

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Ansanus of Siena

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: December 1

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Ansanus of Siena

Young Roman martyr under Diocletian, evangelizer and patron saint of Siena.

Feast day	December 1
Born	c. 284, according to tradition, Rome, Italy
Died	December 1, c. 304, Dofana, near Siena, Italy
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Siena

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Ansanus for Young People and the Courage of Faith

Novena to Saint Ansanus of Siena

Church of Sant'Ansano a Dofana

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Ansanus of Siena

Saint Ansanus (*Sant'Ansano* in Italian) was a young Christian martyr of the early 4th century. According to tradition, this son of a noble Roman family was baptized in secret by his nurse, proclaimed Christ in Siena and baptized many of its people there, before being beheaded near the city, on the banks of the Arbia, during the persecution of Diocletian, around 304. Called "the Baptizer" or "the apostle of Siena," he is the patron saint of the city. His feast day is December 1.

Who was Saint Ansanus?

Ansanus is one of the oldest saints honored in Siena. His existence and his martyrdom are attested by a very ancient cult: a church bearing his name is mentioned as early as the 7th century at Dofana, the place of his martyrdom.

But the detailed account of his life, his *Passion*, was written much later and mixes historical memories with legendary elements. It should therefore be read as a witness of faith rather than as an exact biography. The Roman Martyrology mentions him on December 1 as a martyr of Siena.

Key dates

- **c. 284**: Born in Rome into a noble family, linked by tradition to the great Anicii family.
- **Childhood**: According to his *Passion*, he is baptized in secret by his nurse, Maxima, who raises him in the faith.
- **c. 303**: During the persecution of Diocletian, he openly confesses his faith at nineteen; he is scourged with Maxima, who dies under the blows.
- **Afterward**: Denounced, according to tradition, by his own father, he leaves Rome and preaches in Bagnoregio, then in Siena, where he baptizes many

people.

- **December 1, c. 304**: He is beheaded at Dofana, on the banks of the Arbia, near Siena.
- **c. 650**: First known mention of a church of Saint Ansanus at Dofana.
- **1107 or 1108**: His body is moved to Siena Cathedral.

A young Christian of Rome

The *Passion* of Ansanus tells that he was born in Rome around 284, into a high-ranking pagan family. His nurse, Maxima, was a Christian: she had him baptized in secret and raised him in the faith. The young man thus grew up with a lively faith, at a time when the Empire was about to unleash the most violent of its persecutions against Christians, under Emperor Diocletian.

At nineteen, Ansanus did not hide his faith. Arrested with Maxima, he was scourged. His nurse died of her wounds; the Church honors her as Saint Maxima. According to the account, Ansanus survived this torment, then other tortures, including a cauldron of boiling oil.

The apostle of Siena

Tradition adds that his own father denounced him to the authorities. Ansanus managed to escape and preached the Gospel in northern Lazio, at Bagnoregio, then in Tuscany, at Siena, which was then only a small Roman town. There he converted and baptized so many people that he was called "Ansanus the Baptizer." The people of Siena have regarded him ever since as the one who brought the Christian faith to their city.

Prison and martyrdom

Arrested again, he was first imprisoned: a small church in Siena, on Via San Quirico, is called the "prison of Saint Ansanus" in memory of that time. Then he was taken outside the city, to the banks of the Arbia River, at Dofana, and

beheaded there. He was about twenty years old.

Devotion to Saint Ansanus

Ansanus has been honored as a saint since late antiquity, without a canonization process. His body long remained in the church of Dofana, on the place of his martyrdom, before being carried to Siena Cathedral at the beginning of the 12th century. The diocesan museum of Siena keeps a reliquary of his arm. He is one of the patron saints of the city, with Saint Savinus, Saint Crescentius and Saint Victor, and he appears in the foreground of the famous *Maestà* painted by Duccio for the cathedral between 1308 and 1311.

Why pray to Saint Ansanus?

Ansanus was barely twenty when he gave his life for Christ. He reminds us that the faith can be passed on by humble people, like a nurse, and that a young person can become a courageous witness and a missionary. His nickname, "the Baptizer," invites each of us to rediscover the grace of our own baptism. You can pray to him:

- for young people;
- for the newly baptized and for catechumens;
- for the city of Siena.

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

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Ansanus in art

The painters of Siena often depicted him: Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi placed him beside their great *Annunciation*, now in the Uffizi in Florence, and Giovanni di Paolo painted scenes from his life. He can be recognized by:

- his youth;
- the palm of martyrdom;
- the black and white banner of Siena, the *Balzana*;
- the scene of a baptism he is administering.

Where to pray to Saint Ansanus

- **Dofana** (Castelnuovo Berardenga, province of Siena, Italy): the church of Sant'Ansano a Dofana, on the traditional site of his martyrdom.
- **Siena**: the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, which received his body in the 12th century.
- **Siena**: the small church of the Carceri di Sant'Ansano, on Via San Quirico, where tradition places his prison.
- **Siena**: the diocesan museum, which keeps the reliquary of his arm.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Ansanus for Young People and the Courage of Faith

Saint Ansanus was a young Roman of the 4th century who, according to tradition, was baptized in secret by his nurse, proclaimed Christ in Siena and baptized so many people there that he was called "the Baptizer." He was beheaded near the city around 304, at the age of twenty. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life; it is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to his intercession young people, the baptized and all who need courage to bear witness to their faith.

Prayer to Saint Ansanus

Saint Ansanus,
young witness of Christ,
you received the faith from the humble hands of your nurse
and kept it like a treasure.
In persecution, you were not ashamed of the Gospel,
and you gave your life at twenty.

Apostle of Siena,
you led many men and women
to the waters of baptism.
Help us to live from the grace of our own baptism
and to stay faithful to the promises we have made.

Pray for young people looking for meaning in their lives,
for those who are afraid to say that they believe,
for catechumens and the newly baptized.
Pray for nurses, parents, grandparents
and all who pass on the faith to children.

Watch over Siena and over all who call on you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Ansanus

- On his feast day, December 1.
- For a baptism or the anniversary of a baptism.
- For a young person who hesitates to stand up for their faith.
- For catechumens preparing for baptism.
- When visiting Siena or the Sienese countryside.

A short prayer

You can simply say:

> *Lord, I thank you for my baptism. Keep me faithful.*
> *Saint Ansanus, pray for us. Amen.*

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Ansanus of Siena

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Ansanus, a young Roman martyr and the apostle of Siena in the early 4th century. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, December 1, begin on November 23. It is especially suited to young people and to those who want to rekindle the grace of their baptism, 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 Ansanus, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: The faith of a nurse

According to tradition, Ansanus received the faith from his nurse, Maxima, who had him baptized in secret. God often uses humble people to pass on the faith.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who pass on the faith to children: parents, grandparents, nannies and catechists.

Today: Thank someone who passed the faith on to you, or pray for them.

Day 2: Baptism

Ansanus was baptized as a child. Baptism makes us children of God. It is the beginning of every Christian life.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for my baptism. Help me live each day as a child of God.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism and make the Sign of the Cross with holy water.

Day 3: Growing in faith

Ansanus grew up in a pagan household, but he kept the faith he had received. It took courage to be a Christian in that setting.

Prayer: Lord, support young Christians who live their faith in an indifferent or hostile setting.

Today: Pray for a young person you know.

Day 4: Daring to speak of one's faith

At nineteen, Ansanus openly confessed his faith, despite the persecution. He was not ashamed of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage not to hide my faith when I am asked about it.

Today: Speak simply about your faith in a conversation.

Day 5: Shared suffering

Ansanus was scourged with Maxima, who died of it. He watched the woman who had led him to Christ suffer. Faith does not take away pain, but it passes through it with hope.

Prayer: Lord, comfort those who suffer for their faith, and those who watch their loved ones suffer.

Today: Pray for Christians who are persecuted today.

Day 6: Betrayed by his own

According to tradition, Ansanus was denounced by his own father. Jesus warned that faith could divide families. Ansanus did not answer with hatred.

Prayer: Lord, heal the wounds in families. Help me forgive those close to me who have hurt me.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation in your family.

Day 7: Proclaiming the Gospel

On the run, Ansanus did not hide: he preached in Bagnoregio, then in Siena. His trial became for him an occasion to proclaim Christ.

Prayer: Lord, make my trials an occasion to bear witness to your love.

Today: Share a passage of the Gospel with someone.

Day 8: Ansanus the Baptizer

In Siena, Ansanus baptized so many people that he was called "the Baptizer." He opened the door of new life to many.

Prayer: Lord, bless the catechumens preparing for baptism, and those who accompany them.

Today: Pray for the catechumens of your parish or diocese.

Day 9: Martyrdom on the banks of the Arbia

Around 304, Ansanus was beheaded at Dofana, near Siena. He was about twenty years old. His death sealed the Gospel he had proclaimed, and Siena has venerated him ever since as its apostle.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Ansanus, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Renew your baptismal promises: reject evil and profess your faith.

Living the novena with Saint Ansanus

The life of Saint Ansanus has come down to us through a tradition in which history and legend are mixed, but his message is simple: the faith received in baptism can make a young person a courageous witness. During these nine days, thank God for your baptism and ask for the grace to live it more fully. This novena falls at the beginning of Advent: a fine time to prepare your heart for the coming of Christ.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Ansanus,*
> *young martyr and apostle of Siena,*
> *you kept the faith you received from your nurse*
> *and led many souls to baptism.*
> *Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Give me the courage to bear witness,*
> *the joy of my baptism*
> *and faithfulness to the end.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Sant'Ansano a Dofana

The church of Sant'Ansano a Dofana stands in the countryside southeast of Siena, in the municipality of Castelnuovo Berardenga, not far from the Arbia River. According to tradition, it was here that Saint Ansanus, the young apostle of Siena, was beheaded in the early 4th century. His body rested here for centuries before being moved to Siena Cathedral.

The place of the martyrdom

A church dedicated to Saint Ansanus is mentioned at Dofana as early as the middle of the 7th century, around 650. In the 9th century, in 867, an oratory bearing his name appears among the properties listed in the founding charter of the abbey of the Berardenga. These ancient documents show how deeply rooted the saint's cult is in this place.

The body of Ansanus remained at Dofana until the beginning of the 12th century, in 1107 or 1108, when it was solemnly carried to Siena Cathedral. The church of Dofana kept the memory of the martyrdom and remained a place of pilgrimage. It was restored in 1931 and again in 1980.



The church of Sant'Ansano a Dofana, traditional site of the martyrdom of Saint Ansanus.

Visiting Sant'Ansano a Dofana

The church is in the hamlet of Casetta, in the heart of the Sienese countryside, among rolling hills. The visit can be combined with a walk in Siena in the footsteps of the saint, from the small church of the Carceri di Sant'Ansano to the cathedral.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Ansanus. On the place of his martyrdom, entrust to him young people, the baptized and those who need courage to bear witness to their faith, then say the prayer to Saint Ansanus. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Ansanus

- **Siena**: the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, which received his body in the 12th century.
- **Siena**: the church of the Carceri di Sant'Ansano, on Via San Quirico, where tradition places his prison.
- **Siena**: the diocesan museum, which keeps the reliquary of his arm.
- **Bagnoregio** (Lazio): where he is said to have preached before coming to Siena.

Practical information

Dofana can be reached by car from Siena. The church is not always open: opening hours and times of services may vary, especially outside the feast of December 1. Check with the parish of Castelnuovo Berardenga or the Siena tourist office before you come.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: José Luiz, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The church of Sant'Ansano a Dofana, traditional site of the martyrdom of Saint Ansanus.: Image: Vignaccia76, CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com