

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Chrysogonus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 24

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IN BRIEF

Saint Chrysogonus

Martyr at Aquileia under Diocletian, named in the Roman Canon, patron saint of Zadar.

Feast day	November 24
Born	c. 250
Died	c. 304, Aquileia, Italy
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial cult)
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Zadar

In this booklet

Life

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Chrysogonus

Saint Chrysogonus was a Christian martyr put to death at Aquileia, in northeastern Italy, during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian at the beginning of the fourth century. Honored very early in Rome, where a basilica was dedicated to him as soon as the fourth century, he is one of the saints named in the Roman Canon, the oldest Eucharistic Prayer of the Latin Church. A sixth-century legend makes him the spiritual guide of Saint Anastasia. He is the patron saint of Zadar, in Croatia, and his feast day is November 24.

Who was Saint Chrysogonus?

The name Chrysogonus, in Greek *Chrysogonos*, means "born of gold." What we know of him with certainty fits in a few words: he was a Christian killed for his faith at Aquileia, probably around 304, under Diocletian. His name appears in the oldest Latin martyrology, known as the Martyrology of Saint Jerome (the Hieronymian Martyrology), on two dates, May 31 and November 24. Some local traditions made him a bishop of Aquileia, but nothing confirms this.

His cult, on the other hand, is ancient and important. Rome quickly adopted him as one of its own martyrs. A church was dedicated to him in the Trastevere district, perhaps as early as the pontificate of Saint Sylvester or shortly afterward, and his name entered the Roman Canon. There he is listed with the great martyrs of the Church: "Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus, Cornelius, Cyprian, Lawrence, Chrysogonus, John and Paul, Cosmas and Damian."

For English-speaking Catholics, this is where they are most likely to have heard his name. Whenever a priest uses Eucharistic Prayer I at Mass and says the full list of saints, Chrysogonus is mentioned, often without anyone in the pews

knowing who he was.

Key dates in the life of Saint Chrysogonus

- **Late third century**: A Christian, perhaps a native of Rome according to the legend.
- **Around 304**: Martyrdom at Aquileia during the persecution of Diocletian.
- **Fourth century**: Foundation in Rome of the title church of Saint Chrysogonus, in Trastevere.
- **Fifth and sixth centuries**: His name appears in the Roman Canon; the legend linking him to Saint Anastasia is written.
- **1175**: Consecration of the Church of Saint Chrysogonus in Zadar, which claims his relics.
- **1622**: Rebuilding of the Roman basilica; Guercino paints his *Glory of Saint Chrysogonus*.

The legend of Chrysogonus and Anastasia

In the sixth century, a story written in Rome connected the martyr of Aquileia with the city that honored him. In it, Chrysogonus becomes a Roman Christian and the spiritual teacher of Saint Anastasia, a noblewoman who visited and supported Christians in prison.

Arrested during the persecution, he kept encouraging her by letters from his cell. He was then taken to Aquileia to appear before Emperor Diocletian, who ordered him to be beheaded. His body was thrown into the sea, washed back onto the shore, and gathered up by a priest named Zoilus, who gave him burial.

This account is legendary, but for centuries it shaped the image of Chrysogonus: a man who, though a prisoner himself, strengthened the faith of others. Painters often showed him as a young knight, as the Venetian artist

Michele Giambono did in the fifteenth century.

Rome and Zadar

The basilica in Trastevere

In Rome, the Basilica of San Crisogono in Trastevere preserves, beneath the present church, the remains of the original fourth-century building, one of the oldest Christian places of worship in the city. The church was rebuilt in the twelfth century and transformed in 1622. Its ceiling holds a copy of Guercino's *Glory of Saint Chrysogonus*. His feast on November 24 corresponds to the anniversary of the dedication of this church.

The patron of Zadar

On the Dalmatian coast, the city of Zadar, in Croatia, venerates him as its patron and says it holds his relics, which, according to tradition, arrived there in the early Middle Ages. Croatians know him as Sveti Krševan. The Romanesque Church of Saint Chrysogonus, consecrated in 1175, is one of the landmarks of the old town.

Why is Saint Chrysogonus the patron saint of Zadar?

Zadar has long claimed to keep the relics of Saint Chrysogonus. Wherever the body of a martyr rested, a medieval city naturally took him as its protector, and Zadar built its great Romanesque church in his honor. For the faithful of Zadar, he is the martyr who watches over their city, much as Saint Patrick is for Ireland.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Chrysogonus in art

- **The knight on horseback**: from the late Middle Ages, especially in Venice and Dalmatia, he is shown as a young armored rider.
- **The palm**: the usual sign of martyrdom.

- **The glory in heaven**: in Guercino's ceiling painting, he is carried up to heaven by angels.

What can we learn from Saint Chrysogonus?

Each time a priest prays the Roman Canon, he names Chrysogonus among the witnesses who surround the Eucharist. This martyr, of whom so little is known, reminds us that holiness does not need a detailed biography. It is enough that a man gave his life for Christ and that the Church kept his memory.

The legend adds a beautiful image, that of the prisoner who encourages others. We can pray to him for Christians imprisoned for their faith today, and for all those who visit, write to, and support them.

Where to pray to Saint Chrysogonus

- **Rome**: the Basilica of San Crisogono in Trastevere, with the remains of the early church beneath it.
- **Zadar** (Croatia): the Church of Saint Chrysogonus and the cathedral, in the city of which he is patron.
- **Aquileia** (Friuli, Italy): the city of his martyrdom, with its patriarchal basilica.
- **Venice**: the Church of San Trovaso, which keeps the painting by Michele Giambono.

You can also honor him simply by paying attention to his name the next time you hear the Roman Canon at Mass.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Chrysogonus for Persecuted Christians

Saint Chrysogonus is named in the Roman Canon among the martyrs who surround the Eucharist. According to an ancient legend, while he was in prison he kept encouraging Saint Anastasia and the persecuted Christians by his letters. This prayer asks his help for all who suffer for their faith and for those who stand beside them. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Chrysogonus for Persecuted Christians

Saint Chrysogonus, faithful witness of Christ,
you gave your life at Aquileia rather than deny the Lord,
and the Church has never stopped speaking your name at the altar.

Tradition tells us that, though you were a prisoner,
you strengthened the faith of others.
Look upon all Christians who are imprisoned, threatened or mocked for their faith today.
Give them courage when they are afraid,
peace when they are alone,
and the certainty that they are not forgotten.

Bless those who visit prisoners, who write to them,
who defend them and pray for them.
Make my own faith steady and simple,
so that I do not grow ashamed of the Gospel in small things.

When I hear your name at Mass,
help me to remember that I belong to a great family of witnesses,
and that the sacrifice of Christ is stronger than every persecution.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, November 24, or on May 31, the other date of his memory in the ancient martyrology.
- When you hear of Christians imprisoned or killed for their faith somewhere in the world.
- Before visiting someone in prison, or when writing to a prisoner.
- When you feel discouraged and need the support of a friend in faith.

A short prayer at Mass

When Eucharistic Prayer I is said at Mass, Chrysogonus is named among the martyrs, just after Saint Lawrence. You can quietly join this short prayer to that moment:

> *Lord Jesus, with Saint Chrysogonus and all the martyrs named at this altar, I offer you my life today. Keep me faithful, and protect all who suffer for your name. Amen.*

For a longer devotion, you can follow the Novena to Saint Chrysogonus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Chrysogonus

This novena to Saint Chrysogonus is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the little we know of this martyr of Aquileia and the ancient legend that shows him encouraging others from his prison. To end on his feast day, November 24, begin on November 16. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially for Christians persecuted for their faith.

How to pray this novena

Set aside about ten minutes each day. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Each day also suggests a small concrete act. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. If you can, attend Mass during the novena and listen for his name in the Roman Canon.

Day 1: Born of gold

The name Chrysogonus means "born of gold." Whatever his family or his origins, his true wealth was his faith in Christ. Gold is tested in fire, and so was he. We begin this novena by asking what is truly precious in our own lives.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, teach me to treasure Christ above every other good. Purify my heart, as gold is purified in the fire, and help me to see what really matters. Amen.

Today: Name one thing you hold onto too tightly, and offer it to God in prayer.

Day 2: A witness at Aquileia

Around 304, during the persecution of Diocletian, Chrysogonus was put to death at Aquileia. We do not know his last words or the details of his trial. We know only that he was faithful to the end. That is enough for the Church to honor him.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, you remained faithful when it cost you your life. Help me to be faithful in the small trials of each day, so that I may be ready if a greater one comes. Amen.

Today: Keep one promise you have been putting off.

Day 3: Named at every altar

The Church placed his name in the Roman Canon, among Linus, Cletus, Clement, Lawrence, and Cosmas and Damian. For centuries, priests have spoken it at the heart of the Mass. The martyrs are not distant figures: they stand with us around the Eucharist.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, you stand with all the martyrs around the altar of Christ. When I go to Mass, help me to remember that I am surrounded by the saints, and to pray with more attention and love. Amen.

Today: Read slowly the list of saints in Eucharistic Prayer I, or attend a weekday Mass.

Day 4: The teacher of Anastasia

The legend makes him the spiritual guide of Saint Anastasia, a noblewoman who cared for Christians in prison. A good guide does not draw others to himself, but to God. Chrysogonus helped Anastasia become generous and brave.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, thank you for all those who have guided me in the faith. Bless my parents, teachers, priests and friends who led me to Christ, and make me a good guide for others in my turn. Amen.

Today: Send a word of thanks to someone who helped you grow in faith.

Day 5: Letters from prison

According to the legend, even when he was locked up, Chrysogonus kept writing to encourage Anastasia. His chains did not stop his charity. A prisoner himself, he strengthened the faith of others.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, when I feel limited, tired or shut in, show me that I can still love and encourage. Give me the right word for those who need comfort. Amen.

Today: Write a message, a card or a letter to someone who is lonely or going through a hard time.

Day 6: For those in prison

Christ said, "I was in prison and you came to me" (Matthew 25:36). Through the story of Chrysogonus and Anastasia, we remember all prisoners: those suffering for their faith, and also those who are paying for their crimes and need to meet the mercy of God.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, I entrust to you all who are in prison today. Give hope to the innocent, conversion to the guilty, and strength to all. Bless chaplains, volunteers and families who visit them. Amen.

Today: Learn about a prison ministry in your parish or diocese, or pray a decade of the Rosary for prisoners.

Day 7: Persecuted Christians

Persecution did not end with Diocletian. In many countries today, Christians are arrested, threatened or killed because they believe in Christ. The martyrs of the early Church are close to them in a special way.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, martyr of Christ, stand beside our brothers and sisters who suffer for the faith today. Protect their families, strengthen their courage, and soften the hearts of their persecutors. Amen.

Today: Read the story of a Christian persecuted in our own time, and pray for him or her by name.

Day 8: Remembered by the Church

Rome built a church over his memory in Trastevere, and Zadar in Croatia took him as its patron. Little is known of his life, yet the Church never forgot him. God does not forget anyone who gives himself out of love.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, when I feel that my efforts are unseen, remind me that God sees in secret. Help me to serve without seeking praise, and to trust that nothing done for love is lost. Amen.

Today: Do a good deed that no one will notice.

Day 9: The glory of the martyrs

Guercino painted Chrysogonus carried up into the glory of heaven. This is the end of every Christian life: not death, but life with God. On this last day, we ask him to help us keep our eyes on heaven.

Prayer: Saint Chrysogonus, you now see the face of God. Pray that I may persevere to the end, and that one day I may join you and all the saints in the joy of heaven. Amen.

Today: Go to confession if you can, or make a sincere examination of conscience this evening.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God, you gave Saint Chrysogonus the strength to bear witness to your Son even unto death. Through his prayers, grant us a faith that does not grow weak, and a charity that reaches those who are imprisoned, forgotten or persecuted. Receive the intentions I have entrusted to you during these nine days, and keep us all in your love. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can continue with the Prayer to Saint Chrysogonus or read more about his life.

Credits and sources

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