

**Homily for the Breakfast Meeting of the
St. Thomas More Society of Greater St. Louis
Clayton, Missouri**

**The Memorial of Saint Maria Goretti
July 6, 2012**

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, what does it mean to follow Jesus (cf. Matthew 9:9)? He addresses this invitation several times throughout the Gospels, both at his first encounters with the Twelve and also when they fail him. It means simply to walk behind Jesus, to always have him in front of us in all things, that everything we do is done in imitation of him.

Children seem best at following others, with their natural tendency toward imitation; adults often tend to be too independent or too self-assured to intentionally model their life on that of another. Perhaps this is why Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

Today we celebrate the life and example of one such child, Saint Maria Goretti, who gave up her life in preservation of her virginity at the age of twelve. On July 5, 1902, Alessandro Serenelli, a friend and co-worker of Maria's family, tried to force Maria into the house to have his way with her; she refused and was stabbed several times. Maria ran and was taken to the hospital where she died one hundred and ten years ago today.

As she lay dying she remained alert enough to receive Viaticum. She also said that she forgave Alessandro “for the love of Jesus” and prayed God would also forgive him.

Eight years later, Alessandro spoke of his sorrow over his grave sin. Maria had recently come to him in a dream and offered him lilies, the symbol of purity. When the cause for Maria’s beatification began, Alessandro spoke of her holiness and her pleadings for the state of his soul. Even at such a young age, she realized what Jesus meant when he said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:13).

In her short life lived cheerfully and generously in service of others, we might say that she lived the words of the Psalm: “With all my heart I seek you; let me not stray from your commands” (Psalm 119:10).

The example of Saint Maria’s life shines brightly before us in the legal profession, especially her willingness to forgive her attacker and to pray not for his punishment, but for his forgiveness. Let us ask her to intercede for us, that following the example of her love, we may be found always behind Jesus Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.