

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Charbel Makhlouf

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 24

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IN BRIEF

Saint Charbel Makhlouf

Lebanese Maronite monk and hermit, prayed to around the world for the sick.

Feast day	July 24
Born	May 8, 1828, Bekaa Kafra, Lebanon
Died	December 24, 1898, Hermitage of Saints Peter and Paul, Annaya, Lebanon
Canonized	October 9, 1977, by Pope Paul VI
Era	19th century
Patron saint of	Lebanon, the sick

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Charbel for Healing

Novena to Saint Charbel

Monastery of Saint Maron in Annaya, Tomb of Saint Charbel

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Charbel Makhlouf

Saint Charbel Makhlouf was a Lebanese Maronite monk and priest who died in 1898 after twenty-three years as a hermit in the mountains of Annaya. Born Youssef Makhlouf in a mountain village of northern Lebanon, he lived a hidden life of prayer, silence and penance. After his death, lights reported over his grave and the condition of his body drew crowds, and countless healings have been attributed to his intercession. Canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1977, he is honored on July 24 and is loved today by Catholics around the world.

Who was Saint Charbel?

Charbel belonged to the Maronite Church, an Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with Rome. Its roots go back to Saint Maron, a Syrian monk of the 4th century, and its heartland is Lebanon. Charbel spent his whole religious life in the Lebanese Maronite Order, a monastic order that grew up at the end of the 17th century. He wrote nothing, founded nothing and hardly ever left his mountain. His holiness is that of a life given entirely to God in prayer.

He is now one of the most popular saints of the Middle East. The face attributed to him, based on a photograph taken in 1950 and repeated on countless icons, can be seen in homes, cars and churches, among Christians and among many Lebanese Muslims as well. The Lebanese diaspora has carried his devotion to the United States, Canada, Australia, Latin America and Europe, where many Maronite parishes bear his name.

Key dates

- **May 8, 1828**: Birth of Youssef Makhlouf in Bekaa Kafra, northern Lebanon.

- **1851**: Enters the Monastery of Our Lady of Mayfouk and takes the name Charbel.
- **1853**: Religious profession at the Monastery of Saint Maron, Annaya.
- **July 23, 1859**: Ordained a priest at Bkerké.
- **1875**: Withdraws to the Hermitage of Saints Peter and Paul near Annaya.
- **December 24, 1898**: Dies at the hermitage, eight days after a stroke suffered during Mass.
- **1899 and 1950**: His tomb is opened and his body found intact.
- **December 5, 1965**: Beatified by Paul VI.
- **October 9, 1977**: Canonized by Paul VI.

A childhood in the Lebanese mountains

Youssef Antoun Makhlouf was born on May 8, 1828, in Bekaa Kafra, one of the highest villages in Lebanon, above the holy valley of Qadisha. He was the youngest child of a poor farming family. His father, conscripted for forced labor by the army, died on his way home when Youssef was only three years old. The boy was raised by his deeply devout mother, and later by an uncle.

As a child he tended the flocks and got into the habit of praying in a small cave near the village. Two of his maternal uncles lived as hermits in the Qadisha Valley, and he often visited them. Their example shaped his vocation.

A monk of the Lebanese Maronite Order

In 1851, at the age of twenty-three, Youssef quietly left his village to enter the Monastery of Our Lady of Mayfouk. There he received the habit and the name Charbel, after a martyr of Edessa of the 2nd century. He continued his novitiate at the Monastery of Saint Maron in Annaya, where he made his vows

in 1853. He then studied theology at the monastery of Kfifan, where one of his teachers was Saint Nimatullah Kassab Al-Hardini, who has also been canonized.

On July 23, 1859, he was ordained a priest at Bkerké, the seat of the Maronite Patriarchate. He returned to Annaya, where he lived for sixteen years in community: liturgical prayer, work in the fields, obedience and silence. His brothers noticed his fervor at Mass and his extreme simplicity of life.

Twenty-three years as a hermit

In 1875 Charbel received permission from his superiors to withdraw to the Hermitage of Saints Peter and Paul, on the hill above the monastery. He spent the last twenty-three years of his life there. The rule of the hermits was very strict: one meal a day, manual work and long hours of prayer by night as well as by day. The Mass, which he celebrated every day slowly and with great devotion, was the center of his life.

On December 16, 1898, he suffered a stroke while celebrating Mass. He died eight days later, on December 24, 1898, Christmas Eve. He was buried, as was the custom for the monks, without a coffin, in the monastery cemetery.

After his death: lights and healings

In the months that followed, people from the surrounding area reported seeing a light shining over his grave. In 1899 the grave was opened: the body was found intact and was seeping a liquid mixed with blood. It was placed in a coffin in a chapel of the monastery. In 1950 the tomb was opened again in front of witnesses; the news brought a flood of pilgrims, and many healings were reported.

Paul VI beatified him on December 5, 1965, at the close of the Second Vatican Council, and canonized him on October 9, 1977. Among the many more recent testimonies, the best known is that of Nohad El Shami, a Lebanese woman who said she was healed in 1993 after Saint Charbel appeared to her in a dream. Since then, a prayer walk has been held at Annaya on the 22nd of every month.

Why do Catholics pray to Saint Charbel?

Saint Charbel is invoked above all for the sick: thousands of healings have been attributed to him, and many votive offerings at Annaya bear witness to them. He is also prayed to for Lebanon, for peace in the Middle East, and by those who long for silence and prayer in a life that is too busy. In the English-speaking world, his feast is celebrated with special fervor in Maronite communities from Brooklyn to Sydney. His example shows that holiness can grow in a hidden life, far from noise.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Charbel in art

Saint Charbel is shown as a Maronite monk in a black hooded habit, with a long white beard and lowered eyes. He often holds a rosary or a book. His most widespread image is based on a photograph taken in 1950 by pilgrims at the hermitage, in which some believed they recognized his face.

Where to pray to Saint Charbel

The great place of pilgrimage is the Monastery of Saint Maron in Annaya, Lebanon, with his tomb, a museum and, higher up, the hermitage where he lived. His native village of Bekaa Kafra keeps his family home and the cave where he prayed as a child. Around the world, many Maronite parishes and shrines are dedicated to him.

How to pray to Saint Charbel

Catholics pray to Saint Charbel for the sick, for peace, for Lebanon, or to learn to pray in silence. You can pray the prayer to Saint Charbel or follow the novena to Saint Charbel, from July 15 to 23, so that it ends on the eve of his feast.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Charbel for Healing

Many prayers to Saint Charbel circulate in Lebanon and in the Lebanese diaspora, often printed on the back of holy cards. Saint Charbel himself left no writings, so none of them comes from him. Below you will find an original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by his life as a hermit and by the trust of the sick who turn to him.

Prayer to Saint Charbel for healing

Saint Charbel, monk and hermit of the mountain of Annaya, you who left everything to seek God in silence, teach me to pray with a simple heart.

You who made the Mass the center of your life, help me to recognize the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and in my everyday life.

So many sick people turn to you with confidence. I entrust to you all who suffer, especially (name the person). Obtain healing of body for them, if it is God's will, and always peace of heart.

Watch over Lebanon, your homeland, over the Christians of the Middle East and over all peoples who are waiting for peace.

Help me to find, in the middle of all the noise, a little of the silence in which God speaks.

Saint Charbel, pray for us. Amen.

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

A word to meditate on

> *"But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you."*

Source: Gospel of Matthew 6:6. These words of Jesus sum up the life of Saint Charbel, who spent twenty-three years in the hidden prayer of his hermitage above Annaya.

When to pray this prayer

You can pray to Saint Charbel at any time, especially on July 24, his feast day, and on the 22nd of each month, when pilgrims gather at Annaya. Many people turn to him for someone who is sick, before surgery, for peace in Lebanon and the Middle East, or when they want to rediscover the taste for prayer. You can accompany the prayer with a lighted candle or a moment of silence, in the spirit of his life as a hermit. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Charbel and read the life of Saint Charbel.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Charbel

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Charbel Makhlouf. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on July 15; it ends on July 23, the day before the feast of July 24. You can also pray it at any time of the year for someone who is sick, or whenever you need peace.

Why pray a novena to Saint Charbel?

Saint Charbel spent twenty-three years in a small hermitage in the mountains of Lebanon, praying, working and celebrating Mass. Since his death in 1898, countless people, Christians and Muslims alike, have come to his tomb at Annaya to ask for healing, and many testimonies of graces received are kept there. A novena to Saint Charbel is a way to bring your intention to God with the same perseverance that marked his life. It is also an invitation to rediscover silence, prayer and the Eucharist. Each day follows one step of his journey, from his childhood in Bekaa Kafra to the hermitage where he died on Christmas Eve, and ends with a small concrete act.

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 faithful prayer, in the company of a monk who prayed in silence for most of his life.

Day 1: A childhood in the mountains

Youssef grows up in a poor village without his father, who died when he was three. His mother hands on the faith to him. God often uses hardship and the example of parents to awaken a vocation.

Prayer: Lord, bless families who lack what they need, and children who grow up without a father. I place my intention in your hands for these nine days.

Today: Pray for your parents, living or deceased.

Day 2: The cave of childhood

While tending the flocks, young Youssef prays in a small cave near his village. He learns early to meet God in a place set apart.

Prayer: Lord, give me a place and a time to meet you every day.

Today: Choose a corner of your home for prayer and set a crucifix or an icon there.

Day 3: Leaving everything

At twenty-three, Youssef quietly leaves his village to enter the monastery, and receives the name Charbel. Following Christ sometimes means letting go of what makes us feel safe.

Prayer: Lord, show me what I need to leave behind in order to follow you more freely.

Today: Give up a habit that takes up too much room in your life.

Day 4: Obedience

For sixteen years Charbel lives in community at Annaya, following the rhythm of the rule. He obeys simply. Holiness is built through faithfulness in small things.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to do my daily tasks with love.

Today: Do a task you dislike without complaining.

Day 5: Silence

At the hermitage Charbel lives in deep silence. This silence is not empty: it is filled with the presence of God.

Prayer: Lord, quiet the useless noise in me so that I can hear your voice.

Today: Spend one hour without screens or music.

Day 6: The Mass at the heart of life

Every day Charbel celebrates Mass with great devotion. It is during Mass that he is struck by the illness that takes his life. The Eucharist was his whole life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, increase my faith in your presence.

Today: Attend a weekday Mass or spend time in Eucharistic adoration.

Day 7: Penance

One meal a day, manual work, night vigils: Charbel lives poorly out of love. Penance is not contempt for the body, but a way of making ourselves available to God and to others.

Prayer: Lord, help me to give up a little comfort so that I can share with others.

Today: Go without something small and give what you save to someone in need.

Day 8: The sick

Since his death, countless sick people have turned to Saint Charbel. His tomb has become a place of consolation for all who suffer.

Prayer: Saint Charbel, I entrust to you the sick (name the person). Obtain healing and peace for them.

Today: Visit someone who is sick, or send them a message.

Day 9: Peace

Lebanon, the homeland of Saint Charbel, has known many wars and much suffering. The saint of the mountain is prayed to by Christians and Muslims alike, a sign that prayer can bring hearts closer.

Prayer: Saint Charbel, pray for Lebanon and for peace in the world. Amen.

Today: Pray for a country at war and, if you can, attend Mass on July 24.

Closing prayer

Saint Charbel, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you once more my intention. You who sought God in silence and found him in the Eucharist, obtain for me a heart at peace, healing for those who are sick, and the grace to remain faithful in prayer. Watch over Lebanon and over all who suffer. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Monastery of Saint Maron in Annaya, Tomb of Saint Charbel

The Monastery of Saint Maron in Annaya, in the mountains of the Byblos (Jbeil) District of Lebanon, is the great shrine of Saint Charbel. The saint took his vows there, lived there sixteen years in community, and then twenty-three years in the nearby hermitage. His tomb draws pilgrims from Lebanon and around the world: Christians of every denomination and many Muslims.



The Monastery of Saint Maron in Annaya, Lebanon.

A monastery of the Lebanese Maronite Order

The monastery belongs to the Lebanese Maronite Order, a monastic order of the Maronite Church. It was here that young Youssef Makhlouf, now Brother Charbel, continued his novitiate and took his vows in 1853. Ordained a priest in 1859, he returned to the monastery and led the common life of the monks until 1875, when he withdrew to the hermitage.

What to see in Annaya

- **The tomb of Saint Charbel**, in the monastery, a place of prayer and quiet reflection.
- **The monastery church**, where Mass is celebrated several times a day.
- **The museum**, which displays objects that belonged to the saint and accounts of healings.
- **The Hermitage of Saints Peter and Paul**, on the hill above the monastery, where he lived from 1875 until his death in 1898. Visitors can see his very bare cell.

The pilgrimage on the 22nd of each month

On the 22nd of each month, a prayer walk gathers pilgrims at Annaya. This tradition grew out of the testimony of Nohad El Shami, a Lebanese woman who says she was healed through the intercession of Saint Charbel on January 22, 1993. The faithful walk while praying the Rosary, then take part in Mass.

Tips for the pilgrimage

Annaya is about an hour and a half by road from Beirut, in the mountains above Byblos. The monastery and the hermitage can be visited freely during opening hours; modest dress is requested and silence is expected near the tomb. On July 24, the saint's feast day, and on the third Sunday of July, the feast day in the Maronite Church, the crowds are very large. Before you leave, it is wise to check travel conditions in Lebanon.

Other places connected with Saint Charbel

In Bekaa Kafra, his native village in northern Lebanon, you can visit his family home, now a place of prayer, and the small cave where he prayed as a child. The Monastery of Our Lady of Mayfouk, which he entered in 1851, and the

Monastery of Kfifan, where he studied under Saint Nimatullah Al-Hardini, are also part of pilgrimage itineraries following in the footsteps of the Maronite saints.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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