

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Blandina of Lyon

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: June 2

IN BRIEF

Saint Blandina of Lyon

Young Christian slave martyred in Lyon in 177, patron saint of the city.

Feast day	June 2
Died	177, Lyon (Lugdunum), Roman Gaul
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	2nd century
Patron saint of	Lyon, servant girls

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Blandina, Martyr of Lyon

Novena to Saint Blandina of Lyon

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Blandina of Lyon

Saint Blandina was a young Christian slave of Lyon, in Roman Gaul, martyred in 177 under the Emperor Marcus Aurelius together with the bishop Saint Pothinus and many companions. Small and of humble station, she showed under torture a strength that astonished her executioners and upheld the other martyrs. The account of her death, written by eyewitnesses, is one of the most moving texts of early Christianity. She is the patron saint of Lyon and is celebrated on June 2 with the Martyrs of Lyon.

Who was Saint Blandina?

Blandina lived in *Lugdunum*, today Lyon, the capital of the Gauls, in the second century. She was a slave, in the service of a Christian mistress who was also arrested. We know her through the *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyon* to the Christians of Asia and Phrygia, written by witnesses of the events and preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book V). This exceptional document tells, day by day, the story of the persecution of 177.

The letter describes her as small, weak and looked down upon, so much so that the Christians feared she would not be able to confess her faith to the end. Yet she was the last to die and the most admirable support of her companions.

Key dates in the life of Saint Blandina

- **Second century**: A Christian slave in Lyon.
- **177**: Under Marcus Aurelius, violent popular hostility breaks out against the Christians of Lyon and Vienne.
- **177**: Arrests and interrogations; Bishop Pothinus, more than ninety years old, dies in prison.

- **Summer 177**: Blandina is exposed to the wild beasts in the amphitheater, and none of them touches her.
- **Summer 177**: On the last day of the games, after new tortures, she is put to death.
- **Afterward**: The bodies of the martyrs are burned and their ashes thrown into the Rhône.

"I am a Christian"

In 177, the people of Lyon turned against the Christians. They were barred from the baths and the forum, insulted and beaten, then arrested and brought before the governor. Pagan slaves, threatened with torture, accused them of abominable crimes. The interrogations followed one after another.

Blandina was tortured from morning until evening, until her torturers, exhausted, admitted defeat and wondered that she was still breathing. The letter reports that she regained strength by confessing her faith, and kept repeating: "I am a Christian, and nothing wicked is done among us" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V, 1, 19, translated by Saintspedia).

In the arena

With other Christians, Blandina was led to the amphitheater. She was tied to a stake to be given to the beasts. Hanging there as if on a cross, she prayed aloud, and her companions, looking at her, believed they saw in her the Christ who was crucified for them. None of the beasts touched her, so she was untied and taken back to prison.

On the last day of the games, she was brought back with Ponticus, a boy of about fifteen. Blandina encouraged him like a mother, and he died confessing his faith. She herself was then scourged, given to the beasts, placed on a red-hot iron chair, and finally wrapped in a net and thrown to a bull, which tossed her into the air again and again. She seemed no longer to feel anything, wholly

turned toward Christ. At last she was killed with the sword. According to the letter, the pagans themselves admitted that they had never known a woman to suffer so much and with such courage.

The Martyrs of Lyon

Blandina did not die alone. With her suffered the bishop Saint Pothinus; the deacon Sanctus of Vienne, who answered every question only with "I am a Christian"; the newly baptized Maturus; Attalus of Pergamum; Alexander the physician; and many others. Tradition has kept the number of forty-eight martyrs. Their bodies were exposed for several days, then burned, and the ashes thrown into the Rhône, so that the Christians could not hope for the resurrection.

After the persecution, Saint Irenaeus, a priest of the Church of Lyon, became bishop of the city in place of Pothinus. The Church of Lyon, "the Church of the martyrs," has seen itself ever since as founded on their blood.

Why is Saint Blandina the patron saint of Lyon and of servants?

Blandina is the patron saint of Lyon because she died there, in the amphitheater on the slopes of what is now the Croix-Rousse hill, and because the Church of Lyon has always honored its martyrs of 177 as its foundation. Because she was a slave, she is also invoked as the patron of servant girls and domestic workers.

Saint Blandina is a sign that God chooses what is weak to confound what is strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). A slave whom society despised and whom her own brothers and sisters thought fragile became the mother and support of all, and an image of Christ crucified. Her simple, unshakable "I am a Christian" still resounds for persecuted Christians today. She can be invoked:

- for people who are despised, exploited or defenseless;
- for persecuted Christians throughout the world;
- for young people who must bear witness to their faith;
- for the city of Lyon.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Blandina and the novena to Saint Blandina.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Blandina in art

Saint Blandina is usually shown as a young woman tied to a stake, sometimes with her arms outstretched as on a cross, in the arena among wild beasts that do not harm her. A lion or a bull often appears at her feet, recalling the animals of her martyrdom. She may also hold a net or the palm of the martyrs.

Where to pray to Saint Blandina

- **Lyon, Amphitheater of the Three Gauls**: on the slopes of the Croix-Rousse, a stake recalls her martyrdom. Pope John Paul II prayed there in 1986.
- **Lyon, Church of Saint-Nizier**: tradition links its crypt to the memory of Saint Pothinus and the first martyrs.
- In any church on June 2, feast of the Martyrs of Lyon.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Blandina, Martyr of Lyon

Saint Blandina, a young slave martyred in Lyon in 177, is the patron saint of the city and a figure of courage for persecuted Christians. Here is an original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by the account of her martyrdom preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea.

Prayer to Saint Blandina

Saint Blandina, servant despised by men and chosen by God, you who found your strength in your weakness, teach me to rely on the Lord more than on myself.

You who kept repeating in the midst of torment, "I am a Christian," give me the courage never to deny my faith, in great trials as well as in the small cowardice of every day.

You in whom your brothers and sisters saw the image of Christ crucified, help me to unite my sufferings with those of Jesus.

You who upheld the young Ponticus like a mother, watch over young people who must bear witness to their faith, and over all who are weak and defenseless.

Patron of Lyon, pray for your city, for persecuted Christians throughout the world, and for those who persecute them. I also entrust to you this intention: (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Blandina is celebrated on June 2 with Saint Pothinus and the Martyrs of Lyon. You can pray to her:

- when you feel weak, overlooked or despised;
- for persecuted Christians, especially those who risk their lives for their faith;
- for people held in servitude, trafficked or exploited, and for domestic workers;
- for a young person who must stand up for his or her faith at school or at work;
- for the city of Lyon and its Church.

A short invocation

> *Saint Blandina, strong in weakness, help me to say with you: "I am a Christian." Amen.*

You can also pray the novena to Saint Blandina or read the life of Saint Blandina.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Blandina of Lyon

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyon*, the eyewitness account of the martyrdom of Saint Blandina and her companions in 177, preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on her feast day, June 2, begin on May 25. You can also pray it at any time of year: in a time of weakness or humiliation, for persecuted Christians, or for a person who is exploited and without defense.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

Day 1: A slave in Lyon

Blandina was a slave, owned by another person, with no rights and no voice in Roman society. Yet the Christian community of Lyon welcomed her as a sister, equal to all in the dignity of baptism.

Prayer: Lord, in your eyes no one is worthless. Through the intercession of Saint Blandina, open my eyes to the people around me whom the world ignores, and help me to treat each one as a brother or sister. Amen.

Today: Greet with real attention someone you usually pass by without seeing.

Day 2: Feared to be weak

The letter says that the Christians were afraid Blandina, so frail, would not be able to confess her faith. They judged by appearances. God saw otherwise.

Prayer: Lord, you know my weaknesses better than I do. Do not let me be discouraged by them. Show your strength in my weakness, as you did in Saint Blandina. Amen.

Today: Hand over to God, in a short prayer, one weakness that you find hard to accept.

Day 3: A city turns against them

In 177, the people of Lyon turned on the Christians: shut out of public places, insulted, beaten, falsely accused. Persecution often begins with contempt and rumors.

Prayer: Lord, protect Christians who are excluded, slandered or threatened because of their faith. Keep me from spreading rumors and judging people without knowing them. Amen.

Today: Refuse to repeat a piece of gossip, or speak up kindly for someone who is criticized in their absence.

Day 4: "I am a Christian"

Tortured from morning to evening, Blandina found strength each time she repeated: "I am a Christian, and nothing wicked is done among us." Her confession of faith was her refuge.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, let my faith be my strength. When I am afraid, put on my lips and in my heart the simple words of Blandina, and let me never be ashamed of your name. Amen.

Today: Make the Sign of the Cross openly before a meal, wherever you are.

Day 5: On the stake, like Christ

Tied to a stake in the amphitheater, Blandina prayed aloud. Her companions, looking at her, thought they saw Christ crucified for them. Her suffering, united with his, became a source of courage for others.

Prayer: Lord, I offer you my sufferings of body and soul. Unite them with your Passion, and let them become, through your grace, a support for others. Amen.

Today: Spend a few minutes before a crucifix, in silence.

Day 6: Like a mother to Ponticus

On the last day of the games, Blandina encouraged the young Ponticus, about fifteen years old, like a mother, and he remained faithful to the end. In the worst moment of her own life, she thought of someone else.

Prayer: Lord, bless young people who must bear witness to their faith among friends who mock them. Through Saint Blandina, give them adults who encourage and support them. Amen.

Today: Encourage a young person in your family or parish with a word, a message or your time.

Day 7: Wholly turned to Christ

Scourged, burned, tossed by a bull, Blandina seemed no longer to feel anything. The letter says she was wholly absorbed in her communion with Christ. Prayer had become her whole life.

Prayer: Lord, draw my heart to you, so that in trials I may keep my eyes fixed on you. Give me a prayer that does not depend on my feelings, but on your faithfulness. Amen.

Today: Pray slowly Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd."

Day 8: The Martyrs of Lyon

Blandina did not die alone: Pothinus, Sanctus, Maturus, Attalus, Alexander and many others died with her. Their bodies were burned and their ashes thrown into the Rhône, but the Church of Lyon was born again from their witness.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the communion of saints. Unite me with the martyrs of every age, and give courage to the persecuted Christians of today in every country. Amen.

Today: Learn about an organization that helps persecuted Christians, and pray for its work or support it.

Day 9: Strength in weakness

The pagans themselves admitted that they had never seen a woman suffer so much with such courage. In Blandina, God showed that he chooses what is weak to confound what is strong. The despised slave has become the patron saint of a great city.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Blandina, protect all who are exploited, trafficked or held in servitude today. Give them freedom, justice and people who will defend them. Amen.

Today: Pray for victims of human trafficking, and find out how you can help in your area.

Closing prayer

Saint Blandina, humble servant and courageous martyr, you who found your strength in Christ alone, I thank God for your witness. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Obtain for me the grace to

remain faithful in my weakness, to support others in their trials, and never to be ashamed to say, "I am a Christian." Pray for the persecuted, for the exploited and for the city of Lyon. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Blandina or read her life.

CREDITS

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