

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eustochia Calafato

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 20

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IN BRIEF

Saint Eustochia Calafato

Poor Clare nun of fifteenth-century Sicily, foundress of the monastery of Montevergine in Messina and mystic of the Passion.

Feast day	January 20
Born	March 25, 1434, Messina, Sicily, Italy
Died	January 20, 1485, Monastery of Montevergine, Messina, Italy
Canonized	June 11, 1988, by Pope John Paul II
Era	15th century
Patron saint of	Messina (copatron)

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Eustochia Calafato Before the Cross

Novena to Saint Eustochia Calafato

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Eustochia Calafato

Saint Eustochia Smeralda Calafato was a Poor Clare nun of fifteenth-century Sicily, born and buried in the port city of Messina. She founded the monastery of Montevergine, where she restored a strict observance of the Rule of Saint Clare, and she was a great mystic of the Passion of Christ. Her body, which remained incorrupt, is venerated in the church of her monastery. Canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1988, she is copatron of Messina and her feast day is January 20.

Who was Saint Eustochia Calafato?

Smeralda Calafato, who took the religious name Eustochia, belonged to the great Franciscan reform movement of the fifteenth century known as the Observance, which sought to return to the poverty and fervor of the early friars and sisters. In a Sicily that was prosperous but scarred by epidemics and rivalries, she chose a life of prayer, poverty and penance, against the wishes of her family.

Most of what we know about her comes from the *Legend* written shortly after her death by Sister Jacopa Pollicino, a companion in her monastery. Her religious name recalls Saint Eustochium, the disciple of Saint Jerome in Bethlehem, long held up as a model for consecrated virgins.



Saint Eustochia Smeralda Calafato, Poor Clare of Messina.

Key dates in the life of Saint Eustochia

- **March 25, 1434**: Born in Messina to a well-off family of the city and named Smeralda.
- **Youth**: She refuses the marriage plans of her family and longs for religious life.
- **1449**: At about fifteen, she enters the Poor Clare monastery of Santa Maria di Basicò in Messina and takes the name Eustochia.
- **1457**: Pope Callixtus III authorizes her to found a monastery of strict observance.
- **Around 1460**: First foundation in Messina, in very difficult conditions.
- **1464**: The community moves into the monastery of Montevergine, in the heart of the city, with Eustochia as abbess.
- **January 20, 1485**: She dies at Montevergine, aged fifty.

- **1782**: Pope Pius VI confirms her cult as Blessed.
- **June 11, 1988**: Pope John Paul II canonizes her during his visit to Messina.

A vocation against all odds

Smeralda grew up in a prominent and comfortable family in Messina. Her parents planned a marriage for her, but she felt called to give herself entirely to God. Her family, especially her brothers, strongly opposed the idea.

Around the age of fifteen, she nevertheless managed to enter the Poor Clares of the monastery of Santa Maria di Basicò. There she took the name Eustochia and soon stood out for her fervor, her humility and her love of poverty.

The foundress of Montevergine

Life at Basicò seemed to her too far from the ideal of Saint Clare of Assisi. Eustochia longed for a stricter observance: real poverty, enclosure and long hours of prayer. Supported by Franciscan friars of the Observance, she obtained permission from Pope Callixtus III in 1457 to found a new community.

The beginnings were very hard. The sisters lacked resources, faced opposition and slander, and lived in precarious conditions. A few companions followed her, among them, according to her biographer, members of her own family.

In 1464 the community settled in the monastery of Montevergine, in the center of Messina. Eustochia became its abbess. She governed her sisters with firmness and tenderness, sharing the humblest tasks, and the monastery became a house of prayer whose influence reached the whole city.



The church of Montevergine, in Messina.

A mystic of the Passion

At the heart of Eustochia's spirituality was the contemplation of the Passion of Christ. She spent long hours in prayer before the crucifix, meditating on each step of the sufferings of Jesus, and, according to her biographer, shared his pains in her own body. She practiced severe penances, fasting and keeping vigil at night. She also had a deep devotion to the Eucharist. Tradition says she wrote a book of meditations on the Passion, which has not come down to us.

Her charity did not stop at the monastery walls. She prayed for Messina, struck again and again by epidemics, and many people came to ask for her advice and her prayers.

Death and cult

Eustochia died on January 20, 1485, at the age of fifty, and was buried in the monastery. The early accounts say her body was found intact some time later. It has been kept and venerated ever since in the church of Montevergine.

Popular devotion to her spread immediately in Messina. Pope Pius VI confirmed her cult in 1782, and on June 11, 1988, during his pastoral visit to Messina, Pope John Paul II declared her a saint. She is copatron of the city and the archdiocese of Messina.

Why is Saint Eustochia the patron saint of Messina?

Eustochia was a daughter of Messina who never left it. She founded her monastery in the middle of the city, prayed for its people through plague and hardship, and her body has rested there for more than five centuries. The people of Messina turned to her from the day of her death, and the Church has made her the copatron of the city and archdiocese. Beyond Sicily, she can be invoked by young people discerning a vocation, by contemplative nuns, and by anyone going through a time of trial.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Eustochia in art

Saint Eustochia is shown as a Poor Clare, in a brown habit with a black veil. She usually holds a crucifix or gazes at the suffering Christ, a reminder of her lifelong meditation on the Passion. In Messina, images of her incorrupt body in its glass reliquary are also familiar.

What can we learn from Saint Eustochia?

Eustochia had the courage to follow her vocation against the wishes of her family, and then to reform her own religious life at the cost of great hardship. She shows that love for Christ crucified is a source of strength and freedom,

not of gloom. To pray with her, you can use the prayer to Saint Eustochia or the novena to Saint Eustochia, which ends on January 20.

Where to pray to Saint Eustochia

- **Messina, Sicily**: the church of the monastery of Montevergine, still home to a community of Poor Clares, where her body is venerated. As it is an enclosed monastery, visitors are asked to respect the silence of the sisters, and it is wise to check opening times locally.
- **Messina**: the cathedral of the city of which she is copatron.
- Poor Clare monasteries everywhere, especially those of Sicily.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eustochia Calafato Before the Cross

Saint Eustochia Calafato, Poor Clare of Messina and mystic of the Passion, is invoked by young people discerning a vocation, by contemplative nuns and by all who are going through a time of trial. The prayers addressed to her in Italian are mostly local, so this page offers two original prayers by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Eustochia before the cross

> *Saint Eustochia, you spent so many hours before Christ crucified: teach me to contemplate his love to the very end.*
>
> *When I suffer, help me to unite my pain to that of Jesus, not to love suffering for its own sake, but to find his presence and his strength in it.*
>
> *You left the comfort of your family to follow Christ in his poverty: give me a free heart, detached from what weighs me down.*
>
> *You persevered through opposition and slander: obtain for me patience and faithfulness. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Amen.*

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

Prayer for vocations

> *Lord, through the intercession of Saint Eustochia, enlighten the young people who are looking for their path. Give them the courage to answer your call, even when those around them do not understand. Sustain the nuns and monks who pray for the world in the silence of the cloister, and raise up new contemplative vocations. Amen.*

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Eustochia

- Young people discerning a religious vocation.
- The Poor Clares and all contemplative communities.
- Those who suffer in body or in heart.
- Families divided over a life choice.
- The city and archdiocese of Messina.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Eustochia's feast day is January 20, the anniversary of her death in 1485. Fridays, the day of the Passion, are also a fitting time to pray to her, as is any moment when a cross feels heavy. To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Eustochia from January 12 to 20, and read the life of Saint Eustochia Calafato.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eustochia Calafato

This novena to Saint Eustochia Calafato is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the path of the Poor Clare of Messina: a vocation defended against her family, a reform carried out through hardship, and a whole life spent at the foot of the cross. To end on January 20, her feast day, begin it on January 12. You can also pray it at any time of the year, especially when discerning a vocation or carrying a heavy trial.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a few quiet minutes, if possible before a crucifix. 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 suggested for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue the next one.

Eustochia's prayer was centered on the Passion, so this novena often invites you to look at the cross. This is not a call to seek suffering, but to discover, as she did, how much Christ loves us, and to find in him the strength to carry our own burdens.

Day 1: Called by name

Smeralda was born in Messina on March 25, 1434, the feast of the Annunciation. Like Mary, she would one day answer God's call with a full yes.

Prayer: Lord, you call each of us by name. Open my ears to your voice and my heart to your will. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Take five minutes of silence and ask God what he expects of you now.

Day 2: Courage in front of family

Her family wanted her to marry, and her brothers fiercely opposed her choice. She held firm, without hatred, and entered the Poor Clares at about fifteen.

Prayer: Lord, give courage to all who must make a choice that their loved ones do not understand, and keep peace in their families. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray for a young person you know who is making a life decision.

Day 3: A new name

At Santa Maria di Basicò she took the name Eustochia, after the disciple of Saint Jerome. A new name meant a new life, given entirely to God.

Prayer: Lord, you made me your child in baptism. Help me live up to the name I received that day. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism, or thank God for it.

Day 4: Hungry for more

Life at Basicò seemed too comfortable to her. She longed for the real poverty, enclosure and prayer of Saint Clare. Her desire was not for rigor in itself, but for God alone.

Prayer: Lord, free me from lukewarmness. Give me a heart that wants you more than anything else. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Give up one small comfort, and offer it for someone in need.

Day 5: Through trials

The new foundation began in hardship: no resources, opposition, slander. Eustochia did not give up, and her companions stayed by her side.

Prayer: Lord, when I am criticized or misunderstood, keep me patient and faithful, and free from bitterness. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who has hurt you with their words.

Day 6: Serving as abbess

At Montevergine, Eustochia led her sisters with firmness and tenderness, and she did not spare herself the humblest tasks.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who have authority over others. May they lead by serving, as you did. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Do a humble chore at home or at work without being asked.

Day 7: At the foot of the cross

Eustochia spent long hours before the crucifix, meditating on each moment of the Passion. In the wounds of Jesus she read the measure of his love.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, crucified for me, teach me to look at your cross and see how much you love me. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray the Stations of the Cross, or simply spend ten minutes before a crucifix.

Day 8: Praying for the city

From her enclosure, Eustochia prayed for Messina, struck by epidemics, and many came to her for counsel. Hidden prayer bears fruit far beyond the walls.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you my city, its sick, its poor and those who govern it. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray for the people of your neighborhood, and for a contemplative community you know.

Day 9: Into God's hands

Eustochia died on January 20, 1485, at the age of fifty. Her body rests at Montevergine, where the people of Messina still come to pray with her.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to live and die in your love. Through the intercession of Saint Eustochia, hear the intention I bring you today. Saint Eustochia, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Go to Mass if you can, and give thanks for the vocations in your parish.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Eustochia, faithful daughter of Saint Clare, you loved Christ crucified with all your heart and found in his cross the strength to persevere. Obtain for me a free and generous heart, courage in my choices and patience in my trials. Pray for young people seeking their vocation, for contemplative nuns and monks, and for all who suffer. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

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