

JOURNAL REFLECTION: WIDE MARGINS

Alessandro's Letter and Reflection Questions

Following his death, the Capuchin friars found a sealed envelope from Alessandro. It was his spiritual testament, written as an open letter to the world. It urges all to follow the way of Christ. It also paints a dramatic and touching picture of a man who was able to regain his dignity through the generous mercy that those he wounded extended to him. Read the letter, then journal with the reflection questions following it:

I am now almost 80 years old. I am close to the end of my days. Looking back at my past, I recognize that in my early youth I followed a false road—an evil path that led to my ruin.

Through the content of printed magazines, immoral shows, and bad examples in the media, I saw the majority of the young people of my day following evil without even thinking twice. Unworried, I did the same thing.

There were faithful and practicing Christian believers around me, but I paid no attention to them. I was blinded by a brute impulse that pushed me down the wrong way of living.

At the age of 20, I committed a crime of passion, the memory of which still horrifies me today. Maria Goretti, now a saint, was my good angel whom God placed in my path to save me. Her words both of rebuke and forgiveness are still imprinted in my heart. She prayed for me, interceding for her killer.

Thirty years in prison followed. If I had not been a minor in Italian law I would have been sentenced to life in prison. Nevertheless, I accepted the sentence I received as something I deserved.

Resigned, I atoned for my sin. Little Maria was truly my light, my protectress. With her help, I served those 27 years in prison well. When society accepted me back among its members, I tried to live honestly. With angelic charity, the sons of St. Francis, the minor Capuchins of the Marches, welcomed me among them not as a servant, but as a brother. I have lived with them for 24 years. Now I look serenely to the time in which I will be admitted to the vision of God, to embrace my dear ones once again, and to be close to my guardian angel, Maria Goretti, and her dear mother, Assunta.

May all who read this letter of mine desire to follow the blessed teaching of avoiding evil and following the good. May all believe with the faith of little children that religion with its precepts is not something one can do without. Rather, it is true comfort, and the only sure way in all of life's circumstances—even in the most painful.

Peace and all good.

Alessandro Serenelli
Macerata, Italy
5 May 1961

Alessandro says in his letter, “in my early youth I followed a false road — an evil path that led to my ruin.” When have you done this? Have you continually gone down a “false road”?

JOURNAL REFLECTION: *WIDE MARGINS*

Who are the faithful believers you've ignored on your path to holiness? Name them and also name some people who are currently good witnesses to you.

Challenge:

Seek forgiveness from someone who tried to show you Jesus but you ignored in the past.

When have I felt guilty and in need of forgiveness? Did this situation cause me to think lesser of myself?

When are some times I have lost my sense of dignity? Why is this problematic and how can I change this in the future?

How can I tap into this part of me and share it with the inmates in hopes of showing them the way to renewal and restoration?
