

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Blaise

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Blaise

Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia and martyr, invoked against diseases of the throat.

Feast day	February 3
Born	Late 3rd century, Historic Armenia (according to tradition)
Died	c. 316, Sebaste (present-day Sivas, Turkey)
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	throat ailments, wool combers, veterinarians, animals, Dubrovnik

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Blaise

Saint Blaise was a bishop of Sebaste, in historic Armenia, who died a martyr in the early 4th century. The stories of his life, written long after his death, are woven with legend: according to tradition, he had been a physician, lived as a hermit among wild animals and saved a boy who was choking on a fishbone. That is why Catholics invoke him against diseases of the throat, and why on February 3, his feast day, many parishes offer the Blessing of Throats with two crossed candles.

Who was Saint Blaise?

Blaise (Blasius in Latin, Vlaho in Croatian, Biagio in Italian) was Bishop of Sebaste, a city in eastern Anatolia that corresponds to present-day Sivas, in Turkey. He died a martyr around 316, under Emperor Licinius, according to the date given by tradition. Very little is known about him for certain: his existence and martyrdom are accepted, but the "Acts" that tell his life were written several centuries later and are largely pious legend.

That did not stop his veneration from spreading widely, in both East and West. In the Middle Ages he became one of the most popular saints in Europe and was counted among the Fourteen Holy Helpers, the saints invoked in the needs of everyday life, especially in times of sickness.

Key dates

- **Late 3rd century**: Probable birth, at an unknown date.
- **Early 4th century**: Bishop of Sebaste, in historic Armenia.
- **c. 316**: Martyrdom at Sebaste under Emperor Licinius, according to tradition.

- **6th century**: The Byzantine physician Aetius of Amida already mentions invoking him for bones stuck in the throat.
- **Middle Ages**: His cult spreads across Europe; he is counted among the Fourteen Holy Helpers.
- **2009**: The Festivity of Saint Blaise in Dubrovnik is inscribed on UNESCO's list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

The life of Saint Blaise according to tradition

A physician who became a bishop

According to tradition, Blaise first practiced medicine in Sebaste. He was then chosen as bishop of the city. When persecution broke out, he withdrew to a cave in the mountains, from where he continued to guide his flock. The story says that wild animals came to him, and that he cared for those that were wounded or sick. Hunters sent to capture animals for the arena found him surrounded by beasts and reported him to the governor.

The boy and the fishbone

On the way to prison, the legend continues, a mother threw herself at his feet: her only son was choking on a fishbone stuck in his throat. Blaise laid his hands on the child and prayed, and the boy was saved. This story is the origin of the devotion to Saint Blaise for ailments of the throat.

The poor woman, the wolf and the candles

Another episode tells that a wolf had carried off a pig, the only possession of a poor woman. At Blaise's prayer, the wolf gave the animal back. In gratitude, the woman later brought him food in prison, and candles to light his dark cell. The candles of the Saint Blaise blessing recall her gesture.

The martyrdom

Refusing to deny his faith and offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, Blaise was tortured. According to tradition, his flesh was torn with iron combs like those used to card wool. He was finally beheaded. That is why he became the patron of wool combers and wool workers.

The Blessing of Throats

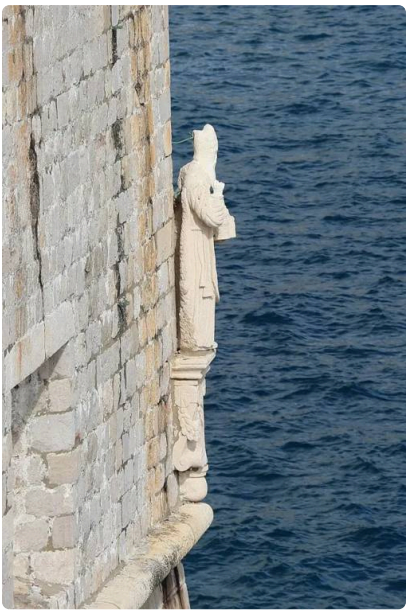
Every February 3, many Catholic parishes, in the United States, the Philippines, Ireland and elsewhere, offer the Blessing of Saint Blaise. The priest or deacon holds two crossed candles, often blessed the day before on Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, against the throat of each person and says: "Through the intercession of Saint Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This blessing is not a magic gesture: it is a prayer of the Church for health of body and soul, entrusted to the intercession of a saint.

Why is Saint Blaise the patron saint of throat ailments?

Because of the boy saved from choking, Saint Blaise has been invoked for centuries against diseases of the throat: sore throats, coughs, difficulty swallowing. Ear, nose and throat doctors often regard him as their protector. The iron combs of his martyrdom made him the patron of wool combers, weavers and wool merchants. In England, wool towns once held festive processions in honor of "Bishop Blaize." His bond with animals made him a patron of veterinarians and of animals. He is also the patron saint of the city of Dubrovnik, in Croatia.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Blaise in art

Saint Blaise is shown as a bishop, with miter and crosier. His symbols are two crossed candles and an iron wool comb, sometimes a child whose throat he is healing, or a wolf or a pig recalling the legend of the poor woman. In Dubrovnik he often holds in his hand a model of the city he protects.



Saint Blaise, protector of Dubrovnik, holding a model of the city.

Where to pray to Saint Blaise

The great shrine of Saint Blaise is the Church of Saint Blaise in Dubrovnik, Croatia, in the heart of the old town, of which he has been patron since the Middle Ages. The cathedral treasury of Dubrovnik keeps reliquaries venerated as those of his head, throat and hands, carried in procession every February 3. In Germany, the abbey of Sankt Blasien in the Black Forest bears his name. Wherever you live, your own parish church on February 3 is the simplest place to receive his blessing.

How to pray to Saint Blaise

Catholics pray to Saint Blaise for healing of the throat and of respiratory illnesses, for sick children and for good health. You can pray the prayer to Saint Blaise or follow the novena to Saint Blaise, from January 25 to February 2, so that it ends on the eve of his feast.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Blaise for the Throat and Good Health

The best-known prayer connected with Saint Blaise is the formula of the Blessing of Throats, given every February 3 with two crossed candles. Below you will find an original prayer to Saint Blaise, inspired by the traditional stories of his life, followed by the words of the blessing.

Prayer to Saint Blaise for the throat and for good health

Saint Blaise, bishop and martyr, you who cared for bodies and souls, you who saved the child who could no longer breathe, hear my prayer.

I entrust to you my health and the health of those I love, especially (name the person). Protect us from diseases of the throat and from every illness, and obtain healing for us if it is the will of God.

You who kept the faith even to martyrdom, help me never to be ashamed of the Gospel, and to use my voice to speak the truth, to comfort others and to praise the Lord.

You who were kind to animals and to the poor, make my heart attentive to every creature and to all who lack what they need.

Saint Blaise, pray for us. Amen.

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

The Blessing of Saint Blaise

On February 3, the priest or deacon holds two crossed candles against the throat of each person and says:

> *"Through the intercession of Saint Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." R. Amen.*

Source: the Catholic Book of Blessings, Order for the Blessing of Throats on the Feast of Saint Blaise. The blessing may be given during Mass, after the homily, or outside Mass.

When to pray this prayer

Pray to Saint Blaise above all on February 3, his feast day and the day of the Blessing of Throats, in the middle of winter when colds and sore throats are common. You can also pray to him for a sick child, before throat surgery, or for anyone who has difficulty breathing or swallowing. Singers, teachers, preachers and all whose voice is their working tool can entrust their voice to him. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Blaise and read the life of Saint Blaise.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Blaise

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the traditional stories of the life of Saint Blaise. It is not an official liturgical text, and several of the episodes it recalls belong more to legend than to history. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on January 25; it ends on February 2, Candlemas, the day before the feast of Saint Blaise on February 3. You can also pray it at any time of the year for someone with an illness of the throat or lungs.

Why pray a novena to Saint Blaise?

Saint Blaise is remembered above all as the bishop who prayed for a child who could not breathe. For centuries, parents, the sick and those who care for them have turned to him in winter illnesses, coughs, sore throats and every difficulty of breathing or swallowing. This novena prepares you to receive the Blessing of Throats on February 3, but it is also a way of entrusting to God your health and the health of those you love. Its nine days follow the traditional story of his life: physician, bishop, hermit, friend of animals, prisoner and martyr. Each step offers a simple lesson for daily Christian life.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. A novena is not a formula that obliges God to answer; it is nine days of trust, in the company of a bishop who cared for body and soul alike.

Day 1: Caring for the body

According to tradition, Blaise was a physician before he became a bishop. Care for the body and care for the soul are not opposed: Jesus himself healed the sick, and the Church has always cared for them.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who care for the sick, and help me to look after my body as a gift from you. I place my intention in your hands for these nine days.

Today: Thank a doctor, nurse or caregiver, or pray for one by name.

Day 2: A shepherd for his people

Chosen as Bishop of Sebaste, Blaise becomes the shepherd of his city. He does not seek this charge, but he accepts it in order to serve.

Prayer: Lord, watch over our bishops and priests, and keep them close to those entrusted to their care.

Today: Pray for your bishop and for the pastor of your parish.

Day 3: The cave in the mountains

During the persecution, Blaise withdraws to a cave. This time apart becomes a time of prayer. There are moments when we need to step aside in order to serve better afterward.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be quiet so that I can listen to you.

Today: Take ten minutes of silence and prayer, away from noise and screens.

Day 4: Friend of the animals

The legend tells that wild animals came to Blaise to be cared for. Kindness toward creatures reflects the goodness of the Creator, who saw that everything he had made was good.

Prayer: Lord, make me respectful of all your creation.

Today: Take care of an animal, a garden or a corner of nature.

Day 5: The boy who was saved

A mother runs to Blaise with her son, who is choking, and Blaise prays for him. No distress is too small to bring before God, and no prayer of a parent is ever wasted.

Prayer: Saint Blaise, I entrust to you sick children, and all who suffer from illnesses of the throat or lungs.

Today: Pray for a sick child or for parents who are worried about their child.

Day 6: The generosity of a poor woman

The woman whose pig the wolf had returned brings Blaise food and candles in prison. Small gestures of gratitude can light up the darkest nights.

Prayer: Lord, teach me gratitude, and show me who is waiting for my visit.

Today: Visit or call someone who is alone, sick or elderly.

Day 7: Light in the prison cell

The candles in the prison became the candles of the blessing. Christ, the light of the world, does not abandon those who suffer in darkness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be my light in the dark moments of my life.

Today: Light a candle and pray for those who are in prison.

Day 8: Faithful to the end

Blaise refuses to deny Christ, despite torture. His courage reminds us that faith can be costly, and that many Christians are still persecuted today.

Prayer: Lord, give strength to persecuted Christians, and make me faithful in my own small trials.

Today: Learn about Christians who are persecuted somewhere in the world and pray for them.

Day 9: A voice for praise

We pray to Saint Blaise for the health of the throat, and so also for the voice. Our voice is given to us to speak the truth, to comfort and to praise God.

Prayer: Saint Blaise, keep me in good health and make my voice an instrument of peace. Amen.

Today: Find out when your parish offers the Blessing of Throats on February 3 and plan to receive it.

Closing prayer

Saint Blaise, bishop and martyr, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you once more my intention and the health of those I love. Through your intercession, may God deliver us from every disease of the throat and from every other illness, and keep us faithful to Christ, the light of the world. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint Blaise in Dubrovnik

The Church of Saint Blaise in Dubrovnik (crkva svetog Vlaha), in Croatia, stands in the heart of the old town, on Luža Square at the end of the great street called the Stradun. It is dedicated to the city's patron saint, whom the locals call Sveti Vlaho. Since the Middle Ages, Saint Blaise has been the protector of the former Republic of Ragusa, and his feast on February 3 is the greatest festival in Dubrovnik.



The Church of Saint Blaise, on Luža Square in Dubrovnik.

The patron of the Republic of Ragusa

According to a Dubrovnik tradition, Saint Blaise appeared in the 10th century to a priest of the city to warn him of a Venetian attack being prepared, allowing the inhabitants to defend themselves. Whether historical or not, this tradition

made him the protector of the city. For centuries the Republic of Ragusa placed his image on its coins, seals, and flags, and his statue still watches over the city gates.

A Baroque church

The present church replaces an older sanctuary, damaged by the great earthquake of 1667 and then destroyed by a fire in the early 18th century. It was rebuilt in the Baroque style in the early 18th century, to plans by the Venetian architect Marino Gropelli. On the high altar stands a statue of Saint Blaise in gilded silver, holding in his hand a model of Dubrovnik as it was before the earthquake. According to tradition, it is one of the few works saved from the fire.

What to see in Dubrovnik

- **The Church of Saint Blaise** and its silver statue of the saint holding the city in his hand.
- **The cathedral treasury**, which preserves venerated reliquaries, such as those of the head, throat, and hands of Saint Blaise.
- **The statues of Saint Blaise** above the Pile and Ploče gates, at the entrance to the old town.
- **Orlando's Column**, in front of the church, from which the flag of Saint Blaise is raised during his feast.

The feast of Saint Blaise

The "Festa svetog Vlaha" begins on February 2, Candlemas, with the release of white doves in front of the church, and reaches its peak on February 3 with a solemn open-air Mass and a great procession. The saint's reliquaries are carried through the streets by bishops and priests, among local people in traditional

costumes who have come from the surrounding villages. In 2009, this festival was inscribed by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Tips for the pilgrimage

Dubrovnik is very crowded in summer. Coming for the feast of Saint Blaise in February lets you discover a quieter city and a living tradition, but you need to book your lodging well in advance. The church is open during the day outside of services; modest dress is requested.

Praying to Saint Blaise elsewhere

All over the world, many parishes offer the blessing of throats on February 3 with two crossed candles. In Germany, the abbey of Sankt Blasien, in the Black Forest, bears his name, and in France many churches are dedicated to him.

CREDITS

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