

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Barnabas, Apostle

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: June 11

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IN BRIEF

Saint Barnabas, Apostle

Levite from Cyprus, apostle and companion of Saint Paul, the "son of encouragement".

Feast day	June 11
Born	1st century, Cyprus
Died	1st century, Salamis, Cyprus, according to tradition
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	Cyprus

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Barnabas, Son of Encouragement

Novena to Saint Barnabas

Monastery of Saint Barnabas and the Apostle's Tomb near Salamis

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Barnabas, Apostle

Saint Barnabas is one of the great figures of the early Church. A Jew of the tribe of Levi from Cyprus, he was the one who welcomed Saint Paul after his conversion, introduced him to the apostles and set out with him on the first missionary journey. The Acts of the Apostles describe him as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Although he was not one of the Twelve, the Church gives him the title of apostle and celebrates him on June 11.

Who was Saint Barnabas?

His birth name was Joseph. The apostles nicknamed him Barnabas, a name the Book of Acts translates as "son of encouragement" or "son of consolation" (Acts 4:36). He belonged to a family of Levites settled in Cyprus, an island that was then home to a large Jewish community. He first appears in the community of Jerusalem, shortly after Pentecost: he sold a field he owned and laid the money at the feet of the apostles, for the needs of all.

Everything we know about him with certainty comes from the New Testament: the Acts of the Apostles, and several mentions in the letters of Saint Paul. The rest, including his death, belongs to tradition. An ancient letter, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, bears his name, but it was written later and historians do not attribute it to him.

Key dates in the life of Saint Barnabas

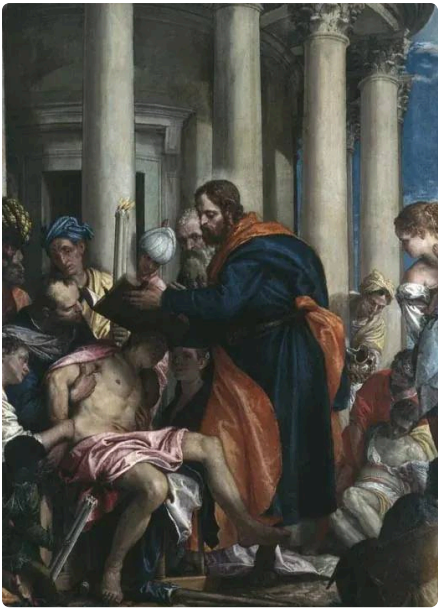
- **AD 30s**: A member of the first community in Jerusalem; he sells his field for the good of all.
- **Around 36-37**: He introduces to the apostles Saul of Tarsus, recently converted, whom many still distrust.

- **Around 40-45**: Sent by the Church of Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria, he goes to fetch Saul from Tarsus; in Antioch, the disciples are called "Christians" for the first time.
- **Around 45-49**: First missionary journey with Paul and John Mark: Cyprus, then Asia Minor (Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe).
- **Around 49**: With Paul, he defends in Jerusalem the welcome of Gentiles into the Church without requiring circumcision.
- **Around 50**: He parts ways with Paul and sails back to Cyprus with Mark.
- **488**: According to Cypriot tradition, his tomb is discovered near Salamis.

The man who opened the door to Paul

When Saul, the former persecutor, arrived in Jerusalem after his conversion on the road to Damascus, the disciples were afraid of him. Barnabas was the one who took him in, brought him to the apostles and told them how the Lord had appeared to him (Acts 9:27). This act of trust, at a time when no one yet believed in Saul's sincerity, ranks among the most decisive in Christian history.

A few years later, the Church of Jerusalem learned that the Gospel had been proclaimed to the Greeks of Antioch, a great city of Syria. It sent Barnabas there. Acts reports that when he saw the work of God's grace, he rejoiced and encouraged everyone to remain faithful to the Lord. He then went to look for Saul in Tarsus, and the two taught together in Antioch for a whole year. It was there, the text specifies, that the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). During a famine, they took together to Jerusalem the aid collected by the community.



Saint Barnabas Healing the Sick, by Paolo Veronese (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen).

The first missionary journey

During a liturgy in Antioch, the Holy Spirit asked that Barnabas and Saul be set apart for a mission. The community prayed, fasted, laid hands on them and sent them off. They began with Cyprus, the homeland of Barnabas, traveling from Salamis to Paphos, where the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus embraced the faith. From that moment on, Acts calls Saul by his Roman name, Paul, and he gradually takes the lead.

The two missionaries then crossed to Asia Minor, in present-day Turkey. At Lystra, after the healing of a lame man, the crowd took them for gods: Barnabas for Zeus, Paul for Hermes. They tore their garments to stop the sacrifice the people wanted to offer them (Acts 14:8-18). The journey was a mix of success and persecution; everywhere, they founded communities and appointed elders.



The Sacrifice at Lystra, tapestry cartoon by Raphael (1515-1516), Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The Council of Jerusalem and the parting from Paul

Back in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas faced a question that divided the young Church: should Gentile converts be required to be circumcised and to keep the whole Law of Moses? They went up to Jerusalem, told what God had done among the nations, and obtained from the apostles and elders that the Gentiles be welcomed without this burden (Acts 15). That decision opened the Church to the whole world.

Soon afterward, the two companions parted. Barnabas wanted to take along again his cousin John Mark, who had left them partway through the first journey; Paul refused. The disagreement was sharp enough that each went his own way: Paul with Silas, Barnabas with Mark to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-40). Events proved Barnabas's patience right: Mark later became a valued co-worker of Paul himself, and tradition attributes to him the second Gospel.



Paul and Barnabas at Paphos before the proconsul Sergius Paulus, cartoon by Raphael.

The death of Barnabas according to tradition

After Cyprus, Acts says nothing more about him. Paul still mentions him as a worker for the Gospel who earned his own living (1 Corinthians 9:6). According to tradition, Barnabas died a martyr at Salamis, stoned to death. The Church of Cyprus tells that in 488, under Emperor Zeno, his tomb was found near the city, with a copy of the Gospel of Matthew laid on his chest. This discovery is said to have helped the Church of Cyprus have its independence recognized, since it could claim to have been founded by an apostle.

Why is Saint Barnabas the patron saint of Cyprus?

Barnabas was born into a Jewish family of Cyprus, began his first mission on the island, returned there with Mark and, according to tradition, died and was buried at Salamis. The Church of Cyprus honors him as its founder. Beyond the island, he is a model for all who accompany others: educators, leaders, mentors. He believed in Paul when everyone distrusted him, and in Mark when Paul no longer wanted him. He also knew how to step aside, leaving first place to his companion. His generosity and his joy at the good done by others make him the saint of trust and of second chances.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Barnabas, or follow the novena to Saint Barnabas, from June 2 to 10, ending on the eve of his feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Barnabas in art

Barnabas is usually shown as a bearded man in the robes of an apostle. He often holds a book of the Gospels, sometimes open, a reminder of the Gospel of Matthew said to have been found on his chest in his tomb. In Renaissance art, he appears alongside Paul in scenes from Acts, such as Raphael's tapestry cartoons, or laying the Gospel on the sick, as in Veronese's painting.

Where to pray to Saint Barnabas

- **Salamis** (Cyprus): the Monastery of Saint Barnabas and the chapel of his tomb, near the ruins of the ancient city.
- **Antioch** (today Antakya, Turkey): the city where he taught with Paul and where the name "Christians" was born.
- **Milan** (Italy): an ancient Milanese tradition venerates him as the first to preach the Gospel in the city, though history does not confirm it.
- **Parishes and churches** named after him, especially in Italy, England and Cyprus, as well as throughout the English-speaking world.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Barnabas, Son of Encouragement

There is no prayer written by Saint Barnabas himself: no authentic text from his hand has come down to us. This page offers the portrait of him given in the Acts of the Apostles, which can nourish prayer, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia to Saint Barnabas, the "son of encouragement," for the grace to welcome and encourage others.

The portrait of Barnabas in the Acts of the Apostles

In Antioch, Barnabas discovered a new community made up of Jews and Greeks. Saint Luke describes his reaction in a few lines, which can be read slowly as a meditation:

> *"When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast hearts. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large number of people were added to the Lord."*

Source: Acts of the Apostles, chapter 11, verses 23-24. Translation from the Greek by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.



Paul and Barnabas at Paphos, before the proconsul Sergius Paulus, by Raphael.

Prayer to Saint Barnabas, son of encouragement

Saint Barnabas, son of encouragement, you were able to see the grace of God at work in others and to rejoice in it: teach me to recognize the good around me, without jealousy or fear.

You held out your hand to Paul when everyone distrusted him, and you did not give up on Mark after his failure: give me a heart that welcomes and believes in second chances. May I know how to encourage those who doubt themselves and to walk with those who are starting over.

You gave everything for the community and left first place to your companion: keep me from pride and from the desire to be seen. Make me generous with my time, my goods and my words.

I entrust to you the Church of Cyprus and all divided communities, those who proclaim the Gospel far from home, and my intention: (name it in silence). Obtain for me the grace to be, like you, a good person, full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Barnabas is celebrated on June 11. You can pray to him at any time for a loved one going through a failure, for a reconciliation, before taking on a role as a mentor, teacher, sponsor or catechist, or when you need courage to give someone a second chance. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Barnabas, and discover the life of Saint Barnabas.

NOVENA

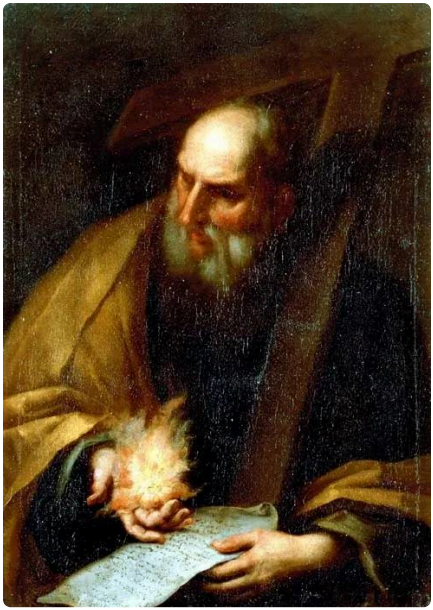
Novena to Saint Barnabas

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the journey of Saint Barnabas as told in the Acts of the Apostles. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on June 2; it ends on June 10, the day before his feast on June 11. It can also be prayed at any time of year, for a reconciliation, for someone who has lost confidence or for a mission entrusted to you.

Barnabas is not the most famous of the apostles, and he wrote nothing that has come down to us. Yet without him, Paul might never have been accepted by the Church of Jerusalem, and Mark might never have found his place. His holiness is that of a man who makes room for others. These nine days invite us to learn from him the art of encouraging.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if possible, the Bible passage indicated, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The suggested act helps you live the prayer during the day.



Saint Barnabas, in a church window or statue.

Day 1: Sharing everything

Barnabas sold his field and laid the money at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:36-37). His first act in the Gospel story is an act of sharing, without calculation. Before he ever preached, he gave.

Prayer: Lord, free my heart from attachment to what I own, and teach me to share with joy.

Today: Give something useful to a person or an organization that needs it.

Day 2: Believing in others

In Jerusalem, everyone was afraid of Saul. Barnabas took him in and introduced him to the apostles (Acts 9:26-27). He took the risk of trust, and that risk changed the history of the Church.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from hasty judgments. Give me the courage to trust the one whom others have pushed aside.

Today: Speak a kind word to someone who is left out.

Day 3: Rejoicing in the good

In Antioch, Barnabas saw the grace of God at work and rejoiced (Acts 11:23). He did not try to control everything: he recognized what God was doing without him.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, open my eyes to the good you accomplish in others, and help me to rejoice in it sincerely.

Today: Congratulate someone on a success, with no ulterior motive.

Day 4: Encouraging

His name means "son of encouragement." He urged everyone to remain faithful to the Lord. A word of encouragement can lift up a whole life.

Prayer: Lord, put on my lips words that lift up and strengthen, not words that discourage.

Today: Send a message of encouragement to someone going through a trial.

Day 5: Going to find the other

Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and brought him back to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). He knew he could not do everything alone and that someone else had gifts he did not have.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to recognize the talents of others and to work with them for your Kingdom.

Today: Invite someone to join you in a worthwhile project.

Day 6: Letting yourself be sent

In Antioch, after fasting and prayer, the community laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them on mission (Acts 13:1-3). Mission begins in the prayer of the Church. No one is sent alone: a whole community stands behind those who go.

Prayer: Lord, make me available for whatever you wish to entrust to me, and may I never set out without praying.

Today: Pray for missionaries and for all who proclaim the Gospel today.

Day 7: Refusing honors

At Lystra, the crowd wanted to offer a sacrifice to Barnabas and Paul, whom they took for gods. They tore their garments: "We too are men like you" (Acts 14:14-15). Glory belongs to God alone.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from seeking admiration. May the good I do give glory to you.

Today: Do someone a quiet favor without letting anyone know.

Day 8: Opening the doors

In Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul obtained that the Gentiles be welcomed into the Church without excessive conditions (Acts 15). The Gospel is not reserved for a few. Barnabas fought so that no unnecessary burden would keep anyone from Christ.

Prayer: Lord, make our communities open houses, where everyone can find a place.

Today: Welcome a newcomer to your parish or your group.

Day 9: Giving a second chance

Barnabas refused to give up on Mark, who had abandoned the mission. He even accepted parting from Paul for his sake (Acts 15:37-39). His patience bore fruit: Mark became a pillar of the Church. Sometimes the most fruitful thing we can do is to refuse to write someone off.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Barnabas, give me a patient heart that forgives and hopes for others. Amen.

Today: Reach out to someone with whom your relationship has broken down.

Closing prayer

Saint Barnabas, good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for me, for those who have lost confidence in themselves and for those who accompany them. Obtain for me the joy of the Gospel and a love of encouraging others. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Barnabas and the prayer to Saint Barnabas.

PILGRIMAGE

Monastery of Saint Barnabas and the Apostle's Tomb near Salamis

The Monastery of Saint Barnabas stands a few miles from Famagusta, in eastern Cyprus, not far from the ruins of ancient Salamis. Cypriot tradition places here the tomb of the Apostle Barnabas, a native of the island. It is the main place of remembrance for Saint Barnabas and one of the founding sites of the Church of Cyprus.

The discovery of the tomb according to tradition

According to tradition, Barnabas died a martyr in Salamis, where he had begun his first mission with Paul. His body is said to have been buried in secret near the city. The Church of Cyprus recounts that in 488, under the Byzantine emperor Zeno, Archbishop Anthemios was led in a dream to the tomb, where the body of the apostle was found with a copy of the Gospel of Matthew. This discovery was invoked to confirm the independence of the Church of Cyprus, founded by an apostle. A church was then built on the site.



The Monastery of Saint Barnabas, near Salamis.

The monastery and the tomb chapel

The present monastery, with its domed church, was rebuilt in the 18th century on older foundations. Monks lived there until the 20th century. Today the building houses an icon and archaeology museum. A few dozen yards away, a small chapel stands over a tomb cut into the rock, which tradition identifies as the apostle's tomb; visitors go down a few steps to reach it.

Praying at the tomb of Saint Barnabas

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Barnabas, or chapters 11 to 15 of the Acts of the Apostles. On site, a moment of silence in the tomb chapel is a chance to entrust an intention, for example for someone who needs encouragement, or for Christian unity and peace in Cyprus. The prayer to Saint Barnabas can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The chapel of the tomb of Saint Barnabas, near Salamis, interior.

Other places of Saint Barnabas

- **Salamis**: the ruins of the ancient city, very close by, where Barnabas and Paul proclaimed the Gospel in the synagogues (Acts 13:5).
- **Paphos** (Cyprus): the city where the proconsul Sergius Paulus embraced the faith; "Saint Paul's Pillar" is also shown here.
- **Antioch** (Antakya, Turkey): the city where Barnabas and Paul taught together.
- **Jerusalem**: the site of the first community and of the council in which he took part.

Practical information

The monastery is in the northern part of Cyprus, administered separately from the Republic of Cyprus since 1974. Visitors usually come from Famagusta or by crossing the demarcation line at one of the official crossing points, with identification. The site functions mainly as a museum; religious celebrations take place there only on certain occasions. Find out about crossing conditions and opening hours before you leave.

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