

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Bruno

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 6

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IN BRIEF

Saint Bruno

Master of the school of Reims turned hermit, founder of the Carthusian Order.

Feast day	October 6
Born	c. 1030, Cologne, Germany
Died	October 6, 1101, Hermitage of Santa Maria della Torre, Calabria (now Serra San Bruno, Italy)
Canonized	never formally canonized; cult authorized in 1514 by Pope Leo X, extended to the whole Church in 1623
Era	12th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Bruno for Silence and Inner Peace

Novena to Saint Bruno

The Grande Chartreuse, Cradle of the Order Founded by Saint Bruno

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Bruno

Saint Bruno is the founder of the Carthusian Order, one of the oldest contemplative orders in the Church, often said never to have needed reform. A brilliant master of the cathedral school of Reims, he left a prestigious career at around fifty to live in solitude. In 1084 he settled with six companions in the Chartreuse mountains of the French Alps, near Grenoble. Called to Rome by the pope, he ended his life in a hermitage in Calabria, where he died on October 6, 1101. He is celebrated on that day.

Who was Saint Bruno?

Bruno was born around 1030 in Cologne, in the Holy Roman Empire. Almost nothing is known of his family or childhood. As a young man he came to study at Reims, one of the great intellectual centers of the West, and stayed there.

Around 1056 he became *scholasticus*, the head of the cathedral school. For some twenty years he taught philosophy and theology and trained students who would become bishops, abbots and even a pope: Odo of Châtillon, the future Pope Urban II. His contemporaries described him as a learned and respected master, a "fountain of wisdom."

Key dates

- **c. 1030**: Born in Cologne.
- **c. 1056**: Head of the cathedral school of Reims.
- **c. 1075**: Chancellor of the archdiocese of Reims.
- **c. 1076-1080**: Conflict with Archbishop Manasses of Gournay, accused of simony, who strips him of his offices; Manasses is finally deposed.

- **c. 1083**: First attempt at hermit life at Sèche-Fontaine, near the abbey of Molesme.
- **1084**: With six companions, he settles in the wilderness of the Chartreuse, with the support of Saint Hugh, Bishop of Grenoble.
- **1090**: Called to Rome by Pope Urban II, his former student.
- **c. 1091**: Founds a hermitage in Calabria, on land given by Count Roger.
- **October 6, 1101**: Dies in his Calabrian hermitage.
- **1514**: Pope Leo X authorizes the cult of Saint Bruno in the Carthusian Order.
- **1623**: Pope Gregory XV extends his feast to the whole Church.

The master of Reims

At Reims, Bruno was not only a teacher: he was also a canon and took part in governing the diocese. When Archbishop Manasses of Gournay behaved like a greedy lord and sold Church offices, Bruno was among the clerics who denounced him to the legates of Pope Gregory VII. He had to leave Reims for several years, until Manasses was deposed in 1080.

It was at that time, Bruno himself recounts in a letter written much later, that he and two friends, in a garden, vowed to leave the world and give themselves to God. The others did not keep their promise; he did. He could have become Archbishop of Reims, but he renounced every honor.



Saint Bruno teaching at Reims, by Eustache Le Sueur (Life of Saint Bruno cycle, c. 1645-1648, Louvre Museum).

The wilderness of the Chartreuse

After a first attempt near Molesme, with the abbot Saint Robert, Bruno sought a deeper solitude. With six companions, four clerics and two laymen, he went to Grenoble to see Bishop Hugh. According to tradition, the bishop had seen in a dream seven stars guiding him to a deserted place in his mountains. In 1084, around the feast of Saint John the Baptist according to tradition, Hugh himself led the seven men into a high, isolated valley of the Chartreuse massif. There they built wooden cells around a small church.

The life they created joined the solitude of hermits with the common life of monks. Each one lives alone in his cell, where he prays, reads, works and eats; all gather in church for the night office, Mass and Vespers, and share a meal and a walk on Sundays. Bruno did not write a rule: his successor Guigo set down the customs of the Chartreuse in writing around 1127.

The name of the place, Chartreuse, gave the order its name: Carthusians in English, and their monasteries are called charterhouses. Today Carthusians live in Europe and the Americas, including Saint Hugh's Charterhouse at Parkminster in England and the Charterhouse of the Transfiguration in Vermont. Many English speakers discovered their life through the documentary *Into Great Silence* (2005), filmed at the Grande Chartreuse.



The monastery of the Grande Chartreuse, in the Chartreuse mountains (Isère, France).

From Rome to Calabria

Only six years after the foundation, in 1090, Pope Urban II, who needed reliable advisers, called his former teacher to Rome. Bruno obeyed, leaving behind a community at a loss, which scattered for a time before returning. In Rome he could not bear life at court. He refused the archbishopric of Reggio, in Calabria, and obtained the pope's permission to return to solitary life, but in

southern Italy. With new companions, around 1091, he founded the hermitage of Santa Maria della Torre, on land given by the Norman count Roger.

He spent the last ten years of his life there. From Calabria he wrote two letters that have come down to us: one to his friend Raoul le Verd, to remind him of their youthful vow, and the other to his brothers at the Chartreuse. Before he died, on October 6, 1101, he made before his brothers a profession of faith that has been preserved.

A hidden saint

Bruno was never canonized by the ordinary procedure: the Carthusians, devoted to hiddenness, never sought to promote his cult. Only in 1514 did Pope Leo X allow them to celebrate his feast, which Pope Gregory XV later extended to the whole Church in 1623. In the seventeenth century the painter Eustache Le Sueur devoted a famous cycle of paintings to him for the Paris charterhouse, now in the Louvre.

Why do Catholics pray to Saint Bruno?

Saint Bruno reminds a noisy world of the value of silence and of a solitude filled with God. He did not flee out of contempt for people: he chose to pray for them in secret. His life also shows that it is never too late to answer a call, and that obedience can overturn even our dearest plans. He is invoked to find inner peace, for contemplative vocations, and by those who are trying to discern their path.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Bruno in art

- **The white Carthusian habit**, with its hood.
- **A crucifix** that he contemplates, sometimes with a skull, sign of meditation on death.

- **A finger on the lips**, a sign of silence.
- **A miter or crozier at his feet**, recalling the honors he refused.
- **Seven stars**, recalling the dream of Saint Hugh and the seven founders.

Where to pray to Saint Bruno

- **Saint-Pierre-de-Chartreuse** (Isère, France): the Grande Chartreuse (the monastery itself is closed to visitors), the chapel of Saint Bruno and the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-Casalibus on the site of the first hermitage, and the Correrie museum.
- **Serra San Bruno** (Calabria, Italy): the charterhouse where his relics rest, and the hermitage of Santa Maria del Bosco.
- **Reims**: the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, whose school he directed.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, a former Carthusian church, which houses a large statue of the saint by Houdon.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Bruno, which quotes his letters, or follow the novena to Saint Bruno from September 27 to October 5, ending on the eve of his feast.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Bruno for Silence and Inner Peace

Saint Bruno wrote very little and left no prayer composed to be recited. Two of his letters, however, have come down to us, written from Calabria at the end of his life. This page presents two passages from them, which express the heart of his experience, followed by an original prayer to Saint Bruno for silence and inner peace.

"Only those who have experienced it know"

In his letter to his friend Raoul le Verd, provost of the cathedral chapter of Reims, Bruno describes the place where he lives in Calabria and invites him to join him in solitary life. The translation from the Latin is by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.

> *What benefit and divine joy the solitude and silence of the wilderness bring to those who love them, only those who have experienced it know.*

Source: Saint Bruno, *Letter to Raoul le Verd*, written in Calabria toward the end of the eleventh century.



Saint Bruno the Carthusian in prayer.

To the lay brothers of the Chartreuse

In his letter to the monks of the Chartreuse, Bruno speaks tenderly to the lay brothers, religious who often could not read:

> *Although you do not know letters, almighty God writes with his finger in your hearts not only love, but also the knowledge of his holy law.*

Source: Saint Bruno, *Letter to the brothers of the Chartreuse*, written in Calabria shortly before 1101.

Prayer to Saint Bruno for silence and inner peace

Saint Bruno, you left the honors of the schools for the solitude of the mountains: teach me to keep silence amid the noise of my days.

All your life you kept the promise you made in your youth: help me remain faithful to the calls God has given me, even when others have forgotten theirs.

You obeyed the pope and left your beloved wilderness: let me not cling to my own plans, even the holiest, when God asks something else of me.

I entrust to you the Carthusian monks and nuns, and all who pray in secret for the world. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me the grace to taste, if only for a moment, the peace you found in God alone. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Bruno is celebrated on October 6, the anniversary of his death in 1101. You can pray to him at the start of a retreat, during a time of discernment, when you feel overwhelmed by noise and hurry, or whenever you are looking for inner peace. It is also a good prayer for anyone considering a contemplative vocation.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Bruno, and discover the life of Saint Bruno.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Bruno

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and letters of Saint Bruno. It is not an official liturgical text or a text written by the saint. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on September 27: it ends on October 5, the day before his feast on October 6. You can also pray it at any time of year, during a retreat, a time of discernment, or a season when you long for more silence.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment and a quiet place. Begin with a few minutes of silence, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. The small act suggested for the day helps you keep a little of that silence as the day goes on. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

The nine days follow Bruno's path: the teacher of Reims, the man who refused injustice, the friend who kept his vow, the founder who went into the wilderness, the monk who obeyed when called away, and the hermit who died in peace in Calabria.



Saint Bruno the Carthusian, in a church window or statue.

Day 1: Seeking wisdom

For years Bruno taught at Reims. He loved learning, but he discovered that true wisdom is to know God. Knowledge is a gift; it reaches its purpose when it leads to the One who gives it.

Prayer: Lord, may what I know lead me toward you, and not toward pride.

Today: Read a psalm slowly, pausing on one verse.

Day 2: Refusing injustice

Faced with an archbishop who sold Church offices, Bruno did not keep quiet, and he paid the price. Faithfulness sometimes means saying no. Bruno did not seek conflict, but he would not let the Church be bought and sold, even at the cost of his position and his security.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to refuse what is unjust, without hatred for anyone.

Today: Refuse a small compromise at work or in daily life.

Day 3: Keeping a promise

In a garden, Bruno and two friends vowed to give themselves to God. Only he kept that vow. God's promises are faithful; ours need his grace. Bruno did not keep his vow at once: years passed before he could leave. But he never let it go.

Prayer: Lord, help me keep the commitments I have made before you.

Today: Take up again a resolution you had abandoned.

Day 4: Setting out

At more than fifty years old, Bruno left everything. It is never too late to answer God's call. The age at which we hear it matters less than the freedom with which we respond.

Prayer: Lord, make me free to follow you, at every age and in every circumstance.

Today: Take one concrete step toward a change you keep putting off.

Day 5: The wilderness

In the high valley of the Chartreuse, Bruno and his companions found a harsh and isolated place. The wilderness strips us bare, but it opens the inner space where God speaks. Each of us can find a small wilderness: a quiet room, an empty church, an early morning hour.

Prayer: Lord, lead me into the wilderness and speak to my heart.

Today: Take a walk alone, in silence, out in nature.

Day 6: Alone and together

Carthusians live alone in their cells, but they pray together in church. Christian solitude is never isolation: it is communion. Alone in his cell, the monk carries the whole world in his prayer.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to welcome you in solitude and to join my brothers and sisters in common prayer.

Today: Go to a weekday Mass or join in a liturgy of the hours.



Praying with Saint Bruno the Carthusian.

Day 7: Obeying

Called to Rome, Bruno left his beloved wilderness. He obeyed, even though it cost him, and God brought about another hermitage in Calabria. What looked like a loss became the start of something new.

Prayer: Lord, may your will come before my plans, even the most beautiful ones.

Today: Accept a change of plans without complaining.

Day 8: The humble

Bruno wrote to the lay brothers, who could not read, that God writes his law in their hearts. Holiness is not a matter of diplomas. The great master of Reims ended his life admiring the faith of men who had never opened a book.

Prayer: Lord, write your law in my heart and give me a simple heart.

Today: Thank a humble person whose faith inspires you.

Day 9: The joy of God alone

At the end of his life, in Calabria, Bruno professed his faith before his brothers and died in peace. He had found what he was looking for: God, and the joy he gives to those who love him.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Bruno, grant me to seek you and find you in silence. Amen.

Today: Pray the Creed slowly, thinking of Bruno's profession of faith.

Closing prayer

Saint Bruno, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I carry. Pray for me, for the Carthusians and for all who seek God in silence. Obtain for me a peaceful, faithful and free heart. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

The Grande Chartreuse, Cradle of the Order Founded by Saint Bruno

The Grande Chartreuse, in the Chartreuse Mountains of Isère, is the motherhouse of the order founded by Saint Bruno in 1084. The monastery, still inhabited by monks, is not open to the public, but you can approach it, visit the nearby museum, and walk to the chapels that preserve the memory of the first hermitage. The relics of Saint Bruno rest in Serra San Bruno, in Calabria.

A foundation in the wilderness

In 1084, the Bishop of Grenoble, Saint Hugh, led Bruno and his six companions to a high, isolated valley, then called the Chartreuse desert. The first cells were built higher up than the present monastery. In 1132, an avalanche destroyed part of these buildings, and the prior Guigo rebuilt the monastery on the site where it stands today. Burned several times, it was largely rebuilt in the 17th century. The monks were driven out at the Revolution, then again in 1903, before returning in 1940.



The Grande Chartreuse, cradle of the order founded by Saint Bruno.

The Correrie Museum

A few miles downhill, the Correrie, the former house of the lay brothers and the monastery's service buildings, houses the Museum of the Grande Chartreuse. It presents the daily life of the Carthusians, a reconstructed cell, and the history of the order. It is the best way to understand from within the silent life begun by Saint Bruno, without disturbing the monks' enclosure.

The chapels of the first hermitage

Above the monastery, a forest path leads to the Chapel of Notre-Dame de Casalibus, built on the site of the first church, then to the Chapel of Saint Bruno, built on a rock where, according to tradition, the saint's cell stood. A spring flows nearby. The walk, in the silence of the forest, is itself a prayer.

Praying in the footsteps of Saint Bruno

Before your visit, you may reread the life of Saint Bruno. On the path to the chapels, walk in silence, then entrust your intention to him before the Chapel of Saint Bruno. The prayer to Saint Bruno can accompany this moment. Respect the enclosure and the silence of the monastery, which is a house of prayer and not a tourist site. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Bruno

- **Serra San Bruno** (Calabria, Italy): the charterhouse where his relics rest, with a museum, and the hermitage of Santa Maria del Bosco, where he liked to pray.
- **Reims**: Notre-Dame Cathedral, whose school he directed for some twenty years.
- **Grenoble**: Notre-Dame Cathedral, seat of Saint Hugh, who welcomed the first Carthusians.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, built within the Baths of Diocletian and once entrusted to the Carthusians, with the statue of Saint Bruno by Houdon.
- **Paris**: the Louvre Museum, which holds the cycle of the Life of Saint Bruno painted by Eustache Le Sueur.

Practical information

The Grande Chartreuse is in the commune of Saint-Pierre-de-Chartreuse, about an hour's drive from Grenoble or Chambéry. Access to the monastery is forbidden, and the road leading to it is regulated: leave your car in the Correrie parking lot or nearby. The museum is closed for part of the year and the path may be snowy in winter. Inquire with the Museum of the Grande Chartreuse or the tourist office before setting out.

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