

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Augustine of Hippo

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 28

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IN BRIEF

Saint Augustine of Hippo

Bishop of Hippo, Father and Doctor of the Church, author of the Confessions.

Feast day	August 28
Born	November 13, 354, Thagaste (today Souk Ahras, Algeria)
Died	August 28, 430, Hippo (today Annaba, Algeria)
Canonized	Pre-congregation (immemorial cult); declared a Doctor of the Church in 1298
Era	5th century
Patron saint of	theologians, printers, brewers

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Augustine

Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, Tomb of Saint Augustine in Pavia

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Augustine of Hippo

Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa, is one of the most influential thinkers in the history of the West. A brilliant teacher of rhetoric who long kept his distance from his mother's faith, he was converted in Milan at thirty-two, became a priest and then a bishop, and left an immense body of work, including the *Confessions* and *The City of God*. He died on August 28, 430, and is celebrated on that day, the day after his mother, Saint Monica. He is a Father and Doctor of the Church.

Who was Saint Augustine?

Aurelius Augustinus was born on November 13, 354, in Thagaste, today Souk Ahras in Algeria, in a Roman province of Africa. His father, Patricius, was a small pagan landowner who was baptized only at the end of his life; his mother, Monica, was a fervent Christian. A gifted child, he was sent to study at Madauros and then in Carthage.

In the *Confessions*, he tells the story of his youth, his ambitions and his disordered life himself, with a sincerity that gives the book its power.

Key dates in the life of Saint Augustine

- **November 13, 354**: Born in Thagaste.
- **c. 371**: Studies in Carthage; he lives with a companion, with whom he has a son, Adeodatus.
- **c. 373**: Reading Cicero's *Hortensius* awakens his passion for wisdom; he joins the Manichaean sect for about nine years.
- **383-384**: Teaches in Rome, then wins the chair of rhetoric in Milan.
- **Summer 386**: Conversion in a garden in Milan.

- **Easter Vigil 387**: Baptized by Saint Ambrose, together with his son and his friend Alypius.
- **387**: Death of Saint Monica at Ostia.
- **391**: Ordained a priest in Hippo, almost against his will.
- **395-396**: Becomes bishop of Hippo.
- **c. 397-401**: Writes the *Confessions*.
- **413-426**: Writes *The City of God*, after the sack of Rome in 410.
- **August 28, 430**: Dies in Hippo, besieged by the Vandals.
- **1298**: Pope Boniface VIII declares him a Doctor of the Church, with Ambrose, Jerome and Gregory the Great.

The long road to faith

For years, Augustine looked for the truth outside the Church. Manichaeism at first seemed to offer an explanation of evil, then disappointed him. In Milan, he went out of curiosity to hear the sermons of Bishop Ambrose, whose eloquence attracted him before their content touched him. Reading the Platonist philosophers, and then the letters of Saint Paul, completed his preparation. One obstacle remained: he felt unable to change his life.

In the summer of 386, in the garden of the house where he was staying, he heard a child's voice repeating, "Take and read." He opened the letters of Saint Paul at random and came upon a passage of the Letter to the Romans (13:13-14) urging him to leave excess behind and to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Peace flooded his heart. He gave up his career and prepared for baptism, which he received from Ambrose at the Easter Vigil of 387.



The conversion of Saint Augustine, fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli in San Gimignano (fifteenth century).

Bishop of Hippo

Back in Africa, Augustine wanted to live in community, in prayer and study. But during a visit to Hippo in 391, the faithful chose him to be a priest. A few years later he became bishop of the city, a charge he held for thirty-five years. He preached several times a week, judged disputes, visited the poor, ransomed captives and shared a common life with his clergy, for whom he wrote a rule. In the Middle Ages, the *Rule of Saint Augustine* was adopted by many religious orders, including the Augustinians, the Canons Regular and the Dominicans.

Augustine was also at the heart of the debates of his time: against the Manichaeans, against the Donatist schism that divided Christian Africa, and against Pelagius, whose idea that human beings could save themselves by their own strength he opposed. His reflection on grace shaped all of Western theology.

The Confessions and The City of God

The *Confessions*, written soon after he became bishop, are not just an autobiography: they are a long prayer addressed to God, in which Augustine rereads his life as the story of a search. Their famous opening sums up his journey: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

The City of God, written after the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, answers the pagans who blamed Christians for the ruin of the Empire, and offers a vast meditation on the meaning of history.



Saint Augustine and Saint Monica at Ostia, by Ary Scheffer (1846).

Augustine's death and the fate of his relics

In the spring of 430, the Vandals laid siege to Hippo. Augustine, then seventy-five, fell ill. He had the penitential psalms posted on the wall of his room and died on August 28, 430. His remains were later taken to Sardinia, then bought back in the eighth century by the Lombard king Liutprand, who had them placed in Pavia, in the Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, where they still rest.

Why is Saint Augustine the patron saint of theologians?

No Latin Father has shaped Christian thought as deeply as Augustine: on grace, the Trinity, the Church, the sacraments and the meaning of history, theologians in the West have drawn on him for sixteen centuries, Saint Thomas Aquinas first among them. Printers and brewers also count him among their patrons. More broadly, he is invoked by students and by all who are searching for the truth, and he is often prayed to together with Saint Monica for loved ones who have drifted away from the faith.

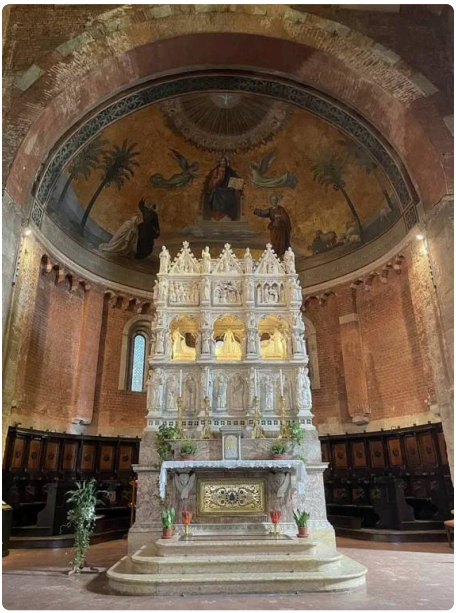
Symbols and how to recognize Saint Augustine in art

- **A flaming heart**, sometimes pierced by an arrow, for his burning love of God.
- **A pen and a book**, for his immense written work.
- **The miter and crozier** of a bishop, often with a black habit for the Augustinian tradition.
- **A child by the sea with a shell**, from a late legend about Augustine meditating on the mystery of the Trinity.
- **Saint Monica** at his side, especially in scenes at Ostia.

Where to pray to Saint Augustine

- **Pavia, Italy**: the Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, which holds his tomb.

- **Annaba, Algeria**: the Basilica of Saint Augustine, built at the end of the nineteenth century on the hill overlooking the ruins of Hippo.
- **Milan**: the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, which keeps the memory of his baptism.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Sant'Agostino, where Saint Monica is buried.



The Arca, tomb of Saint Augustine in Pavia (fourteenth century).

To pray with him, use the prayer "Late have I loved you," taken from the *Confessions*, or follow the novena to Saint Augustine, from August 19 to 27.

PRAYER

Prayer of Saint Augustine: "Late Have I Loved You"

"Late have I loved you" is the most famous prayer of Saint Augustine. It is not a separately composed prayer, but a passage of the *Confessions* (Book X, chapter 27), written around the year 400, in which Augustine speaks directly to God. Below you will find this text, a second line from the *Confessions* to meditate on, and an original prayer to Saint Augustine by Saintspedia.

"Late have I loved you" (Confessions X, 27)

Augustine addresses God as "Beauty." The English translation from the Latin is by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.

> *Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you!*
>
> *And see, you were within me, and I was outside, and there I searched for you; and, deformed as I was, I rushed headlong into the lovely things you have made.*
>
> *You were with me, but I was not with you. Those things kept me far from you, which would not exist at all unless they existed in you.*
>
> *You called, you cried out, and you broke through my deafness; you flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness; you breathed your fragrance, I drew in my breath, and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you; you touched me, and I burn for your peace.*

Source: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, chapter 27 (*Sero te amavi*).

Another line to meditate on

> *"You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."*

Source: *Confessions*, Book I, chapter 1. This is Saint Augustine's most quoted sentence; it sums up his whole journey.

Prayer to Saint Augustine

> *Saint Augustine, you who searched for the truth along so many roads and found it in the depths of your own heart, pray for me.*
>
> *When my heart is restless, teach me to recognize that it is looking for God. When I scatter myself in a thousand things, bring me back within, where he is waiting for me.*
>
> *You who were carried by your mother's tears, I entrust to you the people I love who have drifted away from the faith. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).*
>
> *Give me a taste for the truth, the humility to admit my faults and the joy of serving my brothers and sisters. May I one day say with you: late have I loved you, but I have loved you. Amen.*

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

When to pray this prayer

"Late have I loved you" suits moments of conversion and new beginnings: a return to confession, a retreat, or simply an evening when you feel how far you have wandered. The prayer to Saint Augustine is a good companion for

students, teachers and anyone searching for the truth, and for parents praying for children who have left the Church.

Saint Augustine's feast day is August 28, the day after Saint Monica (August 27). Many people pray to mother and son together for loved ones who are still looking for their way. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Augustine, from August 19 to 27.

NOVENA

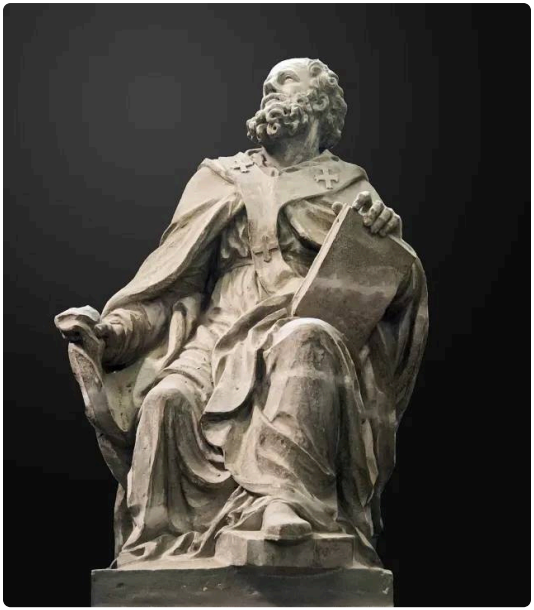
Novena to Saint Augustine

This novena to Saint Augustine is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by his *Confessions*. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on August 19: it ends on August 27, the feast of his mother, Saint Monica, the day before his own feast on August 28. You can also pray it at any time, for a loved one far from the faith, for a student, or for your own search for God.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. The sayings quoted are faithful paraphrases of Augustine; the small act suggested for the day helps carry the prayer into your life. If you miss a day, simply continue: Augustine knew that the road to God is long and full of detours.

You may pray this novena alone, as a family or with a group. If you are praying for a son, daughter or friend who has left the faith, name that person each day, as Monica did for years, without pressure and without discouragement. You might also keep a copy of the *Confessions* nearby and read a few lines each evening.



Saint Augustine of Hippo, in a church statue or window.

Day 1: The restless heart

"Our heart is restless until it rests in you." Restlessness is not first of all a flaw: for Augustine, it is the sign that we are made for God.

Prayer: Lord, you know my restlessness. Let it lead me to you.

Today: Write down, in one sentence, what you are really looking for.

Day 2: Owning up to our faults

Augustine tells plainly how, as a teenager, he stole pears he did not even want, just for the pleasure of doing wrong. Looking our faults in the face is the beginning of freedom.

Prayer: God of mercy, help me see my faults without losing heart, and place them in your hands.

Today: Make an examination of conscience or prepare for confession.

Day 3: Searching for the truth

Reading Cicero kindled in the young Augustine a love of wisdom. His search went down blind alleys, but he never gave up looking.

Prayer: Spirit of truth, keep alive in me the desire to understand, and protect me from easy answers.

Today: Read a page of the Gospel or of a spiritual writer, slowly.

Day 4: A mother's tears

Monica prayed for her son for years. A bishop once told her that the son of so many tears could not be lost. No prayer for a loved one is ever wasted.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the people I love who are far from you. Keep me patient and hopeful.

Today: Pray by name for someone who has drifted away from the faith.

Day 5: Friends on the road

Augustine never searched alone: Alypius, Nebridius and other friends shared his questions. In Milan, Ambrose welcomed him with kindness. God comes to us through faces.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the friends who have helped me grow. Make me, in turn, a companion on the road for others.

Today: Thank a friend who has helped you in your spiritual life.

Day 6: Take and read

In the garden in Milan, a child's voice sang, "Take and read." Augustine opened the Scriptures, and the word of God did what all his reasoning had not been able to do.

Prayer: Lord, speak to me through your Word. Give me the simplicity to open it and listen.

Today: Read Romans 13:11-14, the passage that converted Augustine.



Praying with Saint Augustine of Hippo.

Day 7: Late have I loved you

Augustine regretted having looked for God outside himself when God was within. It is never too late to begin to love.

Prayer: Beauty so ancient and so new, teach me to seek you within me. Let it not be too late for me to love you.

Today: Spend ten minutes in inner silence, without asking for anything.

Day 8: Serving the Church

Augustine dreamed of a quiet life of study; instead he was made a priest and then a bishop. He agreed to serve where he was needed, preaching, judging disputes and visiting the poor.

Prayer: Lord, make me ready for the service you ask of me, even when it does not match my plans.

Today: Offer your help in your parish or to a charity.

Day 9: Rest in God

At the end of his life, in a besieged city, Augustine meditated on the penitential psalms. He died in peace, among the ruins of a collapsing world, because his heart was resting in God.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Augustine and Saint Monica, give my heart rest in you. Amen.

Today: Pray a psalm, for example Psalm 51, "Have mercy on me, O God."

Closing prayer

Saint Augustine, you who searched so much and loved so much, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for me, for those who doubt and for those who teach. Obtain for us the grace to seek God all our lives, and to find him. Amen.

After the novena

The end of these nine days is not the end of the road. Augustine spent his whole life seeking the God he had found. Keep one of the small acts of this novena as a habit: a daily moment of silence, a Gospel passage read slowly, a regular confession, or a name you continue to carry in prayer. On August 28, if you can, attend Mass and give thanks for Saint Augustine and for all those whose prayers have brought you closer to God.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, Tomb of Saint Augustine in Pavia

The Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, in Pavia in Lombardy, has housed the tomb of Saint Augustine since the 8th century. It is the chief place of pilgrimage dedicated to the Bishop of Hippo, about thirty kilometers from Milan, where he was baptized.

How Augustine's relics came to Pavia

After Augustine died in Hippo in 430, his remains were carried to Sardinia by African bishops, probably driven out by the Vandals. In the 8th century, when Sardinia was threatened by Arab raids, the Lombard king Liutprand had them ransomed and brought to his capital, Pavia. He placed them in the church of San Pietro, whose golden ceiling gave it its name: "Saint Peter in the Golden Sky."



Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, tomb of Saint Augustine in Pavia.

The Arca of Saint Augustine

The heart of the basilica is the Arca, a monumental marble tomb carved in the 14th century and set behind the high altar. Dozens of statues and bas-reliefs tell the story of Augustine's life and his spiritual legacy. The remains of the philosopher Boethius also rest in the crypt. The basilica, in the Lombard Romanesque style, is served by the Augustinians, the religious family that follows the saint's rule.

Praying at the tomb of Saint Augustine

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Augustine, or a few pages of the *Confessions*. On site, a time of silence before the Arca is a good moment to entrust an intention, for example for a loved one who is searching for their way. The prayer "Late have I loved you" suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, tomb of Saint Augustine in Pavia, the interior.

Other places associated with Saint Augustine

- **Milan**: the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, linked to the bishop who baptized him in 387.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Sant'Agostino, near Piazza Navona, where Saint Monica is buried.
- **Ostia**: where Saint Monica died in 387, after the famous conversation at Ostia recounted in the *Confessions*.
- **Annaba** (Algeria): the Basilica of Saint Augustine, which overlooks the ruins of ancient Hippo.
- **Souk Ahras** (Algeria): ancient Thagaste, his native town.

Practical information

Pavia is easy to reach by train from Milan. The basilica is in the historic center, near the Visconti castle. On August 28, the feast of Saint Augustine, and around that date, special celebrations are held. Check the times of Masses and visits with the Augustinian community before you come.

Credits and sources

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