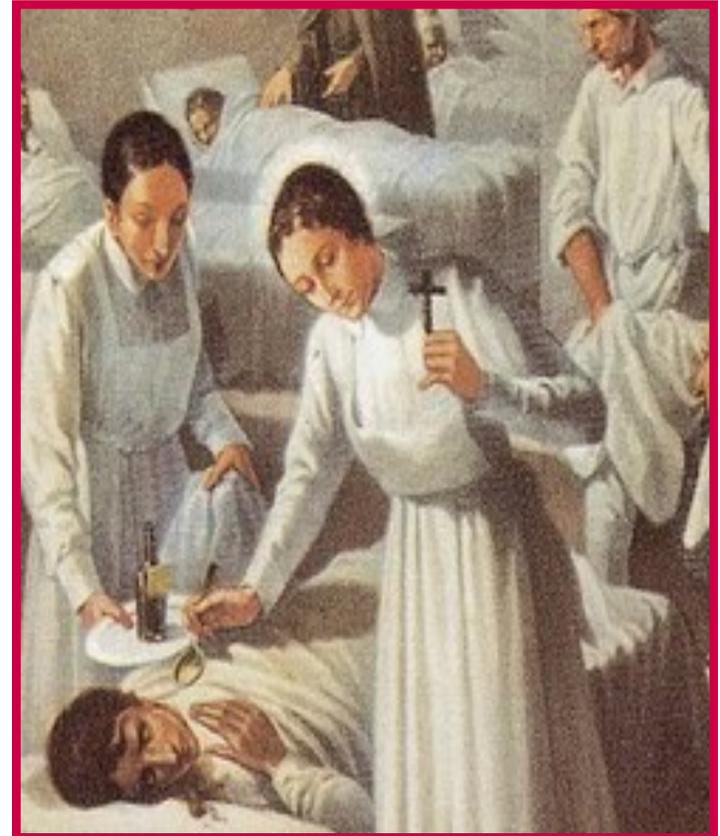


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## ***Saint Maria Crocifissa Di Rosa***

Feast Day: December 15



**Founder of the Handmaids of Charity**

*"I can't go to bed with a quiet conscience if during the day I've missed any chance, however slight, of preventing wrongdoing or of helping to bring about some good."*

## ***Saint Maria Crocifissa Di Rosa***

\*On December 15, we celebrate the feast day of Saint Maria Crocifissa Di Rosa (1813-1855), foundress of the Handmaids of Charity, tireless servant to those in need, and profound example of Christian charity.

Born Paula Francesca Maria Di Rosa, she was born in Brescia Italy, one of nine children of a spinning mill owner and countess. Maria was raised in the Catholic faith, and of her siblings, demonstrated the greatest interest and calling to the Lord. A well-balanced and normal childhood, the family spent happy times together, and religious devotions were a significant part of the time they spent together. When Paula was just ten years old, her mother died, but little changed in the household due to well-established routines. A nearby convent of Visitandine nuns undertook the education and instruction of Paula and her sisters, teaching them the Catechism, sewing, music, poetry, manners, and devotions.

Paula left school at age 17 to assist her father in managing his estate, including the household and servants. Paula began aspiring to religious vocation, and invited her confessor, Monsignor Faustino Pinzoni, frequently to dinner. Similarly, she refused the hands of many suitors her father arranged for her, causing him concern. He wished to see his daughter married, not entering the convent, but was persuaded by the monsignor to stop pressuring her to marry.

Paula was restless in her household chores, seeing suffering and charitable need everywhere around her in Brescia. She told her sisters, “I suffer from seeing suffering,” and set about trying to improve the plight of those in need. Paula first turned her attention to the workers in her father’s mills and the other factories of town. She especially cared for and offered assistance to the young women who were forced by financial circumstances to work long-hours in difficult conditions. Her father encouraged Paula to attend to the spiritual and material needs of his underpaid workers. She further spent long hours visiting local hospitals, ministering to the sick—especially those that no one else would help. During the cholera epidemic of 1836, Paula slept only a few hours each night, running herself into exhaustion helping others.

At the age of 27, Paula decided that she needed to be a bit more organized in her charitable efforts. She was concerned with the lives of the factory workers after they left their jobs, as many of the young were living in unsafe conditions and were easily targeted and victimized. Together with a wealthy widow, Gabriela Bornati, she founded the society of Handmaids of Charity. The sole purpose of the Handmaids was to minister to the material needs of those afflicted by poverty or disease. Her first act was to found a home dedicated to the spiritual needs of the young women she cared for, and a school for deaf children. Forsaking luxury, she lived in a tiny shack by the hospital, caring for the ill on a daily basis.

Her father, for his part, while still wishing to see her married, was concerned with her living conditions. He offered a house to the women, which they accepted. Gabriela died there some three years later, but not before the Handmaids of Charity had established a solid presence throughout the region. In 1840, Paula became the superior of the Order, taking the name Maria Crocifissa. The local bishop offered approval of the order, followed by papal approval in 1850.

In 1852, when war broke out in the region, the Handmaids cared for the soldiers of both sides, seeing God’s people regardless of nationality. They worked throughout the war, being recognized for their courage in defending their patients in the hospitals by blocking doorways to wards with crucifixes and lighted candles, and ministering to the wounded and dying on the battlefields. Soon after the war, a second cholera epidemic pushed the growing order to its limit—with the tired and dedicated sisters working in schools, orphanages, and hospitals.

Maria, worn out from her tireless work, found herself in the hospital at the age of 42. She never recovered, and died after a selfless lifetime of service to those in need.

Saint Maria, you weren't afraid to take new opportunities. It's frightening when we are asked to do something that is different or new. We would rather stay in our safe and comfortable routines. Help us to embrace each obstacle in our path as a new opportunity to serve God. Amen.

\* (Excerpted from: 365rosaries.blogspot.com)



**Incorrupt body of Saint Maria di Rosa**