

Time reveals all, and it did so here. The real situation became known, and now Margaret's reputation for sanctity swelled. Margaret, who had been attending a church run by the Dominicans, was attracted to the order of the Mantellate, which evolved into the Third Order of Saint Dominic. Margaret wished to join this religious order for the laity, so the prior of the church instructed her in Dominican spirituality with its emphasis on study, prayer, and penance. Soon Margaret was clothed with the Dominican habit which consisted of a white tunic, leather belt, and long, white veil.

In addition to the prescribed prayers, Margaret daily recited all 150 Psalms and two religious offices. Soon she passed from meditation to contemplation in which, despite her blindness, she could "see" the Savior. Margaret began to practice mortifications similar to those that St. Dominic had practiced. She often spent whole nights in prayer and then attended daily Mass. She began to care for the sick and dying, limping wherever necessary to offer food, medicine, encouragement, and prayer. She brought many supposedly hopeless sinners to conversion and penance through her prayers to St. Joseph and her own touching example. When she learned of the inhumane treatment of the area's prisoners, she made them her apostolate. Every day she took them food, clothing, and medicine, and many of them returned to the Church. She once elevated during prayer and worked several miracles of various sorts.

For the last years of her life, Margaret was invited to live with some of the area's wealthy families. She accepted the offer, but chose to live in small attics rather than the large, sumptuous rooms offered her. She continued her prayers, penances, and ministries until her death on April 13, 1320, at the age of thirty-three.

Margaret's body was to be buried without a coffin, as was Dominican custom at the time. However, the cure of a crippled child at her bier caused the city council to pay for the embalming of her body and to provide her a coffin for burial in one of the Dominican chapels. Despite the very primitive embalming used, Margaret's body remains incorrupt to this very day and can be seen in [a glass coffin under the high altar in the Church of S. Domenico in Citta di Castello.]

Blessed Margaret of Castello worked miracles during her life time and hundreds afterwards. She was a model of piety, patience, faith, and forgiveness. For those who work in the prolife movement, Margaret of Castello is a powerful intercessor. She herself was deformed [and marginalized]. She ministered to the ill, the unrepentant, and the dying. Whatever the life issue may be, Margaret has had some experience with it. Prolifers should feel confident in asking her intercession in all areas of prolife concerns. The prayers of a forgotten saint, who ministered to the forgotten, are powerful indeed.

**(excerpted from: www.priestsforlife.org)*

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Blessed Margaret of Castello

Memorial — April 13th



**Patroness for the Pro-life movement, the unwanted,
disabled and handicapped individuals,
and those rejected by religious orders**

Blessed Margaret of Castello

*It's a pretty safe bet that, had Blessed Margaret of Castello been conceived in the 1990's, we would never know about her. Why? Because her parents would have chosen prenatal diagnosis and aborted her.

Margaret's parents were members of the Italian nobility. Her father Parisio was Captain of the People, a totally fearless and highly capable soldier. He had captured the mountaintop castle of Metola and instantly became a national hero, along with the awards and pride such recognition brings. As a reward for his valor, Parisio was given the castle and its extensive estate to which he proudly brought his young bride Emilia. Parisio and Emilia enjoyed the adulation of the common people and the easy life of wealth.

Everything was going wonderfully for the upwardly mobile young couple, when these two "beautiful people" conceived their first child. Of course, their child would be a perfectly formed, perfectly behaved infant whom they could show off to friends, family, and neighbors. Since prenatal diagnosis did not exist in those days, the couple did not know that their first born daughter was a badly deformed dwarf until they laid eyes on her at birth.

Emilia and Parisio were totally shocked. How could this happen to them? Where did this ugly child come from? They could not even bear to look at her, so how could anyone else? And what if the country heard about this monstrosity being born to the most important couple in the area?

They decided to hide the child forever and tell no one about her, so they gave the baby to a trusted servant to care for secretly.

"What is the child's name?" the servant asked.

"It has no name," came the reply.

The servant looked at the infant's bulbous head and malformed, short right leg. "You have to have a name," the servant whispered. "How about Margaret?"

Parisio's servant was also a servant of Christ who taught Margaret about the Lord. Even as a child, Margaret would pray frequently. She would hobble on her lame feet into the castle's chapel and bow her head, never seeing any of the candles or religious trappings there because she was blind. On one of her visits to the chapel, another visitor spied her and nearly discovered the horrid secret that this hump backed lump was the lord of the castle's daughter.

"We can't have anyone discovering her," Parisio told Emilia. "She likes to pray. So he'll let her do that."

Parisio had a mason build a cell next to a church in the forest. He had him put a window opening into the chapel so that Margaret could hear Mass. Another small window opened on the outside so that food could be passed in to the child without anyone seeing her. Once the cell was built, six year old Margaret was thrust into it and the doorway walled up. Here, in her stark, damp, doomed to live out her life.

The chaplain of the church spoke to Margaret frequently and soon discovered that she had a brilliant mind that was hungry for the things of God. So the chaplain taught her, and Margaret

grew rapidly in faith and knowledge. So much she did she wish to please God that, at the age of seven, began to fast as the monks did, from mid-September to Easter. For the rest of the year, she fasted four days a week. On Fridays, she took only a little bread and water.

When Margaret was nineteen, Parisio's territory was threatened with invasion. Hardly knowing whether to abandon Margaret to possible rape and slaughter or to take her away, Emilia finally opted for a Christian response. She and her attendant took Margaret with them to the safety of Mercatello. Margaret was immediately hidden in an underground vault, fed, and forgotten. A year later, five pilgrims going through Mercatello told Emilia about the wonderful cures taking place in Castello at the tomb of a Franciscan Third Order member, Fra Giacomo. As soon as Parisio was certain that peace had been restored, he and Emilia took Margaret to the tomb and thrust her there among the sick and crippled. Then they backed off to watch for the cure.

Margaret prayed fervently all day for a cure. But no cure came. "It's hopeless," Parisio said. Look at all those deformed, sick people who are praying, too. She belongs with them, not with us.'

Emilia agreed. So she and Parisio quietly rode off to Metola, abandoning Margaret at the tomb. How dark was it before Margaret realized that her parents were not returning for her? She found her way to the inn where they had lodged and learned that Parisio and Emilia had gone home without her. The knowledge could have unleashed floods of bitterness and anger, yet Margaret resigned herself to the will of God. Perhaps she knew that God had a plan for her, despite the apparent hopelessness of her situation.

The young woman, who had always been fed, sheltered, and secluded, now had to make her way through unknown streets, among unknown people, and beg. Two beggars befriended her and watched over her that first terrifying night. They introduced her to others and to families who were sympathetic to the poor.

As Margaret's story became known, and as people realized that she would not speak a harsh word against her parents but always claimed to love them, the populace of Castello began to regard this four-foot tall hunchback with awe. Families let her live in their homes, honored by her presence. Then the cloistered nuns of St. Margaret's Monastery invited Margaret to live with them. Here she spent many joyous days where, in spite of her blindness, she helped prepare meals, clean the convent, and do other chores.

When the monastery foundress died and the nuns began to relax their rule, Margaret still followed the strict guidelines she had followed at her entry. This austere behavior in the face of the convent's laxity upset the sisters who asked Margaret to leave.

Now the citizens of Castello began to wag their tongues. "She's not as holy as we thought," they whispered, "if the nuns asked her to leave." Day after day, cruel remarks were flung in Margaret's direction, for people cannot abide the notion that a supposed saint is found to be a sinner after all. Margaret bore this persecution stoically and always defended the sisters, telling others of their kindness and patience.