

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Devota, Patron of Monaco and Corsica

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 27

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IN BRIEF

Saint Devota, Patron of Monaco and Corsica

Fourth-century virgin and martyr of Corsica, patron saint of the Principality of Monaco and of Corsica.

Feast day	January 27
Born	late 3rd century, Corsica (Lucciana, according to one tradition)
Died	c. 303-304, Corsica (Mariana or Aléria, according to different traditions)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Monaco, Corsica, Pietranera

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Devota, Patron of Monaco and Corsica

Saint Devota was a virgin and martyr of Corsica, put to death according to tradition at the beginning of the fourth century, during the persecution of Diocletian. According to her *Passion*, the boat carrying her body was guided by a dove to the shore of present-day Monaco, where devotion to her has never ceased. Patron saint of the Principality of Monaco and of Corsica, she is celebrated on January 27. On the evening before, in Monaco, a boat is set on fire in front of her church, in memory of the stories of her legend.

Who was Saint Devota?

Devota (*Dévote* in French, *Santa Devota* in Monegasque, *Santa Divota* in Corsican) is one of the most popular saints of the Ligurian coast and of Corsica. Her story is known from a *Passion* preserved in an eleventh-century manuscript, now in the National Library of France. This account, written several centuries after the events, tells of the death of a young Christian woman of Corsica and then of the miraculous arrival of her body in Monaco.

Historians remain cautious. They accept that a young Christian may have been martyred in Corsica during the Great Persecution, between 303 and 312, but they point out that the *Passion of Devota* closely resembles that of Saint Julia of Corsica, the island's other patron saint. Some even think that the name Devota comes from an epithet, *Deo devota*, "consecrated to God," given to a martyr. What is certain is the age and fervor of a devotion that, since the Middle Ages, has united Monaco and Corsica around this young martyr.



Saint Devota, patron saint of Monaco and Corsica.

Key dates in the life of Saint Devota

- **Late third century**: Born in Corsica; a late tradition places her birth around 283 at Quercio, in today's commune of Lucciana, near the ancient city of Mariana.
- **Around 303-304**: During the persecution of Diocletian, she is arrested and martyred in Corsica, at Mariana or Aléria according to different traditions.
- **January 27**: According to Monegasque tradition, her boat lands in the Gaumates valley, in Monaco, guided by a dove.
- **Eleventh century**: The *Passion of Devota* kept in Paris is written or copied.
- **1639**: Relics of Devota are sent from Monaco to Corsica at the request of the Corsicans.

- **1820**: The Sacred Congregation of Rites proclaims her patron of Corsica, together with Saint Julia.

The martyr of Corsica

According to her *Passion*, Devota was a young Christian woman of Corsica, consecrated to God, who lived under the protection of a Roman notable named Eutychius. He kept her in his household and respected her faith. But the governor, charged with enforcing the edicts of persecution, got rid of Eutychius and had the young woman arrested. Ordered to sacrifice to the gods, she refused. She was then tortured and died for Christ.

The governor ordered her body to be burned so that Christians could not honor it. But at night a priest and a deacon of the community, helped by a sailor, took the body and laid it in a boat, intending to bring it to Africa, where there were many Christians.

The dove and the boat

During the crossing a storm arose. The story tells that a dove then came out of the martyr's mouth and guided the boat northward. It came ashore at the end of a small valley, the Gaumates valley, on the coast of present-day Monaco, where there was a chapel. The body was buried there, and the place became a shrine. This is the origin of the church of Saint Devota in Monaco.

Another legend, written down in the seventeenth century, tells that in the eleventh century thieves tried to carry off the relics by sea; when they were caught, their boat was set on fire. Historians consider this story late, but it explains the rite of the burning boat that takes place in Monaco every year on the evening of January 26.



The church of Saint Devota, Monaco.

A saint at the heart of Monaco

Devotion to Saint Devota is closely tied to the history of the principality. She is its patron, and her feast on January 27 is a public holiday in Monaco. On the evening before, the prince and his family attend the burning of a boat in front of the church of Saint Devota, a very popular rite that grew into a great ceremony in the nineteenth century. The next day a solemn Mass is celebrated and the relics of the saint are carried in procession through the town.

Devota appears throughout Monegasque art: on the Saint Nicholas altarpiece painted by Louis Bréa, on a late sixteenth-century altarpiece in the cathedral, and in the chapel of the Prince's Palace. In 1997, Prince Rainier III had a monument by the sculptor Cyril de La Patellière erected in front of the

church. Motor racing fans know her name too: the first corner of the Monaco Grand Prix circuit, which passes right in front of the church, is called Sainte Dévote.

Why is Saint Devota the patron saint of Monaco and Corsica?

Monaco honors her because, according to tradition, her body came to rest on its shore and has been venerated there ever since. In Corsica, her native island, devotion grew mainly from the seventeenth century, when the Corsicans asked for and obtained relics from Monaco. Proclaimed patron of Corsica in 1820 along with Saint Julia, she is especially honored at Lucciana, where one tradition places her birth, near the Romanesque cathedral of La Canonica, on the site of ancient Mariana. In 2003, Prince Rainier III went to La Canonica for the celebrations of the seventeenth centenary of her martyrdom, his last official journey. She is also patron of Pietranera, near Bastia.

Devota is the saint of faithfulness to the end and of hope in the storm. Young and powerless, she preferred to die rather than deny Christ. The dove of her legend says that the Holy Spirit guides those who trust him, even when all seems lost. Catholics pray to her for Monaco and Corsica, for sailors and travelers at sea, for young people who must bear witness to their faith, and for anyone going through a trial.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Devota and the novena to Saint Devota, prayed from January 19 to 27.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Devota in art

Saint Devota is shown as a young woman holding the palm of martyrdom. Her main attribute is the dove that guided her boat, often accompanied by the boat itself. Some images show her with her eyes raised toward the dove.



The monument to Saint Devota by Cyril de La Patellière, Monaco.

Where to pray to Saint Devota

- **Monaco**: the church of Saint Devota, in the Gaumates valley, where tradition places the landing of her boat and where her relics are kept; the Cathedral of Our Lady Immaculate, with its altarpieces.
- **Lucciana** (Upper Corsica): the cathedral of La Canonica and the place called Quercio, where one tradition places her birth.
- **Pietranera** (San-Martino-di-Lota, Upper Corsica): the parish of which she is patron.
- **Dolceacqua** (Liguria, Italy): the parish church and its altarpiece of Saint Devota.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Devota, Patron of Monaco

In Monaco, popular devotion calls on Saint Devota with an old hymn whose refrain is simple: *Santa Devota, prega per nui*, "Saint Devota, pray for us." Saintspedia offers this refrain as an invocation, followed by an original prayer to Saint Devota inspired by her *Passion* and by the tradition of the dove.

The traditional invocation

> *Santa Devota, prega per nui.*
> *Saint Devota, pray for us.*

Source: refrain of the popular Monegasque hymn to Saint Devota, used in particular in the oratorio *Devota, la martyre* by Canon Louis-Lazare Perruchot (1914).



The reliquary of Saint Devota in her church in Monaco.

Prayer to Saint Devota

Saint Devota, young woman of Corsica consecrated to God, you preferred death to abandoning Christ: give me a faithful heart that does not deny its faith out of fear of what others think.

Your body crossed the sea in the storm, guided by a dove to the shore of Monaco: remind me that the Holy Spirit is leading me, even when I can no longer see the harbor.

Protect sailors, fishermen and all who travel by sea. Watch over the Principality of Monaco and over Corsica, who chose you as their patron, over their families, their pastors and their leaders.

Support young people who must bear witness to their faith against the current, and Christians persecuted throughout the world. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your prayer, may I remain, like you, consecrated to God in each of my days, until I reach the shore of the Kingdom. Amen.

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

Intentions to entrust to Saint Devota

- For the Principality of Monaco and its archdiocese.
- For Corsica and its people.
- For sailors, fishermen and travelers at sea.
- For young Christians called to bear witness to their faith.
- For persecuted Christians.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Devota is celebrated on January 27. In Monaco, the feast begins on the evening of January 26 with the burning of the boat in front of her church. You can also pray to her before a sea voyage, in a storm of life, or when your faith is tested. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Devota, and discover the life of Saint Devota.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Devota

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the *Passion* of Saint Devota and by the traditions of Monaco and Corsica. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on January 27, her feast day, begin it on January 19. The eighth day falls on January 26, the evening when a boat is burned in her honor in front of her church in Monaco. You can also pray this novena at any time, for a sea voyage, a trial of faith or a storm in your life.

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 and a Hail Mary, and finish with the invocation: "Saint Devota, pray for us." The small act suggested for the day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue the next.

We know little for certain about Devota's life, and historians remind us that her *Passion* was written long after her death. But for more than a thousand years, the people of Monaco and Corsica have turned to her with confidence, and their faith is itself a witness. Through her story, this novena invites us to look at our own faithfulness: to God, to our friends, and to the path he has set before us, even when the sea is rough and the harbor is out of sight. You can pray it alone, with your family, or with your parish community.



Saint Devota, virgin and martyr.

Day 1: Consecrated to God

The very name Devota says that she belonged to God. While still young, she had given him her whole life.

Prayer: Lord, I offer you this day and all that I am. Keep me as your own. Saint Devota, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Begin the day with a short prayer of offering.

Day 2: Serving humbly

According to her *Passion*, Devota lived in the service of a household, in prayer and work. Her holiness was first hidden in everyday tasks.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve you in the small things of each day. Saint Devota, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Do a quiet favor for someone without expecting thanks.

Day 3: Faith in a hostile world

Devota lived in a time when being a Christian could cost one's life. Under the persecution of Diocletian, her faith was no longer a private matter but a public choice.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen Christians who are persecuted today, and give me the courage to live my faith openly. Saint Devota, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted.

Day 4: Refusing idols

Ordered to sacrifice to the gods, Devota refused. Today's idols have other names: money, image, comfort, power. They still ask for our hearts.

Prayer: Lord, free me from everything that takes your place in my life. Saint Devota, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Give up something unnecessary and give its price to a charity.

Day 5: Faithful to the end

Tortured, Devota did not give in. She died for Christ, young and powerless, but free.

Prayer: Lord, give me faithfulness in great trials and in small ones. Saint Devota, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Accept one of the day's annoyances without complaining.

Day 6: The courage of friends

At night, a priest, a deacon and a sailor risked their lives to take her body and save it from the fire. Faith is also lived in loyalty to one another.

Prayer: Lord, make me a faithful friend to those who suffer, even when it costs me something. Saint Devota, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Check in on someone who is isolated or going through a hard time.

Day 7: The storm

During the crossing, a storm rose over the sea. The little boat seemed lost. Every life knows such hours, when nothing seems to make sense anymore.

Prayer: Lord, in the storms of my life, keep me from despair. Saint Devota, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Entrust to God, in writing or in silence, what worries you most.

Day 8: The dove

The legend tells that a dove guided the boat to the shore. The dove is the image of the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church and each one of us. Tonight, in Monaco, a boat is burned in her honor.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, guide me in my choices and bring me safely to harbor. Saint Devota, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Slowly pray the *Veni Creator Spiritus* or another prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Day 9: Two shores united

On her feast day, Devota is honored both in Corsica, where she was born, and in Monaco, where her body came ashore. The saints join shores and peoples together.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Devota, I entrust to you the intention of this novena. Bless Monaco and Corsica, and make us builders of unity. Amen.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation with someone you have drifted away from.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Devota, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have brought before you. You were faithful unto martyrdom, and the dove led you through the storm: obtain for me a courageous faith and limitless trust in God. Watch over those I love, over sailors and travelers, and over all who call on you. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

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