



Catholics seem to have a saint for every occasion. As a New York Jet fan, I often pray to St. Jude because he is the patron of the hopeless causes. Poor St. Anthony, spends his eternity in heaven running heaven's lost and found department. He is constantly called on to find lost rings, glasses, money, and even cars in mall parking lots. For many years, some women have been saying this prayer: *St. Anne, find me a man as fast as you can.* I am not sure if there is a saint to help you get rid of a boyfriend you do not like. I think about St. Joseph, the husband of the Blessed Mother and the man who raised Jesus, spending his lifetime on earth being buried upside down so a house can be sold. Although many smile at these traditions, I know I am a big St. Anthony fan since I tend to lose my reading glasses even when I am wearing them.

There are people of other faiths, and even many Catholics who wonder what such practices are about. Might we be using the saints in a rather superstitious way, such as holding a horseshoe or rabbit foot as a good luck charm. I recall a man I met not too long ago who had a form of brain cancer. When I met him, he told me he had been cured from his cancer and was so very grateful to God. I asked him which saint he prayed to and I will never forget his response: *I prayed to the man himself.* He was of course referring to Jesus Christ. His theology was correct. As much as I love the saints of the Church, they do not heal us of disease, free us of worry, or help us face life difficulties. All grace and power on heaven and earth come from God. God is the source of all healing and grace. I think of the greatest saint of all, Mary the Mother of Jesus, who at the wedding feast of Cana, when the wine was running low, went to her son Jesus and told him about the embarrassment the newly married couple would soon face. She then directly the servants with these words: *Do whatever he says.*

Still, I pray to the saints and invite others to do so if they find it comforting. The Catholic Church has certainly encouraged this practice and the names of saints are often included in our official prayers at Mass. I think God gives us the saints because it is all but impossible to grasp an image of God. Even though God took flesh in Jesus and showed us the face of God in his humanity, we as humans naturally struggle with the idea of the Divine, a God who has always been and always will be. A God who created the heavens and earth and all that is, including ourselves, out of nothing, is not easy to grasp. How do you get your hands around the Divine? So, for many of us, we see the love of God and his care and compassion for each one of us reflected in the very human people of flesh and blood, the saints. We know any prayer raised to a saint is also raised to God at the same time. The saints help us to understand and grasp that God cares about all our needs and concerns and He invites us to bring our prayers to Him through the saints. They are our friends and family in heaven, along with our loved ones. Like the crowd that gathers on the streets for the New York City Marathon, they are cheering us on to God.

So, with the background to Saints, onto St. Gerard. Gerard was born in a little village named Muro in the Naples area of Italy in 17. He was a very prayerful young man, although rather sickly, but he managed to enter the Redemptorist Congregation as a Brother. He died in 1755. Although he lived less than thirty years, he was a remarkable man who people saw as very close to God. He often said that his only goal in life was to do the will of God.

He is associated with pregnancy by several stories. Here are two of the stories that occurred during the lifetime of Gerard that have led to his being The Mother's Saint: His miraculous apostolate for mothers began during his lifetime. Once, as he was leaving the home of his friends, the Pirofalo family, one of the daughters called after him that he had forgotten his handkerchief. In a moment of prophetic insight, Gerard said, "*Keep it. It will be useful to you some day.*" The handkerchief was treasured as a precious souvenir of Gerard. Years later, the girl to whom he had given it was in danger of death in childbirth. She remembered the words of Gerard and called for the handkerchief. Almost immediately, the danger passed and she delivered a healthy child. On another occasion, the prayers of Gerard were asked by a mother when both she and her unborn child were in danger. Both she and the child came through the ordeal safely. After his death, the mothers of Italy took Gerard to their hearts and made him their patron. St. Gerard has become popular all over the world as the saint to pray to become pregnant and for a safe delivery as well as to adopt a baby.

St. Gerard has a special role in my family. In 1938, when my mother was pregnant with her first child, she was very nervous about the pregnancy and birth. She asked a priest, who happened to be a Redemptorist, to pray for her. He told her to pray to St. Gerard. The baby was born on October 16, the feast of St. Gerard, and

**in gratitude to St. Gerard, my Mom and Dad named my sister Geraldine. Years later, when my niece was pregnant with her third child, it was a difficult pregnancy and she almost lost the baby several times. My sister stormed heaven with prayers to St. Gerard. Gratefully, Brendan Gerard was born and is blessed with a wonderful godfather named Father Pat. When my niece was first seeking to become pregnant after five years or so of marriage, her husband told me they wanted to become pregnant. He asked if I could help. I told him I was Irish and knew nothing about these matters. I blessed them with my relic of St. Gerard, and after their third child, they told me to put the medal away.**

**Those of you who are here today to pray to St. Gerard for pregnancy, adoption, or a safe delivery are wonderful people who want to bring life into our world or to nurture a child. God sees the goodness in your heart. You come in faith. I know for some of you there may be discouragement at the challenge of not becoming pregnant. Those who wish to have children and struggle to do so carry a burden and sorrow. We pray for and with you today. I hope your prayer is heard. But I pray that whether you become pregnant or adopt that you never doubt that great love that God has for you and know that there are so many ways you can bring the love of God into the world. You are all the beloved children of God. Amen**