

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Bartholomew the Apostle

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 24

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IN BRIEF

Saint Bartholomew the Apostle

One of the twelve apostles of Jesus, often identified with Nathanael, a martyr according to tradition.

Feast day	August 24
Born	1st century, Cana in Galilee, if he is Nathanael
Died	1st century, Armenia, according to tradition
Canonized	pre-congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	tanners, butchers, bookbinders, leatherworkers, Armenia

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Bartholomew, the Man Without Guile

Novena to Saint Bartholomew

Basilica of Saint Bartholomew on the Island, in Rome

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Bartholomew the Apostle

Saint Bartholomew is one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus. The Gospels say almost nothing about him, but an ancient tradition identifies him with Nathanael, the disciple from Cana whom Jesus greeted as "a true Israelite, in whom there is no guile." According to tradition, he preached the Gospel as far as India and Armenia, where he died a martyr, flayed alive. The Latin Church celebrates his feast on August 24.

Who was Saint Bartholomew?

The name Bartholomew appears in all four lists of the Twelve, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles. It is an Aramaic family name, *Bar-Talmai*, meaning "son of Talmai." In the first three Gospels, he is always named right after Philip.

The Gospel of John, for its part, never mentions Bartholomew, but tells the story of the call of Nathanael, who was brought to Jesus precisely by Philip. Since the Middle Ages, many writers have concluded that they are the same person, Nathanael being his given name and Bartholomew the name of his father. This identification is not certain, but it is widely accepted in the liturgy and in preaching.

Key dates

- **Early 1st century**: Born in Galilee, perhaps at Cana if he is identified with Nathanael.
- **c. 28-30**: Called by Jesus near the Jordan, after the witness of Philip.
- **c. 30**: One of the Twelve, a witness to the death and Resurrection of Christ.
- **After Pentecost**: According to tradition, mission to the East, as far as India and then Armenia.

- **Date unknown**: Martyrdom in Armenia, according to tradition.
- **838**: His relics are moved from Lipari to Benevento.
- **c. 983**: Emperor Otto III has relics attributed to the apostle brought to Rome, to the Tiber Island.
- **August 24, 1572**: The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris tragically links his name to the French Wars of Religion.

Nathanael under the fig tree

The first chapter of the Gospel of John tells a vivid scene. Philip, who has just met Jesus, runs to find his friend Nathanael: "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the Law, and also the prophets: Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth." Nathanael answers with skepticism: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip does not argue; he simply says: "Come and see."

When Jesus sees him coming, he says of him: "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no guile." Surprised, Nathanael asks how he knows him. Jesus answers that he saw him under the fig tree, even before Philip called him. Deeply moved, Nathanael makes one of the first professions of faith in the Gospel: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel." Jesus promises him that he will see "heaven opened."

At the end of the Gospel, Nathanael is named again among the disciples to whom the risen Lord appears by the Sea of Tiberias.



Saint Bartholomew in Michelangelo's Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel (1536-1541).

A mission to the far East

After Pentecost, the New Testament says nothing more about Bartholomew, and ancient traditions take over. In the 4th century, the historian Eusebius of Caesarea reports that the Christian philosopher Pantaenus, who traveled to India at the end of the 2nd century, found Christians there who had the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, left with them by the apostle Bartholomew. Other accounts have him preaching in Mesopotamia, Persia and above all Armenia.

The Armenian Apostolic Church venerates him, together with Saint Thaddeus, as one of its two founding apostles. The "Acts" and "Passions" devoted to Bartholomew, written several centuries after his death, belong more

to legend than to history: they tell of royal conversions, battles against idols and miracles. Above all, they bear witness to the veneration that surrounded him throughout the Christian East.

The martyrdom of the apostle

According to the most widespread tradition, Bartholomew died in Armenia, at Albanopolis, on the orders of a king angered by the conversion of his brother. He is said to have been flayed alive and then beheaded; other accounts speak of a crucifixion.

That is why art most often shows him with a large knife, sometimes carrying his own skin over his arm. Michelangelo painted him this way in the *Last Judgment* of the Sistine Chapel, and a striking statue of the flayed apostle by Marco d'Agrate stands in Milan Cathedral.



Saint Bartholomew Flayed, statue by Marco d'Agrate in Milan Cathedral (1562).

The journey of the relics

Tradition says that the apostle's body was carried far from Armenia and reached the island of Lipari, north of Sicily, in the 6th century; its cathedral is dedicated to him. In 838, under the threat of Saracen raids, his relics were moved to Benevento. Around 983, Emperor Otto III had part of them brought to Rome, to the church he founded on the Tiber Island, today the Basilica of San Bartolomeo all'Isola.

Benevento and Rome both claim the main relics. A fragment of the skull is venerated in Frankfurt Cathedral, which bears his name.

Why is Saint Bartholomew the patron saint of tanners and butchers?

Because of the manner of his martyrdom, flayed alive, Bartholomew became the patron saint of tanners, butchers, bookbinders and all who work with leather and hides.

But his deepest legacy is spiritual. Saint Bartholomew is the apostle of honesty. Jesus praised in him the absence of guile: a man who says what he thinks, who doubts openly, yet agrees to go and see. His faith was born of an encounter, not of an argument. He is prayed to for a simple and sincere heart, for those who hesitate to believe, and for all craftsmen who work with leather.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Bartholomew, which includes the Gospel account of his call, or follow the novena to Saint Bartholomew, from August 15 to 23, ending on the eve of his feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Bartholomew in art

- **The knife**: his most common attribute, the instrument of his martyrdom.
- **His own skin**: draped over his arm or shoulders, as in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and Marco d'Agrate's statue in Milan.

- **The book**: like the other apostles, he often holds the Gospel he preached.
- **The fig tree**: in scenes of the call of Nathanael, he is shown sitting beneath it.

Where to pray to Saint Bartholomew

- **Rome**: the Basilica of San Bartolomeo all'Isola, on the Tiber Island, which keeps his relics.
- **Benevento** (Italy): the Basilica of San Bartolomeo, which also claims his body.
- **Lipari** (Aeolian Islands): the Cathedral of Saint Bartholomew, the first stop of his relics in the West according to tradition.
- **Frankfurt am Main** (Germany): the Cathedral of Saint Bartholomew, where a fragment of his skull is venerated.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Bartholomew, the Man Without Guile

No prayer composed by Saint Bartholomew has come down to us. The most beautiful text to pray with him is the Gospel passage that tells of his call, if he is indeed Nathanael, as an ancient tradition holds. Below you will find that passage, followed by an original prayer to Saint Bartholomew.

The call of Nathanael (John 1:45-51)

Translation by Saintspedia from the Greek text of the Gospel of John.

> *Philip found Nathanael and said to him: "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the Law, and also the prophets: Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth."*
>
> *Nathanael said to him: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him: "Come and see."*
>
> *Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him: "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no guile." Nathanael said to him: "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him: "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."*
>
> *Nathanael answered him: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel!"*
>
> *Jesus answered him: "Because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree, you believe! You will see greater things than these." And he said to him: "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

Source: Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 45-51. This is the Gospel proclaimed at Mass on the feast of Saint Bartholomew, August 24.

A word to meditate on

> *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel!"*

Source: John 1:49. Nathanael's profession of faith can be repeated slowly throughout the day, like a prayer of the heart.

Prayer to Saint Bartholomew, the man without guile

> *Saint Bartholomew, apostle of Christ, you whom Jesus saw under the fig tree even before you came to him, remind me that I am known and loved by God before I know him.*
>
> *You who doubted openly, and then believed with all your heart, help me to bring my questions before the Lord and to accept his invitation: come and see.*
>
> *Obtain for me a heart without guile, honest speech and a simple faith. Keep me from duplicity and falsehood, and make me faithful to the end, as you were faithful unto martyrdom.*
>
> *I entrust to you those who seek God without daring to take the step, the Christians of Armenia and of the East, and all who work with their hands. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).*
>
> *Pray that one day I may see heaven opened, with you and all the apostles. Amen.*

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Bartholomew is celebrated on August 24 in the Latin Church; the Eastern Churches keep his memory on other dates, notably June 11 together with Saint Barnabas. You can pray to him when you struggle with doubt, when you want to grow in honesty, or for the persecuted Christians of the East.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Bartholomew, and read the life of Saint Bartholomew.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Bartholomew

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the Gospel of John and by the tradition about the apostle Bartholomew. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on August 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption; it ends on August 23, the day before his feast on August 24. You can also pray it at any other time of year, especially in a season of doubt or searching.

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 small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into the rest of the day. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

Day 1: Under the fig tree

Jesus says to Nathanael: "When you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Even before we seek him, God looks on us with kindness. Nathanael thought he was alone, hidden in the shade; he was already known. The fig tree was a traditional place to sit and study the Scriptures; perhaps he was already searching for the Messiah when Jesus found him.

Prayer: Lord, you know me and you saw me first. Teach me to live under your gaze, without fear.

Today: Spend five minutes in silence, knowing that God is looking at you with love.

Day 2: The friend who calls

It is Philip who runs to tell Nathanael the news. Faith is often passed on from friend to friend, through a simple sentence spoken with joy rather than a long argument.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for those who spoke to me about you. Let me be a Philip for someone in my turn.

Today: Share with someone close to you a Gospel passage that has touched you.

Day 3: Daring to doubt

"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael does not hide his skepticism. God is not afraid of our honest questions; he prefers them to a faith that pretends. Nathanael's doubt did not stop him from walking toward Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I bring you my doubts and my resistance. Turn them into a path toward you.

Today: Write down a question of faith you are carrying, and entrust it to God.

Day 4: Come and see

Philip does not start a debate: he invites Nathanael to experience for himself. We discover Christ only by going to meet him, step by step.

Prayer: Jesus, give me the courage to come and see, to take one step toward you, even without having all the answers.

Today: Spend some time before the Blessed Sacrament or in a quiet church, simply looking and listening.

Day 5: A heart without guile

Jesus praises Nathanael's honesty. Sincerity is a soil where grace can grow. A person without guile has nothing to hide, and so has room for the truth. In a world of appearances and spin, the plain word of a sincere person is a quiet witness to the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, purify my heart of all duplicity. Let my yes be yes, and my no be no.

Today: Avoid every small lie and every exaggeration today.

Day 6: Professing the faith

"Rabbi, you are the Son of God!" The encounter turns into a confession of faith. Bartholomew recognizes in Jesus far more than a teacher. A few minutes earlier he was mocking Nazareth; now he kneels before the Son of God. Grace can work quickly in an honest heart.

Prayer: Jesus, Son of God, I believe in you. Increase my faith and make it more alive.

Today: Pray the Creed slowly.



Praying with Saint Bartholomew the Apostle.

Day 7: Going far away

According to tradition, Bartholomew carried the Gospel as far as India and Armenia. The man who once doubted became a missionary. The Armenian Church still honors him as one of its founding apostles.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you missionaries and the Christians of the East. Keep them in faith and in peace.

Today: Pray for the Church in Armenia, or support an organization that serves the Christians of the Middle East.

Day 8: Faithful to the end

Tradition says that Bartholomew was flayed alive for his faith. He gave what was most intimate to him, his very life. The one who had no guile kept nothing back.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the Christians who are persecuted today. Give them strength, and grant me faithfulness in my small trials.

Today: Pray by name for a country where Christians are suffering, and learn something about their situation.

Day 9: Heaven opened

Jesus promises Nathanael: "You will see heaven opened." Faith opens onto a hope greater than anything we can imagine. What began under a fig tree ends in the glory of God. Jesus himself is the ladder between heaven and earth, the place where God and humanity meet.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Bartholomew, open my eyes to the wonders you are preparing. Amen.

Today: Read John 1:45-51 again and give thanks for your own call.

Closing prayer

Saint Bartholomew, apostle with an honest heart, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. You who believed after doubting, and who bore witness unto martyrdom, obtain for me a sincere faith and a quiet courage. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Saint Bartholomew on the Island, in Rome

The Basilica of Saint Bartholomew on the Island (San Bartolomeo all'Isola) stands on Tiber Island, in the middle of the Tiber, in Rome. Founded at the end of the 10th century, it preserves relics of the Apostle Bartholomew. Since the Jubilee of 2000, it has also been the memorial of Christians who died for their faith in the 20th and 21st centuries.

A church founded by an emperor

The church was founded toward the end of the 10th century by Emperor Otto III, who had relics of Saint Adalbert of Prague, his recently martyred friend, placed there, and then, according to tradition, relics of the Apostle Bartholomew brought from Benevento. The name of Bartholomew gradually took hold. The building has been rebuilt and altered several times, notably after floods of the Tiber; it keeps a Romanesque bell tower and a 17th-century Baroque facade.



Basilica of Saint Bartholomew on the Island, in Rome.

The relics of the Apostle

The relics of Saint Bartholomew rest beneath the high altar, in an ancient porphyry basin. Benevento, where they had been moved in 838, claims for its part to hold the body of the Apostle; the two traditions have coexisted since the Middle Ages. In front of the choir, an ancient well with a carved wellhead recalls the religious history of the island, which was consecrated in antiquity to the healing god Aesculapius and has been devoted to caring for the sick for centuries: the neighboring Fatebenefratelli hospital continues that mission.

The memorial of the new martyrs

During the Great Jubilee of 2000, Saint John Paul II wished the memory of the witnesses to the faith of the 20th century to be preserved. The basilica, entrusted to the Community of Sant'Egidio, became the place of that

remembrance: its side chapels gather objects and mementos of Christians killed under totalitarian regimes, in wars, or on mission, from every Christian confession. A large icon of the new martyrs dominates the altar. Pope Francis presided over a prayer service there in 2017.

Praying at Saint Bartholomew on the Island

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Bartholomew and the account of his calling in the Gospel of John (1:45-51). On site, a time of prayer before the altar of the relics, followed by a stop in the martyrs' chapels, lets you entrust an intention and pray for persecuted Christians. The prayer to Saint Bartholomew can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia for a personal visit.

Other places of Saint Bartholomew

- **Benevento** (Campania): the Basilica of San Bartolomeo, which has claimed the body of the Apostle since 838.
- **Lipari** (Aeolian Islands): the Cathedral of Saint Bartholomew; the Apostle is the patron of the island.
- **Frankfurt am Main**: the Imperial Cathedral of Saint Bartholomew, where a fragment of his skull is venerated.
- **Milan**: the cathedral, with the famous statue of the flayed Apostle by Marco d'Agrate.
- **Rome**: the Sistine Chapel, where Michelangelo depicted him in the *Last Judgment*.

Practical information

Tiber Island can be reached on foot from the Trastevere neighborhood or from the Ghetto, by the Fabricius Bridge or the Cestius Bridge. The basilica is open to visitors outside of services. The Community of Sant'Egidio leads prayers

there, notably for the martyrs. Check the opening hours before you come, especially around August 24.

CREDITS

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