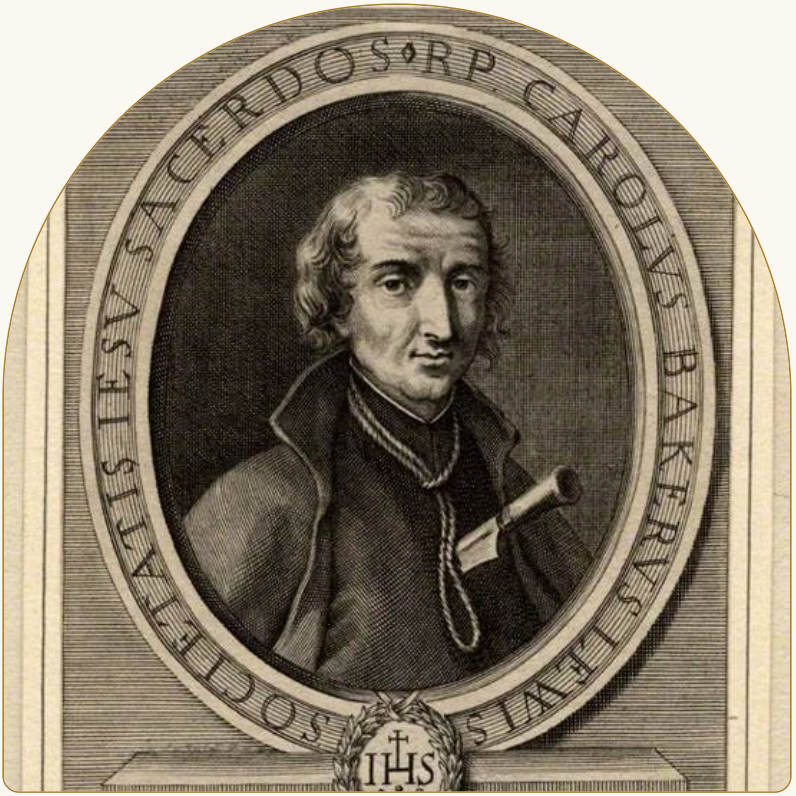


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint David Lewis

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: August 27

IN BRIEF

Saint David Lewis

Welsh Jesuit priest and secret missionary known as the father of the poor, martyred at Usk in 1679.

Feast day	August 27, October 25 (with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales)
Born	1616, Abergavenny (Wales)
Died	August 27, 1679, Usk (Wales)
Canonized	October 25, 1970, by Pope Paul VI
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	Wales (with the Welsh martyrs)

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint David Lewis, Father of the Poor

Novena to Saint David Lewis

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint David Lewis

Saint David Lewis was a Welsh Jesuit priest, born in Abergavenny in 1616 and executed at Usk, in Wales, on August 27, 1679. For some thirty years he ministered in secret to the Catholics of South Wales, so devotedly that he was known in Welsh as *Tad y Tlodion*, "the father of the poor." A victim of the persecution unleashed by the so-called Popish Plot, he is one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1970. His feast day is August 27.

Who was Saint David Lewis?

In seventeenth-century England and Wales, being a Catholic priest was a crime punishable by death. Catholics had to attend Mass in secret, in friendly houses, often at dawn. Priests trained on the Continent came back at the risk of their lives to serve them. David Lewis was one of them.

Born into a Protestant family, he became a Catholic in Paris, trained in Rome and entered the Society of Jesus. He spent most of his priestly life in the countryside of Monmouthshire, serving the poor as much as the faithful. He is often described as the last of the Welsh martyrs of this period. His last words on the scaffold, passed on by witnesses, are among the finest testimonies to freedom of conscience.

Key dates

- **1616**: Born in Abergavenny, to a Protestant father, a schoolmaster, and a Catholic mother.
- **c. 1632**: Goes to Paris as a tutor with a noble family and becomes a Catholic there.
- **1638**: Enters the English College in Rome.

- **July 20, 1642**: Ordained a priest in Rome.
- **April 19, 1645**: Enters the Society of Jesus.
- **1648**: Returns to Wales for good, to a small Jesuit residence in Monmouthshire.
- **1667-1672 and 1674-1679**: Superior of the Jesuits in South Wales.
- **November 17, 1678**: Arrested at dawn as he prepares to celebrate Mass at Llantarnam.
- **March 1679**: Sentenced to death at Monmouth for exercising his ministry as a priest.
- **August 27, 1679**: Executed at Usk and buried in the churchyard of St Mary's Church.
- **December 15, 1929**: Beatified by Pope Pius XI.
- **October 25, 1970**: Canonized by Pope Paul VI with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

From Protestantism to the priesthood

David was the eldest of a large family. His father, Morgan Lewis, ran the school in Abergavenny, and the boy was brought up in the Church of England. He began studying law in London, at the Middle Temple. At about sixteen he went to Paris as tutor in a noble family, and it was there that he became a Catholic.

After the death of his parents, he went to Rome in 1638 and entered the English College, which trained priests for the secret mission in England and Wales. He was ordained in 1642 and joined the Jesuits in 1645.

Thirty years of secret mission

Sent to Wales in 1646, then recalled to Rome for a time as spiritual father of the English College, he returned in 1648, never to leave again. He lived in a modest Jesuit residence in southeast Wales and traveled through the valleys to celebrate Mass, hear confessions, baptize and visit the sick.

He spoke Welsh and stayed close to the poorest, helping them with his own means. His nickname, "the father of the poor," shows the affection he inspired, far beyond the Catholic community. Twice his fellow Jesuits chose him as their superior.

The Popish Plot

In 1678, Titus Oates invented a so-called Catholic plot to assassinate King Charles II. His groundless accusations set off a violent wave of persecution. The Jesuits had to leave their residence and go into hiding. David Lewis was denounced by a former servant, who collected the promised reward. He was arrested at dawn on November 17, 1678, as he was about to celebrate Mass near Llantarnam.

Trial and refusal

Imprisoned at Monmouth and then at Usk, he continued to minister to the other Catholic prisoners. Tried in March 1679, he was condemned not for any plot, but simply for being a Catholic priest and saying Mass. He was taken to London with other priests, including Saint John Kemble, to be questioned about the alleged plot, and was found to have nothing to do with it. He was offered his life if he would denounce other Catholics or renounce his faith. He refused.



St Mary's Church in Usk, in whose churchyard Saint David Lewis is buried.

Death at Usk

On August 27, 1679, he was led to the place of execution at Usk. He addressed the crowd. According to contemporary accounts, he declared that he died not as a murderer, a thief or a criminal, but as a Christian, and so was not ashamed. He added that he was a Catholic and a Catholic priest, a priest of the religious order called the Society of Jesus.

The crowd was so moved that the appointed executioner ran away, and another had to be found. According to the accounts of his martyrdom, the people made sure he was dead before his body was mutilated, as the sentence required. He was buried in the churchyard of St Mary's Church in Usk, where his grave can still be seen.

Why is Saint David Lewis honored in Wales?

With the other Welsh martyrs of the Reformation period, Saint David Lewis is honored as a patron of Wales. He is also remembered on October 25 with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. He united faithfulness to the faith with love for the poor. He was never a conspirator: he died for saying Mass, hearing confessions and giving the sacraments. His witness recalls the price of religious freedom and the beauty of a priest's life given to the end. He can be prayed to for priests, for persecuted Christians, for the poor and for Christian unity in Wales and England.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint David Lewis in art

The best-known image of Saint David Lewis is an engraving of 1683, made a few years after his death, which shows him in bust as a Jesuit priest. His memory is also kept by his simple grave at Usk, which pilgrims still visit, especially around his feast in August.



Usk, in Wales, where Saint David Lewis was executed in 1679.

Where to pray to Saint David Lewis

- **Usk** (Monmouthshire): his grave in the churchyard of St Mary's Church, and the Catholic church of St Francis Xavier and St David Lewis.
- **Abergavenny**: his birthplace, where he grew up before his conversion.
- **Llantarnam**, near Cwmbran: the place of his arrest.
- **Cardiff**: the Catholic Cathedral of St David, where the Welsh martyrs are honored.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint David Lewis and the novena to Saint David Lewis.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint David Lewis, Father of the Poor

Saint David Lewis, the Welsh Jesuit martyred at Usk in 1679, was known as "the father of the poor." He is invoked for priests, for persecuted Christians and for the poor. This page recalls the substance of his words on the scaffold, then offers an original prayer.

The last words of Saint David Lewis

On August 27, 1679, before he died, David Lewis spoke to the crowd gathered at Usk. His speech was reported by witnesses and published soon afterward. In substance, he declared:

> *I die not as a murderer, a thief or an evildoer, but as a Christian, and so I am not ashamed. I am a Catholic and a Catholic priest, a priest of the religious order called the Society of Jesus, and I thank God for calling me to it.*

Source: speech of David Lewis on the scaffold, August 27, 1679, after contemporary accounts. The wording above is a modern rendering by Saintspedia, not the exact text of the original.

Prayer to Saint David Lewis

Saint David Lewis, father of the poor,
for thirty years you served the Catholics of Wales at the risk of your life:
teach me to love Christ more than my own safety.

You celebrated Mass in secret, at dawn, in the houses of friends:
help me to understand the value of the Eucharist
and never to receive it out of habit.

You shared your goods with the poorest:
open my heart to those who lack everything.

You forgave those who betrayed and condemned you:
teach me to forgive.
Pray for priests, for Christians persecuted throughout the world,
and for the unity of all the disciples of Christ.
I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may I bear witness to my faith,
without shame and without hatred.
Amen.

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

Intentions to entrust to Saint David Lewis

- Priests, especially those who minister in secret or in danger.
- Christians persecuted for their faith.
- The poor and those who serve them.
- Christian unity in Wales and England.
- Those who have been betrayed or falsely accused.

When to pray this prayer

Saint David Lewis is celebrated on August 27, the day of his martyrdom. He is also honored on October 25 with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. For nine days of prayer, see the novena to Saint David Lewis, and to know him better, read the life of Saint David Lewis.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint David Lewis

This novena to Saint David Lewis is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of the Welsh Jesuit martyred at Usk in 1679. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, August 27, begin it on August 19. You can also pray it at any time, especially for priests, for persecuted Christians, for the poor or for Christian unity in Wales and England.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the sign of the cross and place your intention before 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 you live in the spirit of Saint David Lewis: love for the Mass, care for the poor and courage in faith. You can pray it alone, with your family or with your parish.



St Mary's Church in Usk, where Saint David Lewis is buried.

Day 1: A Welsh childhood

David Lewis was born in Abergavenny in 1616, the eldest of a large family. His father was a Protestant schoolmaster and his mother a Catholic. God was already at work in this family, even through its differences.

Prayer: Lord, bless families divided in faith, and help them live in respect and love.

Today: Pray for a family member whose faith differs from yours.

Day 2: Conversion in Paris

While working as a tutor in Paris, the young David became a Catholic. Conversion is a gift of grace that often comes when we least expect it. It changed the whole direction of his life, and it would one day lead him back to his own country as a priest.

Prayer: Lord, keep my heart open to your call, and complete the conversion you have begun in me.

Today: Thank God for a moment when your faith became more real to you.

Day 3: Formed in Rome

At the English College in Rome, David prepared for the priesthood knowing that he might one day die for it. He was ordained in 1642 and joined the Jesuits in 1645. He gave himself completely, without holding anything back.

Prayer: Lord of the harvest, send generous priests to your Church, ready to give their lives for your people.

Today: Pray for seminarians and for a priest you know.

Day 4: Mass at dawn

For thirty years, Father Lewis celebrated Mass in secret, often at dawn, in friendly houses. For the Catholics of Wales, every Mass was a risk. Their faith reminds us how precious the Eucharist is, and how much it once cost to receive it.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, never let me receive you out of habit. Increase my love for the Mass.

Today: Go to Mass, or spend time before the Blessed Sacrament.

Day 5: The father of the poor

The people called him *Tad y Tlodion*, the father of the poor. He shared his goods with those in need and was loved far beyond the Catholic community. Charity speaks a language everyone understands.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes and my hands to the poor around me.

Today: Give time, food or money to someone in need.

Day 6: Betrayed for a reward

When the false Popish Plot was invented in 1678, a former servant denounced Father Lewis for a reward. He was arrested at dawn as he prepared to say Mass. Like Christ, he knew betrayal by someone close to him.

Prayer: Lord, heal those who have been betrayed, and give them the grace to forgive.

Today: Pray for someone who has hurt you.

Day 7: A priest even in prison

In prison at Monmouth and Usk, Father Lewis continued to serve the other Catholic prisoners. Nothing could stop him from being a priest. Even in the darkest places, God's love can shine.

Prayer: Lord, be close to prisoners and to all who serve them, and give them hope.

Today: Pray for prisoners, or support a prison ministry.

Day 8: Refusing to betray

Found innocent of any plot, Father Lewis was offered his life if he would denounce other Catholics or renounce his faith. He refused. He chose to protect others and remain faithful, even at the cost of his life.

Prayer: Lord, give courage to persecuted Christians, and make me faithful to you in small things and in great ones.

Today: Speak up kindly for your faith or for someone who is being treated unfairly.

Day 9: Not ashamed

At Usk, on August 27, 1679, he told the crowd that he died not as a criminal but as a Christian, and was not ashamed. The people were so moved that the executioner fled. His grave at Usk is still a place of prayer.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint David Lewis, grant the grace I ask in this novena, and help me never to be ashamed of the Gospel.

Today: Make the sign of the cross before a meal in a public place, simply and without fear.

Closing prayer

> *Saint David Lewis, priest, father of the poor and martyr,*
> *you served the Catholics of Wales in secret for thirty years*
> *and gave your life for the Mass and the sacraments.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Pray for priests, for persecuted Christians,*
> *for the poor, and for the unity of all Christians in Wales and England.*
> *Help me to bear witness to my faith without shame and without hatred.*
> *Amen.*

Continue with the prayer to Saint David Lewis or read his life.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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