

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Blessed Vivaldo (San Vivaldo)

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 1

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IN BRIEF

Blessed Vivaldo (San Vivaldo)

Tuscan Franciscan tertiary, nurse of a leprous priest and hermit at Montaione (c. 1260-1320).

Feast day	May 1
Born	c. 1260, San Gimignano (Tuscany, Italy)
Died	May 1, 1320, Camporena, Montaione (Tuscany, Italy)
Canonized	blessed, cult confirmed on February 13, 1908 by Saint Pius X
Era	14th century
Patron saint of	Montaione

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Blessed Vivaldo for the Sick and Their Caregivers

Novena to Blessed Vivaldo

Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo, the Jerusalem of Tuscany

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Blessed Vivaldo (San Vivaldo)

Blessed Vivaldo of San Gimignano, whom Tuscans have called “San Vivaldo” for centuries, was a Franciscan tertiary of the 14th century. Born around 1260 at San Gimignano, he nursed a leprous priest, Blessed Bartolo, for many years, then lived as a hermit in the hollow trunk of a chestnut tree in the forests of Montaione, where he died on May 1, 1320. On that spot now stands the Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo, the “Jerusalem of Tuscany”. His cult was confirmed by Saint Pius X in 1908. His feast is on May 1.

Who was Blessed Vivaldo?

Vivaldo, sometimes called Vivald in English, was a layman from San Gimignano, the town of towers in the Valdelsa, between Florence and Siena. He belonged to the Third Order of Saint Francis, the Franciscan branch that allows men and women to live the Gospel in the spirit of the Poverello without entering a friary. The sources on his life are brief and partly legendary: two stages stand out, the service of a sick man, then the solitude of a hermit.

Officially, the Church counts him among the blessed: in 1908 Saint Pius X confirmed the cult paid to him since the 14th century, what is called an equipollent beatification. But popular devotion has always called him a saint, and the village that grew up around his hermitage bears his name.



Blessed Vivaldo on an altarpiece by Raffaellino del Garbo (early 16th century).

Key dates in the life of Vivaldo

- **c. 1260**: Born at San Gimignano, in Tuscany.
- **Late 13th century**: He becomes a Franciscan tertiary and devotes himself to the priest Bartolo Buonpedoni, who has leprosy.
- **December 12, 1300**: Death of Blessed Bartolo, whom Vivaldo nursed to the end.
- **Early 14th century**: He withdraws as a hermit to the forest of Camporena, near Montaione, in the hollow trunk of a chestnut tree.
- **May 1, 1320**: Dies in his hermitage; a chapel is soon built on the spot.
- **c. 1500**: The hermitage is entrusted to the Franciscans, who found a friary and begin the "Jerusalem" of San Vivaldo.
- **1516**: Pope Leo X grants indulgences to pilgrims to the Sacro Monte.
- **February 13, 1908**: Saint Pius X confirms his cult.

At the bedside of a leprous priest

At San Gimignano, Vivaldo became close to the priest Bartolo Buonpedoni, a man of great kindness who caught leprosy and withdrew to the leper house of Cellole, just outside the town. Vivaldo followed him and became his nurse. For some twenty years according to tradition, he washed his sores, fed him and prayed with him, without ever catching the disease himself. Bartolo died in 1300; his fellow citizens called him the "Job of Tuscany", and the Church would also recognize him as blessed.

This long hidden service is the heart of Vivaldo's holiness: before he was a hermit, he was the faithful companion of a man everyone avoided.

The hermit of the chestnut tree

After Bartolo's death, Vivaldo left the town and went deep into the forests of Camporena, in the hills of Montaione. According to tradition, he made his cell in the hollow trunk of an old chestnut tree, where he lived in prayer, fasting and poverty. The traditional account of his death, handed down by local devotion, says that hunters found him dead on his knees in his tree, and that the bells of Montaione began to ring by themselves. These details belong to legend, but they show the reputation for holiness that surrounded him at once.

A small chapel was built where his body had been found. His remains were long kept in an urn in the church of San Regolo at Montaione, of which he became the patron; in 1906 they were entrusted to the Franciscans of the friary of San Vivaldo, where they have been venerated ever since, in a chapel of the church.



The church and friary of San Vivaldo, at Montaione.

The Jerusalem of Tuscany

Around 1500, the Franciscans received the hermitage and founded a friary there. Friar Tommaso da Firenze, who knew the Holy Land, then set out to reproduce in the forest the places of the Passion and life of Christ, following the scale and layout of Jerusalem. Between about 1500 and 1515, some thirty chapels were built, decorated with groups of painted terracotta attributed to artists close to Giovanni della Robbia and Benedetto Buglioni. In 1516, Leo X granted indulgences to pilgrims: at a time when the journey to the Holy Land was long and dangerous, people came here to pray along the way of Christ. Seventeen chapels still stand.

What can we learn from Blessed Vivaldo?

Vivaldo reminds us that holiness often begins with humble, lasting service: staying with a sick person, day after day, when no one else will come near. His life as a hermit extends this gift in prayer and detachment, in the spirit of Saint Francis. He is invoked for the sick, for those who care for them, and to rediscover a taste for silence and simplicity. To pray with him, you can use the prayer to Blessed Vivaldo, the novena and discover the Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo.

Where to pray to Blessed Vivaldo

- **San Vivaldo** (Montaione, province of Florence, Italy): the church of the Franciscan friary, which keeps his relics, and the chapels of the Sacro Monte. See the Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo.
- **San Gimignano**: his hometown, where Blessed Bartolo and Saint Fina are also venerated.

PRAYER

Prayer to Blessed Vivaldo for the Sick and Their Caregivers

Blessed Vivaldo left no writings, but his life speaks for itself: twenty years in the service of a leprous priest, then the silent prayer of a hermit in the woods of Montaione. This prayer draws on it, for the sick, for those who care for them and for all who seek God in simplicity. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition.

Prayer to Blessed Vivaldo

Blessed Vivaldo, you who nursed your friend Bartolo, sick with leprosy, without tiring and without fear, teach me to stay beside those who suffer.

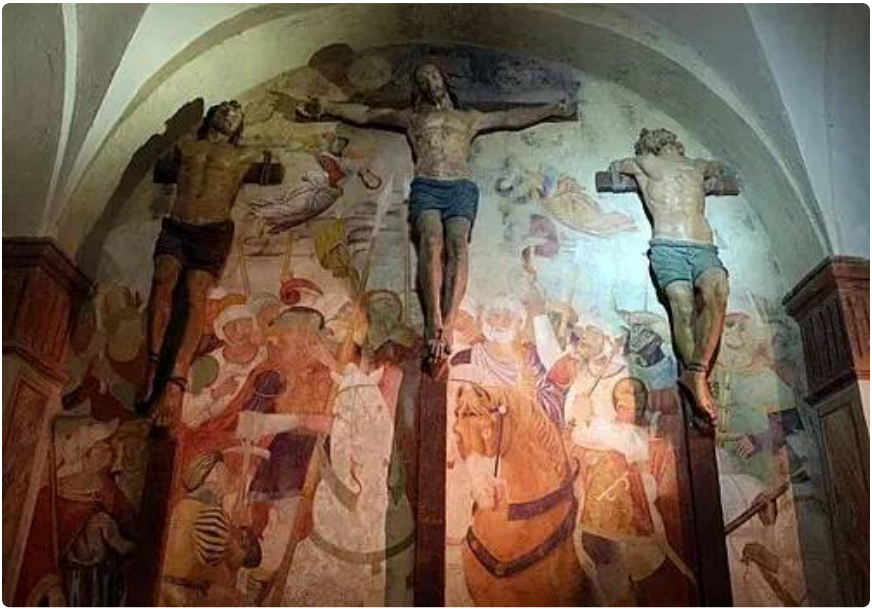
You who washed his sores as one serves Christ himself, give me patient hands and a heart free of disgust before the misery of others.

You who chose the poverty of a hollow tree to live alone with God, help me to let go of what is superfluous and to find a moment of silence each day.

You who, in the spirit of Saint Francis, loved creation and prayer, keep me in the simple joy of the children of God.

I entrust to you the sick, especially those who are alone, caregivers, those who look after their loved ones, and my own intention: (name it in silence).

Pray for us to the Lord, that we may serve him in the least of our brothers and sisters. Amen.



A chapel of the Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo, decorated with terracottas of the early 16th century.

When to pray to Blessed Vivaldo

Blessed Vivaldo is celebrated on May 1, the day of his death in 1320. You can pray to him at any time for a sick person, for a tired caregiver, for someone looking after a loved one, or to ask for the grace of simplicity.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Blessed Vivaldo, and discover the life of Blessed Vivaldo.

NOVENA

Novena to Blessed Vivaldo

This novena follows the life of Blessed Vivaldo of San Gimignano, Franciscan tertiary, nurse of a leprous priest and then hermit in the forests of Montaione, who died in 1320. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, May 1, begin on April 23. You can also pray it at any other time, especially for a sick person or for those who care for them.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the sign of the cross and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Blessed Vivaldo, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The sources on his life are brief: the meditations keep to the essentials.

Day 1: A child of San Gimignano

Vivaldo was born around 1260 in a town of towers and merchants, at the height of its prosperity. He could have sought wealth; he sought God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to seek you first, amid the occupations and ambitions of my life.

Act of the day: Take five minutes this morning to offer your day to God.

Day 2: A disciple of Saint Francis

Vivaldo joined the Franciscan Third Order. Without leaving the world, he wanted to live the Gospel in poverty, peace and joy, like the Poverello of Assisi.

Prayer: Lord, give me the spirit of Saint Francis: a poor, peaceful and joyful heart.

Act of the day: Read a passage from the life of Saint Francis or pray his Canticle of the Creatures.

Day 3: Staying with the sick

When the priest Bartolo caught leprosy, Vivaldo did not abandon him. He followed him to the leper house of Cellole and became his nurse.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to stay beside those whom illness isolates.

Act of the day: Call or visit a sick or elderly person.

Day 4: Serving Christ in his wounds

For years, Vivaldo washed his friend's sores and cared for him tenderly. He saw in him the suffering Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open my eyes to recognize you in those who suffer.

Act of the day: Pray for caregivers, nurses and home helpers.

Day 5: Faithful to the end

Vivaldo stayed with Bartolo until his death in 1300. His faithfulness did not wear out with time, even as the illness grew worse.

Prayer: Lord, support those who have long been caring for a sick loved one, and renew their strength.

Act of the day: Offer concrete help to a caregiver you know.

Day 6: Into the forest

After Bartolo's death, Vivaldo withdrew to the woods of Camporena. He left the town to stand alone before God.

Prayer: Lord, help me to find in my life places and times of silence to meet you.

Act of the day: Take a silent walk in nature, praying as you go.

Day 7: The cell in the chestnut tree

According to tradition, Vivaldo lived in the hollow trunk of a chestnut tree. He made do with the bare necessities and lived on prayer and fasting.

Prayer: Lord, free me from attachment to possessions and teach me to be content with little.

Act of the day: Give away an object or a piece of clothing you do not need.

Day 8: A death in prayer

Vivaldo died on May 1, 1320. Tradition says he was found on his knees, as if death had taken him in the middle of his prayer.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to live and die in your friendship, and give peace to those who are dying today.

Act of the day: Pray for someone at the end of life or recently deceased.

Day 9: A place of prayer for all

On his hermitage, the Franciscans built a "Jerusalem" where pilgrims follow the way of Christ. Vivaldo's hidden life has become a place of prayer for all.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Blessed Vivaldo, heal the sick, strengthen those who care for them, and make my life a humble and faithful service.

Act of the day: Meditate on a moment of the Passion of Christ, for example by praying the Stations of the Cross.



A chapel of the Jerusalem of San Vivaldo, in the woods of Montaione.

To go further: the life of Blessed Vivaldo and the prayer to Blessed Vivaldo.

PILGRIMAGE

Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo, the Jerusalem of Tuscany

The Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo, nicknamed the "Jerusalem of Tuscany", lies in the woods of the Valdelsa, in the municipality of Montaione, province of Florence, some twenty kilometers from San Gimignano. This is where Blessed Vivaldo lived as a hermit in the trunk of a chestnut tree and died in 1320. On his hermitage, in the early 16th century, the Franciscans built a friary and a unique group of chapels reproducing the holy places of Jerusalem.

From hermitage to Sacro Monte

Soon after Vivaldo's death, a chapel was raised where his body had been found, and the place drew the faithful of the surrounding area. Around 1500, the hermitage was entrusted to the Franciscan friars. One of them, Friar Tommaso da Firenze, who had stayed in the Holy Land, planned to recreate in the forest the topography of Jerusalem, with Calvary, the Holy Sepulchre and the other places of the Passion. Between about 1500 and 1515, some thirty chapels were built. In 1516, Pope Leo X granted indulgences to those who visited them: for many of the faithful, it was a way of making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem without the dangers of the journey.



The chapels of the Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo, in the woods of Montaione.

What you can see

Seventeen chapels survive today. They house groups of painted terracotta, almost life-size, depicting scenes from the Passion and life of Christ: the Last Supper, Jesus before Annas and before Caiaphas, the crowning with thorns, the way to Calvary. These Renaissance works are attributed to artists close to Giovanni della Robbia, Benedetto Buglioni and Agnolo di Polo.

The church of the Franciscan friary keeps the relics of Blessed Vivaldo, long preserved in an urn in the church of San Regolo at Montaione and entrusted to the friars in 1906. According to tradition, the friary stands on the very spot of the chestnut tree where he had made his cell.



Painted terracottas in a chapel of San Vivaldo.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Blessed Vivaldo. Begin in the church, before his relics, entrusting to him the sick and those who care for them, then say the prayer to Blessed Vivaldo. The walk through the chapels can be lived as a Way of the Cross, meditating on a moment of the Passion at each stop. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

San Vivaldo is a hamlet of Montaione, reached by car from Montaione, Castelfiorentino or San Gimignano. The site is in the middle of the forest: wear good shoes to walk from one chapel to the next. The Franciscan friars look after the shrine. Mass times and chapel visits vary with the season: check with the friary or the Montaione tourist office before your visit.

Credits and sources

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