BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Emiliana

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 5

IN BRIEF

Saint Emiliana

Roman virgin of the 6th century, paternal aunt of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, who died on the eve of the Epiphany.

Feast day	January 5
Born	6th century, Rome
Died	before January 6, second half of the 6th century, Rome
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century

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Novena to Saint Emiliana

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Emiliana

Saint Emiliana was a Roman woman of the 6th century, a paternal aunt of Pope Saint Gregory the Great. Consecrated to God with her sisters Tarsilla and Gordiana, she lived a life of prayer, charity and penance in the family home in Rome. Her nephew tells us that she died shortly after Tarsilla, just before the Epiphany. Her feast day is January 5.

Who was Saint Emiliana?

Emiliana belonged to a noble Christian family of Rome. Her brother Gordianus, a Roman patrician, married Saint Silvia and was the father of Gregory, pope from 590 to 604. Gregory reports that the family counted among its ancestors Pope Felix, bishop of Rome at the end of the 5th century. With her two sisters, Emiliana chose to consecrate herself to God without leaving her home: the three women lived there together as consecrated virgins, in prayer and self-denial. We know nothing more of her outward life: neither the date of her birth nor her activities. All we know comes from her nephew's account, in a homily preached at the beginning of his pontificate and in his Dialogues.

Key dates in the life of Emiliana

- **6th century**: Born in Rome, into a noble Christian family; she is the sister of Gordianus, father of the future Pope Gregory.
- **Date unknown**: With her sisters Tarsilla and Gordiana, she consecrates herself to God in the family home.
- **The following years**: With Tarsilla, she grows in the life of prayer, while Gordiana gradually grows weary.
- **December 24**: Death of her sister Tarsilla, on Christmas Eve.

- **A few days later**: According to Gregory, Tarsilla appears to her and invites her to celebrate the Epiphany with her.
- **Before January 6, second half of the 6th century**: She falls ill and dies in Rome.
- **c. 591**: Gregory, now pope, tells the story of his aunts in a homily, then in his Dialogues.

A life shared with her sisters

Gregory describes his aunts with tenderness and realism. All three, he says, had committed themselves on the same day, with the same ardor. Emiliana and Tarsilla advanced together on this path: they prayed at length, fasted, avoided distractions and kept great modesty. Their sister Gordiana, on the other hand, grew weary: she sought the company of worldly women and found the retired life hard to bear. Emiliana and Tarsilla were saddened by this and gently urged her to return to her first fervor. Gregory uses this family story to comment on the Gospel saying: "Many are called, but few are chosen."

"We will celebrate the Epiphany together"

Tarsilla died on Christmas Eve, after seeing in a vision the dwelling God was preparing for her. According to Gregory, she soon appeared to Emiliana and said: "Come. I celebrated Christmas without you, but we will celebrate the day of the Epiphany together." Emiliana, worried about Gordiana, asked to whom she would leave their sister; Tarsilla answered that she should come, for Gordiana was now counted among the worldly. Soon afterward, Emiliana fell ill. She died before the feast of the Epiphany, as her sister had foretold. This is why the Church celebrates her on January 5, the eve of that solemnity. Gordiana, left alone, eventually abandoned her consecration and married the steward of her estates.

Devotion and memory

Saint Emiliana is listed in the Roman Martyrology on January 5. Her cult, very ancient, rests entirely on the testimony of Gregory the Great, whose homilies and Dialogues were read throughout the Church in the Middle Ages. No tomb or shrine is known where her relics are venerated. She is usually associated with her sister Tarsilla, and both are depicted as devout Roman women at prayer.

What can we learn from Saint Emiliana?

Emiliana's holiness is one of shared faithfulness. She went toward God with her sister, in a very simple life, without any visible work. She worried about the one who was drifting away. And death, instead of separating her from Tarsilla, became for her a meeting: a feast to be celebrated together before God. You can pray to her for families, for brothers and sisters, for the perseverance of consecrated persons and for those who have lost someone close.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Emiliana and the novena to Saint Emiliana.

Where to pray to Saint Emiliana

- **Rome**: the city where she lived and died, where the Caelian Hill keeps the memory of Saint Gregory and his family.
- **With your family**: as the Epiphany approaches, entrusting your brothers and sisters to God.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Emiliana for Our Families and Our Departed

Saint Emiliana, aunt of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, lived a life of prayer with her sisters in Rome in the 6th century. According to Gregory, her sister Tarsilla, who died on Christmas Eve, invited her to celebrate the Epiphany with her in heaven, and she died shortly before that feast. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to her our families, our brothers and sisters, and our departed.

Prayer to Saint Emiliana

Saint Emiliana,
with your sister Tarsilla
you walked toward God in prayer,
silence and simplicity.
Teach me to support those who walk with me
and to let myself be carried by them.

You worried about your sister who was drifting away,
and you called her gently.
Entrust to the Lord those I love
who no longer seek him.

You who were called to the feast of heaven,
on the day the Magi adore the Child,
console those who mourn a brother, a sister, a friend,
and keep us in the hope of meeting again in God.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Emiliana

- On January 5, her feast day, the eve of the Epiphany.
- For brothers and sisters, and for unity in families.
- For a loved one who has drifted away from the faith.
- After the death of a brother, a sister or a very dear friend.
- For consecrated persons who live in community.

A short invocation

> *Lord, gather one day in your light those you have united on earth.*
> *Saint Emiliana, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Emiliana from December 28 to January 5, and read the life of Saint Emiliana.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Emiliana

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Emiliana, aunt of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, who died in Rome in the 6th century, shortly before the feast of the Epiphany. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition; it is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, January 5, begin on December 28: it then accompanies the Christmas season. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and entrust 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 Emiliana, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from the account of Saint Gregory the Great.

Day 1: A Christian home

Emiliana grew up in a family where faith was handed on: her nephew became Pope Gregory. A home can be the first place of holiness.

Prayer: Lord, make our home a place of prayer and peace.

Act of the day: Pray as a family, even for a few moments, before a meal.

Day 2: Giving oneself to God

With her sisters, Emiliana consecrated herself to God. She chose to belong to him entirely, in a simple and hidden life.

Prayer: Lord, I want to belong to you. Take all that I am and all that I have.

Act of the day: In the morning, offer your whole day to God.

Day 3: Walking together

Emiliana and Tarsilla went forward together toward God. They supported each other. No one becomes a saint alone.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for those who walk with me in faith. Bless them.

Act of the day: Thank a brother, a sister or a friend for their support.

Day 4: Persevering prayer

Gregory describes his aunts as women of prayer, faithful and sober. Their fervor was not a passing impulse, but a long faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord, give me perseverance in prayer, even when I feel nothing.

Act of the day: Set a time for prayer each day and keep to it.

Day 5: Caring for the other

Emiliana worried about her sister Gordiana, who was growing tired of consecrated life. She encouraged her gently. Fraternal love is never indifferent.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those I love who have drifted away from you.

Act of the day: Pray for a loved one who no longer practices the faith, without judging them.

Day 6: Mourning a sister

On Christmas Eve, Emiliana lost Tarsilla. She knew the pain of separation in the very midst of the feasts.

Prayer: Lord, comfort those who are grieving during these festive days.

Act of the day: Write to or call someone who is grieving.

Day 7: A meeting in heaven

According to Gregory, Tarsilla appeared to Emiliana: "I celebrated Christmas without you, but we will celebrate the Epiphany together." Death is not the end of communion.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen in me the hope of finding again in you those I have loved.

Act of the day: Pray for your departed, naming them.

Day 8: Being ready

Emiliana received the announcement of her coming death without rebellion. Her whole life had prepared her for this meeting.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live each day as if you were to come this evening.

Act of the day: Be reconciled with someone, or receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

Day 9: The light of the Epiphany

Emiliana died on the eve of the Epiphany, the feast on which Christ is revealed to all nations. She entered into that light.

Prayer: Lord, guide me as you guided the Magi. Through the intercession of Saint Emiliana, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass on the Epiphany and give to a charity.

Closing prayer

Saint Emiliana,
faithful sister and friend of God,
present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep our families united in faith,
and lead us one day to the feast of heaven.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Emiliana at any time, and read the life of Saint Emiliana.

Credits and sources

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