

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Cyriacus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: August 8

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IN BRIEF

Saint Cyriacus

Deacon of the Church of Rome, martyr around 304, one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers.

Feast day	August 8
Died	c. 304, Rome
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial cult)
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	people with epilepsy

In this booklet

Life

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Cyriacus

Saint Cyriacus was a deacon of the Church of Rome who died a martyr around 304, during the persecution of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, together with several companions. His legend, very popular in the Middle Ages, tells how he freed the emperor's daughter from an affliction, and this made him one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, invoked against epilepsy and inner torment. His feast day is August 8, which he shares with his companions Largus, Smaragdus and the other martyrs of the Via Ostiensis.

Who was Saint Cyriacus?

Little is known with certainty about the history of Cyriacus. He was a Roman martyr of the early fourth century, buried with companions along the Via Ostiensis (the road to Ostia), south of Rome, and honored very early by the Roman Church. His Greek name, *Kyriakos*, means "belonging to the Lord."

Everything else told about him comes from an account of martyrdom written later, the Passion of Saint Marcellus, in which history is mixed with legendary elements. This account makes him a deacon ordained by Pope Saint Marcellus I, serving Christians condemned to forced labor during the persecution. Historians read it with caution, but it explains the extraordinary popularity of Cyriacus in medieval Europe.

Key dates

- **Late third century**: Deacon of the Church of Rome, according to tradition.
- **c. 303-304**: During the persecution, he helps Christians condemned to forced labor.
- **c. 304**: Martyred in Rome with several companions.

- **August 8**: The date of his final burial along the Via Ostiensis, which became his feast day.
- **Tenth-eleventh centuries**: His relics spread to Germany and Alsace.

The deacon of the condemned

According to the Passion, Emperor Maximian had the immense Baths of Diocletian built in Rome and used many Christians as forced laborers on the site. Cyriacus, with his companions Largus, Smaragdus and Sisinnius, brought them food and comfort, and shared their labor.

This service of the weakest fits well with the mission of deacons in the early Church, who were responsible for the poor and for prisoners. Like Saint Lawrence, another deacon martyr of Rome whose feast falls two days later, Cyriacus represents the diaconal Church that serves Christ in those who suffer.

Even so, the fact that the Church of Rome honored Cyriacus so early, and has kept his memory ever since, is the surest sign that a real martyr stands behind the later stories.

The healing of Artemia

The most famous episode of the legend is the healing of Artemia, the daughter of Emperor Diocletian. The young woman, it is said, was tormented by an affliction attributed to a demon. Cyriacus prayed for her and freed her. The account adds that he was then called to Persia to heal a princess suffering from the same affliction.

These episodes explain why, for centuries, Christians invoked him against epilepsy and against temptations and inner anguish. In an age when such illnesses were poorly understood and often feared, turning to Saint Cyriacus was a way of entrusting the sick to God's mercy rather than to rejection.

Back in Rome, still according to the Passion, Cyriacus was arrested on Maximian's orders, cruelly tortured and beheaded with his companions, around 304. His remains were buried on the Via Ostiensis; by tradition, the feast of August 8 keeps the date on which they received a worthy burial.

One of the Fourteen Holy Helpers

From the tenth century onward, relics of Cyriacus reached the German lands. Emperor Otto I is said to have had some brought to Bamberg, and the abbey of Altorf, in Alsace, received some in 1049. Many churches are dedicated to him in Germany, such as the Romanesque collegiate church of Gernrode, founded in the tenth century.

At the end of the Middle Ages he was counted among the Fourteen Holy Helpers, the saints invoked together for the concrete needs of life, alongside Saint Barbara, Saint Christopher, Saint Erasmus and Saint Giles. Devotion to the Holy Helpers was carried by German Catholic immigrants to the United States, where it is still alive in some parishes.

Why is Saint Cyriacus the patron saint of people with epilepsy?

Because of the legend of Artemia's healing, Saint Cyriacus became the saint invoked for those suffering from epilepsy, a disease long misunderstood and attributed to evil spirits. As one of the Holy Helpers, he was also called upon against demonic oppression and temptation.

Beyond the legend, Cyriacus is the figure of the deacon who serves the weakest, even at the risk of his life. His cult also reminds us that the Church has always prayed for those suffering from illnesses that were poorly understood and long stigmatized. You can pray to him for people with epilepsy and their families, for deacons, and for those who carry inner anguish.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Cyriacus in art

Saint Cyriacus is shown as a young deacon wearing the dalmatic, often holding the palm of martyrdom. Many images, especially in German art, show him with a small chained demon or a dragon at his feet, recalling his power over the evil that tormented Artemia, and sometimes with the kneeling princess beside him. In groups of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, he is the one in deacon's vestments with a demon.

Where to pray to Saint Cyriacus

- **Altorf** (Bas-Rhin, France): the abbey church of Saint Cyriacus, a former Benedictine abbey that received his relics.
- **Gernrode** (Saxony-Anhalt, Germany): the Romanesque collegiate church of Saint Cyriacus.
- **Bamberg** (Bavaria): the city where relics were brought under Otto I.
- **Vierzehnheiligen** (Franconia): the basilica of the Fourteen Holy Helpers.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Cyriacus or the novena to Saint Cyriacus.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Cyriacus for People with Epilepsy

Saint Cyriacus, deacon and martyr of Rome around 304, is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. For centuries Christians have turned to him for people suffering from epilepsy and for those troubled by inner anguish, because of the legend of his healing of the emperor's daughter. Below is an original prayer in his honor, followed by a short invocation to all the Holy Helpers.

Prayer to Saint Cyriacus

Saint Cyriacus, faithful deacon of the Church of Rome, you served Christians condemned to forced labor, bringing them bread, comfort and the strength of your presence.

You prayed over the tormented and brought them peace: look with kindness on all who suffer from epilepsy, and on their families who watch over them with worry. Obtain for them relief, good care and confidence in God's love.

Look also on those who carry fear, anguish or temptation in their hearts. Ask the Lord to free them from all that oppresses them and to give them his peace.

You gave your life for Christ rather than deny him: strengthen my faith in times of trial. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Saint Cyriacus, pray for us. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Cyriacus's feast day is August 8, which he shares with his companions Largus and Smaragdus. You can pray to him:

- for a person with epilepsy, before a medical appointment or after a seizure;
- for parents and caregivers of a child with epilepsy;
- in times of anxiety, fear or spiritual struggle;
- for deacons and for all who serve prisoners and the poor.

Prayer to the saints never replaces medical care: it accompanies it and places the sick person in God's hands. To pray with him over nine days, follow the novena to Saint Cyriacus, and read the life of Saint Cyriacus to know him better.

Invocation to the Fourteen Holy Helpers

Saint Cyriacus belongs to the group of Fourteen Holy Helpers, invoked together since the late Middle Ages. You can end your prayer with this short invocation, an original text by Saintspedia:

> *Fourteen Holy Helpers, friends of God who gave your lives for Christ, you know our needs in body and soul. Saint Cyriacus, Saint Barbara, Saint Christopher, Saint Erasmus, Saint Giles, and all the Holy Helpers, present our prayers to the Lord and help us in our trials. Amen.*

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Cyriacus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and legend of Saint Cyriacus, deacon and martyr of Rome and one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, August 8, begin it on July 31. It can be prayed at any time, especially for a person with epilepsy or for someone weighed down by anxiety.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you live in the spirit of Cyriacus, a deacon who served the weakest. You can pray it alone, with your family or with a prayer group.

Day 1: Belonging to the Lord

The name Cyriacus, *Kyriakos* in Greek, means "belonging to the Lord." Before any work or any miracle, his life was first given to God. We begin this novena by remembering that we too belong to the Lord, through our baptism.

Prayer: Lord, I belong to you. Take my life, my worries and my intentions, and keep me close to you.

Today: Renew your baptismal promises in silence, or pray the Creed slowly.

Day 2: A deacon who serves

According to tradition, Cyriacus was a deacon ordained by Pope Marcellus. In the early Church, deacons cared for the poor, the widows and the prisoners. We pray for deacons today and for all who serve in the Church.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came to serve and not to be served. Bless deacons and give me a servant's heart.

Today: Pray for a deacon of your parish or diocese, or offer a hidden service at home.

Day 3: With the condemned

Cyriacus and his companions brought food and comfort to Christians forced to labor on the Baths of Diocletian, and shared their work. They did not stay at a safe distance. We pray for prisoners and for those who visit them.

Prayer: Lord, you are present in those who are in prison. Comfort them, and give courage to those who serve them.

Today: Pray for prisoners, or support a prison ministry in some small way.

Day 4: Praying over the sick

The legend tells that Cyriacus prayed over Artemia, the emperor's daughter, who was tormented by an affliction, and that she was freed. We bring before God all who suffer from epilepsy, and all illnesses that frighten or isolate.

Prayer: Lord, look with mercy on all who suffer from epilepsy. Give them relief, good doctors and the support of those around them.

Today: Pray by name for a person with a chronic illness, or offer them a sign of friendship.

Day 5: For families who keep watch

Behind every sick person there is often a family that keeps watch, worries and hopes. The emperor himself, in the legend, sought help for his daughter. We pray for parents and caregivers who live with the fear of a seizure or a crisis.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen families who care for a sick loved one. Give them rest, patience and peace.

Today: Offer concrete help or a word of encouragement to a caregiver you know.

Day 6: Freed from what oppresses

Cyriacus has long been invoked against temptation and inner anguish. Many people today carry fears and burdens no one sees. We ask the Lord to free us from all that oppresses our hearts.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, deliver me from fear and from all that binds me. Fill me with your peace.

Today: Name before God one fear that troubles you, and entrust it to him; consider going to confession.

Day 7: Faithful under persecution

Cyriacus was arrested on Maximian's orders, tortured and beheaded with his companions around 304. He preferred death to denying Christ. We pray for Christians persecuted today.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen the faith of those who suffer for your name. Make me faithful in my small daily trials.

Today: Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted.

Day 8: Together with the Holy Helpers

Cyriacus is honored among the Fourteen Holy Helpers, saints whom Christians called upon together for the needs of daily life. We are never alone in prayer: the communion of saints surrounds us.

Prayer: Holy Helpers, friends of God, pray with us and for us in all our needs of body and soul.

Today: Ask a friend to pray for your intention, and pray for theirs.

Day 9: Honored with his companions

Cyriacus is celebrated on August 8 with his companions Largus and Smaragdus. He did not serve or die alone, but in a community of faith. On this last day, we entrust our intentions to him and give thanks for those who walk with us.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Cyriacus and his companions, hear the intention I have carried these nine days, and keep me faithful to you.

Today: Thank someone who has supported you in a difficult time.

Closing prayer

Saint Cyriacus, deacon and martyr, servant of the condemned and helper of the tormented, you belonged wholly to the Lord. Present to God the intention I have carried during this novena. Obtain relief for all who suffer from epilepsy, strength for their families, and peace for those troubled by fear and anguish. Help me to serve the weakest as you did and to remain faithful to Christ in every trial. Saint Cyriacus, pray for us. Amen.

For a shorter prayer, see the prayer to Saint Cyriacus.

Credits and sources

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