Saint Maria Goretti • Saint stories

It was one of those days where you can sit outside to do your work. Maria was sewing up a shirt while her mother and siblings were out on the farm working. A young man she knew, Alessandro, snuck up on her and began to attack her.

“No, no you mustn’t! What you are doing is a sin!” screamed Maria.

Alessandro stabbed her many times. A couple of days later she died from those wounds. Before she died, she forgave her attacker and promised to pray for him. She said: “I forgive Alessandro Serenelli…and I want him with me in heaven forever.”

Maria had been born into a Catholic family on October 16, 1890. Her family was very poor after Maria’s father died, but her family’s love for God never wavered. Every day Maria’s mother and brothers and sisters went out into the fields to work. Maria stayed behind and took care of all the household responsibilities including cooking, sewing, and taking care of the youngest child, Teresa, who was still too young to work out in the fields. (Can you imagine having all those responsibilities when you were only 11 years old? Having to cook all of dinner? Maybe the next time your mom asks you to set the table, think about all the chores St. Maria had and don’t complain!)

After Alessandro attacked Maria, he was captured and sent to prison for thirty years. At first he wasn’t sorry for his sin. Then one day he had a dream. In the dream, he was sitting in a garden with Maria and she gave him a bunch of lilies. When he took them, the flowers burned his hands. Upon awakening, Alessandro was a changed man, sorry for his sins.

When Alessandro was released from prison, he found Maria's mother and asked for forgiveness. She responded, "If my daughter can forgive him, who am I to withhold forgiveness?"

On June 24, 1950 Maria Goretti was declared a saint by Pope Pius XII. Alessandro was present at the beatification.

Eventually, Alessandro joined the order of Friars Minor Capuchin as a lay brother. He worked there as both a gardener and receptionist until his death.

Feast day: July 6

St. Maria Goretti, pray for us!

Discussion & Activity: Forgiveness

You'll need some kind of snack or treat to share together at the end.

Have a talk with your child(ren) about forgiveness. For my kids, our best discussions occur while we are eating. So this may be a good one to do during snack or meal time. Here are some good questions to get the discussion going:

- How do you feel when your brother/sister takes your toy away?
- What goes through your mind when you are asked to forgive him/her?
- Do we need to forgive? Why?
- When do you need to tell mom or dad or a trusted adult about someone doing something you don't like? When is it tattling?
- What can you do about the situation when someone takes your toy or says something mean?
- What can you do to make it easier to forgive? (Ask Jesus to help.)

Activity: Acting out forgiveness

Have your children pretend to start arguing over whose turn it was in a game. (Act out the argument.) How can we solve this problem? What if one of you took his turn too early on purpose but now is sorry? What if he isn’t sorry?

After the children figure out how to solve the problem, let them share the snack together.

Artwork by Tricia Hampo. Check out her Etsy shop, When Hearts Listen.