be made public for the instruction of all. He made a good confession. Brother Gerard was indispensable to the success of the retreats.

Pied Piper

It was the month of April and Gerard was on his way to the town of Corato, when a poor farmer, thinking him a priest, called out to him: "Padre, can you give me consolation?" The man pointed sadly to his farm. "See how the mice have eaten my seedlings. They are everywhere. My family will die of hunger because of them." Gerard raised his hand and blessed the fields. "There now," he said. "Everything will be alright," and was on his way. The wretched farmer stood there watching the "Padre" awhile. He turned back to his stricken fields. He blinked his eyes and took a second look. All along the furrows, little field mice lay by the hundreds, not a one alive. "Wait, man of God, wait," he shouted, but Gerard was turning a bend in the road. Corato was waiting.

During the greater part of the Lenten season, Gerard was at Corato. Word of his doings there came by post to the Rector of Illiceto . . . "his good example has attracted everyone and wrought many conversions," the letter said . . . "Crowds follow him everywhere in Corato. They carry him about as though he were a Saint come down from Heaven. From six in the morning till six at night, they gather round the house of Don Felice Papaleo where Gerard has been staying. The people here want not only a mission by the

Acid Test

The days of Brother Gerard's novitiate were drawing to a close. He had tried the Redemptorist Rule and found it to his liking. His various superiors had tried him in many ways and found that he passed their tests. Anyone who observed him in chapel knew he was a man of prayer. His fellow Brothers could vouch for his alacrity at the hardest work. From all over came reports of his wondrous dealings with the poor and the sick and the sinner.

Professed Religious

On the feast of Our Lady's Visitation in 1752, Brother Gerard commenced his fifteen-day retreat in preparation to make his vows as a Redemptorist. On July sixteenth, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, he knelt in the chapel at Illiceto and pronounced in the presence of his community, the vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, and the oath of Perseverance until death. Brother Gerard Majella was a professed member of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. Two months later, with the consent of his Director, he made a fifth vow: To do always that which was most pleasing to God.

Much as Gerard preferred solitude and meditation, his life as a lay brother demanded that he often leave the monastery on business. He traveled with the missionaries, helping them in every way possible, in their tedious weeks of preaching in many villages and towns. Often too, he was called by the poor and the sick. Wherever obedience demanded his presence, Gerard was there to "do the Will of God." And God in turn seemed to do the will of Gerard for the benefit of countless souls.

His hometown of Muro was his first assignment after Profession. It was now three years since he had climbed from his bedroom window and run after the missionaries. His mother was dead. She had passed away in April, four months before he returned. So during his stay in Muro, he lived with Alessandro Piccolo, the watchmaker, though he had invitations from nobles and well-to-do, and was greeted like a hero by everyone in the town.

Not in Text Books

The students of the new seminary in Muro could hardly believe their ears. Their rector had invited Brother Gerard to give them a conference on the first chapter of St. John's Gospel. Some of them had been boys with him. They knew he had left school at the age of twelve; that he could barely read or write; and had never studied theology. And yet when he began discoursing lucidly on the eternal generation of the Second Person of the Trinity, he held them spellbound. He made it sound so simple! Canon Bozzio was later to write of Gerard . . . "Learned men are silent before this poor unlettered Brother. He draws knowledge from its source, the Heart of Christ, not from the muddy cisterns of the human mind. In his mouth the most obscure mysteries become luminously clear." Is it any wonder that confessors flocked to Gerard seeking advice?

missionaries, begging them not to accept their brother. Father Cafaro has no intention whatever of accepting the young man. However, he shrewdly foresaw it would be hard to dissuade this importunate youth. "Detain him at home somehow the day we leave," was Father Cafaro's advice to Gerard's distracted family. They promised to do so.

Benedetta bolted Gerard's door the morning the Redemptorists left Muro. But later when she tiptoed into the room, he was not there. His bed-clothes, knotted together, streamed from the open window, and on a small table lay a scrap of paper: "Mother, I am off to become a saint," it read. It was signed "Gerardo." He had gone after the missionaries.

Success

"Wait, wait for me!" The group of missionaries half way to Rionero turned to see a cloud of dust on the road behind them. It was that young man again. He had pursued them for twelve miles. Gasping for breath, he commenced his entreaties all over. He was too frail for the life, the missionaries countered. He had better go back to Muro. But Gerard would not be put off. He argued. He nagged. He pleaded. He prayed to Our Lady. He made such a holy nuisance of himself during the next few days in Rionero that Father Cafaro at last gave in. He wrote a short note for the Rector of the monastery at Illiceto, and gave it to the persistent young man. At once Gerard was on his way. By nightfall, he had reached the novitiate of the Redemptorists.

On a Saturday evening, the seventeenth of May in 1749, a tired young man, dusty from long hours of walking, knocked on the door of the monastery at Illiceto. Soon he was presenting his precious letter to Father D'Antonio, the rector. He had no idea of what Father Cafaro had written. As the Rector unfolded the note, Gerard was all happiness, his face wreathed in smiles. "I am sending you a brother, who as far as work goes, will be perfectly useless." The Rector glanced up at the young man over the letter, noting the frail little frame and the pallid face. He read on . . . "But because of his many earnest entreaties, and the high reputation he holds in Muro, I could not quite deny him a trial . . ." Now Father D'Antonio was smiling. "This is not an easy life," he dryly remarked, "But we will give you a chance at it." Gerardo Majella was happy unto tears. He was going to be a religious . . . a lay brother of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

Gerard Majella, the Redemptorist Lay-brother

A lay brother is lay: he is not an ordained priest. He is not bound to the Divine Office. He does not say Mass or hear Confessions, or preach missions. But he is a brother to the priests of the community, wearing the same Redemptorist habit, living under the same roof, eating the same meals, sharing the community's prayers and good works. He is a religious with the three vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience . . . the same vows as any Redemptorist priest. In no sense is he a servant to the priests. He is their helper. He takes care of the material upkeep of the monastery while his confreres are busy with the spiritual work of the apostolic ministry. He has little commerce with the world beyond the monastery walls except when the business of the house may require it. He should be modest, humble, simple, and joyously obedient. Above all, he must be devoted to prayer.

Knowing what we do of Gerard, we can appreciate how ideally he fitted these requirements. Today, in the Constitutions of the Lay Brothers of the Congregation, St. Gerard Majella is named their patron and model. But, back to Iliceto in May of 1749.

Next morning he began his new apprenticeship: doing odd jobs here and there about the monastery, helping the brothers at their various tasks. His first assignment was the garden . . . hard and back-breaking work for a lad accustomed to needle and thimble. Somehow he managed to finish his own work and always have time to help the others. "This new-comer does the work of four of us," was the comment of his new companions. Their admiration mounted with the weeks; and by the time Father Cafaro came as Rector to Iliceto in October of that year, the young man from Muro was considered the jewel of the house.

The Will of God

The new Rector of Iliceto was quick to realize how premature he had been with his scribbled recommendations. Absolutely worthless! It embarrassed him to remember what he had written. Not only could the postulant do the work of four, he did the downright impossible! He read the minds of total strangers. He cured sicknesses. He set the natural laws at naught. His recollection was constant. So fixed were his thoughts on God and His Holy Will, he became a model of punctilious obedience. That was the secret of Gerard's holiness: that in everything he sought the Will of God. For him the Redemptorist Rule in its minutest detail was the express Will of God. He knew it by heart. Were the rulebook to be lost, he could have rewritten it from memory, line for line. He obeyed his superiors to the letter. Often they had but to think of a task for Gerard, when at once he began to execute their wish.

There was the morning the Rector sent him off to Lacedonia with a letter for one of the priests of the town. He had been gone some time when the Rector remembered a post-script he had meant to add. "If I could only get hold of that letter," he thought. Hardly had he phrased the thought when there was a knock at his door, and Gerard walked in with the letter. Without a word, he laid it on the Rector's desk.

Some weeks later, the Rector was visiting the Bishop of Melfi. Conversation turned to the young man at Iliceto whom everyone regarded as a saint. The Rector spoke glowingly of him, so much so that the Bishop wanted to meet the young novice: would it be possible for Gerard to visit with him at Melfi? When the Rector agreed, the Bishop called for a messenger; but the Rector smilingly assured him a messenger would be unnecessary. "Your lordship, I will show you the extent of this young man's obedience. I will close my eyes and desire him to come to Melfi.

At that same moment, Gerard went to Father Minister at Iliceto for permission to go to Melfi, as the Rector wished to see him. And while the Bishop was still conversing with the Rector, Brother Gerard came into the room.

"And what brings you here, Brother?" the Rector feigned surprise. "Obedience," said Gerard. "I sent no message for you to come here," the Rector spoke sternly. "No," replied Gerard meekly. "But in the presence of His Lordship you commanded me to come, as he desired to meet me." So the Bishop of Melfi met the novice. He remained at Melfi for three weeks.

Intruder

Reports of his wonders came from all quarters. One afternoon a rough looking character came to Iliceto and asked for the Rector. He wanted to go to confession. After making his peace with God, he told how he had come to seek out Iliceto. "I was coming down the road quite a distance from here thinking my own wicked thoughts, when just below Acadia at an intersection I met one of your Brothers. He stood there as though he were expecting me. I hastened my pace as I had no mind to talk to him. When he saluted me, I snarled that he mind his own affairs. He was a frail, thin fellow; but then he reached out and grasped my arm and held me as in a vice. "Where are you going?" he asked. "I may be able to help you." I was furious at his impertinence! I tried to jerk my arm from his grasp. "I know what is in your heart. You are in despair. You are on the point of giving your soul to the Evil One." I turned pale at his words, because it was the truth. That very moment I had been mulling over that very idea. "God knows what you are thinking. He sent me to this spot to warn you." Frightened at the way he could read my soul, I admitted I was about to commit a crime, and asked his guidance. He told me to come here to Iliceto to you.