

St. Gianna Beretta Molla



Facts:

Feast day: April 28

Patron mothers, physicians, preborn children

Death: 1962

Beatified By: Pope John Paul II

Gianna Francesca Beretta was born in Magenta in Italy. She was the tenth of thirteen children in her family, only nine of whom survived to adulthood. When she was three, her family moved to Bergamo, and she grew up in the Lombardy region of Italy.

In 1942, Gianna began her study of medicine in Milan. Outside of her schooling, she was active in Azione Cattolica. She received a medical diploma in 1949, and opened an office in Mesero, near her hometown of Magenta, where she specialized in pediatrics.

Gianna hoped to join her brother, a missionary priest in Brazil, where she intended to offer her medical expertise in gynecology to poor women. However, her chronic ill health made this impractical, and she continued her practice in Italy.

In December 1954, Gianna met Pietro Molla, an engineer who worked in her office, ten years older than she. They were officially engaged the following April, and they married in September 1955.

The couple had Pierluigi, born in 1956, Maria Zita, in 1957 and Laura, was born in 1959. Gianna suffered two miscarriages after this.

In 1961, Gianna was once again expecting. During the second month, Gianna developed a fibroma on her uterus. After examination, the doctors gave her three choices: an abortion, which would save her life and allow her to continue to have children; a complete hysterectomy, which would preserve her life, but take the unborn child's life, and prevent further pregnancy; or removal of only the fibroma, with the potential of further complications. Roman Catholic teaching would have allowed her to obtain a

hysterectomy, but would forbid an abortion. Wanting to preserve her child's life, she opted for the removal of the fibroma.

After the operation, complications continued throughout her pregnancy. Gianna was quite clear about her wishes, expressing to her family, "This time it will be a difficult delivery, and they may have to save one or the other -- I want them to save my baby."

On April 21, 1962, Good Friday of that year, Gianna went to the hospital, where her fourth child, Gianna Emanuela, was successfully delivered via Caesarean section. However, Gianna continued to have severe pain, and died of septic peritonitis 7 days after the birth.

Gianna was beatified by Pope John Paul II on April 24, 1994, and officially canonized as a saint on May 16, 2004. Gianna's husband Pietro and their last child, Gianna, were present at the canonization ceremony.

The miracle recognized by the Roman Catholic Church to canonize Gianna Molla involved a mother, Elizabeth Comparini, who was 16 weeks pregnant in 2003 and sustained a tear in her placenta that drained her womb of all amniotic fluid. Because a normal term of pregnancy is 40 weeks, Comparini was told by her doctors the baby's chance of survival was "nil."

Through praying to Gianna Molla and asking for her intercession, Comparini delivered by Caesarean a healthy baby despite the lack of amniotic fluid for the remainder of her pregnancy.

In his homily at her canonization Mass, Pope John Paul II called Gianna "a simple, but more than ever, significant messenger of divine love."