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Preghiamo

NEWS SOURCE FOR THE ITALIAN APOSTOLATE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

125 YEARS OF DEVOTION!

THE FEAST OF ST. GERARD MAIELLA

AT ST. LUCY'S CHURCH

Truly a milestone! This year the faithful of St. Lucy's Church (Newark, NJ) will gather with the larger community for the 125th Annual Feast of St. Gerard Maiella from October 16th through the 19th. Over the years, so much has been written about this great saint and this enduring expression of faith here in the Archdiocese of Newark. In this issue of *Preghiamo*, we reprint two articles highlighting different aspects of this devotion. Evviva San Gerardo!



Photo Credit: Darren Tobia



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Church in Newark Passes Down Century-old Tradition of St. Gerard's Feast to a New Generation

BY DARREN TOBIA

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[CLICK HERE](#) to view the original article, published on October 5, 2023.

In the back of St. Lucy's Church in Newark is a dim chapel where the carved likeness of Gerard Majella is kept. Throughout most of the year, visitors gather here at the foot of the marble altar to ask for blessings. Last week, nine church members met there to partake in an annual tradition of taking down the wooden statue to redress the saint in new garbs in time for his autumn celebration called the Feast of St. Gerard.

"The elders are slowly passing the torch down to us," said Gerard DiPopolo, 41, who is part of the committee that organizes the festival. "The majority of what we do each year is the same as when it started."

The Feast of St. Gerard, which spans the first two weeks in October, was first celebrated in Newark in 1899, when the city was the nation's fifth-largest Italian enclave. Father Joseph Perotti, the head of the church, is credited with reviving the festival for his flock who mostly hailed from Italy's Avellino province, where a priest named Gerardo Maiella (note the original spelling) performed miracles in the 18th century.

Originally, these immigrants held processions throughout the year devoted to a pantheon of saints. In Newark, only the Feast of St. Gerard survived, growing in fervor over the last 124 years due to the large community from the Naples region that settled in the city's First Ward.

The legend of St. Gerard, born in 1726, comes from the small town of Muro, Italy, near Naples. The wonderworker's holy handkerchief is credited with saving a pregnant woman from a miscarriage.

That is how he became the patron saint of motherhood and is often associated with handkerchiefs. The statue's garb that is removed each year is cut into hundreds of pieces, symbolizing tiny handkerchiefs, and distributed at St. Lucy's, to those who wish to ward off hardships or misfortune.

"People come all year long for blessings," DiPopolo said. "Women who have been told there's no way you can have children, they come and pray to Saint Gerard — and miracles happen every year."



Photo Credit: Mark J. Bonamo

DiPopolo, who was born on Oct. 16, the day of the feast, was named after the saint, as are many children of families who grew up in Newark’s First Ward.

“Whenever I meet someone with first or middle name Gerard — the first thing I ask them is, where did your family live in Newark?” Gerard said. “There is a strong affiliation with St. Gerard and this neighborhood.”

One of the well-known customs during the Feast of St. Gerard is a two-hour procession in which the statue is carried through the streets of the city’s North Ward, as the crowd pins money to it. “People are surprised that we walk through Newark with so much money, but no one ever bothers us,” said Anthony Dalbo, another committee member who is DiPopolo’s cousin.

The parade route is significant because it meanders through what used to be Little Italy until the 1950s. While many Newarkers escaped the city after the 1967 riots, First Ward residents were forced out by eminent domain much earlier. Their beloved neighborhood was leveled for a housing project called the Columbus Homes. All that remains of a once famous Eighth Avenue, lined with cafes and restaurants, is a sliver of row houses near the I-280 on-ramp.



Photo Credit: Anthony Scillia

“While we’re walking during the procession we hear a lot of stories about where our friends and families grew up,” Dalbo said.

The feast began this week with nine days of prayer called a novena and culminates next weekend in a three-day festival with food, wine, and live music. More than 20 food trucks gather at the plaza in front of St. Lucy’s, selling Italian delicacies from zeppoles to fresh mozzarella. Next year, the church anticipates its largest showing for its 125th anniversary. *Editor’s Note: This year, 2024, marks the 125th anniversary.*

Father Thomas Nicastro in his book [*The Feast of St. Gerard Maiella*](#) called the annual celebration a “pilgrimage” for people with roots in Newark.

“Those who come to venerate St. Gerard are descendants of villagers who actually lived and worked beside St. Gerard in the old country,” Nicastro wrote. “You can see it in their eyes, in their faces and in their hearts as they recount the memories and miracles of their parents and grandparents still present to them in the hallowed walls of the magnificent church.”



Photo Credit: Anthony Scillia

Hope in the Handkerchief of a Saint

BY PETER T. FARRELLY, JR.

Reprinted with permission from *Our Sunday Visitor* where it was originally published on January 19, 1997.

Another look at St. Gerard Majella, who some say should be the patron saint of the pro-life movement.

Can it be that in a handkerchief dropped by an 18th-century Italian saint there's the power to protect the unborn and give strength to women in crisis pregnancies?

St. Gerard Majella's handkerchief has become a symbol for the popular acclamation of Gerard as the patron of mothers and children, the unborn and the pro-life movement.

His feast day, Oct. 16, is even in the month that the Church has officially proclaimed as the month to honor God's precious gift of life.

And if it were up to Father Thomas Nicastro Jr., parochial vicar at Our Lady of Grace Church in Stratford, Conn.*, St. Gerard would not only be named Patron of Mothers and Children but also would have a Mass in his honor on the Church calendar.

Father Nicastro has had a special devotion to St. Gerard since childhood, when his grandmother Anna Miano told him the story of the saint from her hometown in Italy and brought him to the many devotions at what is now the National Shrine of St. Gerard in St. Lucy's Church in Newark, N.J.

"My grandmother spent a lot of time bringing us to church and fostering this devotion," Father Nicastro said recently. "It probably had a lot to do with my vocation as well."

And many like Father Nicastro's grandmother have helped spread the devotion to St. Gerard all over the world.

Although not officially honored as such by the Church, Catholics far and wide recognize him as "protector of expectant mothers," said Father Nicastro, who is gathering material for a book about the saint.*

**Editor's Note: The Very Rev. Cav. Thomas D. Nicastro, V.F., is currently the pastor of St. Mary's Church in Nutley, NJ and his book, [*The Feast of St. Gerard Majella, C.Ss.R.: A Century of Devotion at St. Lucy's, Newark*](#), was published in 2012.*



Photo Credit: Mark J. Bonamo

"Many hospitals and maternity wards are named after him, and his image is always given a special place of honor," he added.

Explaining why devotion to St. Gerard is increasing now, Father Nicastro quotes one of the saint's biographers, Redemptorist Father James Galvin, who wrote: "Today, God seems to have chosen the good example of St. Gerard to contradict an age that has lost trust in God's providence and a way of thinking which seeks to undermine life."

For the second year in a row, Father Nicastro celebrated a special Mass in St. Gerard's honor Dec. 11, the feast of his canonization. Using a first-class relic from St. Gerard and a handkerchief like the one credited with helping many an expectant mother, Father Nicastro blessed almost 100 expectant mothers during the Mass.

As proof of the saint's growing popularity, even in the Diocese of Bridgeport, Conn., more than 400 mothers with children came out that cold rainy night to venerate the saint's image and pray for his intercession, four times as many as the previous year.

A life frail and brief.

Born April 6, 1726, in Muro Lucano, Italy, St. Gerard's special intercession for mothers and unborn children is perhaps explained by his own frail health at birth, which was cause for him to be baptized immediately.

His feeble condition persisted throughout his 29 years, until his death on Oct. 16, 1755, of tuberculosis.



Despite his condition, it fell to him to support his family after his father died while Gerard was very young. He apprenticed as a tailor but had a foreman who belittled his devotion to the Eucharist and his constant works of charity.

Gerard withstood the criticism, however, dividing his earnings equally between his family, the poor and Mass stipends for the release of souls in purgatory.

Gerard's mother, Benedetta, said her son "was born for heaven," and told how he spent hours before the Blessed Sacrament "until he forgot it was dinnertime."

He tried to join two religious orders but was rejected as too weak. He was finally admitted as a lay brother in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer after the superior saw "he could do the work of three men."

The Redemptorists, as they are commonly known, had been founded by St. Alphonsus Liguori only a few years earlier. To their usual vows Gerard added one: "To always do that which would seem most pleasing to God."

Photo Credit: Anthony Scillia



Fr. Nicastro with members of the Italian Apostolate. Photo Credit: Anthony Scillia

So trusted was he that, after joining the monastery, he was made the spiritual director for several communities of nuns.

In 1753, however, a young woman who had quit the convent wrote to St. Alphonsus and accused Gerard of having an affair with a local townswoman.

Gerard refused to offer a self-defense, and St. Alphonsus saw no recourse but to consider him guilty of adultery and violating his vows. He disciplined Gerard by ordering him confined to the monastery and forbidding him to receive Holy Communion—a punishment that for Gerard was like being denied food.

Gerard's only comment was, "There is a God in heaven. He will prevail."

Months later, as his accuser lay on her deathbed, she was stricken with remorse and confessed to fabricating her story. When St. Alphonsus asked Gerard why he had not defended himself, Gerard replied: "But, Father, our holy rule says that we are to bear in silence mortifications imposed on us by our superiors."

St. Gerard spent many hours each day on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament to praise God and give thanks for His blessings.

Many of the gifts attributed to the frail saint were attributed to this time spent in prayer before the Eucharist. It was because of those gifts that his fellow monks frequently brought him with them when they would visit the homes of the sick.

Gerard had the ability to "read" souls and bring sinners back to God by quietly revealing to them their secret misdeeds or sins they had been too embarrassed to confess.

Only one instance is recorded of his curing an expectant mother of her illness while he was alive, but there were many women who claimed that they and their children were granted graces through the prayers of Gerard.

The famous "handkerchief story" goes like this: While he was leaving the house of a family he had gone to visit, he dropped his handkerchief. A young woman retrieved it, but as she handed it to him, Gerard told her mysteriously, "Keep it. One day it will be of service to you."

Although puzzled, the woman did keep it. And a few years later, she faced life threatening complications as she was about to give birth to her first child. She remembered the mysterious hanky and the promise and asked that it be brought to her in her travail. She held it to her womb and immediately the pain ceased, and she delivered a normal, healthy child.

The miraculous handkerchief was passed from mother to mother as they were about to give birth in the town of Oliveto Citra. The first mother passed the precious relic on to her niece and on it went through the generations.

Some families took small pieces of it and only a small shred remained when Gerard was canonized on Dec. 11, 1904. It was enough, though, to pass its special graces on to other cloths touched to it.

Now new handkerchiefs with St. Gerard's likeness, also touched to his relics, are given to visitors to the International Shrine of St. Gerard Majella in Materdomini, Italy, as well as at the national shrine in Newark.

Each year, thousands of expectant mothers, mothers with children and couples wanting to have children, visit the shrine in Newark, where Italian immigrants from Caposele, Teora and other towns around Materdomini settled in the 1900s, bringing their devotion to the saint with them.

Father Nicastro's maternal grandmother was among those early devotees in Newark whose zeal for St. Gerard caused the celebration of his feast day on Oct. 16 to overshadow many others.

When St. Lucy's was rebuilt earlier this century, a special sanctuary was built to house the life-sized statue of St. Gerard brought from Italy in 1900.

During the week-long celebration of his feast, the statue, garbed in a new tailor-fitted Redemptorist habit, is processed through the streets of Newark.

Devotees pin money to the new robes in testimony to the favors received or prayed for.



Photo Credit: Anthony Scillia

This devotion Father Nicastro hopes to spread. In a time when the very existence of the family and the sanctity of life is threatened by abortion, contraception, various biomedical techniques and a growing "culture of death," the little saint with the handkerchief may well be just what is needed for expectant mothers, families and the whole world.

Farrelly writes from Fairfield, Conn.

A Prayer for Life

Almighty and Eternal Father, in your all-wise providence you have raised up St. Gerard Majella to be the glorious protector of the mother and her unborn child.

Humbly we ask You that, through the powerful intercession of this, Your Faithful Servant, we might have the courage to oppose the forces of anti-life in this world and to stand firm in our support of life in all stages of its development.

Grant that the ideal of the Christian family may flourish to the praise and glory of Your Holy Name. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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Photo Credit: Mark J. Bonamo

For More Information Follow These Links!

- [The 125th Annual Feast of St. Gerard Maiella at St. Lucy's Church, Newark](#)
- [A Walk Through Time: The First One Hundred Years of the Feast of St. Gerard Maiella](#)
(Three-Part Video Documentary)

RECIPE - RICETTA

STRUFFOLI

Natale è alle porte! Christmas is just around the corner!

Italian Apostolate member, Aaron Traas, shares a beloved family recipe for the holidays.

"This is a family recipe from my great-aunt, Vittoria. She's a fantastic cook, and I have many memories of her making this in her home in Dongan Hills, Staten Island. Struffoli are of Neapolitan origin, and are very tasty, especially when served fresh. It consists of little fried balls of dough, each about the size of a grape, piled on a platter, covered in a honey syrup, and topped with rainbow nonpareils to provide a nice crunch."

INGREDIENTS

Dough:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 large eggs
- ¼ cup sugar
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract or anisette

Toppings:

- 200g (about a half cup) of honey
- Nonpareils/Sprinkles

Other:

- Neutral tasting frying oil



Preparation

1. Add flour, baking powder, and salt to a bowl and stir to combine.
2. Pour flour on your working surface. Make a well in the middle.
3. Add eggs, sugar, melted butter, vanilla/anisette to the well in the middle of the flour, and whisk to combine with a fork, until eggs are lightly beaten.
4. Slowly stir in the flour, a little at a time. As it thickens, start using your hands to knead the dough until smooth and uniform.
5. Wrap the dough in plastic and let rest at room temperature for 2 hours.
6. Cut a chunk off the dough, and roll into a long snake, about a finger in width.
7. Cut the snake into small pieces, again about a finger in width.
8. Fill a saucepan with about 2 inches of frying oil. Bring up to medium high temperature.
9. Place a small number of the dough balls into the pan, and fry, stirring occasionally, until lightly golden.
10. Remove with a spider or slotted spoon and place on a paper-towel lined vessel to drain.
11. Repeat steps 9 and 10 until all the dough is fried.
12. When ready to serve, heat the honey in the microwave until it's the consistency of maple syrup, 1-2 minutes. Optional: To vary the flavor, you can add a teaspoon or two of your favorite liqueur to the honey such as limoncello, sambuca, or anisette.
13. Toss the fried struffoli balls in the honey syrup. Transfer to serving plate. Garnish with nonpareils/sprinkles.



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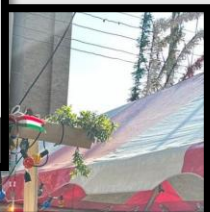
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OUR LADY OF MT. CARMEL LYNDHURST



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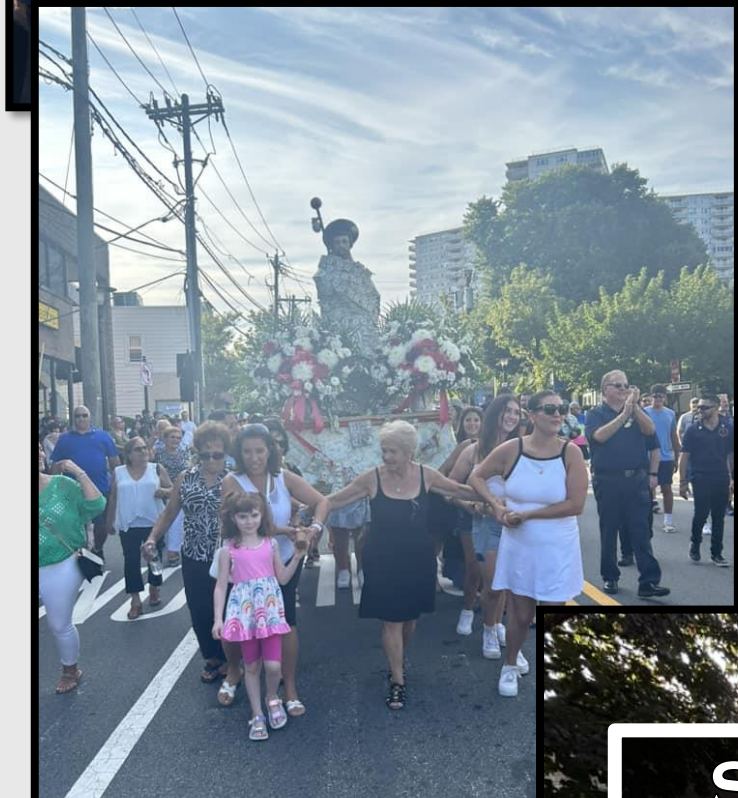


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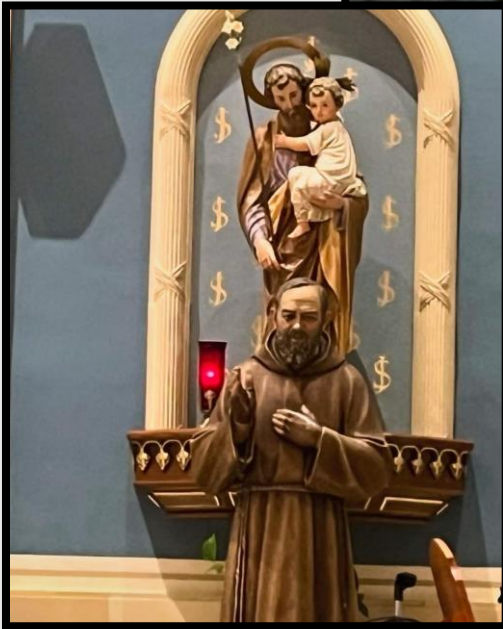
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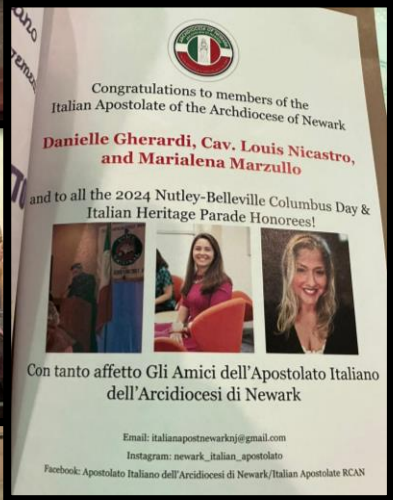


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NUTLEY BELLEVILLE
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