

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Epaphras

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 19

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IN BRIEF

Saint Epaphras

Companion of Saint Paul who brought the Gospel to Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis in the first century.

Feast day	July 19
Born	Colossae, Asia Minor
Died	Colossae, Asia Minor (according to tradition)
Era	1st century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Epaphras for Those We Carry in Prayer

Novena to Saint Epaphras

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Epaphras

Saint Epaphras was a first-century Christian from Colossae, in Asia Minor, and a close co-worker of Saint Paul. He brought the Gospel to his hometown and to the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Paul mentions him three times in his letters and paints a very short but unusually warm portrait of him: a man who is "always striving" in prayer for the communities entrusted to him. His feast day is July 19.

Who was Saint Epaphras?

Everything we know for certain about Epaphras fits into a few verses of the New Testament. In the Letter to the Colossians, Paul reminds the Christians of Colossae that they learned the Gospel from Epaphras, "our beloved fellow servant," whom he calls "a faithful servant of Christ on your behalf" (Colossians 1:7). At the end of the same letter, Paul passes on his greetings and stresses that he is "one of you" (Colossians 4:12). Finally, in the short Letter to Philemon, Paul calls him "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus" (Philemon 23). The Bible quotations on this page follow the World English Bible, a public domain translation.

From these verses, we can gather that Epaphras was a native of Colossae who became a Christian, probably during Paul's long stay in Ephesus, and that he went back home to found a Christian community in the Lycus valley, where Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis stood. Later, he joined Paul, who was then a prisoner, and shared his captivity, at least for a time.

Key dates in the life of Epaphras

- **The 50s**: He preaches the Gospel in Colossae, then in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

- **The 60s**: He is with Paul in captivity; Paul sends his greetings in the Letter to the Colossians and the Letter to Philemon.
- **Unknown date**: According to tradition, he dies a martyr in Colossae.
- **Eighth century**: According to tradition, his relics are brought to Rome.

A founder of the Church in the Lycus valley

Epaphras is one of the rare early Christians we can name as the founder of a local Church. Paul himself had apparently never visited Colossae: the Christians there knew him only by reputation. It was Epaphras, one of their own, who first announced Christ to them. Paul also testifies that Epaphras "has great zeal for you, and for those in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis" (Colossians 4:13). His mission therefore reached the whole valley.

He also acted as a link between his community and the apostle. According to the Letter to the Colossians, it was Epaphras who told Paul about the love of the Colossians (Colossians 1:8). The letter itself, with its great hymn to Christ "the image of the invisible God," was written in response to the news he brought.

A man of prayer for his community

The most beautiful passage about Epaphras is a sentence of Paul to the Colossians: he is "always striving for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

Far from his city, Epaphras did not stop serving: he prayed. The Greek word Paul uses calls to mind the effort of an athlete in a contest. Intercession, in this light, is real apostolic work, not a pious extra. Epaphras teaches that one can keep building up a community even when one can no longer be physically present to it.

What tradition says

Beyond the New Testament, the information becomes uncertain. An ancient tradition counts him among the seventy-two disciples sent out on mission by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. It also makes him the first bishop of Colossae, appointed by Paul, and says he was martyred there. None of this can be verified.

The Roman tradition adds that in the eighth century, during the iconoclast crisis in the Byzantine Empire, Greek monks carried his relics to Rome, where they were placed in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major.

Why is Saint Epaphras a patron saint?

Epaphras has no official patronage. But his short biography makes him a natural intercessor for some vocations: catechists who pass on the faith in their own neighborhood, leaders of small communities, missionaries who return to their home country, and all those who pray quietly for others. He is also a friend for anyone who serves a community from a distance, through illness, exile or old age, and can only give it the gift of prayer.

What can we learn from his holiness?

Epaphras is a reminder that the early Church was not built only by the great apostles. It owes a great deal to lesser-known disciples who brought the Gospel home and carried their communities in prayer. His holiness is humble and hidden, yet Paul gives him one of the finest tributes in his letters.

He can be prayed to for catechists, community leaders and all who intercede in secret for others. His example also invites every Christian to ask a simple question: whom has God entrusted to my prayer, and do I carry them faithfully?

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Epaphras in art

Images of Epaphras are rare. The best known is the statue carved by Stefano Maderno for the outside of the Pauline Chapel at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. It shows him as a bearded man draped in ancient robes, in the style of the apostles and early disciples. Without the inscription or the setting, nothing in particular distinguishes him from other figures of the apostolic age.

Where to pray to Saint Epaphras

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, where tradition places his relics, with his statue on the facade of the Pauline Chapel.
- **Colossae** (Turkey): the archaeological site of the ancient city, still little excavated, near Honaz.



The Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Epaphras for Those We Carry in Prayer

No traditional prayer to Saint Epaphras has come into common use. Yet the New Testament gives us the very heart of his own prayer: he was "always striving" for the Christians of Colossae, asking that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12, World English Bible). The prayer below is inspired by that verse. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Epaphras for Those We Carry in Prayer

Saint Epaphras, faithful servant of Christ,
you brought the Gospel to your own city
and to the towns of the Lycus valley.
Teach me to share my faith simply
with those who live around me.

Far from those you loved, you never stopped serving them:
you struggled for them in prayer, day after day.
Help me to pray with the same perseverance
for my family, my parish and my friends,
especially those I cannot reach in any other way.

Obtain for them and for me the grace
to stand firm and mature
in all that God wills for us.

You shared the captivity of Saint Paul:
pray for prisoners, for persecuted Christians
and for all who suffer for the Gospel.
I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This original text by Saintspedia may be freely used for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

- On July 19, the feast of Saint Epaphras.
- For a catechist, a parish group or a small Christian community.
- When you are separated from people you love and can only pray for them.

- For prisoners and for Christians persecuted for their faith.
- When you are discouraged in praying for someone's conversion.

A prayer from Scripture

The Letter to the Colossians, written in response to the news Epaphras brought to Paul, contains a prayer that he could have made his own. Here it is in the World English Bible, a public domain translation:

> *"For this cause, we also, since the day we heard this, don't cease praying and making requests for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, that you may walk worthily of the Lord, to please him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:9-10)*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Epaphras or pray the novena to Saint Epaphras, from July 11 to July 19.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Epaphras

This novena to Saint Epaphras is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows what the New Testament tells us about this companion of Saint Paul: a man from Colossae who brought the Gospel home, cared for the whole Lycus valley, shared Paul's captivity and never stopped praying for his community. To end on July 19, his feast day, begin it on July 11. You can also pray it at any time, especially for someone you carry in prayer. Bible quotations follow the World English Bible, a public domain translation.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act proposed for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: Touched by the Gospel

Epaphras was born in Colossae. He probably met the faith during Paul's long stay in Ephesus. A single encounter with the Gospel changed the direction of his life. From then on, everything he did would be at the service of Christ and of his brothers and sisters.

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, help me to remember how I received the faith and to give thanks for those who passed it on to me. Amen.

Today: Thank God for one person who helped you to believe, and pray for them.

Day 2: Going back home

Instead of setting out for distant lands, Epaphras went back to his own city to announce Christ. Sometimes the hardest mission field is the place where everyone already knows us, our past, our weaknesses and our family. Epaphras accepted that challenge, and a Church was born.

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, give me the courage to witness to my faith among my family, neighbors and colleagues. Amen.

Today: Speak simply about your faith with someone close to you, if the occasion arises.

Day 3: A faithful servant

Paul calls Epaphras "our beloved fellow servant" and "a faithful servant of Christ on your behalf" (Colossians 1:7). He does not describe him as brilliant or powerful, but as faithful.

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, teach me faithfulness in small things and in daily service. Amen.

Today: Carry out one ordinary task carefully, offering it to God.

Day 4: Zeal for the whole valley

Paul testifies that Epaphras "has great zeal for you, and for those in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis" (Colossians 4:13). His heart was wide enough to embrace several communities.

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, open my heart beyond my own circle, to the needs of the whole Church. Amen.

Today: Pray for a neighboring parish or for a Church in another country.

Day 5: Bringing good news

Epaphras told Paul about the love of the Colossians (Colossians 1:8). He knew how to notice what was good in his community and to speak of it. Instead of complaining, he became a messenger of grace, and Paul answered with a letter that the whole Church still reads.

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, help me to see the good in others and to speak well of them. Amen.

Today: Tell someone sincerely what you appreciate in them.

Day 6: Fellow prisoner

In the Letter to Philemon, Paul calls Epaphras "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus" (Philemon 23). He chose to share the hardships of the apostle rather than remain in safety. Friendship in Christ is proven in times of trial.

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, pray for prisoners and for Christians who suffer for their faith. Amen.

Today: Pray for a prisoner, or learn about a prison ministry near you.

Day 7: Striving in prayer

Epaphras was "always striving" for the Colossians in his prayers (Colossians 4:12). The word suggests the effort of an athlete. Prayer for others is real work, and sometimes a struggle.

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, teach me to persevere in prayer, even when I see no result. Amen.

Today: Spend ten minutes praying for one person, without asking anything for yourself.

Day 8: Perfect and complete in God's will

Epaphras did not ask for success or comfort for his community. He asked that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, help me to desire God's will above my own plans. Amen.

Today: Pray the Our Father slowly, pausing on the words "your will be done."

Day 9: A hidden saint

Tradition says Epaphras died a martyr in Colossae and that his relics rest in Rome, at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major. But his true greatness lies in the few verses where Paul shows him, faithful and praying. Hidden holiness is still holiness.

Prayer: Saint Epaphras, help me to serve without seeking to be seen, and to remain faithful to the end. Amen.

Today: Do a good deed in secret.

Closing prayer

On the last day, or on July 19 itself, you may end the novena with this prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, you gave the Church of Colossae
a faithful servant in Saint Epaphras,
who brought your Gospel to his people
and never ceased to pray for them.
Through his intercession, make me a witness in my own surroundings
and a faithful intercessor for those you entrust to me.
Grant the intention I place before you in this novena,
if it is according to your will.
You who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Return to the life of Saint Epaphras or pray the prayer to Saint Epaphras.

CREDITS

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