

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Anna Schäffer

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 5

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IN BRIEF

Saint Anna Schäffer

Young Bavarian woman disabled after an accident, mystic and Franciscan tertiary, a saint for the sick.

Feast day	October 5
Born	February 18, 1882, Mindelstetten, Bavaria, Germany
Died	October 5, 1925, Mindelstetten, Bavaria, Germany
Canonized	October 21, 2012, by Pope Benedict XVI
Era	20th century

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Tomb of Saint Anna Schäffer in Mindelstetten

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Anna Schäffer

Saint Anna Schäffer was a young Bavarian woman, born in 1882 in Mindelstetten, where she died in 1925 after twenty-four years of near immobility. A housemaid who dreamed of entering a convent, she was severely burned on her legs in an accident at nineteen. Confined to her bed, she turned her room into a place of prayer, advice and consolation for her whole village. Canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 21, 2012, she is celebrated on October 5.

Who was Saint Anna Schäffer?

Anna Schäffer founded nothing, published nothing in her lifetime and hardly ever left her village in Bavaria. Her holiness lies entirely in the way she lived a suffering she had not chosen. She first knew rebellion and discouragement, then, little by little, she united her pain with that of Christ and turned toward others. A member of the Franciscan Third Order, she left letters and notes that allow us to follow this inner journey.

At her beatification, Pope Saint John Paul II summed up her life in words that have often been repeated: weakness and suffering, he said, are the pages on which God writes his Gospel, and her sickbed became the cradle of an apostolate that reached the whole world.

Key dates

- **February 18, 1882**: Born in Mindelstetten, Bavaria, into a modest family.
- **1896**: After her father's death, she leaves home to work as a maid, first in Regensburg, then in Landshut.
- **February 4, 1901**: At the forester's house in Stammham, she falls into a vat of boiling laundry water and is badly burned on her legs.

- **1901-1925**: More than thirty operations; she remains bedridden in her mother's home in Mindelstetten.
- **October 5, 1925**: Dies in Mindelstetten, aged forty-three.
- **March 7, 1999**: Beatified by Pope John Paul II.
- **October 21, 2012**: Canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in Saint Peter's Square.

A young housemaid

Anna was the daughter of a carpenter in Mindelstetten who died at forty, leaving his family in poverty. At fourteen she went out to work as a domestic servant, first for a pharmacist's wife in Regensburg, then for a magistrate in Landshut. She hoped to earn enough to pay the dowry needed to enter a missionary congregation.

The accident at Stammham

On February 4, 1901, Anna was working at the forester's house in Stammham. During the washing, the stovepipe above the laundry vat came loose. She climbed onto a ledge to put it back in place, lost her balance and fell into the boiling water up to her knees.

A long series of hospital stays followed: more than thirty operations, painful dressings changed every day, skin grafts that failed. Anna would never recover. She had to give up religious life and went home to her mother, who cared for her to the end.

The three keys to heaven

The first years were a struggle. Her brother mocked her by calling her "the saint." But Anna gradually found peace. She received Communion almost every day, brought by the village priest, and spent her sleepless nights praying

in spirit before the tabernacle. She wrote a sentence that sums up her life: she had three keys to heaven. The largest, made of rough iron and very heavy, was her suffering; the second was her sewing needle; the third was her pen.

The needle stood for the embroidery she made in bed, often decorated with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which she gave to churches and friends. The pen stood for the letters she wrote to those who asked her for advice. For people came to her: neighbors, the sick, children, to whom she spoke about the Virgin Mary and the saints. Her biographers also report mystical graces, including stigmata that remained invisible at her request.

In her last years she could no longer sew. After receiving Communion one last time, she died on October 5, 1925, whispering, "Lord Jesus, I love you."

A saint for the sick

Right after her death, the faithful began to come and pray at her grave and entrust their intentions to her. Thousands of graces attributed to her intercession have been reported to the parish of Mindelstetten since 1929.

Beatified in 1999, she was canonized on October 21, 2012, the same day as Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Saint Marianne Cope and Saint Pedro Calungsod. For English-speaking Catholics, this canonization day is well remembered: it gave the Church the first Native American saint, the nun of Molokai's lepers, and a young Filipino martyr.

Why pray to Saint Anna Schäffer for the sick?

Saint Anna Schäffer has no official patronage, but she speaks to everyone whose life has been broken by an accident, an illness or a disability. She shows that a life spent in bed can remain fruitful: through prayer, through work suited to one's strength, through listening and friendship.

You can pray to her for burn victims, for people with chronic illness, for the bedridden and for those who care for them. Her mother, who nursed her for nearly a quarter of a century, also makes her a natural intercessor for family caregivers.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Anna Schäffer in art

Because she lived in the age of photography, Anna Schäffer is known mostly from real photographs: a young woman in dark clothing, sometimes in bed with her mother beside her. Devotional images often show her lying in bed with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, recalling her embroidery and her love for the Eucharist. Her three "keys," the cross of suffering, the needle and the pen, are fitting symbols of her life.

Where to pray to Saint Anna Schäffer

- **Mindelstetten** (Bavaria, Germany): the parish church that holds her tomb, a place of pilgrimage.
- **Regensburg**: the diocese to which Mindelstetten belongs, which promoted her cause.

To pray with her, use the prayer to Saint Anna Schäffer or the novena to Saint Anna Schäffer.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Anna Schäffer for the Sick

Saint Anna Schäffer left letters and notes in which she speaks to God about her sufferings with great simplicity. This page first offers a prayer taken from her writings, then an original prayer by Saintspedia for the sick and those who care for them.

A prayer by Anna Schäffer

Anna, who barely slept anymore, spent part of her nights standing in spirit before the tabernacle. She wrote down this prayer, given here in English translation:

> *"Sacred Heart of Jesus, hidden in the Blessed Sacrament, I thank you for my cross and my sufferings, in union with the thanksgiving of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows."*

Source: writings of Anna Schäffer, quoted in the biographies published for her beatification; common translation.

Prayer to Saint Anna Schäffer for the sick

Saint Anna, your youth was shattered by an accident. You know pain, rebellion and sleepless nights. Pray for me.

You turned your sickbed into a place of prayer and welcome: help me to make my limits a path toward God and toward others.

I entrust to you burn victims, people with chronic illness, people with disabilities and all who can no longer leave their homes. I also entrust to you those who care for them, as your mother cared for you, with patience and faithfulness.

You had three keys to heaven, suffering, the needle and the pen: teach me to offer what I live through, to work according to my strength and to write words that console. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Saint Anna Schäffer, pray for us. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Anna Schäffer's feast day is October 5, the day of her death in 1925. You can pray to her:

- during a hospital stay, before an operation or in a long convalescence;
- for a burn victim or someone recovering from a serious accident;
- for a loved one who is bedridden or chronically ill;
- for family caregivers, nurses and doctors;
- on sleepless nights, joining her in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

To pray with her over nine days, follow the novena to Saint Anna Schäffer. To know her better, read the life of Saint Anna Schäffer.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Anna Schäffer

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and writings of Saint Anna Schäffer, the Bavarian saint who spent twenty-four years in bed after a terrible accident. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, October 5, begin it on September 27. It can be prayed at any time, especially during an illness, before an operation or for a loved one who suffers.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you live in Anna's spirit of prayer and attention to others. If you are sick yourself, adapt the act to your strength, as she did.

Day 1: A dream of giving herself

As a young maid, Anna worked to save the dowry she needed to enter a missionary congregation. She wanted to give her life to God. We begin by offering our own desires and plans to the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, I offer you my plans and my dreams. Make them yours, even if your way is not the one I imagined.

Today: Write down one desire you carry, and entrust it to God in prayer.

Day 2: The day everything changed

On February 4, 1901, Anna fell into a vat of boiling water. In one moment, her future collapsed. We pray for all whose lives have been changed by an accident, and for burn victims.

Prayer: Lord, be close to all who have been injured in an accident. Heal their wounds of body and heart.

Today: Pray for burn victims and for the staff of burn units.

Day 3: Rebellion and discouragement

Anna did not accept her suffering at once. She knew discouragement, and her brother mocked her. Holiness did not come all at once. We bring to God our own anger and our questions.

Prayer: Lord, you hear my complaints and my questions. Do not let me lose hope, and lead me gently to your peace.

Today: Tell God honestly what weighs on you, without hiding anything.

Day 4: The heavy iron key

Anna wrote that she had three keys to heaven, and that the largest, heavy and made of rough iron, was her suffering. United to Christ's cross, it became a way to God. We ask for the grace to offer what we cannot change.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, crucified for love, I unite my sufferings to yours. Give them meaning and make them fruitful.

Today: Offer one pain or difficulty of this day for someone who needs it.

Day 5: The needle

From her bed, Anna embroidered, often the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and gave her work to churches and friends. Even with very little strength, she created beauty and gave gifts. We pray for the grace to use the strength we have.

Prayer: Lord, help me to do what I can, with the strength I have today, and to do it with love.

Today: Make or give something small with your own hands for someone else.

Day 6: The pen

The third key was her pen. Anna wrote letters to those who asked her for advice and comfort. Her words reached far beyond her room. We pray for the gift of consoling words.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me words that console, encourage and lead others to God.

Today: Write a card, letter or message of encouragement to someone who is struggling.

Day 7: Before the tabernacle

Anna received Communion almost every day, brought by her parish priest, and spent her sleepless nights adoring Jesus in spirit before the tabernacle. We pray for the sick who cannot go to Mass, and for those who bring them Communion.

Prayer: Sacred Heart of Jesus, hidden in the Blessed Sacrament, I adore you and thank you for staying with us.

Today: Make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or pray in spirit before the tabernacle as Anna did.

Day 8: A mother who cared

For nearly twenty-four years, Anna's mother cared for her daughter. Behind every sick person there is often a caregiver whose devotion goes unseen. We pray for all who care for a loved one.

Prayer: Lord, bless family caregivers, nurses and doctors. Give them strength, rest and recognition.

Today: Offer a moment of rest or a word of thanks to a caregiver you know.

Day 9: "Lord Jesus, I love you"

Anna died on October 5, 1925, after receiving Communion, whispering, "Lord Jesus, I love you." Her whole life ended in an act of love. On this last day, we entrust our intentions to her and ask for the grace of a holy death.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I love you. Through the intercession of Saint Anna Schäffer, hear my prayer and keep me in your love until the end.

Today: Repeat several times during the day Anna's last words: "Lord Jesus, I love you."

Closing prayer

Saint Anna Schäffer, you transformed a broken life into a gift of love. From your sickbed you prayed, embroidered, wrote and consoled. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Watch over the sick, the bedridden, burn victims and all who care for them. Teach us to find Jesus in our sufferings and to serve others with the strength we have. Saint Anna Schäffer, pray for us. Amen.

For a shorter prayer, see the prayer to Saint Anna Schäffer.

PILGRIMAGE

Tomb of Saint Anna Schäffer in Mindelstetten

Mindelstetten is a village in Bavaria, between Ingolstadt and Regensburg. It is where Anna Schäffer was born in 1882, where she spent her twenty-four years of illness, and where she died in 1925. Her tomb, in the village parish church, has drawn pilgrims for nearly a century, people who come to entrust a sick loved one or a trial to her.

History of the place

When she died, Anna Schäffer was buried in the village cemetery. Very soon, local people and then visitors from farther away made a habit of praying at her grave. The parish began recording graces attributed to her intercession as early as 1929, and today there are several thousand of them. Later, her remains were transferred to the parish church, where they now rest. Her beatification in 1999 and her canonization in 2012 made Mindelstetten a pilgrimage site known throughout Germany.

What you can see there

The saint's tomb is inside the church. Pilgrims leave flowers, candles, and written intentions. The village also keeps the memory of the house where Anna lived bedridden, cared for by her mother, and where she received those who came to ask her advice. At Mindelstetten you can learn about the embroidery she did in bed, often decorated with the Sacred Heart, and the letters she wrote to many correspondents.

Praying on site

Before the pilgrimage, you can reread the life of Saint Anna Schäffer. At her tomb, take time to name the sick people you carry with you, then say the prayer to Saint Anna Schäffer. A time before the tabernacle of the church joins the prayer she offered in thought, at night, from her bed. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Anna Schäffer

- **Stammham**: the locality of the forester's house where the 1901 accident took place.
- **Regensburg** and **Landshut**: the cities where she worked as a maidservant in her youth.
- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Square, where she was beatified in 1999 and canonized in 2012.

Practical information

Mindelstetten is in the district of Eichstätt, in Upper Bavaria, about thirty kilometers from Ingolstadt. The village is mainly accessible by car. The pilgrimage is especially busy around October 5, her feast day. Ask the parish about Mass times and about welcoming groups before you come.

Credits and sources

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