BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Catherine Yi

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: September 20

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IN BRIEF

Saint Catherine Yi

Korean laywoman and mother, martyred in Seoul in 1839, one of the 103 Korean Martyrs.

Feast day	September 20
Born	c. 1782 or 1783, Seoul (Korea)
Died	late September or early October 1839, Seoul (Korea), in prison
Canonized	May 6, 1984 by John Paul II (beatified in 1925 by Pius XI)
Era	19th century

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Catherine Yi

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Catherine Yi

Saint Catherine Yi was a Korean laywoman and mother who died for her faith in 1839 in a Seoul prison, during the great persecution of that year. Arrested with her daughter, Saint Magdalene Cho, she refused to deny Christ despite torture. Beatified in 1925, she was canonized by Saint John Paul II in 1984 with the 103 Korean Martyrs. Her feast day is September 20.

Who was Saint Catherine Yi?

Catherine Yi was born around 1782 or 1783 in Seoul, into a Catholic family, at a time when the Christian faith, brought to Korea by lay people at the end of the 18th century, was forbidden and regularly persecuted. She had received only limited religious instruction. What we know of her comes mainly from the notices gathered for the cause of the Korean martyrs, published today by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea. The sources differ on some details, especially on the exact circumstances of her death.

Key dates in the life of Catherine Yi

- **c. 1782 or 1783**: Born in Seoul, into a Catholic family.
- **Adulthood**: She marries a man who is not a Christian, makes her faith known to him and leads him to conversion.
- **Following years**: The mother of many children, she raises them in the faith; her daughter Magdalene chooses to remain a virgin for Christ.
- **1839**: At the time of the persecution, she settles in Seoul with Magdalene; Bishop Laurent Imbert helps them find lodging with Catholics.
- **Late June or early July 1839**: She is arrested with her daughter and three other women.

- **Summer 1839**: She refuses to deny her faith and is severely tortured; she falls ill in prison.
- **September or October 1839**: She dies in prison in Seoul, of illness according to most sources; others speak of a beheading.
- **1925**: She is beatified by Pope Pius XI with other Korean martyrs.
- **May 6, 1984**: Saint John Paul II canonizes her in Seoul with the 103 Korean Martyrs.

A mother who handed on the faith

Catherine married a man who did not share her faith. She spoke to him of Christ with such conviction that he eventually converted. Together they had several children, whom Catherine raised in the love of God and neighbor. Among them, her daughter Magdalene stood out for her fervor. When Catherine wanted to arrange a marriage for her, Magdalene refused: she wanted to remain a virgin for Christ.

The mother understood this desire, but she was worried. In the Korea of that time, an unmarried woman was regarded with suspicion, and this choice could draw attention to the Catholic family. So as not to embarrass her, Magdalene went to work for several years as a servant in Seoul. She only came back to live with her mother after the age of thirty. This story shows the mutual respect of a mother and a daughter, united by the same faith despite their worries.

The persecution of 1839

In 1839, a violent persecution struck the Catholics of Korea. Catherine and Magdalene then decided to settle in Seoul. Bishop Laurent Imbert, a French missionary bishop living in hiding in the country, learned of their arrival and helped them find lodging in a Catholic house. They could have lived there in peace, but the capital proved more dangerous than the countryside. Still, they chose to stay.

About a month later, at the end of June or the beginning of July 1839, they were arrested with three other women from their circle. The police chief urged Catherine to deny her faith to save her life. She refused. She was then severely tortured. In prison she fell ill, like her daughter, and suffered for about two months.

Her death and canonization

Catherine Yi died in prison in Seoul at the end of September or the beginning of October 1839, worn out by illness and ill-treatment, according to the notices of the Church in Korea. Other sources report that she was beheaded in September 1839. Her daughter Magdalene died in the same weeks. Both are recognized as martyrs: they died because of their faith, which they refused to deny.

The Holy See recognized their martyrdom in 1925, and Pope Pius XI beatified them that same year with other Korean martyrs. On May 6, 1984, during his journey to Korea, Saint John Paul II canonized 103 martyrs in Seoul, among them Catherine Yi and her daughter. Their common feast is set on September 20; some calendars also commemorate Catherine and her daughter on September 26.

What can we learn from Saint Catherine Yi?

Catherine Yi is a saint of everyday life who became a martyr. She handed on the faith to her husband and children, respected her daughter's vocation, and then, in the hour of trial, preferred Christ to her own life. Her example speaks to mothers, to spouses whose partner does not share the faith, and to all who suffer for remaining faithful to God. You can pray to her for families, for the handing on of the faith and for persecuted Christians today.

Where to pray to Saint Catherine Yi

- **Seoul** (South Korea): the city where she died, where the Church honors the memory of the martyrs of 1839 in several shrines.
- In parishes dedicated to the Korean Martyrs around the world, especially on their feast day, September 20.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Catherine Yi for Families and the Handing On of Faith

Saint Catherine Yi, a Korean mother, handed on the faith to her husband and children, then died in prison in Seoul in 1839, together with her daughter Saint Magdalene Cho, for refusing to deny Christ. She was canonized in 1984 with the Korean Martyrs. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to her mothers, the handing on of the faith and persecuted Christians.

Prayer to Saint Catherine Yi

Saint Catherine Yi,
wife and mother of Korea,
you spoke of Christ to your husband
and led him to the faith.
Help me to bear witness to God in my home,
with patience, gentleness and perseverance.

You raised your children in the love of God
and respected the vocation of your daughter Magdalene.
Watch over parents who hand on the faith,
and teach them to welcome God's call
on the lives of their children.

In prison you refused to deny Christ,
despite torture and illness.
Support persecuted Christians today
and give me the strength to remain faithful in trial.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Catherine Yi

- On the feast of the Korean Martyrs, September 20.
- For a mother, especially in difficulty.
- For a spouse who does not share the faith.
- For parents whose child hears a call to consecrated life.
- For Christians imprisoned or persecuted because of their faith.

A short invocation

> *Saint Catherine Yi and Saint Magdalene Cho,*
> *mother and daughter faithful unto martyrdom,*
> *pray for our families. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Catherine Yi from September 12 to 20, and read the life of Saint Catherine Yi.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Catherine Yi

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Catherine Yi, a Korean mother and martyr who died in 1839. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the feast of the Korean Martyrs, September 20, begin on September 12. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and 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. End with: "Saint Catherine Yi, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A faith received in the family

Catherine was born into a Catholic family, at a time when being a Christian in Korea was forbidden. She received the faith as a fragile treasure.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who handed on the faith to me. Keep me faithful to this treasure.

Act of the day: Pray for your parents, your grandparents or your godparents.

Day 2: A simple faith

Catherine had received only limited religious instruction. But her faith was alive, and she lived it to the end.

Prayer: Lord, give me a simple and strong faith that shows itself in my life.

Act of the day: Read the Creed slowly and meditate on one sentence of it.

Day 3: Bearing witness to her husband

Catherine married a man who was not a Christian. She spoke to him of Christ, and he converted.

Prayer: Lord, bless couples in which only one spouse believes, and make their love a path toward you.

Act of the day: Pray for someone close to you who is far from the faith, without judging them.

Day 4: Raising children in the love of God

The mother of many children, Catherine raised them in the love of God and neighbor. Her home was a little Church.

Prayer: Lord, bless parents and make our homes places where people learn to love you.

Act of the day: Pray as a family, or bless a child with the Sign of the Cross.

Day 5: Respecting a vocation

Her daughter Magdalene wanted to remain a virgin for Christ. Catherine was worried, but she respected this choice.

Prayer: Lord, teach parents to welcome your call on the lives of their children.

Act of the day: Pray for vocations to religious life and the priesthood.

Day 6: Staying despite the danger

In Seoul, the persecution was harsher than in the countryside. Yet Catherine and Magdalene chose to stay.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to remain faithful when faith becomes dangerous or frowned upon.

Act of the day: Make a visible sign of faith, such as saying grace before a meal in public.

Day 7: Refusing to deny Christ

Once arrested, Catherine was urged to deny her faith to save her life. She refused, despite torture.

Prayer: Jesus, you who suffered your Passion, give strength to those who are tortured for their faith.

Act of the day: Pray for imprisoned Christians, or support a work that helps them.

Day 8: Mother and daughter in trial

In prison, Catherine and Magdalene suffered illness together. Mother and daughter supported each other in faith to the end.

Prayer: Lord, unite families in times of trial and make them grow in love.

Act of the day: Visit or call a family member who is ill or alone.

Day 9: The crown of the martyrs

Catherine died in prison in 1839. The Church has recognized her as a saint, with her daughter and the Korean Martyrs.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to remain faithful to you to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Catherine Yi, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and pray for the Church in Korea.

Closing prayer

Saint Catherine Yi,
wife, mother and martyr,
you handed on the faith in your home
and kept it until death.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Watch over our families
and over persecuted Christians.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Catherine Yi at any time, and read the life of Saint Catherine Yi.

Credits and sources

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