

"Freedom—St Maria "

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At least two revolutions vie for the spirit of America today. The American Revolution, with its patriots and principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, loosed us from the tyranny of taxation without representation. The social revolution, with its activists and cries for peace, love, and liberation, untied us from the moorings of nature and society. They are not equal partners in seeking freedom, nor do they mean the same thing when they use the word.

On July 5th of 1902, eleven year-old Maria was watching her baby sister while her family was out in the field. Alessandro, the twenty-year-old son of family with which Maria's family lived, was interested in Maria in an unchaste way and had already harassed her on other occasions. On this particular day he tried to force himself upon her. When she resisted and cried out, "No! It is a sin! God does not want it!" He proceeded to stab her fourteen times.

Maria was rushed to the hospital for surgery and Alessandro was rushed to jail. For Maria, the surgery was unsuccessful. She died on July 6th, after receiving Viaticum and Anointing, but also after having forgiven Alessandro and expressed the desire that he be in heaven with her someday. She died in pain, but at peace.

Alessandro was given a sentence of only thirty years because he was a minor and there were other familial maladies, including alcohol abuse. He clearly struggled to come to grips with what he had done, denying it at first and then later confessing it. He was quite disturbed during his first six years of incarceration and approached despair, until Maria

appeared to him offering fourteen lilies. From that time on he was at peace.

When Alessandro was released from prison, he went to visit Maria's mother, Assunta, to ask pardon and did the same at their parish church. He joined a community of Capuchin Franciscans, and was even able in 1950 to attend, with Maria's mother, the Mass in Rome at which Maria was officially listed as a saint.

On July 4th, 2016, far from Maria Goretti's Italy, America celebrates independence. But the anniversary of Maria's death just two days later urges reflection on the nature of freedom. Who is free? What constitutes freedom? Certainly, Maria, bound by the strictures of conventional morality, was freer than Alessandro, bound by the chains of lust, alcohol, and dissolute living. Moreover, Alessandro was freer in his later imprisonment than he was in his earlier rages.

A third revolution vies for the spirits of Americans. This third turn, with its saints and commandments to love of God and neighbor, seeks a freedom which looses from sin and binds all to Christ. The revolution of Maria and finally Alessandro is actually the first turn, the necessary final turn, and the revolution that comes round right.