

St Gerard Majella  
the mothers' saint

## Prayer

Great protector of the family, St Gerard, we ask your prayers for all parents, that they may receive the grace to live in the love of God and bring up their children to know and love God with all their hearts.

We ask you to pray that all may value the holiness of Christian family life. God, our loving Father, your life gives life to the world. Bless and make holy all human love, especially the life-giving love of fathers and mothers.

May your love fill the hearts and homes of all families, so that the world may enjoy the peace and happiness promised by your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.



## St Gerard - the Mothers' Saint

"Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire." These words of St Catherine of Siena would be an inspiration for St Gerard Majella. Only one thing mattered to him: to do the will of God, that is to be what God meant him to be. The first reference he got from the Redemptorists could not deter him.

"I'm sending you a useless fellow" were the words which introduced Gerard Majella to Redemptorist life. His poor health prompted the first Redemptorist priest to whom he spoke to believe Gerard wouldn't be able to do anything. However, Gerard was resolute and determined. He wanted to join the group of missionaries who came to work in his town. They told him to go away. He was so persistent that the Superior of the mission asked his family to keep him locked in the house when they were leaving town. Gerard was a match for them too. In true heroic style he climbed out of his bedroom window, lowered himself to the street and raced after the missionaries. When he caught up with them he simply asked to be given a chance "and if I'm no use then send me away".

*Michael McGreevy CSSR*

## Early days

Born in the town of Muro southern Italy in 1726 Gerard was only twelve years old when his father died. From then on his family depended on him. He trained as a tailor and by the age of nineteen had a prosperous business going. However he was not satisfied. There was a burning passion within him. It was to do God's will, but he wasn't sure what God's will was for him. He applied to the Capuchins and he tried life as a hermit. God had something else in store for him. So in 1749 the Redemptorists came to Muro to preach a mission and Gerard thought he knew what God wanted of the Capuchins and he tried life as a hermit. God had something else in store for him. So in 1749 the Redemptorists came to Muro to preach a mission and Gerard thought he knew what God wanted of him.

Far from being useless, Gerard, given the chance, proved himself to be quite a talented young man and willing to work. Already a qualified tailor he quickly developed skills at gardening, carpentry and cooking. He also proved to be an excellent sacristan able to look after the church buildings. He could turn his hand to almost anything. And he showed too that he was a remarkably sensitive listener to people who wanted to talk to him. People in need sought him out and found strength and support in him.

## Spirituality

His spirituality was basically very simple but its roots went right to the heart of his catholic faith. He had an immense love for the Holy Eucharist and for the abiding presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In his childhood he learned a deep love for Jesus in receiving Holy Communion and he never lost it. In the Mass he grasped the meaning of suffering and could identify with the sacrifice Jesus made for love of us. Gerard wanted to share Christ's sufferings. When he was wrongly accused of having an affair he did not attempt to defend himself even when he was summoned to appear before St Alphonsus. He wanted to imitate Jesus who did not defend himself but bowed before his accusers. He was forbidden to go to Communion but was utterly confident that God would come to his rescue. God did. However, in the meantime, he had suffered intensely being deprived of the bread of life upon which he depended.

His love of Jesus in the tabernacle was often playful. He was heard talking to Jesus and saying he really must go for he had work to do. This happy childlike spirit was shown too in the second profound love of his life. He was deeply devoted to Mary, the Mother of God. He would dance for joy at her feasts. It was through her guidance he came to know Jesus intimately and longed to be one with her at the foot of the cross. And knowing that these roots of faith were available to all God's children he was able to guide others in the spiritual life. His own profound love for God gave him an insight and an eloquence that even the most learned of theologians could not match.

## Miracles

Gerard only lived six years as a Redemptorist but during those years he acquired a reputation for miracles. He was known as a 'wonder-worker', able to feed the poor people who came to the monastery door even when there seemed to be no food left. He would cajole his superiors, the cooks, and anyone who might be able to help. He equated his love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with his love for Jesus in those who were poor and in need.

His prayers were sought in every need. When a woman was dying in child-birth, her husband, who had met Gerard during one of the parish missions, begged him to pray for her. Gerard prayed. The mother and child recovered and this miracle was cited later when the case for the canonisation of Gerard came forward. The healing was to provide the first intimation that here would be the patron saint of mothers and mothers-to-be.

Gerard would accompany the missionaries to towns and villages across southern Italy. Missioners were confident all would be well if Gerard was there. Besides all his other work he wrote numerous letters of spiritual direction. He was bright and cheerful and in his own gentle way could explain the faith and the mysteries of God's love in a way beyond the capacity of talks and sermons.

## Final years

His first Redemptorist superior had been anxious that Gerard's poor health would prevent him from being any good to the community or to the people. Fortunately Gerard's character prevailed over that anxiety. However, in 1755 the tuberculosis from which Gerard suffered became much worse. He worked through the summer but by September it was clear that this time his illness was too great, he would not survive. He was still determined not to let the sadness of death take over for he knew the risen Christ would have the last word. He had printed a text for the wall of his room: "The will of God is done here, as God wills it and for as long as God wills it". He urged his brothers in the Redemptorists to be cheerful: "I'm doing God's will and I'm going to God so we've every reason to be happy".

Gerard died on 15 October 1755.

After his death the miracles worked through his intercession increased. There were countless accounts of healing and new life. One of the most celebrated came when a young woman expecting her first child was in danger of death. She remembered Gerard had left his handkerchief behind on a visit to her home years before. "It may be useful some day", he had said. Now it was clutched to her heart in prayer and the baby was born in good health. It is no wonder that countless young women have turned to St Gerard in prayer asking that they might have a child, others having a child that all might be well with them, and all mothers that their children might be blessed. In fact, men, women and children have all found great comfort and inspiration in the life and example of St Gerard Majella. He is a saint not only to pray to but to learn from so that each person may be the person God meant them to be.

Gerard Majella was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1893 and  
canonised a Saint on 11th December 1904



