Last week I included information about St. John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests. He was very devoted to St. Philomena and considered many of the healings and conversions that he prayed for were due to her intercession. Her feast day is August 11. The
twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
following is adapted from the website of St. Philomena Catholic Church, Des Moines, WA and other sources.
In 1802 the remains of a young woman were found in the catacomb of Saint Priscilla on the Via Salaria. It was covered by stones, the symbols on which indicated that the body was a martyr named Saint Philomena. The bones were exhumed, cataloged, and effectively forgotten since there was so little known about the person. An inscription near her tomb read “Peace be with thee, Philomena,” along with drawings of 2 anchors, 3 arrows and a palm. Near her bones was discovered a small glass vial, containing the remains of blood. Because it was a popular custom of the early martyrs to leave symbols and signs such as these, it was easily determined that St. Philomena was a virgin and a martyr. In 1805 Canon Francis de Lucia of Mugnano, Italy was in the Treasury of Relics in the Vatican. He was seeking to bring a martyr’s relics back to his parish in order to reverse the laxity of his parishioners. When he reached the relics of Saint Philomena he was suddenly struck with a spiritual joy and requested that he be allowed to enshrine them in a chapel in Mugnano. After some disagreements, settled by the cure of Canon Francis following prayers to Philomena, he was allowed to translate the relics to Mugnano.

Miracles began to be reported at the shrine including cures of cancer, healing of wounds, and the Miracle of Mugnano in which Venerable Pauline Jaricot was cured of a severe heart ailment overnight. Philomena became the only person recognized as a saint solely on the basis of miraculous intercession as nothing historical was known of her except her name and the evidence of her martyrdom.

On the left-hand side of the Church in Mugnano and in front of the chapel where the blood of the Martyr is preserved lies the wax figure containing the bones of the Martyr. This rests in a magnificent urn, the front of which has a crystal plate, enabling the visitor to see the image distinctly. This figure is clothed in rich robes, and on one of the fingers of the right hand is a gold ring set with topaz, one of the symbols on which indicated that the body was a martyr named Saint Priscilla.

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