

BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Dominic

*Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage*

Feast day: August 8

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IN BRIEF

## Saint Dominic

*Castilian priest, founder of the Order of Preachers, known as the Dominicans.*

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| **Feast day** | August 8 |
| **Born** | c. 1170, Caleruega, Castile, Spain |
| **Died** | August 6, 1221, Bologna, Italy |
| **Canonized** | July 3, 1234, by Pope Gregory IX |
| **Era** | 13th century |
| **Patron saint of** | preachers, astronomers |

## In this booklet


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Basilica of San Domenico in Bologna, Tomb of Saint Dominic

Credits and sources



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LIFE

# Saint Dominic

Saint Dominic de Guzmán was the Castilian priest who, in the early thirteenth century, founded the Order of Preachers, known as the Dominicans. A canon of Osma sent to Languedoc, in southern France, where he preached for ten years in poverty, he conceived a new form of religious life devoted to study and to proclaiming the Gospel. He died in Bologna on August 6, 1221, was canonized as early as 1234, and is celebrated on August 8.

## Who was Saint Dominic?

Dominic was born around 1170 in Caleruega, a village in Old Castile, into a family of minor nobility. His father was named Felix; his mother, Jane of Aza, has been beatified. Entrusted as a boy to an uncle who was a priest, he went on to study the liberal arts and then theology at Palencia, one of the first university centers in Spain. His first biographers, beginning with Blessed Jordan of Saxony, his successor as head of the order, report that during a famine he sold his books, precious as they were, to feed the poor.

After his ordination, around 1196 he joined the chapter of the cathedral of Osma, whose bishop wanted it to become a community of canons living by the Rule of Saint Augustine. Dominic led a regular life of prayer and study there, under the prior, Diego of Acebo, who soon became Bishop of Osma and would change the course of his life.

## Key dates in the life of Saint Dominic

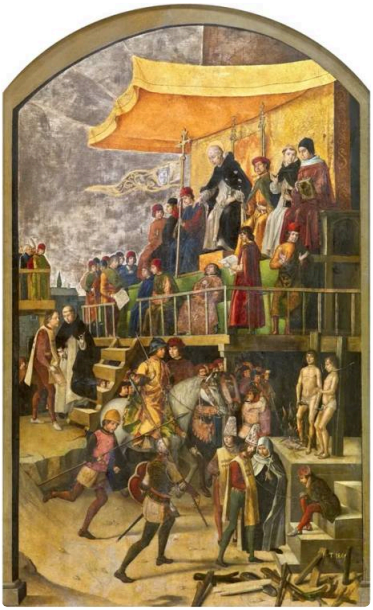
- **c. 1170**: Born in Caleruega, Castile.
- **c. 1186-1196**: Studies at Palencia.
- **c. 1196**: Canon regular of the cathedral of Osma.

- **1203 and 1205**: Journeys with Bishop Diego to northern Europe; crossing Languedoc, he encounters Catharism.
- **1206-1207**: Begins itinerant preaching in Languedoc; founds a community of women at Prouille.
- **1215**: In Toulouse, Dominic and his first companions form a community of preachers, approved by Bishop Fulk.
- **December 22, 1216**: Pope Honorius III confirms the new community.
- **January 21, 1217**: A new papal bull calls the brothers "preachers."
- **August 15, 1217**: Dominic sends his brothers out to Paris, Spain and Bologna.
- **1220 and 1221**: First general chapters of the order in Bologna.
- **August 6, 1221**: Dies in Bologna, at the priory of Saint Nicholas of the Vineyards.
- **July 3, 1234**: Canonized by Pope Gregory IX.

## Encountering the Cathars

In 1203 the King of Castile sent Diego on a diplomatic mission to the "Marches," probably Denmark, and Dominic went with him. Passing through Toulouse, they lodged with an innkeeper won over to the ideas of the Cathars, who opposed a good spiritual world to an evil material one and rejected the Church. According to Jordan of Saxony, Dominic spent the whole night talking with him and by morning had brought him back to the Catholic faith. That night is often presented as the origin of his vocation.

Returning from a second journey in 1206, the two men met in Montpellier the Cistercian legates charged with combating the heresy, who were discouraged by their failure. Diego proposed a radical change: give up their retinues and preach on foot, without money, begging their bread like the apostles. The poverty of the preachers had to be as convincing as that of the Cathars. Dominic embraced this life and never left it.



*Saint Dominic and the Albigensians by Pedro Berruguete (late 15th century), Prado Museum. The scene belongs to the legend of the saint.*

## Ten years of preaching in Languedoc

Near Fanjeaux, in 1206-1207, Dominic founded at Prouille a community of women converted from Catharism: it was the first house of the future Dominican family and the forerunner of the Dominican nuns. Diego died at the end of 1207. A few months later, the murder of the papal legate Peter of Castelnau set off the Albigensian Crusade, led by Simon de Montfort. Dominic was not a man of war: he kept preaching, debating and praying, often alone, in a devastated land. Early biographers describe him as joyful by day with his brothers and spending long nights in prayer in churches.

A tradition spread from the fifteenth century by the Dominican Alan de la Roche holds that the Virgin Mary gave him the Rosary. Historians find no trace of it in thirteenth-century sources, but the Dominican order did a great deal afterward to spread this prayer.

## Founding an order of preachers

In 1215, in Toulouse, a wealthy citizen, Peter Seila, gave his house to Dominic and his first companions. Bishop Fulk recognized them as preachers of his diocese. Dominic then went to Rome and obtained from Pope Honorius III, in December 1216 and January 1217, the confirmation of his order: a community of canons following the Rule of Saint Augustine, but entirely devoted to preaching, which requires study.

On August 15, 1217, against the advice of many, Dominic dispersed his small community, sending brothers to Paris and Bologna, the two great university cities, and to Spain. The gamble paid off. Within a few years the order attracted students and teachers, organized itself through chapters in which the brothers elected their superiors, and spread throughout Europe. Exhausted by his journeys on foot, Dominic died in Bologna on August 6, 1221. To his weeping brothers he promised, according to Jordan of Saxony, that he would be more useful to them after his death than during his life.



*The Arca of Saint Dominic in the Basilica of San Domenico, Bologna (13th-15th century).*

## Why is Saint Dominic the patron saint of preachers?

Dominic wanted brothers who would "speak with God or about God," in the words of his first companions: for him, contemplation and preaching could not be separated. He founded the first religious order whose very name and purpose is preaching, and he trusted in the power of the word, of study and of example rather than coercion. That is why preachers, students and theologians invoke him, as do all who seek the truth. He is also traditionally invoked by astronomers, a patronage usually linked to the star that tradition places on his forehead.

To pray with him, you can use the ancient Dominican chant *O spem miram*, or follow the novena to Saint Dominic from July 30 to August 7, so that it ends on the eve of his feast.

## Symbols and how to recognize Saint Dominic in art

- **The Dominican habit**: white tunic and scapular with a black cloak.
- **A star**: on his forehead or above his head, a sign of the light of his preaching.
- **A lily and a book**: purity of life and the Word of God he proclaimed.
- **A dog with a torch in its mouth**: from a legend about his mother's dream before his birth, and a play on the Latin *Domini canes*, "the Lord's dogs."
- **The Rosary**: in later images, recalling the tradition of the Rosary given by Our Lady.



*Saint Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers, in a church.*

## Where to pray to Saint Dominic

- **Bologna** (Italy): the Basilica of San Domenico, which holds his tomb.

- **Prouilhe** (France): the monastery of Dominican nuns, heir to the first foundation of 1206-1207.
- **Fanjeaux** (France): the house and places where he lived during his years of preaching.
- **Toulouse** (France): the Jacobins church, the great Dominican church where the relics of Saint Thomas Aquinas rest.
- **Caleruega** (Spain): his home village, where Dominican friars and nuns keep his memory.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Sabina on the Aventine, entrusted to Dominic by Honorius III and today the seat of the Master of the Order.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Dominic: "O Wonderful Hope"

Saint Dominic left almost nothing in writing, apart from a few letters and documents of government. To pray to him, the Dominican family has sung since the thirteenth century a responsory, *O spem miram*, which takes up the promise Dominic made to his brothers on his deathbed. This page presents that text, followed by an original prayer to Saint Dominic.

## The promise of the dying Dominic

Blessed Jordan of Saxony, who knew Dominic and succeeded him as head of the order, reports in his *Libellus* on the beginnings of the Order of Preachers, written around 1233, that the saint, seeing his brothers in tears in Bologna in August 1221, comforted them by promising to be more useful to them after his death than he had been in his life. All Dominican prayer to their founder rests on this promise.



*Saint Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers, at prayer.*

## O spem miram: O wonderful hope

This responsory is traditionally sung by Dominicans at the end of the day, after Compline, during the procession of the *Salve Regina*. Translated from the Latin by Saintspedia; the original thirteenth-century text is in the public domain.

> *O wonderful hope that you gave to those who wept for you at the hour of your death, when you promised that after your death you would help your brothers!*
>
> *Fulfill, Father, what you have said, and help us by your prayers.*
>
> *You who shone with so many miracles on the bodies of the sick, bring us the help of Christ and heal our sick souls.*
>
> *Fulfill, Father, what you have said, and help us by your prayers.*

Latin text: "O spem miram quam dedisti mortis hora te flentibus, dum post mortem promisisti te profuturum fratribus: imple, Pater, quod dixisti, nos tuis iuvans precibus. Qui tot signis claruisti in aegrorum corporibus, nobis opem ferens Christi aegris medere moribus." Source: responsory of the office of Saint Dominic in the Dominican liturgy, thirteenth century.

## Prayer to Saint Dominic

Saint Dominic, you who sold your books to feed the poor of Palencia, and who walked the roads of Languedoc to proclaim the Gospel, pray for me.

Teach me to speak with God before speaking about God. Give me a love for study and for the truth, and the patience to talk with those who do not think as I do, without despising or forcing them.

You who were joyful with your brothers and spent your nights in prayer, keep me joyful and faithful in prayer, even when the mission seems to bear no fruit.

I entrust to you preachers, students, teachers and all who seek the truth. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

And since you promised to help your brothers after your death, fulfill, Father, what you have said, and help us by your prayers. Amen.

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

## When to pray this prayer

Saint Dominic's feast is on August 8. Before the calendar reform of 1969 it was kept on August 4; it was then moved to August 8, because August 6, the day of his death, is the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord. You can also pray to him by praying the Rosary, which the Dominican order did so much to spread. For a longer time of prayer, you can follow the novena to Saint Dominic from July 30 to August 7, and read more about the life of Saint Dominic.

NOVENA

# Novena to Saint Dominic

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Dominic as his first biographers tell it. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on July 30; it ends on August 7, the day after the anniversary of his death. Each day follows a step of his journey, from Palencia to Bologna, and draws from it a lesson for our own life of faith.

## How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father or, if you can, a decade of the Rosary. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life.



*Saint Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers, church statue or stained glass.*

## Day 1: Books for the poor

As a student in Palencia, Dominic sold his books, his most precious possessions, to feed the victims of a famine. Study only makes sense if it does not close the heart to the poor. Knowledge that forgets the hungry has lost its way.

**Prayer:** Lord, never let me prefer my possessions, even the noblest, to the distress of my brothers and sisters.

**Today:** Give something you value to a person or a charity in need.

## Day 2: A night of dialogue

In Toulouse, Dominic spent a whole night talking with an innkeeper who had been won over by the Cathars. He did not condemn him: he listened, he reasoned, and he brought him back to the faith through the word. Truth is offered, not imposed.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me the patience to listen to those who do not believe as I do, and the right words to answer them.

**Today:** Take time for a real conversation with someone who thinks differently.

## Day 3: Preaching in poverty

Dominic chose to walk barefoot and beg his bread. He knew that the Gospel is passed on not only through words but through a way of life. People listened to him because his life matched his preaching.

**Prayer:** Lord, make my life consistent with what I believe, so that my actions speak of you.

**Today:** Give up an unnecessary expense and give the money away.

## Day 4: Prouille, prayer at the heart

Dominic's first foundation was not a house of preachers but a community of women devoted to prayer. Every mission rests on hearts that pray. The hidden prayer of contemplatives carries the work of those who go out on the roads.

**Prayer:** Lord, bless the nuns and all who pray in secret for the mission of the Church.

**Today:** Pray for a contemplative community, or write to one to entrust an intention to it.

## Day 5: Persevering in a torn land

During the Albigensian Crusade, Dominic kept preaching, often alone, amid the violence. He never let go of prayer or of the word. Results were few, yet he remained faithful to what God had asked of him.

**Prayer:** Lord, when everything seems useless, keep me faithful to what you have entrusted to me.

**Today:** Take up again a commitment you had dropped out of discouragement.

## Day 6: Speaking with God or about God

His companions said that he spoke only with God or about God. His nights of prayer nourished his days of preaching. What he gave to others he had first received in silence.

**Prayer:** Lord, teach me to speak with you before speaking about you, and to keep you present in my conversations.

**Today:** Spend some time in silent prayer this evening, before going to sleep.



*Praying with Saint Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers.*

## Day 7: Studying in order to proclaim

Dominic sent his brothers to Paris and Bologna, to the universities. For him, study was a service: we study in order to proclaim the truth better. Faith seeks to understand, and understanding seeks to share.

**Prayer:** Spirit of truth, give me a love for learning and the humility to put my knowledge at the service of others.

**Today:** Read a page of a book on the faith, or a chapter of the Gospel, taking notes.

## Day 8: Scattering the seed

On August 15, 1217, Dominic scattered his few brothers across Europe. "Hoarded grain rots," he is said to have remarked, according to tradition. He trusted God more than his own calculations, and the order spread far beyond

what anyone had imagined.

**Prayer:** Lord, free me from the fear of losing, and give me the boldness to sow without controlling everything.

**Today:** Share with someone a word of the Gospel that has touched you.

## Day 9: The promise of Bologna

To his weeping brothers, the dying Dominic promised to be more useful after his death. The saints do not leave us: they go on praying for us. The Dominican family has trusted in this promise for eight centuries.

**Prayer:** Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Dominic, fulfill what he promised, and help us by his prayers. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for a loved one who has died and who passed the faith on to you.

## Closing prayer

Saint Dominic, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for me, for preachers and for all who seek the truth. Obtain for us the grace to pray, to study and to proclaim the Gospel with your joy and your poverty. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Dominic and pray the *O spem miram*.

PILGRIMAGE

# Basilica of San Domenico in Bologna, Tomb of Saint Dominic

The Basilica of San Domenico in Bologna, in Emilia-Romagna, houses the tomb of Saint Dominic, who died in the neighboring convent on August 6, 1221. His marble tomb, the Arca, on which Nicola Pisano and the young Michelangelo worked, makes it both a summit of Italian art and the foremost pilgrimage site of the Dominican family.

## From the convent of Saint Nicholas to the basilica

In 1219, the first preaching friars sent to Bologna, a great university city, settled near the small church of Saint Nicholas of the Vineyards. Dominic stayed there several times, presided there over the order's first two general chapters in 1220 and 1221, and died there. He was first buried very simply beneath the church floor. After his canonization in 1234, the church was enlarged and rebuilt; it took the name of its founder and became one of the order's great convents.



*Basilica of San Domenico in Bologna, tomb of Saint Dominic.*

## The Arca of Saint Dominic

In 1267, Dominic's body was transferred to a marble sarcophagus carved by the workshop of Nicola Pisano, whose bas-reliefs tell the story of the saint's life and miracles. Two centuries later, Niccolò da Bari added a crowning group of statues, work that earned him the nickname Niccolò dell'Arca. After his death, the young Michelangelo, then about twenty, completed the ensemble around 1494-1495 with three statuettes, including a kneeling angel carrying a candelabrum. The tomb stands in the chapel of Saint Dominic, rebuilt in the early 17th century, whose dome is decorated with a *Glory of Saint Dominic* painted by Guido Reni.

## Praying at the tomb of Saint Dominic

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Dominic. In the chapel, a time of silence before the Arca lets you entrust an intention, for example for a student, a teacher, or a person searching for truth. The responsory "O spem miram," offered on the prayer to Saint Dominic page, has been sung here by generations of friars. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



*Basilica of San Domenico in Bologna, tomb of Saint Dominic, the interior.*

## Other places of Saint Dominic

- **Caleruega** (Castile, Spain): his native village, with the Dominican friary and the nuns' monastery.
- **Prouilhe** (Aude): the Monastery of Notre-Dame de Prouilhe, heir to the first community founded by Dominic in 1206-1207.
- **Fanjeaux** (Aude): the house where he is said to have lived and the church where he prayed during his years in Languedoc.

- **Toulouse**: the Couvent des Jacobins, the great Gothic church of the Preachers, and the Seilhan house, cradle of the order in 1215.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Sabina, on the Aventine, seat of the Master of the Order, where the cloister and mementos of the saint are shown.

## Practical information

The Basilica of San Domenico is in the historic center of Bologna, about a ten-minute walk from Piazza Maggiore. Bologna is a major rail hub, connected by high-speed train to Milan, Florence, and Rome. The convent is still inhabited by Dominicans. On August 8 and around that date, special celebrations take place; check Mass times and chapel visiting hours with the basilica before you come.

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