

## Homily for 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Maria Goretti was born in 1890. Her family was very poor. When she was six the family moved to a town called Nettuno where they shared a farm house with a man and his teenage son, Alessandro Serenelli.

On July 5, 1902 Maria's family was out working in the fields. Maria was eleven and remained at the residence taking care of the house and her infant sister. She was outside sitting on the steps when Alessandro, now 19, tried to force himself onto her with the intention of having his way with her. Maria refused his advances, crying desperately, and pushing him away. She warned him that he was risking his soul and salvation with such evil intentions. Alessandro threatened to kill her...she wouldn't comply. Alessandro stabbed her fourteen times and left her for dead.

Maria was rushed to the nearest hospital. When the priest came to anoint her, she told him, "I forgive Alessandro, and I want him to be in Paradise with me. Maria died the next day while clutching a cross.

Alessandro repented during his twenty-seven years in prison. When released, he went to visit Maria's mother, Assunta, and, in tears, begged her forgiveness. She placed her hands on his head, caressed his face, and said to him, "Alessandro, Maria forgave you. Christ has

forgiven you. Why should I not also forgive? I forgive you, my son! Your evil days are past, and to me, you are a long-suffering son.”

The next day, the people in the village were shocked to see Assunta Goretti with head held high and tears falling down her face, taking Alessandro Serenelli by the hand and leading him to Church where they attended Mass together.

Twenty years later, Pope Pius XII canonized Maria Goretti. Present were her mother, Assunta, and Alessandro Serenelli.”

The Gospel today speaks about our being a servant...a person who serves a Master. There are many Masters in our world today. Money, power, lust, greed, pleasure, possessions...the list of possible masters is pretty endless. And there is another Master...the one who created our lives, the one who is the source and fountain of compassion, mercy, forgiveness, kindness and love.

The example of Maria Goretti, her mother, Assunta and her assailant, Alessandro, teach us that it is only in following Jesus Christ as Master of our lives that we can come to know the love of God which is so powerful that it surpasses even the love of a mother for her child.

Who is my master? Who or what governs my life? Whom do I follow? Where am I going? Would our lives reflect the love of God as powerfully as did St. Maria Goretti and her family?

There is an afterthought to this sermon. Everytime you come to Mass here, everytime you look at our beautiful altar, I want you to think of St. Maria Goretti. I want you to think of her because some of her bones are buried within the altar. It is her relic that I honor every time I kiss the altar. It is her spirit and her story that call us to let Jesus Christ be our Master and our Guide.