

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Ebba the Younger

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 2

IN BRIEF

Saint Ebba the Younger

Abbess of Coldingham, martyred with her nuns in a Viking raid in 870 according to tradition.

Feast day	April 2
Died	April 2, 870, according to tradition, Coldingham (Scotland)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	9th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Ebba the Younger for Women Threatened by Violence

Novena to Saint Ebba the Younger

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Ebba the Younger

Saint Ebba the Younger, Æbbe in Old English, was according to tradition an abbess of the monastery of Coldingham, on the southeast coast of present-day Scotland, who died a martyr with her nuns during a Viking raid on April 2, 870. To escape the violence of the invaders, she is said to have disfigured her own face, and her sisters followed her example. Her story is known only from 13th-century chroniclers, and historians consider it uncertain. Her feast day is April 2.

Who was Saint Ebba the Younger?

She should not be confused with Saint Ebba of Coldingham, known as Ebba the Elder, sister of King Saint Oswald of Northumbria, who founded the monastery in the seventh century. Ebba the Younger lived about two centuries later, in the same house.

She is presented as a Benedictine nun who became abbess of Coldingham. Nothing else is known of her life: not her birth, nor her family, nor her path. All we know of her comes down to a single episode, that of her death.

Key dates

- **Seventh century**: Saint Ebba the Elder founds the monastery of Coldingham, where Ebba the Younger will later live.
- **Ninth century**: Ebba the Younger is a nun, then abbess of Coldingham, according to tradition.
- **c. 869-870**: Danish armies ravage England; King Saint Edmund is killed in East Anglia.
- **April 2, 870**: According to tradition, Viking raiders attack Coldingham; Ebba and her nuns die when the monastery is set on fire.

- **13th century**: The chroniclers Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris record her story.
- **1584**: An engraving after a fresco in the English College in Rome shows her among the martyrs of the Church in England.

The story of her martyrdom

In the ninth century, the coasts of Britain were regularly attacked by Vikings from Scandinavia. Monasteries, rich and defenseless, were prime targets. According to the chroniclers, when the raiders approached Coldingham, Abbess Ebba gathered her sisters. She knew the invaders threatened the nuns with rape.

To turn them away, she took a knife and cut off her nose and upper lip. She urged her nuns to do the same, and all of them followed her. When the attackers came in and saw their mutilated faces, they turned away in horror. The nuns thus escaped rape, but the furious Vikings set fire to the monastery. The abbess and the whole community died in the flames. Tradition places this martyrdom on April 2, 870.

A story to read with care

The first to tell this story were two English monk chroniclers of the 13th century, Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, nearly four centuries after the events. No older source mentions it. Historians today therefore consider the account doubtful, and some even doubt that Ebba the Younger existed. The act attributed to her is also found in other stories of threatened virgins.

Yet the story keeps its power. It speaks of the horror of violence against women in wartime, and of the dignity of those who resist it. The Church does not ask anyone to imitate Ebba's self-mutilation; it honors the faith and courage that tradition saw in her.

Devotion to Saint Ebba the Younger

Ebba the Younger is honored as a saint and martyr, with her companions, on April 2; some old calendars also mention her on August 23. The calendars of Scottish saints include her, and she is also commemorated by the Orthodox Churches.

The fresco of the English College

In Rome, in the 16th century, the painter Niccolò Circignani depicted her in a cycle of frescoes devoted to the martyrs of the Church in England, at the English College, where priests were then trained for persecuted England. An engraving by Giovanni Battista de' Cavalieri, published in 1584, preserved the image.

Why pray to Saint Ebba the Younger?

Even if her story is uncertain, Ebba the Younger recalls a reality that is still with us: in wartime, women are often the first victims of violence. She also brings to mind an abbess who did not flee, but stayed with her sisters to the end. She has no official patronage, but Christians can pray to her:

- for women threatened by or suffering from violence;
- for religious sisters in countries at war;
- for all who protect the weakest.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Ebba in art

She is shown as an abbess, surrounded by her nuns, sometimes at the moment she disfigures her face, with the burning monastery in the background.

Where to pray to Saint Ebba the Younger

- **Coldingham** (Scottish Borders, Scotland): the medieval priory, built near the site of the old monastery; you can pray there in silence for the victims of war.
- **St Abbs** (Scotland): the nearby headland, which bears the name of Saint Ebba the Elder.

To pray with her at home, you can use the prayer to Saint Ebba the Younger or the novena to Saint Ebba the Younger.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Ebba the Younger for Women Threatened by Violence

According to tradition, Saint Ebba the Younger was abbess of the monastery of Coldingham, in Scotland. During a Viking raid in 870, she is said to have disfigured her face to escape the violence of the invaders, before dying with her nuns when the monastery was burned. This prayer is an original composition inspired by her story; it is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to her women threatened by violence and all who protect the weakest.

Prayer to Saint Ebba the Younger

Saint Ebba,
abbess of Coldingham,
when violence came from the sea,
you did not abandon your sisters.
You wanted to keep their bodies and hearts unharmed,
consecrated to the Lord.

In the flames of your monastery,
you placed your life in the hands of God,
with your whole community.

Pray for women threatened by or suffering from violence,
for those whom war has wounded in body and soul.
Obtain for them healing, peace and justice.
Pray for religious sisters living in countries at war,
and for all who protect the weakest.
Give us a pure and courageous heart.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Ebba the Younger

- On her feast day, April 2.
- For a woman who has suffered violence or abuse.
- For civilians in countries at war.
- For religious communities that are threatened or persecuted.
- When you must protect those entrusted to you.

A prayer for victims

You can conclude with this short prayer:

Lord, hear the cry of women wounded by violence.
Comfort them, raise them up, give them back their peace.
Saint Ebba, pray for them. Amen.

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Ebba the Younger from March 25 to April 2, and discover the life of Saint Ebba the Younger.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Ebba the Younger

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the story of Saint Ebba the Younger, abbess of Coldingham, who died with her nuns during a Viking raid in 870, according to tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on her feast day, April 2, begin on March 25, the feast of the Annunciation. It is especially suited to praying for women who suffer violence, and you can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present 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: "Saint Ebba, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A house of prayer

Coldingham was a monastery founded two centuries earlier by Saint Ebba the Elder. Generations of women had prayed there. Ebba the Younger received this inheritance and kept it faithfully.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the communities that pray for the world. Keep them in peace.

Today: Pray for a religious community you know.

Day 2: A consecrated life

The nuns of Coldingham had given their whole lives to God. The heart of consecrated life is an undivided love for Christ.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to love you with all my heart, in the state of life that is mine.

Today: Spend ten minutes in silence before God.

Day 3: A mother to her sisters

As abbess, Ebba was responsible for her community. She watched over each of her sisters. All of us have people entrusted to our care.

Prayer: Lord, help me take care of those you have entrusted to me.

Today: Check in on someone you are responsible for.

Day 4: The threat

The Vikings were coming. Ebba did not flee and did not leave her sisters alone. In her fear, she looked for a way to protect them.

Prayer: Lord, when fear takes hold of me, let me not abandon others.

Today: Pray for civilians living under the threat of war.

Day 5: The dignity of the body

According to the story, Ebba wanted at all costs to protect her sisters from rape. The human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Any violence that defiles it is a wound inflicted on God himself.

Prayer: Lord, heal the women and men wounded in their bodies. Give them back their dignity.

Today: Support an organization that helps victims of violence.

Day 6: An extreme act

Ebba is said to have disfigured her face. This act is not to be imitated, but it shows how far the refusal of evil can go. It challenges us about our own courage in the face of injustice.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to refuse evil, without violence and without hatred.

Today: Do not look away from an injustice you can help to stop.

Day 7: Together to the end

All the sisters followed the example of their abbess. They stayed united in the trial. Communion among brothers and sisters is a strength that violence cannot destroy.

Prayer: Lord, make our families and communities stand together in times of trial.

Today: Be present to someone who is going through a hard time.

Day 8: The flames

The monastery was set on fire, and the nuns died in the flames. Their death seemed a defeat. For Christians, it became a witness.

Prayer: Lord, welcome all who die as victims of violence. Grant them eternal peace.

Today: Pray for Christians who are persecuted today.

Day 9: A memory that endures

Centuries later, the Church still remembers Ebba and her sisters. Even when history is uncertain, the memory of the martyrs speaks to us of faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Ebba and her companions, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Give thanks for the women of faith who have shaped your life.

Living the novena with Saint Ebba the Younger

The story of Saint Ebba the Younger is poorly known, and it must be received with care. Yet it touches a very real suffering: that of women who are victims of violence, yesterday as today. This novena can be prayed for a particular person, for women in countries at war, or for those who silently carry an old wound. If you are accompanying a victim, remember that prayer does not replace listening, practical help and justice. It supports them.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Ebba,*
> *faithful abbess and martyr with your sisters,*
> *present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Obtain healing and peace for the victims of violence,*
> *strength and wisdom for those who protect them,*
> *and for me a pure and courageous heart.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Ebba the Younger at any time, and discover the life of Saint Ebba the Younger.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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