

March 3, 1947

MARTYR FOR PURITY

Anzio is in the news again. This time because of a young girl from that neighborhood who was murdered by a sex-minded boy. In dying for the love of purity she became a martyr. The process for her canonization has already started.

This is the story. Maria Goretti lived with her widowed mother and little brothers and sisters in one half of a double house on a farm near Anzio. The other half of the house was occupied by Giovanni Serenelli and his son, Allesandro. Maria's father and Giovanni were partners in running the farm. That accounts for the two families living in the same house. Because of long association with the Serenellis, it was difficult for Maria's family to leave and seek livelihood elsewhere after the father's death.

Allessandro Serenelli, the young man in the case, grew up an undisciplined and dissolute youth. He conceived an unholy passion for Maria, who, though only twelve, already looked like a young woman. Twice Allesandro had tempted Maria and was repulsed both times. Then he laid plans that he was certain would succeed. One day when he knew the girl would be in her room, he excused himself from his work, went to his room and picked up a long knife that he had sharpened for his purpose. He hoped to terrorize the girl into yielding to him. He went to the room where Maria was working and made demands of her. The girl simply refused and went about her sewing.

Suddenly Allesandro rushed in, seized Maria and dragged her by the hair across the floor. The girl cried out, but the noise of the threshing outside prevented her voice from being heard. "No, no, it's a sin. God doesn't want it. If you do it you will go to hell." She resisted his advances. Baffled and enraged, Allesandro plunged the knife into Maria's body; not once, many times as if he were hacking a block of wood. Seeing her lying senseless, and thinking her dead, Allesandro slunk out and went to his own room. In a few moments Maria revived and with superhuman effort managed to drag herself to the head of the stairway and called the boy's father. But Allesandro heard her. Further enraged, he went back and drove blow after blow into the girl's back. The doctors later testified she had been stabbed 14 times.

Maria's mother found her in a dying condition. "Mother, it was Allesandro!" "But why did he do it, my child?" "Because he wanted me to do something bad, and I wouldn't," replied Maria.

At the hospital the doctors declared the case hopeless. They disinfected and stitched Maria's wounds. Her weakened condition would not permit an anaesthetic, so for two hours she bore the agony of the operating room. Before the priest gave her her last Communion he asked, "Do you forgive this assassin from your heart?" "Yes, she replied, "I forgive him. In heaven I will pray for his conversion". Then she added, remembering Christ's words on the Cross, "I, too, want him to be with me in Paradise." Maria died 24 hours after the tragedy.

Prayer and sacrifice keep one strong in the practice of purity. During the month of March pray to St. Joseph for strength in that virtue. In his Litany he is called, "Most chaste" and "Guardian of virgins".

PRAYERS: (deceased) mother of Father Leonard Collins, CSC; Father James Trahey, CSC (3rd Anniv); brother of Joe Hipp (1y) (Anniv); father of Richard Bowes, '38. (ILL) brother of Stan Severyn (Sor), dying; Mr. Casagrande, friend of Tom Gargan (Sor); brother of John Cosgrove (OC). 2 Special Intentions.