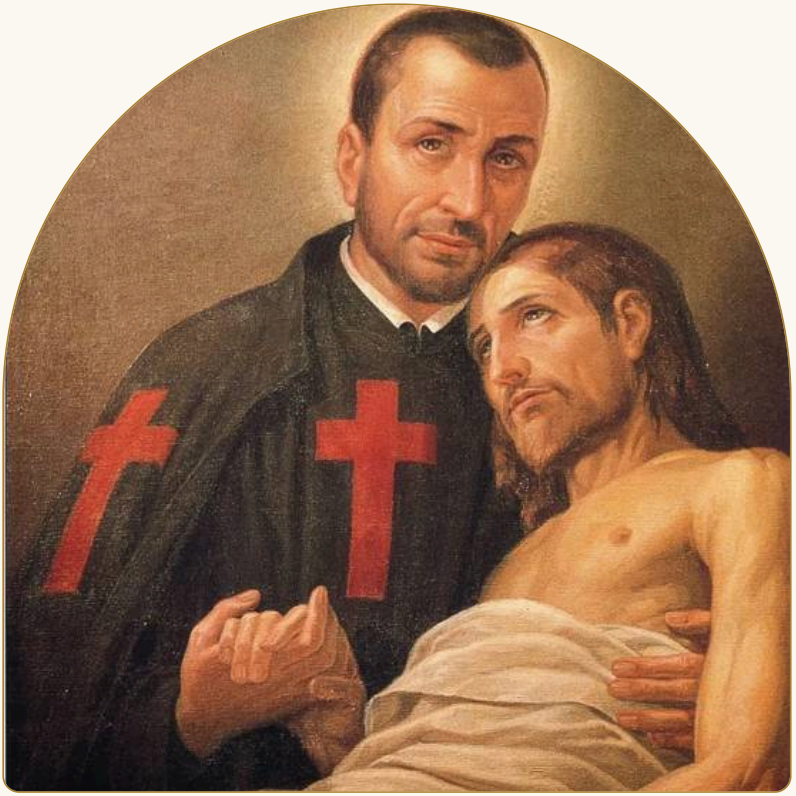


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Camillus de Lellis

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 14

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IN BRIEF

Saint Camillus de Lellis

Former soldier and gambler converted, founder of the Camillians in the service of the sick, patron saint of hospitals and nurses.

Feast day	July 14
Born	May 25, 1550, Bucchianico, Abruzzo, Italy
Died	July 14, 1614, Rome, Italy
Canonized	June 29, 1746, by Pope Benedict XIV
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	the sick, hospitals, nurses

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Camillus de Lellis for the Sick and Caregivers

Novena to Saint Camillus de Lellis

Church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Rome, Tomb of Saint Camillus de Lellis

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Camillus de Lellis

Saint Camillus de Lellis was an Italian priest of the late sixteenth century and the founder of the Order of Clerks Regular, Ministers to the Sick, known as the Camillians. A brawling soldier and a ruined gambler in his youth, he was converted at the age of twenty-five and then gave his whole life to the sick, whom he wanted to serve with the love of a mother for her sick child. He died in Rome in 1614 and was canonized in 1746. With Saint John of God, he is the patron saint of the sick, hospitals and nurses. His feast day is July 14.

Who was Saint Camillus de Lellis?

Camillus was born on May 25, 1550, at Bucchianico, in the Abruzzo region, then part of the Kingdom of Naples. His father was an officer who had served in the Neapolitan and French armies. His mother died when he was still a child, and his education was badly neglected.

Tall and strong, he followed his father into military life at a very young age and enlisted as a soldier of fortune in the service of Venice, then of Naples, in the wars against the Turks. Camp life gave him above all one passion: gambling. Cards and dice ruined him, at times leaving him in utter poverty.

He also suffered from a wound on his leg that never truly healed and that would cause him pain for more than forty years. It was first in the hope of being treated that he went to Rome, to the Hospital of San Giacomo degli Incurabili, where he found work. But his violent temper and his taste for gambling soon got him dismissed.

Key dates

- **May 25, 1550**: Born at Bucchianico, in the Abruzzo.

- **1570s**: Soldier in the service of Venice, then of Naples.
- **February 1575**: Conversion at Manfredonia, through contact with the Capuchins.
- **c. 1575-1584**: Nurse, then head of staff at the Hospital of San Giacomo in Rome.
- **1584**: Ordained a priest; founds the company of the "Servants of the Sick."
- **1586**: Pope Sixtus V approves the congregation and grants it the red cross on the black habit.
- **1591**: Gregory XIV raises it to a religious order.
- **1607**: He gives up the office of superior general to devote himself to the sick.
- **July 14, 1614**: Dies in Rome.
- **1742**: Beatified; **1746**: canonized by Benedict XIV.

The conversion of a gambler

After another period under arms, Camillus, penniless, was hired by the Capuchins of Manfredonia to work on the building of their friary. He kept on gambling, until the day when the words of the friary's guardian touched him deeply. He decided to change his life and asked to join the Capuchins.

Accepted as a lay brother, he was soon sent away because the wound on his leg opened again. He tried a second time, with no more success. His vocation lay elsewhere.

Back in Rome, he returned to the Hospital of San Giacomo, this time not as an employee hoping to be cared for, but as a man determined to serve. His piety, good sense and dedication led to his appointment as head of the hospital staff. There he saw the misery of the sick, often looked after by poorly paid and heartless servants, and he dreamed of a community of men who would serve them out of love for God.

The Servants of the Sick

His first plan, an association of lay nurses, met strong opposition. On the advice of his friends, and especially of his spiritual director, Saint Philip Neri, he resolved to become a priest. At more than thirty years of age, he sat on the school benches of the Jesuit college to learn Latin among much younger students.

Ordained in 1584, he gathered a few companions who bound themselves by vow to serve the sick, even at the risk of their lives. They did not limit themselves to hospitals: they also cared for the sick in their homes and assisted the dying, which earned them the name "Fathers of a Good Death."

In 1586, Pope Sixtus V approved the congregation. Camillus obtained for his religious the right to wear a large red cross on their black habit. His first biographer, Father Sanzio Cicatelli, explains that this cross was meant to show that they were "like slaves sold and vowed to the service of the poor sick," and that their life was a life of the cross. In 1591, Gregory XIV made the congregation a religious order, confirmed the following year by Clement VIII.

Serving to the end of his strength

The Camillians soon settled in Naples, then in many cities of Italy. In Naples, two of them died after caring for the sick aboard a ship held in quarantine in the harbor: they were the first "martyrs of charity" of the order, which would count many more during epidemics.

Camillus himself never spared his efforts. Despite his diseased leg and other infirmities, he refused to be looked after and got up, barely able to stand, to visit the sick. In 1607, he gave up the office of superior general so as to have more time for the sick and the poor.

He died in Rome on July 14, 1614, at the age of sixty-four, after a last exhortation to his brothers. He was buried in the church of Santa Maria Maddalena, the mother house of his order.

Why is Saint Camillus the patron saint of the sick, hospitals and nurses?

In 1886, Leo XIII proclaimed Saint Camillus and Saint John of God patrons of hospitals and of the sick. In 1930, Pius XI named them patrons of nurses and of nursing associations. The choice is natural: Camillus wanted every sick person to be treated as Christ himself, with skill and with tenderness, and he reformed the way the sick were cared for in the hospitals of his time.

Today, Camillian religious are present on several continents, alongside lay people who share their charism. In Rome, a basilica has been dedicated to him since 1910. In the United States, where July 14 is the memorial of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, his feast is kept on July 18.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Camillus in art

- **The red cross**: the large red cross on a black habit or cassock, sign of the Camillians.
- **A sick person**: he is often shown caring for or supporting a sick or dying person.
- **The crucifix**: he is sometimes shown praying before a crucifix, recalling a Camillian tradition that he received decisive encouragement from it.

What can we learn from him?

Saint Camillus shows that a life that began badly can become a source of good for thousands of others. What was hardest in him, his fiery temperament and his own illness, became energy and compassion in the service of those who

suffer. He is prayed to for the sick, for the dying, for caregivers and for all who work in hospitals, and also for those caught in gambling or other addictions.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Camillus de Lellis and the novena to Saint Camillus, from July 5 to 13.

Where to pray to Saint Camillus de Lellis

- **Rome**: the church of Santa Maria Maddalena, near the Pantheon, where he rests under the altar of his chapel.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of San Camillo de Lellis, consecrated in 1910, near the ancient Gardens of Sallust.
- **Bucchianico** (Abruzzo): his hometown.
- **Manfredonia** (Apulia): the place of his conversion in 1575.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Camillus de Lellis for the Sick and Caregivers

Saint Camillus de Lellis has been invoked for centuries by the sick and by those who care for them. Below you will find words of his first biographer on the meaning of the Camillians' red cross, then an original prayer to Saint Camillus for the sick, the dying and caregivers.

The meaning of the red cross

> *"The second [reason], to make known to the world that all of us, marked with this sign of Christ, are like slaves sold and vowed to the service of the poor sick. And the third, to show that this is a religion of the cross, that is, of death, of suffering and of toil."*

Source: Father Sanzio Cicatelli, first biographer of Saint Camillus, 1620, explaining why the founder wanted his religious to wear a red cross on their habit, a privilege granted by Sixtus V on June 20, 1586. Translated from the Italian through its French version.

Prayer to Saint Camillus for the sick and caregivers

Saint Camillus de Lellis, you knew sickness in your own flesh. You know what is lived by those who suffer and who are afraid. Pray for the sick, especially for those who are alone, and for those who are drawing near to death.

You wanted to serve every sick person as Christ himself. Give doctors, nurses, nursing assistants and all who watch over the suffering skill, patience and an attentive heart.

You were rescued from gambling and disorder by the mercy of God. Pray for those who are prisoners of an addiction, and obtain for them the strength to begin again.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Teach me to see the face of the Lord in those who suffer, and to serve them with skillful hands and a mother's heart. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- **On his feast day**, July 14, the day of his death in Rome in 1614 (July 18 in the United States).
- **On the World Day of the Sick**, February 11, the memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes.
- **At the bedside of a loved one** in the hospital, or before surgery.
- **Before a shift**, for nurses, doctors and all who work in hospitals and care homes.
- **In the struggle against gambling** or any other addiction.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Camillus de Lellis

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Camillus de Lellis. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, July 14, begin on July 5. It can be prayed at any time of year for a sick person, by a sick person, or by a team of caregivers.

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 the day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

The nine days follow the path of Camillus, from his wounded childhood to his service of the dying.

Day 1: A wounded childhood

Camillus lost his mother very young and grew up with almost no education. Nothing hinted at the saint he would become. God does not choose perfect lives; he transforms them. The wounds of our story are not an obstacle to his grace.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the wounds of my story. As you did for Camillus, make them a way toward you. Amen.

Today: Pray for a child who has lost his or her parents.

Day 2: The ruined gambler

As a soldier of fortune, Camillus lost everything at cards and dice, to the point of falling into poverty. He knew the trap of addiction and the shame that comes with it. He knows what those who struggle today are living.

Prayer: Lord, set free those who are chained by gambling, alcohol, drugs or screens, and give them faithful friends. Saint Camillus, pray for them. Amen.

Today: Give up one habit that takes your time or your freedom.

Day 3: A word that touches the heart

At Manfredonia, a simple exhortation from the guardian of the Capuchin friary overwhelmed Camillus. He was twenty-five, and he decided to change his life. God often speaks through an ordinary word, at the right moment.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, make me attentive to the words through which you call me to conversion. Amen.

Today: Take a moment to look back over your day in the presence of God.

Day 4: Accepting to be sent away

Twice Camillus entered the Capuchins; twice his diseased leg forced him to leave. What looked like failure led him to his true vocation. Our closed doors can become the way God opens another.

Prayer: Lord, when my plans collapse, help me to seek your will rather than my own. Amen.

Today: Entrust to God a failure that still weighs on you.



Saint Camillus de Lellis serving a sick man.

Day 5: Serving Christ in the sick

At the Hospital of San Giacomo degli Incurabili, Camillus found sick people badly cared for and neglected. He wanted them to be served as one would serve Christ in person, with the love of a mother for her sick child.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you said, "I was sick and you visited me." Open my eyes to those who suffer near me. Amen.

Today: Visit or call a person who is sick.

Day 6: Learning past thirty

To found his community, Camillus agreed to become a priest and went back to school to learn Latin among much younger students. He did not let pride stop him. Humility opens paths.

Prayer: Lord, give me the humility to learn, at any age, what I need in order to serve you. Amen.

Today: Ask someone for advice, as Camillus asked Saint Philip Neri.

Day 7: The red cross

The Camillians wear a red cross on their habit, a sign that they belong entirely to the service of the sick. Giving oneself has a cost, and it bears fruit. Caregivers today carry the same weariness and the same dignity.

Prayer: Lord, bless all caregivers. Sustain them in their fatigue and keep them from indifference. Amen.

Today: Thank a nurse, a family caregiver or a volunteer.

Day 8: At the risk of their lives

In Naples, two of Camillus's companions died after caring for the sick aboard a ship in quarantine. The Camillians bind themselves by vow to serve the sick even at the risk of contagion. Many caregivers have given their lives in the same way.

Prayer: Lord, welcome into your peace all who have died while caring for others, and protect those who care for the sick today. Amen.

Today: Pray for caregivers in countries at war or struck by an epidemic.

Day 9: Accompanying toward a good death

The Camillians were called the "Fathers of a Good Death." Camillus wanted no dying person to be left alone and without spiritual help. He himself died in Rome while still exhorting his brothers.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Camillus, give every dying person a loving presence and your peace. Amen.

Today: Pray for people at the end of life and for those who accompany them.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Camillus de Lellis, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented to you. Pray for the sick, for the dying and for all who care for them. Obtain for us a mother's heart for those who suffer, and the grace to see Christ in each of them. Amen.*

To go further: the life of Saint Camillus de Lellis and the prayer to Saint Camillus de Lellis.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Rome, Tomb of Saint Camillus de Lellis

Saint Camillus de Lellis rests in Rome, in the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene (Santa Maria Maddalena), a few streets from the Pantheon. This is where the community he founded lived, where he died on July 14, 1614, and where the Camillian religious still have their mother house. For the sick, for caregivers and for members of the Camillian family, it is the main pilgrimage site connected with their patron saint.

The house of the Servants of the Sick

After Sixtus V approved his congregation in 1586, Camillus and his companions settled next to the Church of the Magdalene, in the heart of Rome. From there they set out each day for the city's great hospitals, such as the Hospital of the Holy Spirit, and for the sick cared for at home. Camillus died there in 1614. He was first buried near the high altar; after the recognition of miracles obtained through his intercession, his body was placed beneath the altar dedicated to him.



The facade of the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Rome.

A Baroque church

The present church was rebuilt by the Camillians in the 17th and early 18th centuries. Its facade with undulating lines is one of the rare examples of the rococo style in Rome, and its interior, richly decorated with marble, stucco and gilding, contrasts with the poverty Camillus had wanted for himself. The chapel of Saint Camillus holds his relics. The religious also preserve there the memory of a crucifix before which, according to Camillian tradition, the saint received decisive encouragement to continue his work.

Visiting the church

The church stands on Piazza della Maddalena, steps from the Pantheon, in a busy neighborhood. It remains a place of worship: visit quietly and outside of services. The Camillian religious who live there can give information to

pilgrims and groups who wish to pray near the relics.



The altar of Saint Camillus in the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Camillus de Lellis. In front of his relics, it is good to entrust by name the sick people you carry in your heart, as well as the caregivers you know. You can say the prayer to Saint Camillus de Lellis or, in July, begin the novena to Saint Camillus. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Camillus

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Camillus de Lellis, consecrated in 1910, near the former Gardens of Sallust.
- **Rome**: the Hospital of San Giacomo for the Incurables, where he was first a patient, then a nurse and administrator.

- **Bucchianico** (Abruzzo): his native town, which honors his memory.
- **Manfredonia** (Apulia): the site of his conversion in 1575.
- **Bry-sur-Marne** (Val-de-Marne): the chapel of Saint-Camille, dedicated to him.

Practical information

The church is easy to reach on foot from the Pantheon or Piazza Navona. Modest dress is required, as in all the churches of Rome. Opening hours and Mass times may vary with the season and with celebrations: check with the Camillian religious or on the order's official website before your visit.

Credits and sources

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