

Homily based on the readings from July 6, 2026 (Hosea 2.16, 17c-18, 21-22; Matthew 9.18-26)

As you may have noticed, many of the Church's major holydays – such as the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul and the Feast of Saint Thomas, both of which we celebrated this past week – have their own specific readings for Mass. For the more routine memorials, though – including the one occurring today – we typically use the regular weekday lectionary. Nevertheless, it is striking how often these readings fit *perfectly* with the saints we are commemorating.

The Gospel reading, which we just heard, describes a situation where Jesus brought a young woman back from the dead. The text does not mention her age, although similar accounts in both Mark and Luke describe her as being twelve years old. In any case, the passage specifically refers to her as a “little girl.” (The Greek word, in case you are curious, is *korasion* [κοράσιον].) There is no question that the mourners' sorrow was *magnified* by the girl's youth – they were not

only lamenting the loss of her unspoiled *joy* and *innocence*, but also a *lifetime's* worth of potential. We can only imagine how *intense* their rejoicing must have been when Jesus, as he always *does*, transformed *death* into *life*.

The story of Saint Maria Goretti is, in *some* respects, similar to the event depicted in today's Gospel – but there are *also* substantial differences.

As you may be aware, when she was only eleven years old, Saint Maria was stabbed *fourteen times* during the course of an attempted rape. Just before she died, she begged God to forgive the man who had killed her.

After serving 27 years in prison, that man – Alessandro Serenelli – repented of his sins and begged Maria's mother for forgiveness. He later became a Capuchin friar, living long enough to see his virgin victim both *beatified* and *canonized*.

The most obvious similarity here, of course, is the tragic death of a young girl. The most apparent difference is that *one* of the girls came back to life – while the other, at least in a physical sense, did not.

Nevertheless, both situations *clearly* demonstrate Christ's uncontested victory over death. We know – beyond the shadow of a doubt – that Saint Maria Goretti was reborn into “eternal happiness in heaven.” The new life she received – directly from the hands of Jesus Christ – is not confined to her heavenly homeland, but radiates throughout *this* world as well. Her mother and her siblings experienced it; the Holy Father – Pope Pius XII – experienced it, joyfully proclaiming her the “Saint Agnes of the 20th century”; even her murderer, Brother Alessandro, experienced it. All of *us*, here at Mass this morning, have the opportunity to experience it as well. Saint Maria Goretti – in addition to providing an *unassailable* model of persistence, chastity, and forgiveness – serves as a *fearless* witness to the new life Christ is offering *all* his sisters and brothers. Each of us is destined, in the time and manner chosen by the Lord, to endure the end of this mortal life. Pray that we may all meet that moment with the *faith* and the *courage* of a little girl.