Margaret of Cortona, penitent, was born in Loviana in Tuscany in 1247. Her father was a small farmer. Margaret's mother died when she was seven years old. Her stepmother had little care for her high-spirited daughter. Rejected at home, Margaret eloped with a youth from Montepulciano and bore him a son out of wedlock. After nine years, her lover was murdered without warning. Margaret left Montepulciano and returned as a penitent to her father's house. When her father refused to accept her and her son, she went to the Friars Minor at Cortona where she received asylum. Yet Margaret had difficulty overcoming temptations of the flesh. One Sunday she returned to Loviana with a cord around her neck. At Mass, she asked pardon for her past scandal. She attempted to mutilate her face, but was restrained by Friar Giunta. Margaret earned a living by nursing sick ladies. Later she gave this up to serve the sick poor without recompense, subsisting only on alms. Eventually, she joined the Third Order of St. Francis, and her son also joined the Franciscans a few years later. Margaret advanced rapidly in prayer and was said to be in direct contact with Jesus, as exemplified by frequent ecstacies. Friar Giunta recorded some of the messages she received from God. Not all related to herself, and she courageously presented messages to others. In 1286, Margaret was granted a
charter allowing her to work for the sick poor on a permanent basis. Others joined with personal help, and some with financial assistance. Margaret formed her group into tertiaries, and later they were given special status as a congregation which was called The Poverelle ("Poor Ones"). She also founded a hospital at Cortona and the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy. Some in Cortona turned on Margaret, even accusing her of illicit relations with Friar Giunta. All the while, Margaret continued to preach against vice and many, through her, returned to the sacraments. She also showed extraordinary love for the mysteries of the Eucharist and the Passion of Jesus Christ. Divinely warned of the day and hour of her death, she died on February 22, 1297, having spent twenty-nine years performing acts of penance. She was canonized in 1728. Her feast day is February 22nd.

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