

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Alexis Falconieri

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 17

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IN BRIEF

Saint Alexis Falconieri

Merchant of Florence, one of the Seven Holy Founders of the Servites of Mary, who remained a lay brother.

Feast day	February 17
Born	c. 1200, Florence, Tuscany, Italy
Died	February 17, 1310, Monte Senario, near Florence, Italy
Canonized	January 15, 1888, by Pope Leo XIII, together with the six other founders
Era	14th century

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Sanctuary of Monte Senario

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Alexis Falconieri

Saint Alexis Falconieri was a 13th-century merchant of Florence and one of the Seven Holy Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary, known as the Servites. The son of a wealthy Florentine family, he left business with six companions to live in penance and in the service of the Virgin Mary. He refused to be ordained a priest, remained a simple brother all his life, and died at the friary of Monte Senario in 1310. His feast day is February 17, together with his six companions.

Who was Saint Alexis Falconieri?

In the early 13th century, Florence was a rich and restless city, torn by the struggles between the Guelphs, who supported the pope, and the Ghibellines, who supported the emperor. The city also saw the birth of many confraternities of lay people who wanted to live the Gospel more radically. It was in this setting that Alexis and six other Florentine merchants met, united by their devotion to Mary. Together they would found an order that still exists today.

Alexis is the best known of the seven, because he lived the longest and left the memory of a striking humility. His story comes to us through the chronicles of the order, which mix faithful memories with pious tales.

Key dates

- **c. 1200**: Born in Florence, into the family of Bernardo Falconieri, a wealthy merchant.
- **Early 13th century**: Joins a confraternity devoted to the Virgin Mary, where he meets his six future companions.

- **August 15, 1233**: According to the tradition of the order, the Virgin Mary appears to the seven friends, who decide to leave the world.
- **1233-1234**: They withdraw to La Camarzia, just outside Florence, then to Monte Senario.
- **1252**: Alexis completes the church of Cafaggio in Florence, the future Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata.
- **February 17, 1310**: Dies at Monte Senario, at a very advanced age.
- **1717**: Beatified by Pope Clement XI.
- **January 15, 1888**: Canonized by Pope Leo XIII, together with his six companions.

Seven merchants in the service of Mary

Alexis grew up in a devout and well-to-do family that belonged to the Guelph party. He joined a confraternity of lay people devoted to the Virgin Mary. There he met six other Florentine merchants, whom tradition names Bonfilius, Bonajuncta, Manettus, Amideus, Hugh and Sostene. According to the accounts of the order, on August 15, 1233, the feast of the Assumption, the Virgin appeared to them and invited them to give themselves entirely to God.

From Florence to the mountain

The seven friends then left their business and their possessions. They first lived together in a poor house, La Camarzia, at the edge of Florence, then withdrew to Monte Senario, a wooded height north of the city. There they led a life of prayer, penance and work.

Tradition tells of a second apparition, on Good Friday 1240, when Mary showed them the black habit, a sign of her sorrows at the foot of the cross. They took the name of Servites of Mary, the "Servants of Mary." The order

adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine and received final papal approval in 1304, during Alexis's lifetime.

A founder who remained a brother

Among the seven, Alexis made a particular choice: he refused to be ordained a priest, because he did not consider himself worthy. He remained a lay brother, that is, a religious who is not a priest, entrusted with humble tasks. He went begging in Florence to feed his brothers. This son of a rich merchant was willing to hold out his hand in the streets of his native city.

In 1252, with the financial help of his relative Chiarissimo Falconieri, he completed the church of Cafaggio, just outside Florence. It would become the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, the center of the order and the great Marian shrine of Florence. Alexis was also the spiritual guide of his niece, Saint Juliana Falconieri, who would found the women's branch of the Servites.

The last of the seven

Alexis outlived all his companions. At the end of his life he withdrew to Monte Senario, where he died on February 17, 1310. According to tradition, he reached the age of 110, which is probably an exaggeration but speaks of his great longevity. He had seen the order pass through crises, grow under Saint Philip Benizi and spread beyond Italy.

Devotion to Saint Alexis

The cult of Alexis and his companions was confirmed by Pope Clement XI in 1717. On January 15, 1888, Leo XIII canonized the seven founders together, as if they were a single man, something rare in the history of the Church. Their memorial is in the calendar of the universal Church on February 17, the day of Alexis's death. At Monte Senario, a small grotto below the friary bears the name of Saint Alexis and keeps his memory.

Why pray to Saint Alexis Falconieri?

Alexis shows that you can found a great work without seeking first place. He could have been a priest, a prior, a superior: he chose to remain a brother and to beg for others. His life also recalls the power of spiritual friendship, since it was as one of seven, and not alone, that he answered God's call. Finally, he leads us to Mary, the mother who stands at the foot of the cross. You can pray to him:

- for humility;
- for projects carried out together, as a team or a community;
- for those who serve unseen.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Alexis Falconieri and the novena to Saint Alexis Falconieri.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Alexis in art

The seven founders are usually shown together, in black habits, praying before the Virgin Mary.

Where to pray to Saint Alexis Falconieri

- **Monte Senario** (Vaglia, near Florence, Italy): the friary of the seven founders, where he died, and the grotto that bears his name.
- **Florence** (Italy): the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, the former church of Cafaggio that he completed.
- **Around the world**: the churches and friaries of the Servants of Mary.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Alexis Falconieri for Humility and Love of Mary

Saint Alexis Falconieri, a rich merchant of Florence, left everything with six companions to serve the Virgin Mary and found the Order of the Servites. He refused to become a priest and remained a simple brother all his life, begging for his community. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It asks for humility, love of Mary and the joy of serving unseen.

Prayer to Saint Alexis Falconieri

Saint Alexis,
you left wealth and trade
to become a servant of Mary.
With your six companions,
you sought God in poverty and prayer
on the mountain of Senario.

You could have been honored among the first:
you chose the last place.
You begged in the streets of your city
and did the humblest tasks
with a joyful heart.

Teach us true humility,
the kind that seeks neither title nor praise.
Teach us to work together,
like you, the seven friends of Florence,
for a work greater than ourselves.

Lead us to Mary,
standing at the foot of the cross,
so that she may teach us to stay faithful
in joy and in sorrow.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Alexis Falconieri

- On his feast day, February 17, with the Seven Holy Founders.
- When you are tempted to seek recognition or first place.
- At the start of a project carried out with others, as a team or a community.

- For religious brothers who serve without being priests.
- To entrust a sorrow to Our Lady of Sorrows.

A prayer to Our Lady of Sorrows

The Servants of Mary meditate in a special way on the sorrows of the Virgin. With Saint Alexis, you can say:

> *Holy Mary, Mother of Sorrows, standing by the cross of your Son,*
> *stay close to me in my trials.*
> *Saint Alexis, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Alexis Falconieri from February 9 to 17, or read the life of Saint Alexis Falconieri.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Alexis Falconieri

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Alexis Falconieri, one of the Seven Holy Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary, who died at Monte Senario in 1310. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, February 17, begin on February 9. You can also pray it at any time of the year.

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: "Saint Alexis Falconieri, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A family of Florence

Alexis grew up in a rich family of merchants, a family that also prayed. He received the faith along with comfort. God makes use of everything we have received.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all I have received from my family. Teach me to put it at your service.

Today: Thank a parent or grandparent for what they passed on to you.

Day 2: Friends in the faith

In a Marian confraternity, Alexis met six friends who shared his faith. Together they became bolder than they would have been alone.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the friends who help me follow you. Make me a faithful friend to them.

Today: Get in touch with a friend with whom you share your faith.

Day 3: Mary calls

According to tradition, Mary appeared to the seven friends on the feast of the Assumption in 1233. Mary never keeps for herself those who love her: she leads them to her Son.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, lead me to Jesus, and help me hear what he asks of me.

Today: Pray a decade of the Rosary.

Day 4: Leaving everything

The seven merchants left their business and their possessions to live in poverty. It was a great leap of trust.

Prayer: Lord, show me what I am too attached to, and give me the freedom to let it go.

Today: Give something you value to someone who needs it.

Day 5: The mountain of prayer

On Monte Senario, the seven lived in solitude, prayer and penance. Sometimes we need to step away in order to hear God better.

Prayer: Lord, draw me into silence, far from the noise that keeps me from listening to you.

Today: Spend a moment of silence in a church or in nature.

Day 6: Remaining a brother

Alexis refused to be ordained a priest. He remained a brother, serving in humble tasks. He knew that greatness, in God's eyes, is the greatness of the servant.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you who washed the feet of your disciples, teach me to choose the last place.

Today: Quietly do a task that nobody likes to do.

Day 7: Begging for others

This son of a rich merchant went begging in the streets of Florence to feed his brothers. He accepted to depend on the generosity of others.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to receive with humility, and to give with joy to those who ask of me.

Today: Give to someone who is begging, with a kind word and a look in the eye.

Day 8: Building a house for Mary

Alexis completed the church of Cafaggio, which became the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata. He also guided his niece Juliana in consecrated life. He built with stones and with souls.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who build and care for our churches, and those who walk with young people in the faith.

Today: Make a donation or offer a service to your parish church.

Day 9: At the foot of the cross

The Servites contemplate Mary standing at the foot of the cross. Alexis died at Monte Senario in 1310, the last of the seven, after a long life of faithfulness.

Prayer: Virgin of Sorrows, stay near me in the hour of trial and at the hour of my death. Through the intercession of Saint Alexis Falconieri, Lord, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Spend a few minutes before a crucifix, with Mary.

Living the novena with Saint Alexis Falconieri

You can pray this novena alone, but it takes on its full meaning when prayed with others, as the seven founders lived their vocation together. You might suggest it to a group of friends, to your parish team or to your family. During these nine days, also look for a concrete chance to serve without being noticed: that is the heart of Alexis's life. And entrust to Mary, Mother of Sorrows, the sufferings that you or your loved ones are carrying.

Closing prayer

Saint Alexis Falconieri,
servant of Mary and humble brother,
you left everything with your friends to follow Christ
and you preferred the last place to every honor.
Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.
Teach me humility,
faithfulness in spiritual friendship
and love for the Virgin Mary.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Alexis Falconieri at any time, or read the life of Saint Alexis Falconieri.

PILGRIMAGE

Sanctuary of Monte Senario

The sanctuary of Monte Senario stands at the top of a wooded hill about twelve miles north of Florence, in the municipality of Vaglia. It was here that the Seven Holy Founders of the Servants of Mary withdrew in the 13th century to live in prayer and penance. Saint Alexis Falconieri, the last survivor of the seven, died here on February 17, 1310. The friary, still home to Servites, remains the spiritual cradle of the order.

The cradle of the Servants of Mary

In 1233, after leaving their business, the seven Florentine merchants looked for a place of solitude. They first settled just outside Florence, then on Monte Senario, where a first hermitage was built in 1234. There they led a very austere life of prayer, work and fasting. It was here, according to tradition, that Mary showed them the black habit they would wear from then on, in memory of her sorrows.

Over the centuries, the first hermitage became a friary, with a church that was enlarged and decorated in the Baroque period. Monte Senario has become a place of pilgrimage for the Servite family from all over the world, and for the people of Florence and the Mugello.

Visiting Monte Senario

The sanctuary is reached by a road that climbs through the forest. From the esplanade, the view stretches over the hills of Tuscany and the Mugello valley. The visit lets you discover the church and the places associated with the seven founders. Just below the friary, a small grotto bears the name of Saint Alexis Falconieri: a plaque recalls the memory of the saint, who, according to tradition, loved to withdraw there.

Praying on site

Before you go up, you can read the life of Saint Alexis Falconieri. At Monte Senario, take time for silence, like the seven founders. In the church or before the grotto of Saint Alexis, entrust to him the projects you carry out with others, those who serve unseen, and bring your sorrows to Our Lady of Sorrows. You can say the prayer to Saint Alexis Falconieri. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Alexis

- **Florence**: the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, the former church of Cafaggio that he completed in 1252.
- **Florence**: the native city of the seven founders, where Alexis begged for his brothers.

Practical information

Monte Senario is in the municipality of Vaglia, north of Florence, and can be reached by car or on foot along hiking trails. The sanctuary is a place of prayer where a religious community lives: modest dress and silence are requested. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the Servite friary of Monte Senario or the Mugello tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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