

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Epaphroditus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 22

IN BRIEF

Saint Epaphroditus

Christian of Philippi, co-worker of Saint Paul, first bishop of the city according to tradition.

Feast day	March 22
Era	1st century

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Epaphroditus

Saint Epaphroditus was a Christian of Philippi, in Macedonia, whom the apostle Paul calls in his Letter to the Philippians "my brother and fellow laborer and fellow soldier." Sent by his community to bring help to Paul in prison, he fell gravely ill in the apostle's service. Tradition makes him the first bishop of Philippi, and an Italian tradition links him to Terracina. He is celebrated on March 22 in the Catholic Church.

Who was Saint Epaphroditus?

Everything we know for certain about Epaphroditus fits into a few verses of the Letter to the Philippians (2:25-30 and 4:18). His name, of Greek origin, is derived from that of the goddess Aphrodite and was common at the time; it suggests that he came from a pagan family that had converted. He belonged to the community of Philippi, the first Church founded by Paul in Europe, around the year 50, with which the apostle had particularly warm ties.

He has sometimes been identified with Epaphras, the founder of the Church of Colossae, whose name is a shortened form of Epaphroditus. Scholars do not accept this hypothesis: the two men belonged to different communities, one in Macedonia, the other in Asia Minor.

Philippi, a Church dear to Paul

The Acts of the Apostles (chapter 16) tell how Paul, traveling with Silas, came to Philippi, a Roman colony in Macedonia. There Lydia, a seller of purple cloth, was baptized with her household, and a small community took shape around her home. Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned in the city before being released. The Philippians never forgot the apostle: in his letter Paul

recalls that they alone supported him from the beginning, sending help more than once (Philippians 4:15-16). The gift carried by Epaphroditus belongs to this long story of generosity.

Key dates in the life of Saint Epaphroditus

- **c. 50**: Paul founds the Church of Philippi, of which Epaphroditus becomes a member.
- **The 50s or early 60s**: Sent by the Philippians to Paul in prison, he brings their gift.
- **Shortly afterward**: He falls gravely ill, recovers, and returns to Philippi, probably carrying Paul's letter.
- **According to tradition**: First bishop of Philippi.

The messenger who fell ill

Paul wrote his Letter to the Philippians from prison, perhaps in Ephesus or in Rome. Through Epaphroditus, the Christians of Philippi had sent him what he needed to live. Paul thanks them with a liturgical image: their gift is "an odour of sweetness, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18, Douay-Rheims).

But the messenger had fallen ill, "nigh unto death." Paul writes that God had mercy on him, "and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow" (Philippians 2:27). This passage shows a very human apostle, worried for a friend. It also reveals the sensitivity of Epaphroditus himself, more troubled by the anxiety of his own people, who had heard of his illness, than by his own condition.

Paul decided to send him back to Philippi, no doubt with the letter, and asked that he be warmly received: "Receive him therefore with all joy in the Lord; and treat with honour such as he is. Because for the work of Christ he came to the

point of death" (Philippians 2:29-30).

A brother, a co-worker, a fellow soldier

The three titles Paul gives him say a great deal. Brother: he shares the same faith and the same family in Christ. Fellow laborer: he takes part in the work of the Gospel. Fellow soldier: he shares its struggles and its risks. Paul also calls him the "apostle," that is, the envoy, of the Philippians, sent to minister to his needs (Philippians 2:25).

What tradition says

Later traditions count Epaphroditus among the Seventy disciples sent out by Jesus (Luke 10). They make him the first bishop of Philippi, and the old Roman Martyrology also presented him as bishop of Terracina, in Italy. Nothing in the New Testament confirms these details, which mainly express the veneration of the Churches for this companion of Paul.



The ruins of Philippi, in Greek Macedonia, the city of Epaphroditus.

What is Saint Epaphroditus invoked for?

Epaphroditus has no official patronage, but his story makes him a natural intercessor for certain people. He is the saint of discreet and risky service. He founded no Church and wrote no letter: he formed the link between a community and an imprisoned apostle, to the point of nearly losing his life. He reminds us of the value of those who bring help to others, such as volunteers, aid workers, and those who visit prisoners. He is close to the sick who worry more about their loved ones than about themselves, and to all who live friendship in the service of the Gospel.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Epaphroditus and the novena to Saint Epaphroditus.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Epaphroditus in art

Images of Epaphroditus are rare. In medieval manuscripts and icons he appears as one of the companions of Paul, sometimes dressed as a bishop in keeping with the tradition that made him the first bishop of Philippi. A letter or a scroll can recall the Letter to the Philippians that he probably carried home.



The cathedral of Terracina, a town that tradition associates with Saint Epaphroditus.

Where to pray to Saint Epaphroditus

- **Philippi, Greece**: the archaeological site of the city, with the ruins of its early Christian basilicas, where the community of Epaphroditus lived.
- **Terracina, Italy**: the town that an Italian tradition associates with him, with its cathedral.

The simplest way to meet him is to read the Letter to the Philippians, especially chapter 2, verses 25 to 30, and chapter 4, verse 18. His feast on March 22 is a good day to read the whole letter slowly, from beginning to end.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Epaphroditus for the Sick and Those Who Serve

Saint Epaphroditus left no writings and no traditional prayer. What we know of him comes from a few lines of the Letter to the Philippians, in which Paul praises his friend who almost died bringing help to him in prison. Below you will find that passage, followed by an original prayer to Saint Epaphroditus for those who serve others and for the sick.

Words of Saint Paul about Epaphroditus

> *"But I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow labourer and fellow soldier, but your apostle, and he that hath ministered to my wants. [...] For indeed he was sick, nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."*

Source: Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians 2:25-27 (Douay-Rheims translation).

Prayer to Saint Epaphroditus for those who serve and for the sick

Saint Epaphroditus, faithful messenger of the Church of Philippi, you carried to Paul in prison the gift of your brothers and sisters, and you risked your life in his service. Pray for all who bring help to others: volunteers, caregivers, those who visit prisoners and the lonely, and those who work far from home for the good of others.

You fell sick, close to death, and you were more troubled by the worry of your loved ones than by your own suffering. Pray for the sick, especially for (name the person), and for families who are anxious about someone they love. Obtain for them the mercy that God showed to you.

Paul called you his brother, his fellow laborer and his fellow soldier. Teach me to be a true friend in the service of the Gospel, faithful in small things, generous without seeking to be noticed.

May my life, like the gift you carried, be a sweet fragrance and an offering pleasing to God. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Epaphroditus is celebrated on March 22. You can pray to him at any time for someone who is gravely ill, for a friend who is far away, or for people who give their time and strength to serve others: nurses, aid workers, prison visitors, parish volunteers. It is also a good prayer before setting out on a mission or a trip to help others, or when you are worried about a loved one who is sick.

A prayer of thanksgiving for help received

Paul's letter to the Philippians is above all a letter of thanks. In the same spirit, you can pray: "Lord, thank you for those who have helped me when I was in need. Reward them for their kindness, and make me grateful and generous in return. Amen."

For nine days of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Epaphroditus, and read the life of Saint Epaphroditus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Epaphroditus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what the Letter to the Philippians tells us about Saint Epaphroditus, the friend and co-worker of Saint Paul. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on March 22, begin on March 13; it ends on March 21. In most years these days fall during Lent, a good time to meditate on service and generosity. It can also be prayed at any time for a sick person or for those who serve others.

Who was Saint Epaphroditus?

Epaphroditus was a Christian of Philippi, the first Church that Paul founded in Europe. His community sent him to bring a gift to the apostle, who was in prison. While with Paul he fell gravely ill and almost died, then recovered and returned home, probably carrying the Letter to the Philippians. Paul calls him "my brother and fellow laborer and fellow soldier." Tradition makes him the first bishop of Philippi. These nine days follow the few verses that speak of him (Philippians 2:25-30 and 4:18).

How to pray this novena

Each day, 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. The suggested act helps you carry the prayer into your day. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.



The ruins of Philippi, home of Saint Epaphroditus.

Day 1: A brother in Christ

The first title Paul gives Epaphroditus is "brother." Before any task or role, we belong to one another in Christ. The Church is first a family.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the brothers and sisters you have given me in the faith. Through the intercession of Saint Epaphroditus, help me to love them truly. Amen.

Today: Greet warmly someone from your parish whom you do not yet know.

Day 2: Sent by a community

Epaphroditus did not travel on his own initiative: the Church of Philippi sent him. His mission carried the love of a whole community.

Prayer: Lord, make me aware that I am sent by your Church, and that I never serve alone. Amen.

Today: Take part in a service or project of your parish, even in a small way.

Day 3: Visiting the prisoner

He went to Paul in prison. Jesus said: "I was in prison, and you came to me" (Matthew 25:36, Douay-Rheims). Epaphroditus did this for the apostle.

Prayer: Lord, bless prisoners and all who visit them. Let no one feel forgotten. Amen.

Today: Pray for a person in prison, or support a prison ministry.

Day 4: A gift that pleases God

Paul calls the gift of the Philippians "an odour of sweetness, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." Generosity toward others is a form of worship.

Prayer: Lord, make my gifts, large or small, an offering pleasing to you. Amen.

Today: Give something to a person or a cause in need, without telling anyone.

Day 5: A fellow laborer

Paul calls him his co-worker. Epaphroditus did not preach to crowds, but he shared the work of the Gospel in practical, hidden ways.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to value hidden work and to do it with love. Amen.

Today: Do a humble task at home or at work that no one will notice.

Day 6: Sick, close to death

Epaphroditus fell gravely ill while serving. Service sometimes costs health, strength and comfort. He did not regret it.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you all the sick, especially (name the person). Give them strength and, if it is your will, healing. Amen.

Today: Call or visit someone who is sick.

Day 7: Worried for others

He was more troubled by his friends' anxiety than by his own illness. His heart remained turned toward others even in suffering.

Prayer: Lord, when I suffer, keep my heart open to those who love me and worry about me. Amen.

Today: Reassure someone who is worried about you, or share good news with your family.

Day 8: God had mercy

Paul writes that God had mercy on Epaphroditus, and on him too, sparing him "sorrow upon sorrow." Healing and friendship are gifts of God's mercy.

Prayer: Merciful Father, thank you for the times you have spared me and those I love. Amen.

Today: Write down three mercies you have received this year and thank God for them.

Day 9: Received with joy

Paul asks the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus "with all joy in the Lord" and to honor such men. Those who serve deserve our gratitude.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Epaphroditus, make me faithful in service and grateful to those who serve me. Amen.

Today: Thank, in words or in writing, someone who has served you or your family.

Closing prayer

Saint Epaphroditus, brother, fellow laborer and fellow soldier of Saint Paul, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have placed before God. You carried the love of your Church to a prisoner and almost gave your life for it. Pray for the sick, for those who care for them, and for all who serve without being seen. Obtain for me a generous heart, ready to help and quick to give thanks. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Epaphroditus and pray the prayer to Saint Epaphroditus.

Credits and sources

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