

A Mother, A Saint

An upright model can often be a great help when dealing with something difficult. When faced with such an uncertain situation, such as abortion or maternal and infant health, it can be an extremely hard time to go through. It is a comfort, when you are in pain physically or mentally, to know that someone else suffered this and lived through it to the joy on the other side. Saint Gianna Berretta Molla is an extraordinary example of *Loving Both Heartbeats* for moms going through what seems like a messy situation. And she can help shine the light down the tunnel of swirling thoughts so that the two precious people struggling inside it can have hope and take the right paths.

Saint Gianna Berretta Molla, who was canonized on May 16, 2004, is most well-known for the magnificent sacrifice of her life for her little baby, Gianna Emanuela. Saint Gianna was born into a big family of thirteen children on October 4, 1922. Her family were devout, Catholics living in Magenta, Italy. She grew up and became a doctor, and since she loved children, she served as their physician in parish camps. She prayed for a clear vocation from Our Lady in heaven and then she began seeing the much beloved (by his family) engineer Pietro Molla, who was also a devout Catholic. On September 24, 1955 the glowing bride was wed to the faithful Pietro. The next four years she and Pietro welcomed three lovely children into their family, Pierluigi, Mariolina, and Laura or Lauretta. Saint Gianna was a loyal mother, faithful wife, doctor, enthusiastic climber and skier and always trusted in the Father's care. She was a pretty normal person, not one who saw visions but a mom who had struggles like everyone else.

Saint Gianna would come to make a huge sacrifice, although she was very quiet about it. In 1962 she became a great hero. Saint Gianna wished for a fourth child, then when on vacation with her family she realized she was expecting! She and Pietro were overjoyed and thanked God

for this special blessing. For the next few weeks all went well but then Gianna noticed an unusual swelling in her abdomen. She decided to return home and there her brother Ferdinando, also a doctor, discovered she had a tumor growing next to her uterus. This caused her intense pain but she remained calm because she trusted in her Creator. Doctors gave her three options; abortion, hysterectomy or removal of the fibroma alone. She wanted to save her baby's life, so she chose the more risky option to only remove the tissue. On September 6, 1961 she went into surgery. Gianna, being a doctor, realized there was a risk of miscarriage based on what the doctor might find in surgery. She firmly put the baby before herself and pleaded the surgeon to respect these wishes no matter what happened or what they found. The operation was an overall success and the exhausted Gianna returned home. Then on April 21, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl and, as you know, she was named Gianna Emanuela. After the birth, however, things got worse. The postpartum pains persisted and her temperature rose. She was in intense pain but asked to not be sedated. Many a day she spent this way but she didn't complain. On Friday, she fell into a coma, then on Saturday, April 28th, she was brought to her house where she died peacefully with Pietro at her side and her children sleeping in the next room.

Just two years after Saint Gianna's death, Mariolina died following a very short illness. Gianna Emanuel grew up to be a doctor and surgeon. Pierluigi became a father and Laura lived at home with their papa. In 1994 during the year of family, Pope John Paul II beatified Saint Gianna Beretta Molla. On May 16, 2004 she was canonized by John Paul II. He called her "*a simple, but more than ever, significant messenger of divine love*". Her canonization was unique because she was the very first doctor and wife to be officially declared a saint in modern times. And it was the first time in history that the husband of the saint was present at the canonization and beatification! Her siblings and children were there too.

To love both heartbeats can be a difficult thing to do but Saint Gianna Molla sets an amazing example of this. Now we might not have this sort of situation ever but we can be like her though even if it's not always a matter of life and death, but living with the attitude of trust in Him and knowing He will make it right in the end. She can be a light (by lantern) for us in the tunnel so we can get to the true light, the outside of the tunnel is a field filled with love and joy. So, let's love them both because now you have an idea about what it's like for at least one great mom in the world. I would like to close with a prayer from Gianna Emanuela which she said at her mother's beatification which brought tears to the pope's eyes *"Dear Mama, thank you for giving me life two times: when you conceived me and when you permitted me to be born. Dear Mama, intercede always to all mothers and all families who turn to you and entrust themselves to you."*