BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Euthymius the Great

*Life, prayer and novena*

Feast day: January 20

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IN BRIEF

## Saint Euthymius the Great

*5th-century monk, founder of a laura in the Judean Desert and master of Saint Sabas.*

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| **Feast day** | January 20 |
| **Born** | 377, Melitene (now Malatya, Turkey) |
| **Died** | January 20, 473, his laura in the Judean Desert, near Jerusalem |
| **Canonized** | immemorial cult |
| **Era** | 5th century |

## In this booklet


Life

Prayer to Saint Euthymius the Great for Faithfulness and Charity

Novena to Saint Euthymius the Great

Credits and sources



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LIFE

# Saint Euthymius the Great

Saint Euthymius the Great was a 5th-century monk, born in 377 at Melitene, in Roman Armenia, and died on January 20, 473, in his laura in the Judean Desert, near Jerusalem. A priest who came to the Holy Land, he was one of the great founders of Palestinian monasticism and the master of Saint Sabas. His feast day is January 20, the day of his death, for Catholics and Orthodox.

## Who was Saint Euthymius the Great?

Euthymius is one of the major figures among the monks of the Judean Desert. His life is known to us through Cyril of Scythopolis, a 6th-century monk who gathered the memories of the disciples of Euthymius and Sabas. His account, more sober than many hagiographies, mixes precise historical information with miracle stories. It presents Euthymius as a man of prayer and discernment, drawn to solitude, who nevertheless guided many monks, welcomed Arab tribes into the Church and defended the faith of the Council of Chalcedon in troubled times.

## Key dates in the life of Euthymius

- **377**: Born at Melitene (now Malatya, in Turkey), in Lesser Armenia.
- **Childhood**: After his father's death, his mother entrusts him to the Bishop of Melitene; she becomes a deaconess.
- **c. 400**: Ordained a priest, he is put in charge of overseeing the monasteries of the diocese.
- **c. 405-406**: At about twenty-nine, he leaves for Jerusalem and enters the laura of Pharan.
- **c. 411**: With his friend Theoctistus, he settles in a desert cave; a community grows up around them.

- **428**: He founds his own laura, in the Judean Desert, east of Jerusalem.
- **451**: He accepts the faith defined at the Council of Chalcedon, despite the opposition of many monks.
- **January 20, 473**: Dies in his laura, at nearly ninety-six years of age.
- **482**: His laura becomes a cenobitic monastery, whose church keeps his tomb.

## A child of prayer

According to Cyril of Scythopolis, Euthymius's parents, long childless, obtained him through prayer. His name means "good cheer" or "joy of soul." His father died while he was still small. His mother, who became a deaconess, entrusted him to the Bishop of Melitene, who oversaw his education. Ordained a priest while young, Euthymius was given the task of visiting the monasteries of the region. But he himself longed for a more withdrawn life. At about twenty-nine, he left his country for the Holy Land, venerated the holy places of Jerusalem and entered the laura of Pharan, one of the oldest in Palestine.

## The desert monk

At Pharan he became friends with another monk, Theoctistus. Every year, after the feast of the Epiphany, they went together deep into the desert to live in prayer and fasting until close to Easter, eating wild plants. Around 411 they discovered a cave in a ravine and settled there. Disciples joined them and a monastery took shape. Euthymius entrusted its direction to Theoctistus and kept a more solitary life for himself.

Euthymius had the gift of reading hearts. His advice, as Cyril reports it, stresses vigilance, obedience, humility and above all charity. "Always keep," he said in substance, "sincere charity as the beginning and end of every action, for it is the bond of perfection." According to his biographer, he also healed the son of an

Arab tribal chief. The father, Aspebetos, was converted with his people and received baptism under the name of Peter; he later became bishop of these nomadic tribes. Euthymius thus stands at the origin of one of the first Arab Churches of Palestine.

## Founder and father of monks

In 428, Euthymius founded his own laura in the Judean Desert, east of Jerusalem. Its church was consecrated by the Bishop of Jerusalem. The monks lived in separate cells during the week and gathered for the liturgy. Euthymius formed many disciples, some of whom became bishops or founders. The most famous is Saint Sabas: arriving young, he was sent by Euthymius to the monastery of Theoctistus to learn community life first. Sabas would later found the great laura that bears his name.

In 451, the Council of Chalcedon defined faith in one Christ in two natures, divine and human. Many monks in Palestine rejected these decisions and rebelled. Euthymius, however, received them and remained faithful to the faith of the council, which earned him much opposition. For a time he withdrew further into the desert. His biographer reports that Empress Eudocia, living in retirement in Jerusalem, was reconciled with the Church on his advice.

## His death and cult

Euthymius died on January 20, 473, after announcing his end to his disciples and urging them to humility and charity. He was nearly ninety-six. His laura was turned into a monastery in 482, and his body was laid in a crypt of the church. The monastery remained active until the 12th century; its ruins survive today east of Jerusalem. He is venerated as a saint by the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, who celebrate him on January 20. He is shown as an old man with a long white beard, in monastic dress, often holding a scroll.

## What can we learn from Saint Euthymius the Great?

Euthymius united the solitude of the desert with great spiritual fruitfulness. He did not seek to lead, but many came to him. He was able to welcome foreign nomads into the Church, to form disciples who surpassed him, and to remain faithful to the faith of the Church when it would have been easier to follow the majority. You can pray to him for monks and vocations, for the Church in the Holy Land, for those who must stay faithful despite opposition, and for those who accompany others spiritually.

## Where to pray to Saint Euthymius the Great

- **Judean Desert**, east of Jerusalem: the ruins of his monastery, where his tomb was.
- **Mar Saba Monastery**: the great laura founded by his disciple Saint Sabas, still inhabited by monks.
- **Everywhere**: on January 20, in prayer for monastic life and for the Christians of the Holy Land.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Euthymius the Great for Faithfulness and Charity

Saint Euthymius the Great, a priest who came from Armenia to the Holy Land, lived in the Judean Desert in the 5th century and founded there a laura where many monks were formed, including Saint Sabas. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him the life of prayer, the Christians of the Holy Land and faithfulness in the faith.

## Prayer to Saint Euthymius

*Saint Euthymius,*
*child obtained through prayer,*
*you left your country*
*to seek God in the Judean Desert.*
*Teach me to make my life an offering.*

*You taught that sincere charity*
*is the beginning and end of every action.*
*Help me to love in truth,*
*to be watchful in prayer*
*and humble in service.*

*You welcomed nomads into the Church*
*and kept the faith when many rejected it;*
*watch over the Christians of the Holy Land,*
*support those who stay faithful in trial,*
*and raise up vocations to monastic life.*
*Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## When to pray to Saint Euthymius

- On his feast day, January 20.
- For monks, nuns and vocations.
- For the Christians of the Holy Land and the Middle East.
- When you must stay faithful to the Church despite opposition.
- For couples hoping for a child.

## A short invocation

> *Saint Euthymius, father of the desert monks,*
> *keep us in charity and faithfulness. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Euthymius from January 12 to 20, and read the life of Saint Euthymius the Great.

NOVENA

# Novena to Saint Euthymius the Great

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is inspired by the life of Saint Euthymius the Great, monk of the Judean Desert, as told by Cyril of Scythopolis in the 6th century. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, January 20, begin on January 12. 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 Euthymius, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely.

## Day 1: A child given

According to his biographer, Euthymius's parents obtained him after long years of prayer. Every life is a gift.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for the gift of life. Bless couples who are hoping for a child.

**Act of the day:** Pray for a couple hoping for a child.

## Day 2: A mother who entrusts

Widowed, his mother entrusted him to the Bishop of Melitene and devoted herself to the service of the Church as a deaconess.

**Prayer:** Lord, bless single mothers and widows, and give their children good guides.

**Act of the day:** Help a single mother or a widowed person around you.

## Day 3: Leaving one's country

A respected priest, Euthymius leaves everything for the Holy Land. He seeks God beyond what is familiar and comfortable.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me the courage to leave what keeps me far from you.

**Act of the day:** Give up a habit that turns you away from prayer.

## Day 4: Spiritual friendship

With Theoctistus, Euthymius shares prayer, fasting and life in the desert. A friendship in God sustains the journey.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for the friends who help me follow you. Help me to be a true brother to them.

**Act of the day:** Pray for a friend and get in touch with them.

## Day 5: The time of the desert

Every year, from Epiphany until close to Easter, Euthymius went deep into the desert to live alone with God.

**Prayer:** Lord, lead me into the desert of my heart, and speak to me in silence.

**Act of the day:** Plan a real time of retreat in the coming months.

## Day 6: Charity, beginning and end

Euthymius taught that sincere charity must be the beginning and the goal of every action. Without it, all effort is in vain.

**Prayer:** Lord, let everything in me begin and end in love.

**Act of the day:** Do a free act of charity for someone who cannot repay you.

## Day 7: Welcoming the stranger

Euthymius heals the son of an Arab chief. The whole tribe asks for baptism. The desert monk opens the Church to nomads.

**Prayer:** Lord, open my heart to strangers, and make your Church a home for all peoples.

**Act of the day:** Greet or help a foreigner in your neighborhood.

## Day 8: Faithful in the storm

After the Council of Chalcedon, many monks rebel. Euthymius remains faithful to the faith of the Church, despite opposition.

**Prayer:** Lord, keep me faithful to your Church, even when it is easier to follow the crowd.

**Act of the day:** Recite the Creed slowly and pray for Christian unity.

## Day 9: Dying in peace

On January 20, 473, Euthymius dies after urging his disciples to humility and charity. He leaves behind him generations of monks.

**Prayer:** Lord, grant me to die in your peace and to leave behind me a little of your love. Through the intercession of Saint Euthymius, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

**Act of the day:** Pray for the Christians of the Holy Land and attend Mass if possible.

## Closing prayer

*Saint Euthymius,*
*monk of the Judean Desert and father of Saint Sabas,*
*you sought God in silence*
*and served him in charity.*
*Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you,*
*and keep me faithful to the end.*
*Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

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