



# League of St. Gerard

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## NEWSLETTER

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*Our God is an  
“all-or-nothing” God.  
Becoming one with God  
requires accepting the  
whole package. God’s  
peace and glory are  
certainly part of it,  
but to be filled with God  
we must first become  
empty of ourselves.  
That requires  
sacrificing our own ego,  
and it is not an easy  
process at all.  
The struggle between our  
self and God lasts an  
entire lifetime.*

## *Becoming Christ*

DAVID WERTHMANN

Because so many miracles are attributed to St. Gerard, and because he was so admired by others, it is tempting to imagine him as the perfect saint without any of the trials of normal earthly life. In fact, when I was young and first read his biography, the image painted of his life and spirituality seemed so far beyond my own that I could not imagine anyone emulating his life or virtues. I even declared to my spiritual director, “This is like reading a fairy tale.”

We must realize that Gerard suffered as much as any of us do. For one thing, he came from a very poor family. He was also sick much of his life. And despite his outward holy appearance, his internal spiritual struggles were great.

When we read the spiritual classics we learn that many holy people who drew intimately close to God—like Teresa of Avila, Francis of Assisi, and others—agonized greatly over

their relationships with God. So did St. Gerard.

We would expect that closeness to God would bring with it much consolation and joy, and it does, but there’s a catch. As human beings we can only relate to others as “other,” that is, as someone distinct and apart from ourselves. We recognize another mostly by his or her differences from us. As we draw close to God and become more united with him, the separation begins to fall away. As we allow God to live more fully within us, we no longer experience God as someone apart from ourselves, and so it feels like God is not there. Then we begin to fear that God has abandoned us, yet we do not know what we did wrong or where to find him.

Such an experience is often referred to as “a dark night of the soul.” It’s a time full of confusion because even



though we have worked very hard to build our personal spirituality, there seem to be no results. On the cross Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Everyone who achieves a deep degree of intimacy with God will endure a similar type of anguish.

### The Spiritual Depths

Around 1752, Gerard began to experience such an inner conflict. “This is my grief: that I believe I am suffering without God...Because I see myself downcast and...believe that for me there is no God and that his divine mercy for me has come to an end.” He wrote to a nun, “Pray a great deal to God for me, for I have a great spiritual need, and only God knows how afflicted and disconsolate I am now.”

Throughout his life Gerard had desired to be included in the sufferings of Christ on the cross, and he prayed for that. Although only in his late twenties, he had achieved such union with Christ that he actually began to feel the emotional discomfort of Jesus’ passion and death. His love for God and for his fellow



human beings caused him to become nauseated whenever he came in contact with someone living in serious sin. Although all of Gerard’s actions were innocent and pure, he felt the weight of all the sins in the world on his shoulders. He even called them “my sins” because he began to experience what Jesus felt hanging on the cross.

That inner trial lasted for more than two years. Just after Easter in 1754, a young woman who had left the

convent made a false accusation against Brother Gerard. While under investigation he was forbidden to receive Holy Communion. God must have relieved Gerard’s inner trial during that public scandal because Gerard said he survived the ordeal only by contemplating the greatness of his dear God.

Once he was exonerated, the inner trial began again, even more intensely. During that time Gerard is reported to have walked out on the sea during a bad storm to save the crew of a fishing boat that was nearing shipwreck. That story—so similar to an event in the life of

Jesus—is told to witness how close the union between Christ and Gerard was. It teaches us the effects of such deep association with Christ. By participating so profoundly in the sufferings of Christ, our Lord uses holy people like Gerard to influence sinners and bring them to conversion. Gerard’s act of saving the mortal lives of those men in the boat symbolized their spiritual salvation and shows that God uses us to bring others to faith and forgiveness.

## Living Memorial

That last phrase is worth repeating: God uses us to bring others to faith and forgiveness.

That is why *living as Christ* is so important in our world today. Sure, Jesus brought us salvation when he came to live on earth. But the risen Christ continues living in the world even now, and he continues redeeming the world and everyone in it through all the members of his body. Thus, as

God uses us to bring others to faith and forgiveness.

baptized Christians, we have an influence on those around us. People still encounter Jesus Christ when they meet

someone who belongs to his Body.

Through his closeness to God, St. Gerard became the risen Christ. Jesus Christ died for others; Gerard Majella lived for others. His life

and example greatly affected those who met him. But it was really Christ working through Gerard's life that had the impact.

The same can be true for us. We won't ever walk on water or perform exciting miracles for others to see. No, our greatest impact often comes from the little things we do for others each day. The kind acts we do, the sacrifices we offer, and the compliments we give all help our neighbors to experience a bit of God's love and bring this world closer to the reign of God.

Adapted from "The Christocentrism of Saint Gerard" by Domenico Capone, C.Ss.R., in *Saint Gerard Majella: His Writings and Spirituality*, Noel Londoño, C.Ss.R., editor, Liguori Publications

## Excerpts from a letter to a nun with whom Gerard corresponded regularly:

*My sister, I sympathize greatly with you, because you are alone, afflicted, and disconsolate, because you have no one to whom you can pour your heart out and be consoled. I know from personal experience the pains that you have gone through and are still going through; but I tell you that I feel them more sharply in my heart than Your Reverence does. You cannot imagine with what clarity and sharpness I understand them: if I say I do so even more than you, I am not lying.*

*For my part, I tell you that, with respect to your sufferings, not to think of them anymore so that they may not cause you even more pain. Rather leave them in the arms of God's pity. Confarm yourself to his divine will. And value highly what you have suffered for God, because this merit of yours will serve to make you a greater saint.*

*Your Reverence's most unworthy brother in Jesus Christ,  
Gerard Majella of the Most Holy Redeemer*

*"Let us see  
ourselves in God,  
in whom we are and  
live, and together  
let us love our sole  
Good, Jesus,  
who loves us so  
much."*

Mother Maria  
Celeste  
Crostarosa,  
a dear friend  
and confidant of  
Brother Gerard



*"I wish to live  
and die to give  
pleasure to my God."*

from a letter  
of St. Gerard  
to Sister  
Maria of Jesus



# The Heart of the Matter

## **From Mississippi**

I am a seventy-one year old grandmother. Forty-two years ago I was without children after six years of marriage. A Jesuit priest gave a mission in our parish and told me about St. Gerard, he promised I would have a child if I said prayers to St. Gerard. I said the motherhood prayer faithfully for six months. Soon I was with child. Staying faithful to my prayers and thanksgivings I had seven wonderful healthy children. I named one of my sons after St. Gerard. We had many trials during these forty-two years, all of which worked out for us and the children through prayer and devotion. I've distributed literature and spoke to many friends about St. Gerard and his help through Jesus.

Now one of my granddaughters is in serious need of help. She is in with the wrong crowd and in a lot of trouble. We desperately need the prayers of your community to soften her heart. Please pray also for her family that we will have the strength, grace, and courage to do what we have to do to help her.

## **From Washington**

My husband and I have been trying to conceive for over five years. I have had three miscarriages and one ectopic pregnancy during this time and have tried to hold on to my faith. It has been very difficult but I have prayed to St. Gerard and asked his assistance. We recently adopted a beautiful baby girl and we feel so blessed; we can't imagine our lives without her. We would love to expand our family and ask for a healthy pregnancy.

## **From Pennsylvania**

Please keep my husband and me in your prayers. We struggled to have a child and after praying to St. Gerard and St. Philomena our beautiful baby girl Juliana was born on St. Gerard's feast day, October 16. We long to add another child to our family and once again implore the help of St. Gerard. We know with his help, we can once again experience this great miracle.

Please send your prayer requests and thanksgiving letters to the address on the front page or to [miss-spon@liguori.org](mailto:miss-spon@liguori.org).