

Parishioners' Corner

St. Maria Goretti – Inspiring Us to Forgive



How do we learn about God's forgiveness and mercy? Among the avenues that come to my mind are the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In addition, some of Father Deo's homilies and his Sunday Bulletin letters, plus his "Forgive as we are Forgiven" 2026 Lenten Mission have provided me with perspectives about the depths of God's mercy. Father Deo has suggested these questions to pray about: *"How can we forgive as God forgives? How do we respond when we are hurt or offended by someone? How do we forgive what seems unforgivable?"*

Another inspirational source about forgiveness that may not come to mind for many parishioners are two stories connected to St. Maria Goretti. She is depicted on the first stained glass window on the St. Joseph's side of our church. (St. Maria Goretti's biography -- along with all the saints on our stained-glass windows -- can be found on the parish's website. <https://stelizabethtrinity.org/parish/st-maria-goretti-window/>)

Part I – Maria Goretti was born October 16, 1890, in a village in central Italy, the third of six children of parents who were peasant farmers. Maria's father died when she was 10 years old and she was put in charge of an inter-generational household of 10 people. Even with these responsibilities, Maria found time to learn her catechism and was permitted to make her First Communion before the usual age of 12. She regularly walked a long distance to Mass to receive the Eucharist.

Then one day, when Maria was not yet 12, Alessandro Serenelli, who was nearly 20 years old, attempted lustful advances which Maria resisted. Alessandro was infuriated by Maria's protests and he stabbed her 14 times. In her last hours, Maria offered her sufferings to God and expressed repeated concern about her family. In addition, she consciously forgave Alessandro and prayed that someday he would be with her in heaven.

Part II -- For his crime, Maria's attacker was sentenced to 30 years in prison. Alessandra was described as a tormented individual and he was placed in solitary confinement. Then, one night he had a dream in which Maria, dressed in white, placed lilies into his hands. When he awoke, he felt certain that Maria was praying for him and that he was forgiven and saved. This launched Alessandro's arduous journey of redemption. When he was released from prison in 1929, he was a changed man.

Five years after his release from prison, while still haunted by his crime, Alessandro went unannounced to the home of Maria's mother, Assunta, to say how horribly sorry he was for his unspeakable actions. Alessandro begged her for mercy. Assunta's words, recorded forever, were, "If God has forgiven you, and Maria has forgiven you, then I forgive you." Alessandro and Assunta were reconciled.

The next time you hear one of the Jesus' parables about forgiveness or hear Father Deo provide us his insights about mercy, I hope you'll join me in looking up at St. Maria Goretti's stained glass window in our church with a deeper appreciation of what it means to forgive.

Maria Goretti's feast day is July 6.

Ron Polaniecki

