

April Holy Hero – St. Gemma Galgani

Saint of the Passion of Jesus – feast day, April 11

Gemma Galgani loved Jesus with her whole being. So much so that she longed to join in His sufferings. Her prayer for this was granted.....

Born in Italy on March 12, 1878, Gemma's early childhood was a happy one. This ended with her mother's death when Gemma was 7 years old. At age 9 she attended a boarding school run by nuns. She asked the Sisters to teach her in detail about the Passion of Christ, which her mother had often spoke. Gemma was overcome with sorrow when she learned how much Jesus suffered for us through the scourging, the crowning with thorns, and the crucifixion. Her love for Jesus crucified became a fire in her heart, and she asked Jesus to allow her to participate in His Passion. As she grew older, her health became poor. So much that she had to leave school. Even so, while she was at home, she often woke in the night to pray the rosary on her knees.

After her father's death when she was 19, Gemma went to live with her Aunt Caroline. During these years she wrote in her diary about her conversations with Jesus and her Guardian Angel, who often appeared to her. The next trial that came was her affliction with tuberculosis of the spine, which caused her to go deaf, lose her hair, have severe headaches and become paralyzed. In March of 1899, after praying a novena (a special nine day prayer), she was instantly cured. Three months later, Jesus let it be known to her she would soon receive a very special grace.

That evening, Jesus appeared to her with flames coming forth from the wounds of His Passion. Gemma suddenly felt excruciating pain in her hands and feet and realized blood was flowing from them. She received the stigmata; she bore the wounds of Christ. With excessive pain, it would occur on Thursday evenings until Friday at 3pm, the hour of Christ's death. The blood stopped on Friday and the wounds would heal over until the next time.

While always helping with household chores, Gemma longed to join the Passionist nuns, but was never able. Enjoying fair health since her miraculous cure, she offered herself to God as a victim for the salvation of souls and fell dangerously ill in 1902. Her family, no longer able to care for her, sent her to the Nursing Sisters of St. Camillus. They were amazed and inspired by the way Gemma patiently endured her suffering.

Gemma spent much of her life sharing the Passion of her Lord. As she wished, she suffered with Him, now she would soon share in His Glory! After receiving Holy Communion and making her final confession on Holy Saturday, 1903, Gemma died at age 25 with a smile on her lips and clothed in the habit of the Passionist nuns. Gemma Galgani was canonized by Pope Pius XII in May of 1940.