

FROM SUPREME KNIGHT CARL A. ANDERSON AND
SUPREME CHAPLAIN BISHOP THOMAS V. DAILY

Almost every day brings new evidence of an unrelenting anti-Catholicism in the United States. While many of the Church's recent woes are the result of self-inflicted wounds, the intensity of attacks has roots that reach back several centuries.

Intellectuals who shaped much of the thinking, politics and culture of Europe — and of large segments of American society during the 19th and 20th centuries — believed that Christianity did not make sense. In their view Christianity was not just irrelevant, it was dangerous to man's welfare. They believed that what Christianity said about human nature was wrong and therefore a barrier to progress.

They offered alternatives. Karl Marx, for example, suggested economics as the only way to further human progress. Friedrich Nietzsche asserted that only the "will to power" could safeguard man's freedom. And Sigmund Freud maintained that sexuality was the key to understanding human action. Each declared that Christianity is not adequate to understand man, his freedom or his dignity. They insisted that Christianity is not the truth that sets man free. To the contrary, they said, it is what keeps him enslaved.

And so, for those who understand the world in these terms, problems that arise in the Catholic Church are seen as more evidence of the detrimental effect of Christianity on both the individual and society.

On Feb. 22, we celebrate the feast of the Chair of St. Peter. It is an occasion for Catholics and especially Knights of Columbus to gratefully acknowledge that the "cathedra" or Chair of St. Peter serves the universal Church as a source of unity. But this feast also celebrates the Chair of St. Peter as a service of authority. It is a feast that supports the truth of Christianity.

Pope John Paul II has used this authority to strike at the root of contemporary anti-Catholicism. To those who assert that economics, power or sexuality adequately provides for the human experience, John Paul II offers this response:

"God created man in His own image and likeness; calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love.... Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being."

In other words, only love is adequate to understand the human person, to guide his freedom and to protect his dignity. And this vocation to love is fully revealed only in the person of Jesus Christ.

Father Michael J. McGivney and his brother Knights knew this to be the true explanation of human existence. They found that it led to a deeper personal commitment to this truth through the principles of charity, unity and fraternity.

The steady drumbeat of criticism of the Church may tempt some to demand radical changes. Perhaps they should reflect on the words of the late Orthodox Christian theologian, Paul Evdokimov: "It is not a question of reforms in the Church; as it is, the Church is a miracle and a sanctuary. It is a question of *metanoia*, a change in the being of every believer." *Vivat Jesus!* ❖



CARL A.
ANDERSON

I have always found one of the great blessings of being supreme chaplain is that I get an opportunity to be with the supreme knight when he visits the Holy Father. Meetings with Pope John Paul II have occurred for me perhaps more frequently in my capacity as supreme chaplain than in my position as the bishop of Brooklyn, N.Y.

One time on a visit with the supreme knight to Rome and the Vatican, we were privileged to sit at the Holy Father's desk and have a chat with him, almost informally. On such occasions, I have been able to thank the Holy Father for his outstanding leadership in the Petrine office and for speaking so clearly about the issues of the day. His still very active ministry reminds me of the great principle, *Ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia*. "Where Peter is, there is the Church."

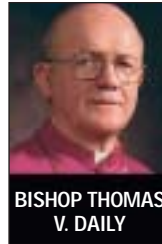
We have spoken of his very clear pronouncements regarding social justice, especially in Third World countries, and on moral issues like abortion and contraception. God knows, if ever there was a time for clarity in religious principles and in the teachings of the faith, it is now, in our current situation in the world and the Church.

The Holy Father reminds us that it is very important to share what he calls the *ministerium Petrinum*, or Petrine ministry. His remarks recall for me a selection in the Liturgy of the Hours from Pope St. Leo the Great of the sixth century: "It is more helpful and more suitable to turn your thoughts to study the glory of the blessed Apostle Peter. ... He overflowed with abundant riches from the very source of all graces, yet though he alone received much, nothing was given over to him without his sharing it." The Church is "constituted of distinct orders of members; still, in the many parts of its holy body, the Church subsists as an integral whole, just as the Apostle says: 'We are all one in Christ.' There is not anyone separated from the office of another in such a way that a lower group has no connection with the head."

It seems to me that all of us in the Church, be we clergy, religious or laity, need to reflect in our ministry the teaching of the head of the body which is Christ, because he is Christ's vicar, the successor of Peter. In this way do we, each of us, find our security and peace.

Dear brother Knights and families, it is precisely in union with Peter that our beloved Order has been so successful since its founding more than 120 years ago.

Praise be to Jesus Christ! ❖



BISHOP THOMAS
V. DAILY

THE EUCHARIST AND THE PRIESTHOOD

The Eucharist defines our Catholic
identity as priests and laity.

by Cardinal Jan P. Schotte

Editor's Note: The following address was delivered at the first Knights of Columbus Eucharistic Congress in Washington, D.C., on June 22, 2002.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is the sacrament of love, because it is Jesus Christ himself. It is God who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8). The sacrament comes from divine love, increases that love and has that love as its goal. The Eucharist comes from the loving desire of Christ at the Last Supper to remain and constantly abide with his Church until the end of time. The sacrament is Christ's supreme act of love and worship of the Father, accomplished on the mount of Calvary.

Because of the intimate union of the soul with Christ, the worthy reception of the Eucharist causes the love of God to grow. The Eucharist is a foretaste and pledge of the love that will bind the soul to God for all eternity. Every aspect of this sacrament is love: its source, its reality and its ultimate fulfillment. On God's part, the sacrament is divine life, the life of the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For the Church and her members, it is access to that divine love through the celebration and partaking of the sacrament.

To this divine gift and mystery, the response of each individual must be gratitude that is manifested in seeking to live the eucharistic mystery to the full in a life of sacrifice and communion with Christ the beloved. In this way, the Eucharist is the basis for the vocation of every Christian. In a particular way, this sacrament is fundamental in the vocation to the priesthood and the consecrated life.

'DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME'

At the moment of the consecration of the Mass, the simple elements of bread and wine, through the spoken words of the priest, are "consecrated" or made holy. They become the body and blood of Christ. The word "consecration" is not used in a merely symbolic way; we have the Lord's words and the Church's unerring tradition that Christ's words are to be taken in a literal sense. At the Last Supper, Christ said, "I consecrate myself for their sakes now, that they may be consecrated in truth" (Jn 17:19).

"Consecrating" means that the bread and wine cease to exist and only their appearance remains. There is a substantive change in the elements, which has been described theologically as "transubstantiation."

It is in the act of consecration of the body and blood of Christ that the relation of the Eucharist to the priesthood emerges. At the Last Supper, the Lord added to the words of consecration, "Do this in memory of me." In this way, Christ ordained his Apostles his priests. To this day, as if in testimony, those words remain in the Mass immediately following the actual words of consecration. They remind us that the priesthood comes from the Eucharist and exists for the Eucharist. In virtue of ordination, the priest is "consecrated" in his own right or "set apart" for a sacred service to the body of Christ, both in the sacrament of the altar and in the Church, which is his body. In fact, St. Thomas Aquinas held that the priest's power over the *corpus mysticum*, Christ's body, the Church, follows from his power over the *corpus physicum* of Christ. In other words, because the priest consecrates the body and blood of Christ, the priest can teach, govern and sanctify the members of the Church.

Because of this intimate relationship, whatever the priest does is directly linked to the Eucharist. Whether he enters the confessional, anoints the sick or administers the other sacraments, the priest is coming from the foot of the cross, from the altar of Calvary, to dispense the fruits of redemption. His priestly work on behalf of the Church, in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, receives power and efficacy from the sacrifice of the Mass that he offers. In consideration of the intimate bond between the priesthood and the Eucharist, how can any priest consider eucharistic prayer and adoration an option to a sound priestly spirituality?

From the moment of his ordination, a priest acts *in persona Christi*, "in the person of Christ," or as Christ himself. For this reason, in former times, a priest was often referred to as *alter Christus*, "another Christ." St. Thomas Aquinas illustrated this exalted priestly dignity by exclaiming that, if he met an angel and a priest, he would bow to the priest first because of his identification with Christ, even though the angel be superior to man in nature.

A EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

The word "consecrate" used by Jesus in his priestly prayer in reference to the first priests (cf. Jn 17:19) is the Greek word *hagiazein*, coming from the adjective *hagios*, which is usually translated "holy." Its basic meaning, however, is different or separate. Thus, this idea of consecration for the priest has two aspects. It not only "sets him apart" for a special office or task but, at one and the same time, "equips" a man with the qualities of mind, heart and character that are necessary to achieve that task. In other words, the sacrament of orders provides the security of sacramental grace,



CARDINAL JAN
SCHOTTE

that is, God's constant unfailing spiritual assistance to enable the priest to fulfill the task to which he has been called. In this sense, it is a reason for hope for priest and the lay faithful alike.

Since Christ's love is the source, reality and ultimate end of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the priest, because of his sacramental conformity to Christ in holy orders and his relation to the sacraments is, by necessity, to live a eucharistic spirituality. In other words, his consecration is a commitment to Christ's life and death. The commitment to Christ's life for the priest is his separation from the world to act on behalf of humanity standing in front of God. This means that the priest's support comes not from this world but from heaven, from the Spirit of God. Only the Spirit can make the life of the priest acceptable in sacrifice. The Spirit's divine source is in the mystery of the Eucharist — "...unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (Jn 6:53).

In addition to Christ's life, the eucharistic consecration commits priests to live Christ's death in their person. This aspect of the priesthood is very much overlooked today. In other words, like Christ, the priest is to be a victim. That is, he is to be identified with the world and its sin. For a priest this means taking upon himself, in his person, human suffering and human sin and incorporating them into the death of Christ, who was "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one" (Heb 2:9).

You also must be, in your councils and in your personal lives, truly eucharistic people. Build, therefore, your fraternal activities and your volunteer programs around the Eucharist.

Priests cannot escape reproducing in themselves the mystery that they are privileged to enact upon the altar. As the Lord made a sacrifice of himself, so must priests. They do without, so that others might have. They sacrifice time, so that others might have eternity. In celibacy, they sacrifice human affection and family, so that others may come to know the all-satisfying love of God.

PRIESTLY SCANDAL AND ST. FRANCIS' EXAMPLE

Tragically, the image of the priesthood is facing difficulties in these times because of the actions of a significant minority. The situation is not unlike what the Church faced in central Italy in the 13th century when many people, including priests, lived immoral lives. St. Francis of Assisi himself, before his conversion as a young man, contributed to the scandal by his care-free ways. But, he changed and, through the grace of God, he became one of the greatest saints.

On one occasion a confrere, who was scandalized by the behavior of a priest, asked: "Brother Francis, what would you do if you knew that the priest celebrating Mass was living an immoral life?"

Francis responded immediately: "When it

came time for Communion, I would go to receive the sacred body of Christ from the priest's hands."

What St. Francis was emphasizing was the truth of our faith in the Blessed Sacrament — that after the priest's words of consecration, regardless of his inner disposition, Christ is present whole and entire, body and blood, soul and divinity.

Christ surely acts through imperfect human instruments. To conclude the incident, St. Francis then added that he would then make a special prayer for the priest. Does not the tragic situation lived in some parts of the Church today remind us all of the necessity of praying for our priests, and for priests to leave ourselves ever more open to the workings of the Spirit through devotion to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, so that we might indeed live our consecration authentically on behalf of Christ and his faithful?

THE EUCHARIST TRANSFORMS LIVES

It has been said — and I am convinced that this is true — that the Knights of Columbus is the strong right arm of the Church and its members are the pillars of many Catholic parishes. I also know this to be true: that the Knights of Columbus are the most ardent defenders and helpers of priests. To continue to be all this, you also must be, in your councils and in your personal lives, truly eucharistic people and promoters of eucharistic devotion. The holy Eucharist defines our Catholic identity. Build, therefore, your fraternal activities and your volunteer programs around the Eucharist. Be examples and models of faithful attendance at Sunday Mass in your parishes. Participate and promote eucharistic adoration, holy hours and frequent visits to Christ in the tabernacles of your churches.

The holy Eucharist will transform your lives and the lives of your families. ❖

Cardinal Jan P. Schotte is general secretary of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican.





The Blessed Mother presenting a rosary to St. Dominic is depicted in a stained-glass window at Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church in Medford, Wis.

Rosarium Virginis Mariae and the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary

Pope John Paul II's letter on the rosary and the new Mysteries of Light

by DOMINICAN FATHER PETER JOHN CAMERON

On the day that Pope John Paul II began the 25th year of his pontificate, he published the apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (*The Rosary of the Virgin Mary*) and proclaimed the period between October 2002 and October 2003 to be the Year of the Rosary. He called all Catholics to “reclaim the full meaning of the rosary.” The rosary, he said, “deserves to be rediscovered” because it is “an inner journey which [brings] the faithful into living contact with the mystery of Christ and his Blessed Mother.”

The pope referred to the rosary as “the school of Mary” in which we are “led to contemplate the beauty of the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love.” The rosary “offers the ‘secret’ which leads easily to a profound and inward knowledge of Christ.” The rosary “is a means of learning from [Mary] to ‘read’ Christ, to discover his secrets, and to understand his message.” For “Mary constantly sets before the faithful the ‘mysteries’ of her Son, with the desire that the contemplation of those mysteries will release all their saving power.” Through the rosary “in Mary’s company” we are enabled “to share [Christ’s] deepest feelings.”

THE ROSARY’S REVIVAL This revival of the rosary is crucial because “today we are facing new challenges” that require recourse to the rosary. The letter speaks of the urgent need to “counter a certain crisis of the rosary”

caused when the rosary is devalued and, therefore, “no longer taught to the younger generation.” For this reason, the Holy Father places the focus of the revival of the rosary on Christian families since renewed devotion to the rosary within family life “will be an effective aid to countering the devastating effects of this crisis typical of our age.”

At the same time, the Holy Father calls for a “revival of the rosary...to implore from God the gift of peace.” For “the rosary is by its nature a prayer for peace.... One cannot recite the rosary without feeling caught up in a clear commitment to advancing peace.” This prompts Pope John Paul to declare: “I willingly entrust to the power of this prayer...the cause of peace in the world and the cause of the family.”

THE MYSTERIES OF LIGHT The pope’s letter emphasizes how much the rosary is a Christ-centered prayer that “contains all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety.” In order “to bring out fully the Christological depth of the rosary,” the Holy Father has decided to make “a suitable addition to the traditional pattern,” namely, the Mysteries of Light, or Luminous Mysteries, that feature moments of Christ’s public ministry. “This addition of these new mysteries,” writes the pope, “is meant to give fresh life and to enkindle renewed interest in the rosary’s place within Christian spirituality as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ.” Meditation on the Luminous Mysteries is designed to lead us more deeply into what the Holy Father calls “the inner logic of the Incarnation.”

The First Luminous Mystery: Christ's Baptism in the Jordan

Great crowds went out to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. Jesus joins the people in the gesture of repentance — not because there is any sin in him, but in order to show us the most authentic way to approach the Father. God the Father delights in being acknowledged by human nothingness when such attention is an expression of utter trust. Jesus goes to the Baptist as a beggar in loving surrender to the merciful Father. The Lord submits himself to baptism to invite us to share in the relationship to which the Father attests from the heavens: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” When we get lost, the Baptism of the Lord enables us always to return to the beginning and remember how much our Savior desired to identify himself with our sin in order to rescue us from it.



Baptism of Christ
by Giotto di Bondone



Marriage at Cana
by Giusto de Menabuoi

The Second Luminous Mystery: Christ's Self-Manifestation at the Wedding of Cana

We often feel like the host of the wedding feast of Cana who runs out of wine: panicked and powerless. The chaos of life convinces us how much we need something that goes beyond our feeble resources. The thirst created at Cana symbolizes our spiritual thirst for God. Through that water-turned-wine, all the world would come to know that God-is-with-us. Christ's

presence transforms every dimension of creation, no matter how menial, meager, or mundane. St. Bede wrote that at Cana “the wine was made to fail to give our Lord the opportunity of making even better wine so that the glory of God in man might be brought out of its hiding place.” The Blessed Virgin Mary, the fountain of hope, leads the glory of God in man out of its hiding place by leading us to her Son, “the fountain of all holiness.” On the cross Jesus will thirst for our union with him in holiness.



The Sermon on the Mount
by Fra Angelico

The Third Luminous Mystery: Christ's Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

At Cana, the Mother of God instructs us: “Do whatever he tells you.” Now we wait, eager to hear the preaching of the Son of God. “The Lord inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 763). The preaching of Jesus fills us with the conviction to follow him in faith like sheep who find

the voice of the shepherd irresistible. Christ communicates not a static rule of life, but his very self. The preaching of Jesus promises that we can personally share in Christ's own life. The Lord's preaching generates us. And our response is deeper conversion, for conversion, as Cardinal John Henry Newman claims, is nothing more than a deeper discovery of what we already truly desire. Christ's preaching, the central mystery of light, awakens us to what we truly desire as it reveals how his Person completely corresponds to our desires.

The Fourth Luminous Mystery: The Transfiguration

The Transfiguration of Jesus reveals the possibility of our own configuration to Christ. In Tabor's glorious vision we behold our own destiny. Thanks to the utterly "different" Christ whom we behold in the Transfiguration, we come to believe in a difference for ourselves we never would have imagined. St. Leo the Great says that "the members of Christ's body were to look forward to sharing in that glory which first blazed out in Christ." However, due to the insolence of original sin, we doubt that personal perfection is possible. We foolishly measure the world according to our own defective standards, which produces a mentality marred by defiance, cynicism and fatalism. But the beauty of Jesus' humanity in the Transfiguration refines and refires our desire for sanctity. Silently from Tabor's splendor, the Savior beckons: "Become what you behold!"



Transfiguration
by Fra Angelico

The Fifth Luminous Mystery: Christ's Institution of the Eucharist

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, and of the Luminous Mysteries. Jesus takes into his hands a puny, paltry, pitiful piece of bread and makes it his body to assure us that he can do the same with our



The Last Supper
by Jaime Serra

nothingness. Moreover, at Cana the Blessed Mother instructed us, "Do whatever he tells you." We revere this memory at the memorial of the Eucharist by reverencing the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. Msgr. Luigi Giussani writes that, "to sacrifice is to allow the memory of Christ to penetrate into what you love, so that what you love becomes truer because it is within the eternal." Christ preached one of his greatest and most succinct sermons at the Last Supper: "I call you friends." Holy Communion assures us that Jesus' friendship is with us, even inside us. In fact, only in the Eucharist can we truly understand our ultimate longing for companionship — a word that means "with bread." And the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament reminds us of the miracle of the Transfiguration and how much Jesus longs for us to behold him, to belong to him and to become like him.

THE EFFECTS OF PRAYING

THE ROSARY What happens when we pray the rosary? The Holy Father writes that when family members turn to Jesus in the recitation of the rosary, they "also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communi-

cate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another, and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Spirit of God." Even more, "the family that recites the rosary together...places Jesus at the center, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on."

As an invaluable aid to securing world peace, "the rosary obtains for us the strength to face [the problems of the world] with the certainty of God's help.... The rosary allows us to hope that, even today, the difficult 'battle' for peace can be won." For "the rosary has a peaceful effect on those who pray it, disposing them to receive and experience in their innermost depths, and to spread around them, that true peace which is the special gift of the risen Lord."

In sum, "to pray the rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and his Mother." And, in a special way, the Mysteries of Light help to lighten our load. ❖

Dominican Father Peter John Cameron is professor of homiletics at St. Joseph's Seminary-Dunwoodie in Yonkers, N.Y., spiritual director of St. John Neumann Residence and Hall, and editor-in-chief of *MAGNIFICAT*.

Witness to Life

Behold A Catholic Mother!

The Life of Blessed Gianna Molla

BY MELAINE RYTHER

In October 1997, at the Second World Meeting of Families in Rio de Janeiro, a young woman stepped forward to address the crowd gathered around Pope John Paul II at Maracana Stadium. The woman offered her testimony on the sanctity of life and ended with this prayer:

“Dear Mama: Thank you for having given me life two times: when you conceived me and when you permitted me to be born, protecting my life. My life seeks to be the natural continuation of your life, of your joy of living, of your enthusiasm... Dear Mama, intercede always for all mothers and all families who turn to you and entrust themselves to you.”

The pope was visibly moved as he listened to Gianna Emanuela Molla. He knew well the woman whom she invoked. Just three years earlier he had formally proclaimed her “Blessed,” declaring her “a woman of heroic love.” He knew of the quiet, courageous choice she made on a spring day in 1962 that would forever distinguish Blessed Gianna Beretta Molla as a contemporary martyr to the cause of life.

Early Influences

Blessed Gianna was born on Oct. 4, 1922, in Magenta, Italy, the 10th of 13 children born to Alberto and Maria Beretta. The Berettas were a devout couple who made every effort to pass their faith on to their children. Though comfortable in their means, they eschewed superfluous goods, teaching by example how to live simple yet joyful lives of quiet piety and self-sacrifice.

In this serene, faith-filled environment, Gianna and her siblings thrived. Gianna was active in the St. Vincent de Paul Society and in Catholic Action, a popular apostolate in Italy that focused on catechizing young people. She loved the outdoors, especially family vacations spent skiing and hiking in the mountains. Her enthusiasm was not as great for academics, however, and she struggled to pass her courses.

When Gianna was 15, her oldest sister Amalia died after a long illness. Deeply affected by her sister's death, Gianna enrolled in a retreat structured around the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. The experience had such a profound influence on her that she wrote down a list of resolutions that were to become her new “program of life.” One of these resolutions — to study harder — had the immediate effect of dramatically improving her grades. No longer hindered by poor academic performance, Gianna set her sights on the profession she felt most passionate about: medicine.

Physician For Life

Gianna received her medical degree

in 1949 from the University of Pavia and went on to specialize in pediatrics. She especially loved working with children, mothers, the poor and the elderly. She refused no one, no matter the day or hour. If a patient couldn't pay, Gianna would accept a bouquet of flowers or a basket of eggs instead. Sometimes she would leave money in the home of a needy patient.

Blessed Gianna viewed her vocation as a unique opportunity to glorify God. “This is a priestly mission!” she explained once. “Just as the priest can touch Jesus, so we doctors touch Jesus in the bodies of our patients.” Well aware that not everyone shared her experience of growing up in a faith-filled and loving environment, Gianna resolved early in her training not to judge her patients and to treat everyone with compassion and dignity. But never did her good intentions cause her to compromise her moral convictions.

Gianna felt strongly about the value of every human life, and was not afraid to use her position as a physician to testify to her beliefs. One day a man came to her office seeking an abortifacient for his wife. Gianna dismissed him quickly and bitterly, exclaiming, “You're coming to me to ask for it?”

The very idea of abortion filled her with dread, and Gianna frequently asked parish priests to preach against it. Whenever one of her patients considered abortion, Gianna suffered greatly and worked feverishly to counsel the woman against it.



(Clockwise from left) Blessed Gianna Beretta Molla with children Pierluigi and Mariolina; at the birth of Mariolina; with her husband Pietro and son Pierluigi; and with Mariolina in 1958.

Wife and Mother

Across the street from Gianna's medical office lived a devout and successful engineer named Pietro Molla. He had met Gianna a few times in passing, but began seeing her more frequently when Gianna hired a nurse who happened to live with the Molla family.

Soon their casual encounters grew into a formal courtship, and on Sept. 24, 1955, they were married by Gianna's brother, Father Joseph Beretta.

As deeply devoted to their faith as they were to each other, Gianna and Pietro held firm to their vision of forming a truly Christian family. "May our

Heavenly Mother always watch over us and give us the grace to be cheered by little angels," Pietro wrote in a letter a few weeks after their wedding. The following year their prayers were answered when their son Pierluigi was born. Daughter Mariolina followed a year later in 1957, and daughter Laura was born in July 1959.

In the summer of 1961, after having suffered two successive miscarriages, Gianna became pregnant again. But her joy was soon tempered when, in her second month, she noticed that her abdomen was swelling at an unusual rate. Upon examination, doctors discovered that the painful swelling was due to a uterine tumor, or fibroma. Gianna was given three choices: a complete hysterectomy, which would most likely save her life but would end her pregnancy and preclude future ones; a direct abortion, which would also save her life and still allow her to have more children; or the surgical removal of just the fibroma, the riskiest of the three options, given the unknown nature of the tumor and the effects the surgery could render on the remainder of her pregnancy.

There was no hesitation on Gianna's part; she chose the third option. "I trust in God," she told those around her, "but now it is up to me to fulfill my duty as a mother. I renew the offering of my life to the Lord. I am ready for anything as long as my baby is saved." Profoundly moved by her decision, the attending surgeon exclaimed to Gianna's brothers, "Behold the Catholic mother!"

The Final Sacrifice

The surgery to remove the fibroma went without incident, as did the remainder of Gianna's pregnancy. Though she hid her misgivings well from family and friends, there is little doubt she knew of the cross awaiting her. On Good Friday, April 20, 1962, Gianna entered the Monza Maternity Hospital. Prior to delivery, she told Pietro in a calm yet firm voice: "If you have to make a decision between me and the child, do not hesitate: Choose the child — I demand it — save him."

On Holy Saturday their daughter Gianna Emanuela was born via Caesarean section. As doctors feared, however, Gianna's condition rapidly declined after the delivery, a result of an infection of the lining of the

abdomen. Refusing pain medication, she suffered intensely for the next six days. Slipping in and out of lucidity, Gianna murmured words of love for her children and for Pietro, expressing her great sorrow for leaving them. "Jesus, I love you!" was her constant prayer as she clutched a small crucifix.

The Friday after she entered the hospital, Gianna fell into a coma. The next morning Pietro arranged to have her brought back to their house, to their marital bed, where he believes she heard for one last time the happy sounds of their children awakening that morning in the room next door. He was alone with her when she died at 8 a.m., Saturday, April 28, 1962.

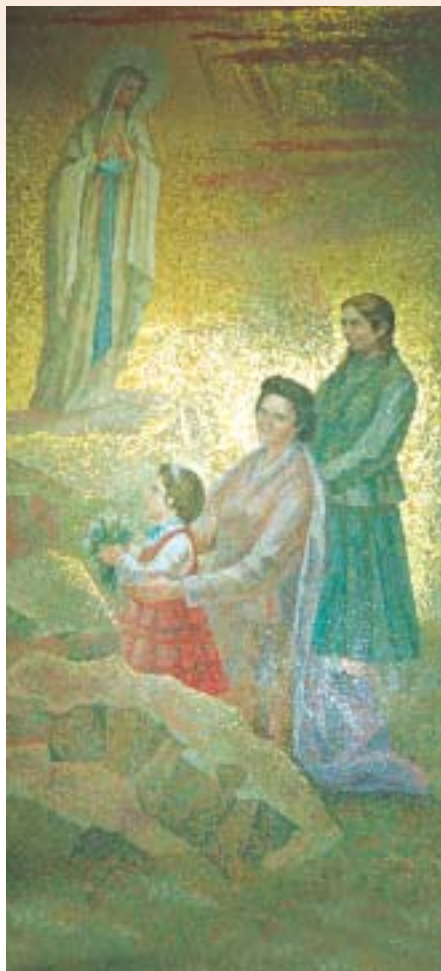
A year after her death, Father Olinto Marella, a family friend who remained with Gianna until the end, published a booklet testifying to Gianna's life of heroic virtue. The bishop of Milan at that time, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, who later became Pope Paul VI, took an interest in Gianna's case. In 1972 her cause for beatification was officially opened.

The Miracle

In November 1977, in the hospital founded by Gianna's missionary brother, Father Alberto Beretta, in Grajau, Brazil, a young mother lay dying. Following the Caesarean delivery of her fourth child, who was stillborn, Lucia Silva Cirilo developed a serious infection from a vaginal abscess that was inoperable at the remote facility. The nearest hospital with the means available to save her life was nearly 400 miles away in San Luis, a dangerous if not impossible move given the woman's worsening condition.

A concerned nurse in Lucia's ward, Franciscan Sister Bernardina, turned in prayer to Gianna Beretta Molla: "You who are the sister of Father Alberto, make this abscess heal and the trip to San Luis be averted," she prayed. She asked two other nurses to join her petition.

Gathered around a small picture of



Mosaic depicting Blessed Gianna Beretta Molla and Our Lady of Fatima.

Gianna, the women prayed for a miracle. Lucia's pain immediately disappeared, and her abscess and infection completely, and inexplicably, healed.

On April 24, 1994, Pope John Paul II, having officially recognized the Brazilian healing as a miracle, beatified Gianna in the presence of her husband, her brothers and sisters, and her three surviving children.

It was Mother's Day. ❖

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A Pro-Life Patron Saint?

Warsaw, N.D., may seem an unlikely place to honor a little-known Italian woman who never set foot in the United States. But Mary Pat Jahner, the resident director of Blessed Gianna's Maternity Home in Warsaw, can't think of a better patron for this residential shelter. "It just seemed so logical, given how she sacrificed her life and gave her love to give birth. That's what all women are called to do, and especially these women who are in difficult situations." The Blessed Gianna Maternity Home provides women in crisis pregnancies spiritual and physical support for themselves and their children. It is the only Catholic-based facility for unwed mothers in North Dakota, and the first and only such facility in the United States named after Blessed Gianna.

While the United States currently has only a handful of organizations dedicated to Blessed Gianna, other countries, most notably Italy and Brazil, have a multitude of parishes, schools, maternity homes, and lay groups under her patronage. As the story of her life becomes more widely propagated (an assured benefit of her ongoing canonization process), it is expected that more organizations and individuals worldwide will place themselves under her patronage in the defense of life.

Joseph Cunningham, president of the Society of Blessed Gianna Beretta Molla in Philadelphia, says there are many who feel that Blessed Gianna should be the patron saint of the pro-life movement. Her messages, he emphasizes, are simple and fundamental: "The message of Gianna is a message of a mother of a family; it is a message of life, of joy, of love. It is a message of a woman who is a witness to the Gospel; as a young person, wife, mother and physician." — MR

More About Blessed Gianna Molla

For more information about Blessed Gianna, or to obtain holy cards or to send prayer requests, contact:

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