

BLESSED LITTLE MARGARET OF CITTA DI CASTELLO

1287 – 1320

Many people don't know about Margaret. Her little uncorrupted body lies in a glass coffin under the high altar

in the Church of S. Domenico in Citta di Castello. The Church is beautiful, large and peaceful -- with magnificent stained glass windows and frescoes.



Citta di Castello is an ancient, timeless town in northern Umbria. It's still surrounded by many areas of high walls from medieval days. The Umbria region is Italy's "greenbelt." The earliest inhabitants of Umbria were the "Umbri," thought by the Romans to be the most ancient inhabitants of Italy. Little is known about them, but they appear to have left with the arrival of the Etruscans. No one even really knows where the Etruscans came from, or what eventually happened to them. Umbria later became like a Papal State, and it had a few powerful medieval families who exerted control in the Middle Ages. Umbria has produced a major share of Saints (including Saints Francis, Clare, Benedict, Rita, and Valentine). At the end of World War II, Citta di Castello was liberated by the British. Someone told us the population is about 38,000. Many of the town's buildings probably look today pretty much the way they looked when Margaret lived and died there.



Margaret was born in 1287 in a castle on top of a very steep mountain in Metola, a village in a mountainous area outside Citta di Castello. Metola is over in the Marches region, northeast of Citta di Castello. Only the castle's tower now remains. The exact date of her birth is unknown, but we know she died on April 13, 1320.

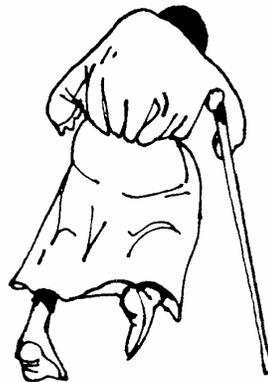
Margaret was born blind and deformed. She was extremely hunchbacked, and one leg was much

shorter than the other. She grew to be just over 4 ft. tall and was so lame she could hardly walk. Her head was large in proportion with the rest of her body. She was a tiny little soul.

Her father was a wealthy nobleman who owned and ruled the whole forest area beneath his castle in Metola. No one now knows what his last name was or what eventually happened to him and his wife. The information we have seems to have been passed down through the castle's Priest who befriended Margaret, and from castle servants as well as townspeople. Her father was despised, feared and cruel. He had planned a large celebration for the birth of a son. Instead, the firstborn baby was Margaret. He was furious ... and Margaret being blind and deformed only made matters worse.

Margaret's mother had a kind personal maid. It was the maid and her husband who later took Margaret to be Baptized in Mercatello, down the road from Metola. That way, Margaret's thought their identities could remain the Priest discovered Margaret's physical deformities during her Baptism.

is not far from Metola. A tiny square center of Mercatello has a beautiful her. That Mercatello Priest knew Margaret's last name though. The (Pieve d'Ico) is in the main piazza. Unfortunately, the Baptism records Margaret was not Baptized immediately birth. Her parents hoped she would not also wanted her existence to remain unknown. Fortunately, their hopes and intentions didn't succeed.



*parents
secret if*

*Mercatello
park at the
statue of*

Church

*vanished.
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To keep Margaret out of sight, her mother's kind maid was given complete charge. The castle's Priest who befriended Margaret educated her as best he could. He even carved her a cane to make it easier for her to move around. Margaret easily memorized the Psalms and all other Bible verses he taught her. She was unusually brilliant ... always loving, never complained, and expressed no resentment toward her cruel parents.

When Margaret was about six, she wandered away from her mother's maid into a hallway leading to her parents' rooms. Guests who were just arriving saw her and almost discovered who she really was. Her mother's maid quickly

picked up Margaret and whisked her away. When her father heard about the near discovery, he had his workmen quickly build a stone room next to a small Church away from his castle. Little Margaret lived as a prisoner in that stone room for 14 years. She couldn't get out, but her needs were provided for. The Priest was furious with her father, but he was helpless to do anything that might bring harm to Margaret. Instead, he became her closest friend, teacher, confidant, confessor ... and provided the Sacraments for her through a window. (The stone room is still there, and a little Church dedicated to Margaret. You can walk down to it from the castle tower. From Citta di Castello, the road to the Metola castle tower is through the village of Palazzi.)

Margaret's mother heard about miracles taking place in Citta di Castello at the tomb of well-known Fra Giacomo. The tomb was in the Church of S. Francisco (still there, and across the street from the Hotel Tiforno). Margaret's parents thought it a good idea to take her there and achieve a miracle. So, under cover of darkness, her parents took her over to Citta di Castello. (It was a day-long journey back then, and it's not a short ride by car now.) Margaret was so happy and later told someone it was the only time her parents showed love for her. They left her at the altar in the Church of S. Francisco amongst others seeking cures. When they returned later that day, however, Margaret was unchanged. Without saying a word, they quietly fled back to their castle in Metola. They deserted her! After the Church closed that night, she sat outside on the Church steps to wait for her parents. In the morning, beggars saw and befriended her. She lived with them and became a beggar herself. (In a short time, she converted the beggars to being Christians.)

It wasn't long before townspeople learned where Margaret had come from. In time, she was aided by a few wealthy families and even lived at the convent for a short while. (The convent and a later school for the blind are closed.) Margaret died while living with a wealthy family that truly treasured her presence.

Margaret was known for her kind and gentle demeanor. She was well aware that her parents regarded her as a repulsive embarrassment, but she still loved them and felt guilty about her condition. She was so very religious, possessed mystical qualities and performed many miracles, helped the poor, the ill, and even prisoners. Everyone loved Margaret ... except her parents.

She accepted her suffering through the eyes of faith. She didn't know why God permitted her to have so many afflictions. She felt that because it was He who permitted her misfortune, He didn't need to reveal His purpose. Margaret wondered why people pitied her. Pain made her sensitive, compassionate and understanding toward others. Her faith was uncompromising, and she found strength in prayer and the Sacraments.

Margaret came to be declared a "Blessed" because of so many miracles being attributed to her. We were told that, later, there was water damage to her original coffin. When Margaret died, she wasn't embalmed. Official witnesses were shocked to find her body perfectly preserved when the coffin was opened in 1558 -- but her clothing had crumbled. She is called an "uncorrupted." At one point, her body was taken to Rome for examination toward canonization. Following a rigorous examination by physicians, she was re-clothed in the Dominican habit she wears today. Exposure to air elements during that time caused her skin to darken ... but her teeth, hair, etc. are all intact. If you know anything about her and go there, and walk up to kneel in front of her glass coffin, it takes your breath away and calms every inch in your own body.

During Margaret's lifetime and long after her death, towns and regions in that part of Italy were still fighting amongst themselves. There were also frequent times of famine and plagues. The Black Death alone killed millions in Europe -- and who knows what happened to the people and paper work that had already been done for her canonization? We who are devoted to sharing the life story of Little Margaret are trying to do something about that!

Without question, Margaret should be declared the Saint of the Unborn and Physically Handicapped. If she were conceived today, she would probably be aborted, left to die at birth, or killed at birth (as are many such children in countries most of us have heard about).