

## **Saint Gianna Beretta Molla**

Another Italian that we can look up to is St Gianna Beretta Molla. She was born in the 1920's. She went to school and studied to be a medical doctor and a surgeon. She joined the Saint Vincent de Paul Society when she was in university. She focused on helping mothers, babies, the elderly and the poor. She married in 1955 and gave birth to 4 children in the mid 1950's.

During her last pregnancy it was discovered that she had a tumor in her uterus. One of the options was to have the tumor removed. The doctors however advised that it would be best to abort the child. She decided to have the tumor removed. This was the only option to save the unborn child, but the risk of pregnancy related complications was high. When she went into labour, it was found she needed to deliver her child by caesarean section. She gave birth to a baby girl. Later Gianna developed peritonitis, an infection from the surgery and died 7 days after the child was born. Gianna never considered the possibility of aborting her child. She also repeatedly made it clear that if only one life could be saved, it should be the baby's life.

You could say she was a contemporary and ordinary woman. She liked fashionable clothes and valued education. She enjoyed the arts. Her husband said that Gianna's life "was a nonstop search for the will of God for every decision and for every work, with prayer and meditation, Holy Mass, and the Eucharist. " St John Paul II said that "she gave witness in her daily life to the demanding values of the Gospel."

Gianna knew about loss. She lost her sister who died at the age of 26. She lost both her parents when she was 20 years old. At university she was involved in the Catholic action group. Two of her brothers became priests. She married her husband in 1955.

On her engagement day she wrote this to her future husband.

"My dearest Pietro. How can I thank you for the magnificent ring? Pietro, dear, in exchange I give you my heart, and I will always love you as I love you now. Tell me what I should be, and what I should do to make you happy. I have great trust in the Lord and I am certain that he will help me to become your worthy spouse."

She saw in her children the “goodness of God” and the hope that the world was destined for renewal and new life.”

One of the churches in the Hamilton area has a large statue of St Gianna in the foyer of the church. It shows St Gianna sitting on some grass with a picnic basket. She is cradling a child in her arms as if she is rocking the child. There are two other children there with her as well. At St Gianna Beretta Molla church in Winnipeg there is a shrine dedicated to her. One of her relics is there.

One of her sayings is “One earns paradise with One’s daily task.” She said “Our task is to live holy the present moment.”

Two miracles are needed for someone to be declared a saint. In this case they occurred in Brazil. One woman gave birth to her child and developed an infection. It was inoperable. A nun prayed to Gianna to intercede for the woman. Her pain immediately left her and it was found that her condition was healed.

Then in 1999, another woman was having trouble with her pregnancy. There were complications with blood clots, the amniotic fluid and the placenta. This meant both the child and the mother could be at risk of infection. The doctors wanted to abort the child. She read a book on Gianna and prayed to her. “Intercede before the Lord for the grace of a miracle and save the life of this little child.”

They decided to wait for the natural death of the fetus. Instead, the child was delivered at 32 weeks and weighed only 1.8 kg. The mother had life threatening complications but recovered after 3 days. The child developed normally.

She is the patron saint of mothers, pre-born children, infertility and physicians. She was declared a saint in 2004.

What can you and I take away from knowing about her?

Gianna was a woman of great faith and courage. She made the choice that enabled her daughter to be born. We can often wish that we were in different circumstances, but holiness frequently comes from making difficult choices in bad situations.

Saint Gianna Beretta Molla, pray for us.