

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Alexander Briant

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 1

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IN BRIEF

Saint Alexander Briant

English priest and Jesuit, martyr hanged at Tyburn in 1581 at the age of twenty-five.

Feast day	December 1, October 25
Born	August 17, 1556, Somerset (England)
Died	December 1, 1581, Tyburn, London (England)
Canonized	canonized on October 25, 1970, by Pope Paul VI
Era	16th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Alexander Briant

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Alexander Briant

Saint Alexander Briant was a 16th-century English Catholic priest. Born in Somerset in 1556 and trained at the English College in Douai, he carried out his ministry in secret, was arrested in 1581, tortured in the Tower of London, received into the Society of Jesus in prison, and hanged at Tyburn on December 1, 1581, with Saint Edmund Campion. He was twenty-five years old. His feast day is December 1, and he is also honored on October 25 with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

Who was Saint Alexander Briant?

Alexander Briant belonged to the generation of young English priests trained abroad and then sent back secretly to their own country under Elizabeth I, when saying Mass or being a Catholic priest in England was punishable by death. His life is well documented through the accounts of his companions and through his own letters. He is remembered for his youth, his gentleness and an astonishing strength under torture.

Key dates

- **August 17, 1556**: Born in Somerset, England.
- **Around 1574**: As a student at Oxford University, he gets to know Robert Persons, who leads him to the Catholic faith.
- **Around 1577**: Crosses to the continent to study at the English College in Douai.
- **March 29, 1578**: Ordained a priest at Cambrai.
- **August 1579**: Returns to England; secret ministry in Somerset.
- **April 28, 1581**: Arrested in London, then taken to the Tower of London, where he is tortured.

- **1581**: In prison, he asks to be admitted to the Society of Jesus and is received into it.
- **November 16, 1581**: Tried at Westminster and condemned for high treason.
- **December 1, 1581**: Hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn, with Edmund Campion and Ralph Sherwin.
- **December 29, 1886**: Beatified by Pope Leo XIII.
- **October 25, 1970**: Canonized by Pope Paul VI among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

From Oxford to Douai

Alexander studied at Oxford, at Hart Hall and Balliol College. There he met Robert Persons, a young tutor who would later become a Jesuit. Under his influence, he turned to the Catholic faith, which was then forbidden. Wanting to become a priest, he crossed the Channel to join the English College in Douai, founded to train priests for England. He was ordained at Cambrai on March 29, 1578.

A priest in hiding

In August 1579, Alexander returned to England. He carried out his ministry in his native Somerset: he celebrated Mass in secret, heard confessions, and reconciled with the Church those who wished it. His biographers report that he brought Robert Persons's father back to the Catholic faith. Every Mass, every visit was a risk.

Torture and faithfulness

On April 28, 1581, he was arrested in London, according to the accounts in a house next to the one where Persons was staying, whom the authorities were actively hunting. To make him say where his friend was hiding, they deprived

him of food and drink, then put him on the rack in the Tower of London. He revealed nothing.

In a letter to the Jesuits, he wrote that in the midst of the torture he no longer felt any pain, and he humbly added that he did not know whether this was miraculous or not: God knew. In his cell, he asked to be received into the Society of Jesus, and his request was granted.

The trial and martyrdom

On November 16, 1581, he was tried with other priests, accused of plotting against the queen. He had made himself a small wooden cross on which he had drawn the figure of Christ in charcoal, and he had shaved his head in the tonsure as a sign of his priesthood. Cross in hand, he entered the courtroom. He was condemned to death.

On December 1, 1581, he was taken to Tyburn with Saint Edmund Campion and Saint Ralph Sherwin. He was hanged, drawn and quartered. He was only twenty-five.

Veneration and iconography

Alexander Briant was beatified by Pope Leo XIII on December 29, 1886, then canonized by Pope Paul VI on October 25, 1970, with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. He is celebrated on December 1, the day of his martyrdom, which the Society of Jesus keeps together with Edmund Campion and Robert Southwell, and on October 25 with his companions. He is shown as a young Jesuit priest, often with the small wooden cross he held at his trial, or with the martyr's palm.

What can we learn from Saint Alexander Briant?

Alexander Briant was young, gentle and not especially remarkable. Yet he held firm under torture to protect a friend and stay faithful to his faith. He reminds us that the strength of martyrs does not come from themselves but from God. He can be invoked for persecuted Christians, for prisoners, for victims of torture and for young priests.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Alexander Briant and the novena to Saint Alexander Briant.

Where to pray to Saint Alexander Briant

- **London**: Tyburn Convent, near Marble Arch, a shrine to the martyrs executed at Tyburn.
- **London**: the Tower of London, where he was tortured.
- **Douai** (Nord, France): the town of the English College where he prepared for the priesthood.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Alexander Briant for Strength in Trials

Saint Alexander Briant, a young English priest trained at Douai, carried out his ministry in secret under Elizabeth I. Arrested in 1581, he was tortured in the Tower of London without betraying his friend Robert Persons, entered the Society of Jesus in prison, and was hanged at Tyburn on December 1, 1581, at twenty-five. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It asks for strength in trials and entrusts persecuted Christians to God.

Prayer to Saint Alexander Briant

Saint Alexander,
young priest with a burning heart,
you crossed the sea to prepare for service,
then came back to your country
to bring the sacraments to those who thirsted for them.

In prison and under torture,
you did not betray your friend,
and you humbly acknowledged
that the strength that held you up came from God.

With your little wooden cross,
you walked toward your judges without hatred,
and you gave your life at Tyburn
for Christ and for his Church.

Pray for Christians persecuted today,
for prisoners and victims of torture,
for young priests and those preparing to become priests.
Obtain for me the grace to stay faithful in small trials
as in great ones.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Alexander Briant

- On his feast day, December 1, and on October 25 with the Martyrs of England and Wales.
- When you are going through a physical or emotional trial that seems too heavy.
- For Christians who are persecuted or imprisoned for their faith.

- For seminarians and young priests.
- When you must keep a secret or stay loyal to a friend.

A short prayer before the cross

Holding a cross in your hands, as he did at his trial, you can say:

> *Lord Jesus, your cross is my strength.*
> *Keep me faithful to the end.*
> *Saint Alexander Briant, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Alexander Briant from November 23 to December 1, and read the life of Saint Alexander Briant.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Alexander Briant

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Alexander Briant, a Jesuit priest martyred at Tyburn on December 1, 1581. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, December 1, begin on November 23. It is especially suited to times of trial, and you can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present 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: "Saint Alexander Briant, pray for us." The act suggested for each day helps you live the novena in a concrete way.

Day 1: A young man searching

As a student at Oxford, Alexander was searching for the truth. Meeting Robert Persons opened him to the Catholic faith. God often uses a friend to call us.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who helped me discover your light. Make me, in turn, a friend who leads others to you.

Today: Pray for a young person who is searching for meaning in life.

Day 2: Leaving everything

To become a priest, Alexander had to leave England and study at Douai. He chose a dangerous path out of love for Christ.

Prayer: Lord, give me the generosity to follow you, even when the road is costly.

Today: Pray for the seminarians of your diocese.

Day 3: A priest forever

On March 29, 1578, Alexander was ordained a priest at Cambrai. He received the power to celebrate the Eucharist and to forgive sins in the name of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gift of the priesthood. Bless the priests who have given me your sacraments.

Today: Thank a priest, in person or in writing.

Day 4: Mass in secret

Back in Somerset, Alexander celebrated Mass in hiding, at the risk of his life. For English Catholics, every Mass was a treasure.

Prayer: Lord, rekindle in me a love for the Eucharist, which I receive so easily.

Today: Go to a weekday Mass, or spend some time before the Blessed Sacrament.

Day 5: The arrest

On April 28, 1581, Alexander was arrested. His life was turned upside down. He entered the darkness of prison, not knowing what awaited him.

Prayer: Lord, remember prisoners, especially those imprisoned for their faith.

Today: Pray for a prisoner, or support a prison ministry.

Day 6: Loyal to a friend

Alexander was tortured so that he would reveal where Robert Persons was hiding. He kept silent. He preferred to suffer rather than betray a friend.

Prayer: Lord, make me loyal to those who trust me. Keep me from betrayal, even in small things.

Today: Refuse to take part in gossip.

Day 7: A strength that comes from God

Under torture, Alexander said he no longer felt the pain. He took no glory from it: "God knows." The strength of martyrs is a gift from God.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you my fears in the face of suffering. Be my strength when I am weak.

Today: Pray for victims of torture around the world.

Day 8: A Jesuit in prison

In his cell, Alexander asked to enter the Society of Jesus. He offered himself completely, even though he knew his life was nearing its end.

Prayer: Lord, I offer myself to you today, with all that I am and all that I am living.

Today: Pray the prayer of Saint Ignatius: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty."

Day 9: Tyburn

On December 1, 1581, cross in hand, Alexander walked to Tyburn with Edmund Campion and Ralph Sherwin. At twenty-five, he gave his life for Christ.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Alexander Briant, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for Christians persecuted today, naming a particular country.

Living this novena with Saint Alexander Briant

Saint Alexander Briant was not a hero by nature. He was a young man who said yes, step by step, all the way to the end. During these nine days, keep a small cross near you, like the one he made in prison. Look at it when trials come. Think also of the Christians who, even today, risk their lives to go to Mass. This novena often comes just before Advent: let it prepare you to welcome Christ.

Closing prayer

Saint Alexander Briant,
priest of Christ and martyr of Tyburn,
you served in secret, suffered in silence
and gave your life with the cross in your hands.
Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.
Teach me faithfulness in trials,
loyalty to my friends,
and trust in the strength of God.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Alexander Briant at any time, and read the life of Saint Alexander Briant.

CREDITS

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