

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Constantina, Daughter of Constantine

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: February 18

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IN BRIEF

Saint Constantina, Daughter of Constantine

Eldest daughter of Emperor Constantine, 4th-century imperial princess, honored as a saint in Rome.

Feast day	February 18
Born	between 307 and 317
Died	354, Bithynia
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Constantina for the Sick and the Powerful

Novena to Saint Constantina

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Constantina, Daughter of Constantine

Saint Constantina, also called Constantia or Constance, was the eldest daughter of Emperor Constantine and his wife Fausta, in the 4th century. An imperial princess bearing the title *Augusta*, closely involved in the power struggles of her family, she is also honored by Roman tradition as a saint, linked to the memory of the martyr Saint Agnes. Her mausoleum, the church of Santa Costanza in Rome, is one of the most beautiful Christian monuments of antiquity. Her memory is celebrated on February 18.

Who was Saint Constantina?

Constantina was born on an uncertain date, between 307 and 317, into the family that would make Christianity the favored religion of the Roman Empire. She was the granddaughter of Saint Helena and the daughter of Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor.

Her life is known to us through two very different paths. The historians of antiquity describe a woman of power, involved in the politics of the empire. Christian tradition, on the other hand, presents her as a consecrated virgin healed at the tomb of Saint Agnes. The two pictures must be carefully distinguished.

Key dates in the life of Constantina

- **Between 307 and 317**: Born, the daughter of Constantine and Fausta.
- **335**: Marries her cousin Hannibalianus and receives the title of *Augusta*.
- **337**: Death of Constantine; Hannibalianus is killed in the massacre of part of the imperial family.

- **Around 349**: Her brother, Emperor Constantius II, marries her to their cousin Gallus.
- **351**: Gallus is named Caesar; the couple settles in Antioch to govern the East.
- **354**: She dies in Bithynia, on her way to meet her brother; her body is brought back to Rome.

A woman of power

In 335, Constantine gave her in marriage to his nephew Hannibalianus, to whom he entrusted a kingdom on the eastern borders of the empire. Two years later, at the emperor's death, Hannibalianus was murdered along with several members of the family.

As a widow, Constantina kept real influence. When the usurper Magnentius seized power in the West, she urged the general Vetranio to take power in order to defend her family.

Wife of Gallus in Antioch

Her second husband, Gallus, governed the East from Antioch, where she also played a political role. The historian Ammianus Marcellinus, who was hostile to the couple, describes her in very harsh terms and accuses her of encouraging the cruelty of Gallus. In 354, Gallus was recalled by Constantius II. He sent his wife ahead to calm the emperor, but she fell ill and died during the journey, in Bithynia.

The Christian tradition

Christian tradition, handed down in particular by the stories linked to the cult of Saint Agnes, gives a very different picture. According to it, Constantina, seriously ill, came to pray at the tomb of Agnes and of Saint Emerentiana,

along the Via Nomentana. She was healed, was baptized and consecrated herself to God in virginity.

This legendary account contradicts history, since Constantina was married twice and was the mother of a daughter, Anastasia. The figure of the princess was probably merged with that of another Constantia, a consecrated virgin.

What is certain is her link with the shrine of Agnes: she had a great basilica built near the martyr's tomb, the origin of the present church of Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura, Saint Agnes Outside the Walls.



The vision of Saint Constantina, by Pietro da Cortona.

The mausoleum of Santa Costanza

After her death, Constantina was buried in Rome, along the Via Nomentana, in a round mausoleum built beside the basilica of Saint Agnes. Its vaults still keep 4th-century mosaics: grape harvest scenes, birds and plant patterns. The

building later became a church and took the name of Santa Costanza. Her porphyry sarcophagus is now in the Vatican Museums.

Visitors to Rome often discover Santa Costanza while going to Saint Agnes Outside the Walls. Its circle of paired columns and its early Christian mosaics make it a rare witness to the first age of public Christian art, when the faith was coming out of the time of persecution.

What does her holiness teach us?

The case of Saint Constantina invites honesty: the princess of history looks little like the virgin of legend. Her cult, ancient and local, became attached to a place more than to a biography. She is remembered on February 18 and, in some traditions, on February 25 with the young women she is said to have converted.

Her story still speaks today. It reminds us that the Church does not ask us to confuse history and legend, and that God can write straight with crooked lines. It also shows the power of a place of prayer: the tomb of a young martyr, Agnes, drew an imperial princess to build a basilica, and that shrine has welcomed pilgrims for more than sixteen centuries.

Is Saint Constantina a patron saint?

Constantina has no well-established patronage. Her memory is tied above all to Rome, to the Via Nomentana and to the shrine of Saint Agnes. Those who visit Santa Costanza or who pray for a healing, as the legend tells of her, may turn to her and to Saint Agnes together.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Constantina in art

Constantina appears mainly in scenes connected with Saint Agnes. The best known is the painting by Pietro da Cortona showing her vision: the sick princess, asleep before the tomb of Agnes and Emerentiana, sees the two saints appear to her. She is shown as a young noblewoman, sometimes crowned. The grape harvest mosaics of her mausoleum and the putti gathering grapes on her porphyry sarcophagus are also closely linked to her memory.

Where to pray to Saint Constantina

- **Rome**: the church of Santa Costanza, her former mausoleum, on the Via Nomentana.
- **Rome**: the neighboring basilica of Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura, over the tomb of Saint Agnes.
- **Vatican City**: the Vatican Museums, which display her porphyry sarcophagus.

Wherever you are, you can pray with the prayer to Saint Constantina or the novena to Saint Constantina.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Constantina for the Sick and the Powerful

No prayer of Saint Constantina has come down to us, and her life is known through two very different sources: the historians, who describe a powerful princess, and the tradition of the Church of Rome, which tells of her healing at the tomb of Saint Agnes. This original prayer draws on what is certain: her link with the shrine of Agnes, her life in the midst of power and the ancient memory the Church keeps of her.

Prayer to Saint Constantina

Saint Constantina, daughter of the first Christian emperor, you lived among the honors and the struggles of power, and you knew grief, exile and the dangers of the road.

The memory of the Church places you in prayer at the tomb of Saint Agnes, along the Via Nomentana. There, according to tradition, you asked for healing and found the Lord.

Pray for the sick who wait for healing of body and soul. Pray for those who hold power, that they may serve justice and not their own ambition. Pray for families torn by rivalry and violence.

With Saint Agnes, whose shrine you honored, teach me to seek Christ above all things, and to place my trust in him when the road is hard.

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

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Constantina is remembered on February 18, and in some traditions on February 25. This prayer is especially suited:

- on her feast day, February 18;
- when praying for a sick person, as the legend tells of her own healing;
- for those who hold political or economic power;
- for families divided by conflict or ambition;
- during a pilgrimage to Rome, at Santa Costanza or at Saint Agnes Outside the Walls.

A prayer with Saint Agnes

The memory of Constantina is inseparable from that of Saint Agnes, the young Roman martyr whose shrine she helped to build. You can join them in this short prayer.

> *Lord Jesus, you gave to Saint Agnes the courage to remain faithful to you, and you drew to her tomb the princess Constantina. Through their intercession, heal what is wounded in us and make us faithful to you in every circumstance of life. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Constantina, or pray the novena to Saint Constantina.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Constantina

This novena to Saint Constantina is an original composition by Saintspedia. Her life is known through two sources: history, which describes an imperial princess caught up in the struggles of power, and the Christian tradition, which tells of her healing at the tomb of Saint Agnes. Each day draws on what can be said honestly about her. To end on her feast day, February 18, begin it on February 10. It is especially suited to praying for the sick and for those who hold power.

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 the small act proposed. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Day 1: Born into a Christian empire

Constantina was the daughter of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, and the granddaughter of Saint Helena. She grew up at the moment when the Church came out of the age of persecution. What had been forbidden became public and honored.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the freedom to believe and to pray. Strengthen those who are still persecuted for your name. Amen.

Today: Pray for Christians who cannot practice their faith freely.

Day 2: The weight of power

Constantina was given the title of *Augusta* and was married for political reasons. She lived in a world of honors, rivalries and ambition. Power is not evil in itself, but it is a heavy responsibility before God.

Prayer: Lord, give wisdom and justice to those who govern, and keep them from the temptation of pride. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for a leader of your country or your city.

Day 3: Grief and violence

In 337, at the death of her father, her first husband Hannibalianus was murdered with several members of her family. Constantina knew the violence that can tear a family apart. God is close to those whose hearts are broken.

Prayer: Lord, comfort those who mourn a violent death, and bring peace to families torn by hatred. Amen.

Today: Pray for victims of violence and their families.

Day 4: Honesty about history

The historian Ammianus Marcellinus judged Constantina harshly, and legend later made her a consecrated virgin. The truth about her life is mixed and uncertain. Only God knows the depths of each heart, and he alone judges with mercy.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from rash judgment of others, and help me to see them as you see them. Amen.

Today: Refuse to repeat a criticism or a rumor about someone.

Day 5: At the tomb of Agnes

According to tradition, Constantina, seriously ill, came to pray at the tomb of Saint Agnes along the Via Nomentana. The young martyr, who had given her life for Christ, became for her a guide toward the Lord.

Prayer: Saint Agnes and Saint Constantina, pray for the sick who place their hope in God. Amen.

Today: Visit or call a sick person, or pray for them by name.

Day 6: Healing of body and soul

The legend says that Constantina was healed and then baptized. Beyond the details of the story, it speaks of a healing deeper than the body: the encounter with Christ, who makes all things new.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, heal in me what is wounded, and renew the grace of my baptism. Amen.

Today: Make the Sign of the Cross with holy water, recalling your baptism, or go to confession if you can.

Day 7: Building for God

Constantina had a great basilica built near the tomb of Saint Agnes, the origin of Saint Agnes Outside the Walls. She used her wealth to honor a martyr and to welcome pilgrims. For more than sixteen centuries, people have prayed there.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who build and care for churches, and make me a living stone of your Church. Amen.

Today: Offer some time or a gift to your parish.

Day 8: The last journey

In 354, Constantina set out to meet her brother, Emperor Constantius II, to plead for her husband. She fell ill and died on the way, in Bithynia. Our life, too, is a journey toward God, and we do not know when it will end.

Prayer: Lord, keep me ready to meet you, and grant eternal rest to those who have died far from home. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who has died, especially someone who died alone or far away.

Day 9: Beauty that speaks of eternity

The mausoleum of Santa Costanza, with its mosaics of vines and birds, still speaks of joy and of the harvest of the Kingdom. In the early Christian imagination, the vine evoked Christ and the Eucharist. Beauty can lead us to God.

Prayer: Lord, you are the true vine and we are the branches. Keep us united to you, now and forever. Amen.

Today: Take a moment to contemplate a beautiful work of Christian art, or a church near you.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Constantina, imperial princess honored by the Church of Rome, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you my intention. With Saint Agnes, pray for the sick, for those who hold power and for divided families. Help us to seek Christ above every honor of this world, and to reach one day the joy of his Kingdom. Amen.*

To go further, read the life of Saint Constantina and the prayer to Saint Constantina.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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