

*VENERABLE BROTHER*

*GERARD GEROMETTE*

*1904 - 1958*



## THE LIFE STORY OF BROTHER GERARD

If for the average Christian, life must be a following of Christ on the way of the cross, all the more must it be such for the Capuchin, who is bound by vow to walk in the footsteps of the Crucified Savior. Brother Gerard was a man whose entire life was conformed to this obligation, and to a marked degree.

Joseph Geromette, the future Brother Gerard, was born into a poor farming family in Zurich, Ontario, Canada, on January 28, 1904, the fifth of eleven children. His parents were David Geromette and Laura Ducharme, who exemplified in their lives the faith and trust in God so necessary in rearing the traditionally large French-Canadian family.

The very beginning of Joseph's life was visibly marked with the cross, when his mother was forced to flee with him in her arms, from a flood which inundated their home. Because the family was poor and there were so many children, each child in turn had to be sent out to work as early as possible to help the poor parents support the new arrivals. So, at the age of twelve, Joseph, "poor and in labors from his youth" got his first job helping on a neighbor's farm. In his sister's words, "He was always a hard worker, quiet and very obedient." The first part of his day was spent in school, the Hensall Public School. After classes, he worked five or six hours with a short intermission for supper. To supply for the lack of formal religious education, he would study his catechism by lamp-light in the barn, after he had finished his chores at ten-o'clock in the evening. We can be sure that a boy who had so high a regard for a knowledge of his Catholic faith was well prepared for his First Communion which he received shortly after he got his first job.

Because the Geromette's lived quite some distance from the nearest Catholic church, they had to hire a large buggy for transportation to Mass, and their poverty allowed them to attend only once a month. Later, when Joseph worked on a farm three miles from the church, he made up for the earlier deprivation by assisting at Mass several times a week.

The following years brought him a variety of jobs. Once he worked as a hod-carrier for a construction company, then as a factory hand in Timken Axel Company, and again as a farm-hand during the harvest. So conscientious was he in his work, that one well-to-do farmer promised him a large legacy if he would remain with him. Apparently at this time, Joseph already contemplated the religious life, because the offer was worded: "If you stay in the world." Even though Joseph didn't stay in the world, the farmer's offer was proved to be sincere, because at his death he left several thousand dollars to the then Brother Gerard.

When Joseph was about nineteen, he found employment in Detroit. Now that he was living in a large city in close proximity to several religious houses, his intention to become a religious took a practical turn. In his hours after work he sought information about the requirements of different communities and compared the answers. His visit to St. Bonaventure Monastery was unfortunate. There were two Friars in the office at the time, (Brother Gerard never revealed their names) and the reception they gave him was so indifferent, perhaps designedly so, as a test, that he decided to join the U.S. Army.

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In the army, Joseph Geromette was made cook and in time rose to the rank of sergeant. He had to feed five hundred men and from that learned the skills that made him so valuable to the Province later on. Although, on his own admission, he immensely enjoyed army life. After four years, the call of grace became so insistent he returned to the civilian state with the intention of becoming a religious.

Then, probably for the first and last time in his life, he wavered. For a whole month, he spent the evening hours walking up and down Mt. Elliott Avenue, in front of St. Bonaventure Monastery, trying to decide whether he should return to the army or enter the monastery. The outcome we know, but we can only surmise what were the groping and indecision, the prayers for light and the rising hopes, and finally the quiet despair as he turned away each evening and slowly made his way home. Ultimately he reached a decision and entered the monastery as a candidate on December 12, 1930.

In his application for admission to the Order, he declared he had been considering the step for five years and gave as his purpose, "to become perfect, to follow in the footsteps of Christ more closely." How closely he was to follow Christ and to what a degree of Crucifixion, would become evident with the passing years.

Joseph Geromette was invested as a novice at St. Felix Friary, Huntington, Indiana, on July 22, 1931, and received the name, Brother Gerard. Although he mixed easily with his fellow-novices, he preferred quiet and retirement; and was much given to prayer. Even now in the novitiate he rendered valuable service in the kitchen. In applying for admission he modestly stated, "I learned a little cooking in the army." Those who enjoyed his excellent meals know what an understatement that was.

Brother Gerard made his simple profession on July 23, 1932, and received his first assignment as cook at Sacred Heart Friary, Yonkers, New York. It was here that he experienced the first symptoms of the ailment that was to develop into cancer and cause his death. Now began for him a long series of visits to doctors and clinics, repeated examinations and consultations, all without much benefit. The loss of time involved must have been a severe trial for his energetic nature, but the fruitlessness of it all must have been even worse. However, in the midst of all this, he did not lose his aim, to follow in the footsteps of Christ more closely. He continued his work and assumed the added burden of giving devoted care to another brother who was crippled with arthritis.

In March, 1938, Brother Gerard was transferred to St. Felix Friary, again as cook, with the additional duty of supervising the work of the Brothers. This assignment lasted until February, 1941, when he was sent to Detroit. Here especially, as assistant to the Novice Master, he trained several new cooks, and was notably successful in transmitting to them his own culinary skills. He also proved to be an excellent general handyman, keeping furniture, plumbing, and boilers in good condition.

### THE LIFE STORY OF BROTHER GERARD/CONT'D.

The poverty and hard labor of his early life very likely accounted for the tendency he now manifested to be quite demanding of himself. Despite the fact that his health was gradually failing, he drove himself to an exact fidelity to all his appointed tasks. He also expected others to give all that they had, and yet when a novice cook was rushed and worried about his work, Brother Gerard would suddenly waltz him around the kitchen or spend a few moments in joking to break the tension.

In 1945, he underwent major surgery (over the years he had eight operations in all), and was sick enough to be anointed. This stay in the hospital lasted about three months. The following winter he was quite ill again and was relieved of his duties as assistant to the Novice Master, and made assistant Porter. Approximately a year later, that is around 1947, he underwent more surgery, was again in danger of death, but once more rallied. Within a few months he was back at his desk in the office, performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy for the many callers each day.

In this assignment as Porter, he came into immediate contact with the needs of souls, and in dispensing help revealed some of his own principles of action. He urgently recommended frequent and daily Communion, devotion to Mary, and immediate compliance with all the directives of the Holy See. Devotion to his patron, St. Gerard Majella, he proposed to all married people, especially as a help in overcoming temptations against the sanctity of marriage. In quiet moments between callers, he read Holy Scripture and Church History. He went through Pastor's "Lives of the Popes" at least once, and considered it choice reading. He was faithful to the community exercises as far as his work permitted, and when he had to miss any of them, he would make them up privately. He made the Stations of the Cross everyday, as one of his favorite devotions.

In June, 1956, he had to enter the hospital again. He was released just before his twenty-fifth anniversary which he celebrated quietly, together with two other silver jubilarians. Eight months later, in March, 1957, he had another serious operation. During this stay in the hospital, he made known to his brother Ivan, that he had prayed for all the suffering he could possibly bear, in order to make atonement for the sins of the people known to him through his work at the monastery office. Evidently his prayer was answered, because he was in constant pain for the rest of his days on earth.

The last years of his life was divided between work as Porter and visits to the doctor. He did all he could to stay out of the hospital. He even took injections to deaden the pain somewhat so he would be able to continue working. But in March, 1958, he had to submit to the inevitable and return to the hospital. Even then he continued his work for souls. He was instrumental in bringing back to the Church a fallen-away Catholic, dying of cancer, whom the hospital Chaplain had been vainly trying to convert for some time.

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During these last weeks, Brother Gerard's conversation frequently turned to the sufferings of Christ, and he declared it a privilege to share in those sufferings for the salvation of souls. He referred to his own pain, but in a very matter-of-fact and uncomplaining way; and yet the pain must have been intense because one of the hospital Sisters remarked that he was "full of cancer." He returned to the monastery on May 21, 1958, where he was able to assist at Holy Mass in the Infirmary, but it was evident by the second day that he needed hospital attention, and was taken back to St. John's Hospital for the last time.

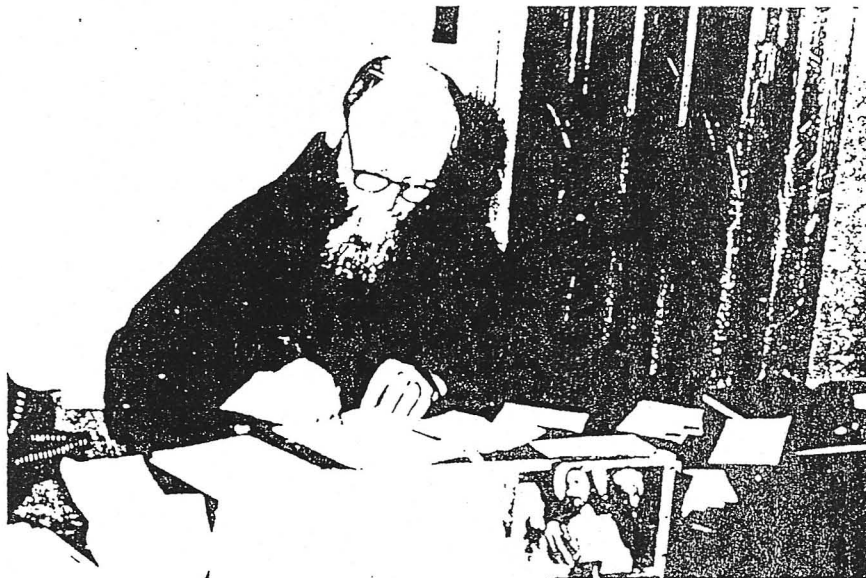
From then on his decline was rapid. He had several convulsions as the pain increased and received the Last Sacraments. Brother Ignatius, or one of the other Brothers or Fathers was with him until the end. During his last conscious moments he made visible efforts to respond to the prayers for the dying and to kiss the crucifix held to his lips. He passed to his reward quietly on Saturday, June 7, 1958, shortly before midnight.

In a beautiful letter that he wrote to his sister just before his last Christmas on this earth, Brother Gerard said:

*"Your day of leaving this earth will be the easiest thing you ever did. It will be a sweet restful easing into a delight that will take your breath away. God is so good, so charming, so easy to look at, yes, so desirable, all else will fade into nothingness."*

May Christ, the Alpha and the Omega of the Capuchin's existence, who showed Himself to Brother Gerard in this life as the Crucified Christ, now show Himself to His faithful servant as the glorious Risen Christ, *"so good, so charming, so easy to look at, that all else will fade into nothingness."*

Father Gerald of Detroit, O.F.M. Cap.  
Minister Provincial, I.I.



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**GERARD GEROMETTE**  
 O.F.M. CAP.  
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