

BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Emily de Rodat

*Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage*

Feast day: September 19

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IN BRIEF

## Saint Emily de Rodat

*French religious sister from the Aveyron, foundress of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Villefranche-de-Rouergue.*

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| **Feast day** | September 19 |
| **Born** | September 6, 1787, Druelle, Aveyron, France |
| **Died** | September 19, 1852, Villefranche-de-Rouergue, France |
| **Canonized** | April 23, 1950, by Pope Pius XII |
| **Era** | 19th century |

## In this booklet


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Novena to Saint Emily de Rodat

Holy Family Chapel, Tomb of Saint Emily de Rodat

Credits and sources



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LIFE

# Saint Emily de Rodat

Saint Emily de Rodat (Émilie de Rodat) was a French religious sister of the nineteenth century, born in the Rouergue region in 1787 and died at Villefranche-de-Rouergue in 1852. In the years after the French Revolution, she opened a free school for poor girls in her own bedroom, and from it grew the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Behind a very active life, she went through a deep inner darkness for more than twenty years. Canonized in 1950, she is celebrated on September 19.

## Who was Saint Emily de Rodat?

Marie-Émilie de Rodat was born on September 6, 1787, at the Château de Druelle, near Rodez in southern France, into a noble family of the Rouergue. She was the eldest child of Jean-Louis de Rodat, a royal treasury official in the district of Montauban, and of Henriette de Pomayrols. Her childhood was marked by the Revolution, which closed the convents and scattered the nuns.

Drawn very early to religious life, she made four attempts to enter religious communities, and all of them failed. She then joined her grandmother, Agathe de Pomayrols, at Villefranche-de-Rouergue, in a house where former nuns driven from their convents were living. There, in a small town of the Aveyron, her vocation would take an unexpected shape.

## Key dates

- **September 6, 1787**: Born at the Château de Druelle, near Rodez.
- **1805**: Father Marty, later vicar general, becomes her confessor.
- **1815**: She opens a free class for poor girls in her bedroom.
- **May 3, 1816**: She founds the Congregation of the Holy Family with three companions.

- **1817**: Purchase of the former Franciscan (Cordeliers) convent of Villefranche.
- **From 1820**: More than twenty years of inner trials.
- **September 19, 1852**: Dies at Villefranche-de-Rouergue.
- **June 9, 1940**: Beatified by Pope Pius XII.
- **April 23, 1950**: Canonized by Pope Pius XII.

## A school in a bedroom

In 1815, Emily heard several mothers lamenting the disappearance of the free schools that the Ursulines had run before the Revolution: their daughters were growing up without any education. She decided to act at once and set up a class in her own bedroom.

The pupils flocked in. There were soon about forty of them, squeezed into the room. The school had to move several times, into larger and larger premises, until the former convent of the Cordeliers was bought in 1817.

### The Sisters of the Holy Family

On May 3, 1816, Emily founded the Congregation of the Holy Family with three young women, Éléonore Dutriac, Marie Boutaric and Ursule Delbreil. Her confessor, Father Marty, guided her and is considered the co-founder. The community grew quickly. Some sisters devoted themselves to teaching poor girls, while others went to care for the sick in their homes. By the time the foundress died, forty houses had been opened, in France and in other countries.

## The night of faith

What no one saw was that this energetic woman was living a long inner struggle. From 1820, and for more than twenty years, she was tormented by doubt, discouragement, temptations and the feeling of being abandoned by

God. Those around her never suspected it.

What sustained her was her love for the poor and the orphan girls, the faithfulness of her confessor and the very weight of her responsibilities as superior. She found peace again only in the last months of her life.

This trial brings Emily de Rodat close to other saints who kept serving in darkness, such as Saint Thérèse of Lisieux or Saint Teresa of Calcutta. She dictated the story of her life to her second confessor, Pierre-Marie Fabre, and her letters were published in 1888.

## Death, miracles and canonization

Emily de Rodat died on September 19, 1852, at Villefranche-de-Rouergue. She was first buried in the garden of the Cordeliers, near a small oratory of Our Lady of La Salette, where healings were soon attributed to her intercession. Her cause for beatification opened as early as 1853.

The healing of Marie Verdier, who suffered from a cancer judged incurable, in 1894, opened the way to her beatification in 1940. The healing of Gabrielle Hambrouche, in 1921, led to her canonization by Pope Pius XII on April 23, 1950.

## Why turn to Saint Emily de Rodat?

Saint Emily has no official patronage, but she is a natural friend for teachers and educators, for those who serve the poor and the sick, and for all who pass through doubt without ceasing to love.

She did not wait to have resources before answering a need: she began with a bedroom and good will. Her holiness also lies in her faithfulness in trial, when faith no longer brought her any consolation. Her congregation, of pontifical right, is now present on every continent.

## Symbols and how to recognize Saint Emily de Rodat in art

Emily de Rodat is usually shown in the habit of her congregation, with a black veil and a white wimple. She is also depicted in prayer on devotional images. Her true emblem remains the school that began in her bedroom: a small room, a few benches and the poor girls of Villefranche.

## Where to pray to Saint Emily de Rodat

- **Villefranche-de-Rouergue** (Aveyron, France): her tomb in the crypt of the chapel of the Holy Family convent, where her feast is celebrated every year on the third Sunday of September.
- **Toulouse**: the Émilie de Rodat school complex, founded in 1869 by four sisters of the congregation.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Emily de Rodat or follow the novena to Saint Emily de Rodat before September 19.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Emily de Rodat for Children and Those Who Doubt

There is no ancient prayer to Saint Emily de Rodat that has become traditional outside her congregation. Below is an original prayer inspired by her life: the school opened in a bedroom for poor girls, the care of the sick, and the long inner night she passed through without ceasing to serve.

## What her life teaches us

In 1815, at Villefranche-de-Rouergue, Emily de Rodat heard mothers grieving that they could no longer have their daughters educated. She looked for neither a building nor funding: she opened her own bedroom. A few years later, as her work was growing, she entered more than twenty years of doubt and spiritual dryness that no one around her suspected. During that time her prayer was above all faithfulness: to go on loving the poor and the orphan girls entrusted to her sisters.

## Prayer to Saint Emily de Rodat

*Saint Emily de Rodat, you who opened your door and your room to the children no one was teaching, teach me to answer without delay the needs I see around me.*

*You who sent your sisters to the bedside of the sick, make me attentive to those who suffer alone in their homes.*

*You who walked for so many years in the night of faith without ceasing to serve, support those who doubt, those who feel abandoned by God and those who no longer find any joy in prayer. Obtain for them patience, and peace at the time the Lord wills.*

*I entrust to you the children who cannot go to school, teachers and educators, the Sisters of the Holy Family, and the intention I carry today: (name it in silence).*

*With you, I tell the Lord again that I want to love him even when I do not feel his presence. Amen.*

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

## When to pray this prayer

- On her feast day, **September 19**, the day of her death in 1852. At Villefranche-de-Rouergue, her feast is celebrated every year on the third Sunday of September.
- At the start of the school year, for pupils, teachers and parents.
- In a time of inner trial, when God seems silent and prayer feels empty.
- For a sick person who lives alone, or for those who care for the sick at home.

## A short prayer for a time of doubt

> *Saint Emily, you who kept serving in the dark, stay with me in mine. Help me to take the next step of love, even when I see nothing. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia. To know her better, read the life of Saint Emily de Rodat, or pray the novena to Saint Emily de Rodat.

NOVENA

# Novena to Saint Emily de Rodat

This novena to Saint Emily de Rodat is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by her life. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on her feast day, September 19, begin it on **September 11**. It is also well suited to the start of the school year, to a time of doubt, or to prayer for a sick person.

## How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day slowly, then pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be in honor of the Holy Family, whose name Emily gave to her congregation. Finally, choose to carry out the small act suggested for the day. Like Emily, who served for years without feeling consolation, do not worry if your prayer feels dry: faithfulness is what counts.

## Day 1: A childhood in troubled times

Emily was born in 1787 near Rodez, just before the Revolution closed the convents and scattered the nuns. She grew up in a time when practicing the faith was difficult. God prepares his servants even in hard times.

**Prayer:** Saint Emily, you who grew up in troubled times, watch over children who grow up amid war, poverty or family conflict. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for children who live in a country at war.

## Day 2: Doors that close

Emily made four attempts to enter religious communities, and all of them failed. She could have given up. Instead she kept searching, and God opened another path for her in Villefranche.

**Prayer:** Saint Emily, help me to trust God when my plans fail, and to recognize the new door he opens. Amen.

**Today:** Offer to God a disappointment or failure you have not yet accepted.

## Day 3: Listening to mothers

In 1815, Emily heard mothers lamenting that their daughters were growing up without education. She did not simply sympathize: she listened, and she understood that God was speaking through their worry.

**Prayer:** Lord, open my ears to the cries of those around me, and give me a heart that hears your call in their needs. Amen.

**Today:** Truly listen to someone who needs to talk, without interrupting.

## Day 4: Beginning with what we have

Emily had neither a building nor money. She opened her own bedroom, and soon forty girls crowded into it. God does great things with small beginnings offered generously.

**Prayer:** Saint Emily, teach me not to wait for perfect conditions to do good, but to begin today with what I have. Amen.

**Today:** Do at once a good deed you have been putting off.

## Day 5: Founding together

On May 3, 1816, Emily founded the Congregation of the Holy Family with three companions, guided by her confessor, Father Marty. She did not build alone: holiness grows in communion.

**Prayer:** Lord, bless religious communities, especially the Sisters of the Holy Family, and send workers into your harvest. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for a religious sister or brother you know, or for vocations.

## Day 6: At the bedside of the sick

Some of Emily's sisters went to care for the sick in their homes. In the bedrooms of the poor, they served Christ himself. Many sick people today suffer alone, far from any visit.

**Prayer:** Saint Emily, comfort the sick who are alone, and bless nurses, caregivers and all who care for the sick at home. Amen.

**Today:** Visit, call or write to a sick or elderly person.

## Day 7: The night of faith

From 1820, for more than twenty years, Emily lived with doubt, discouragement and the feeling of being abandoned by God. No one around her suspected it. She went on serving, loving and leading her sisters.

**Prayer:** Saint Emily, you who knew the night of faith, stay with all who doubt and all who feel God is far away. Give them the strength to keep loving. Amen.

**Today:** Make an act of faith, even a simple one: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

## Day 8: Faithful to the end

Emily found peace again only in the last months of her life, before dying on September 19, 1852. Her faithfulness was not rewarded with comfort, but it bore fruit: forty houses had been opened by the time of her death.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me perseverance in what you have entrusted to me, even when I see no result. Amen.

**Today:** Carry out a daily duty with patience and care, offering it to God.

## Day 9: A saint for every continent

Healings were soon attributed to Emily's intercession, and she was canonized in 1950. Her congregation is now present on every continent. The small school in a bedroom has become a worldwide work of education and care.

**Prayer:** Saint Emily, I entrust to you the intention of this novena. Pray for children who cannot go to school, for teachers and for all who serve the poor. Amen.

**Today:** Support a school or an educational project for poor children.

## Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, you inspired Saint Emily de Rodat to open her door to poor children and to serve the sick, and you kept her faithful through a long night of the soul. Through her intercession, grant us generous hearts, ready to act without delay, and a faith that holds firm when we no longer feel your presence. Grant the grace I have asked during these nine days, if it is according to your will. You who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Saint Emily de Rodat, pray for us.

PILGRIMAGE

# Holy Family Chapel, Tomb of Saint Emily de Rodat

Saint Emily de Rodat is buried in Villefranche-de-Rouergue, in the Aveyron, in the crypt of the chapel of the Holy Family convent, the motherhouse of the congregation she founded in 1816. This place, on Rue du Sergent-Bories, is the heart of her memory: every day, visitors come to pray at her tomb or to give thanks for a grace received.

## History of the place

In 1817, a year after the founding of the Holy Family, Emily de Rodat acquired the former Franciscan (Cordeliers) convent of Villefranche, abandoned since the Revolution, to house her sisters and their classes. She lived there and governed the congregation until her death on September 19, 1852. She was first buried in the garden, near a small oratory dedicated to Our Lady of La Salette, where healings are attributed to her intercession. Her body is now kept in the crypt of the convent chapel.

The house has remained the seat of the Congregation of the Holy Family, an institute of pontifical right present on every continent. It thus connects pilgrims to the small community of the early days and to the sisters who, around the world, carry on her work of education and care.




*The Holy Family convent in Villefranche-de-Rouergue.*

## Visiting the place

The chapel and the saint's tomb are a place of prayer open to visitors. The feast of Saint Emily de Rodat is celebrated there each year on the third Sunday of September, around September 19, the anniversary of her death. In the town, one can also see the tower of the house on Place Bernard-Lhez, where the institute was founded on May 3, 1816, by Emily and three companions.

Villefranche-de-Rouergue, an old bastide town founded in the Middle Ages on the banks of the Aveyron, lends itself well to a day of pilgrimage: a walk through the old town links the places of the Holy Family's beginnings.

## Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Emily de Rodat. At her tomb, entrust to her an intention for children, for the sick, or for someone going through doubt, then say the prayer to Saint Emily de Rodat. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

## Other places associated with Saint Emily de Rodat

- **Druelle**, near Rodez: the château where she was born on September 6, 1787.
- **Villefranche-de-Rouergue**: the house on Place Bernard-Lhez, cradle of the congregation.
- **Toulouse**: the Émilie de Rodat school complex, on Avenue de Lombez, whose school was founded in 1869 by four Sisters of the Holy Family.

## Practical information

The Holy Family convent is an inhabited religious house: the opening hours of the chapel and of services may vary by day and season. Before you come, and especially for a group, ask the congregation, through its official website (sainte-famille-villefranche.com), or the Villefranche-de-Rouergue tourist office.

CREDITS

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