

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Florian of Lorch

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 4

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IN BRIEF

Saint Florian of Lorch

Roman officer martyred around 304 at Lauriacum, in Austria, patron saint of firefighters.

Feast day	May 4
Born	c. 250
Died	c. 304, Lauriacum (Enns, Austria)
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	firefighters, chimney sweeps, blacksmiths, brewers, bakers, coopers, soap makers, Upper Austria, Poland, Kraków

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Florian for Firefighters and the Protection of Homes

Novena to Saint Florian

Saint Florian Abbey (Stift Sankt Florian), Upper Austria

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Florian of Lorch

Saint Florian of Lorch was an officer in the Roman military administration, martyred around 304 at Lauriacum, today's Enns in Austria, during the persecution of Diocletian. According to the account of his passion, he refused to deny Christ and was thrown into the river Enns with a stone tied around his neck. Patron saint of firefighters and of all who fight fire, he is venerated in Austria, Bavaria, Poland and throughout the Alpine world. His feast day is May 4.

Who was Saint Florian?

Florian lived at the end of the third century in Noricum, a Roman province that covered part of present-day Austria, on the Danube frontier. He held an important post in the administration of the army there. According to tradition, he was also in charge of the men responsible for fighting fires, which partly explains his later patronage. A Christian, he kept his faith discreet in an empire where it was still under suspicion.

What we know of him comes mainly from a *Passion of Saint Florian*, written several centuries after the events. It no doubt mixes historical elements with edifying additions. The heart of the story, a martyrdom at Lauriacum during the Great Persecution, is nevertheless consistent with what is known of the period, and the cult of Florian is ancient in the region.



The abbey of Sankt Florian in Upper Austria, built over the martyr's tomb.

Key dates in the life of Saint Florian

- **Around 250**: Probable birth, perhaps in the Danube region.
- **303**: Beginning of the Great Persecution under Diocletian.
- **Around 304**: Arrested at Lauriacum, refuses to sacrifice to the gods, is tortured and drowned in the Enns.
- **After his death**: According to tradition, a Christian woman named Valeria buries his body on the site of the present-day abbey of Sankt Florian.
- **1071**: Canons Regular of Saint Augustine settle in the monastery that keeps his memory.
- **1184**: According to tradition, Pope Lucius III sends relics of Florian to Kraków at the request of Duke Casimir II.
- **1686-1751**: Baroque rebuilding of the abbey of Sankt Florian.

The martyrdom at Lauriacum

According to his passion, the governor Aquilinus came to Lauriacum to enforce the edicts against Christians. Believers were arrested and imprisoned. When Florian learned what was happening, he went to join them and declared that he too was a Christian.

Aquilinus ordered him to offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome. Florian refused. He was beaten and tortured, but did not give in. He was then led onto a bridge over the Enns and thrown into the river with a heavy stone tied around his neck.

The rest of the story belongs to tradition. Florian's body is said to have been washed up on the bank. A woman named Valeria, warned by the martyr in a dream, gathered it and buried it in a more worthy place a few miles away. There the abbey that bears his name would rise, southeast of Linz.

Why is Saint Florian the patron saint of firefighters?

A popular legend tells that Florian put out a great fire, or saved a village from the flames, with a single bucket of water. Together with the tradition that he commanded men who fought fires, this image made him the protector against fire.

Fire brigades of Central Europe took him as their patron, and May 4 has become firefighters' day in many countries, including International Firefighters' Day. In the United States and elsewhere, the cross often seen in fire department emblems is commonly called the Saint Florian cross.

He is also invoked by trades that work with fire or whose workshops feared it: chimney sweeps, blacksmiths, brewers, bakers, coopers and soap makers. In the villages of Austria and Bavaria, his statue adorns countless facades, fountains

and chapels. A German proverb, gently mocking human selfishness, even asks Saint Florian to spare one's own house... and to set fire to the neighbor's instead.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Florian in art

Saint Florian is almost always shown as a Roman soldier in armor, holding a banner, pouring water from a bucket onto a burning house. He is sometimes recognized by the millstone of his martyrdom. These images are found on houses, fire stations, fountains and roadside shrines throughout the Alpine countries.

From Austria to Poland

The cult of Florian first developed around his tomb, in the monastery that became a house of Canons Regular of Saint Augustine in the eleventh century. Today Saint Florian is the patron of Upper Austria.

According to tradition, relics were taken to Rome, and in 1184 Pope Lucius III gave part of them to the Polish duke Casimir II. They arrived in Kraków, where the church of Saint Florian was built in his honor in the suburb of Kleparz. Florian became one of the patrons of the city and of the Kingdom of Poland.

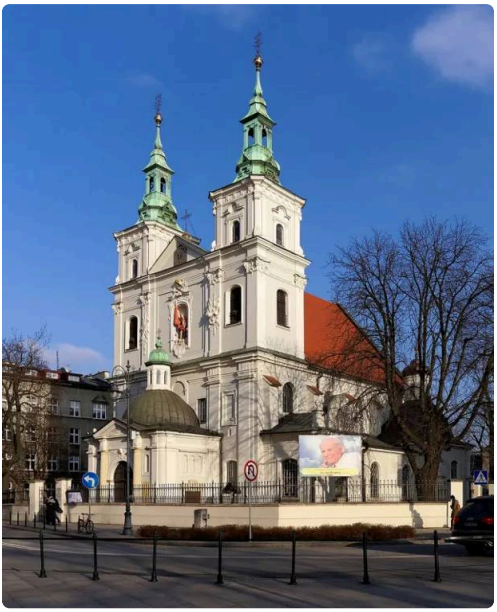
It was in this parish of Saint Florian that the young Father Karol Wojtyła, the future Saint John Paul II, served as assistant priest and chaplain to university students.

What can we learn from his holiness?

Florian left no writings. His holiness comes down to one act: he did not abandon his arrested brothers and sisters but confessed his faith with them, when he could have stayed silent. Popular tradition extended this courage by

making him the friend of those who risk their lives to save others from the flames. He is prayed to for firefighters and rescue workers, for the protection of homes, and for those who must bear witness to their faith in a hostile setting.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Florian or the novena to Saint Florian, from April 25 to May 3.



The church of Saint Florian in Kraków, which keeps relics of the martyr.

Where to pray to Saint Florian

- **Sankt Florian** (Upper Austria): the abbey of Sankt Florian, built according to tradition over his tomb.
- **Enns** (Upper Austria): the ancient Lauriacum, place of his martyrdom, on the banks of the river Enns.
- **Kraków** (Poland): the church of Saint Florian in Kleparz, which has kept relics since the end of the twelfth century.

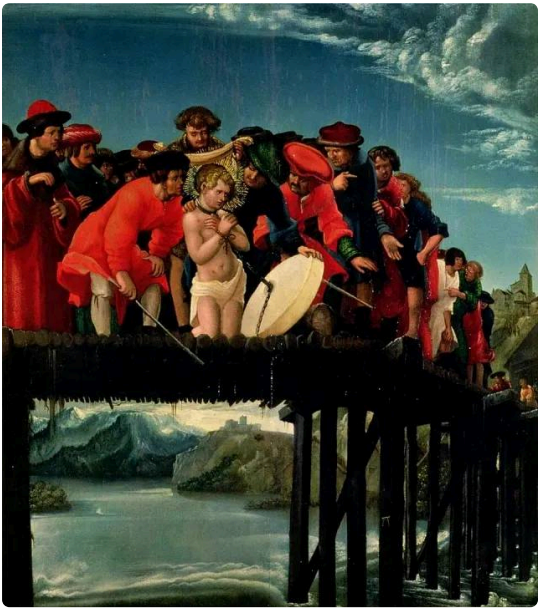
PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Florian for Firefighters and the Protection of Homes

Saint Florian has been invoked against fire for centuries, especially in the Alpine countries and in Poland, where many popular prayers are addressed to him in local languages. No text from his own hand has come down to us. Below you will find an original prayer by Saintspedia for firefighters, rescue workers and the protection of homes.

A saint invoked against fire

In the villages of Austria and Bavaria, the image of Saint Florian pouring a bucket of water onto a burning house is placed on facades and above doors, like a silent prayer for the protection of the home. Firefighters honor him on May 4, often with a Mass and a blessing of their equipment and vehicles.



Saint Florian, Roman officer and martyr.

Prayer to Saint Florian for firefighters and the protection of homes

Saint Florian, you did not abandon your imprisoned brothers and sisters but confessed Christ with them: give me the courage not to turn away when others need me.

Protect firefighters, rescue workers and all who risk their lives to save the lives of others. Keep them safe in danger, bring them home safely to their families, and support those who are injured or grieving.

Watch over our homes, our workplaces, our forests and our fields. Keep fire and disaster far from us, and do not let fear or selfishness close our doors to those who have lost everything.

You were thrown into the waters of the Enns rather than deny your faith: help me to remain faithful to Christ when it costs me. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

May the fire of God's love burn within us, and may nothing ever put it out. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Florian is celebrated on May 4, a date many countries also keep as firefighters' day. This prayer is also fitting:

- at the blessing of a home, a fire station or fire engines;
- before a dangerous call-out or a shift;
- after a fire, for the victims and for those who fought it;
- during wildfire season, for communities under threat;

- at the funeral or anniversary of a firefighter who died in the line of duty.

A short firefighter's invocation

> *Saint Florian, guardian of those who face the flames, stand beside us in the fire, guide our hands, and bring us all home. Amen.*

This invocation is also an original text by Saintspedia.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Florian, from April 25 to May 3, and read the life of Saint Florian.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Florian

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and tradition of Saint Florian, martyr and patron saint of firefighters. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on May 4, begin on April 25; it ends on May 3. It can also be prayed at any time, for a firefighter or rescue worker, after a fire, or for the protection of a home.

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. Fire stations, families of firefighters and parish groups may pray it together. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

Day 1: Serving where we are placed

Florian held an important post in the administration of the Roman army. He served his country seriously while keeping Christ at the center of his life. Holiness is not lived somewhere else, but in the duties we have today.

Prayer: Lord, help me to do my work with honesty and to serve you through it. Saint Florian, pray for me. Amen.

Today: Do carefully a task you usually rush through.

Day 2: A quiet but true faith

In an empire where Christians were under suspicion, Florian lived his faith without fuss. Discretion is not shame: it can be the time when faith puts down roots. The courage Florian would show at the hour of trial had been prepared

by years of hidden fidelity.

Prayer: Lord, make a deep faith grow in me, one that does not need to be seen in order to be real. Amen.

Today: Spend ten minutes in silent prayer.

Day 3: Not abandoning one's brothers and sisters

According to his passion, when Christians were arrested at Lauriacum, Florian went to join them. He could have stayed safe; he chose to be with them. Solidarity in danger is already a form of love.

Prayer: Lord, let me be present to those who suffer, even when it costs me. Saint Florian, give me your courage. Amen.

Today: Visit or call someone who is going through a hard time.

Day 4: Saying "I am a Christian"

Before the governor, Florian refused to sacrifice to the gods. He did not seek confrontation, but he did not deny who he was. Many Christians today face a similar choice, in less dramatic ways, at work, at school or among friends.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the courage to bear witness to Christ simply, without fear and without arrogance. Amen.

Today: Do not hide your faith in a conversation where it has its place.

Day 5: Holding firm in trial

Beaten and tortured, Florian did not give in. His strength did not come from himself, but from the One he loved.

Prayer: Lord, sustain those who are persecuted for their faith, and strengthen me in my own trials. Amen.

Today: Pray for persecuted Christians around the world.

Day 6: The waters of the Enns

Florian was thrown into the river with a stone around his neck. The water that was meant to erase him became the sign of his victory, like the water of baptism, in which we die and rise with Christ.

Prayer: Lord, renew in me the grace of my baptism. Saint Florian, pray for me. Amen.

Today: Make the sign of the cross with holy water, remembering your baptism.

Day 7: Those who face the fire

Tradition made Florian the patron of firefighters. Every day, men and women risk their lives to save strangers, often in silence and without thanks. Their courage reflects the love of the Good Shepherd, who gives his life for his sheep.

Prayer: Saint Florian, protect firefighters and rescue workers, and bring them home safely to their families. Comfort the families of those who have died in the line of duty. Amen.

Today: Thank, in one way or another, the emergency services near your home.

Day 8: The neighbor's house

A mocking proverb asks Saint Florian to spare one's own house and burn the neighbor's. True prayer makes no difference between my house and the houses of others.

Prayer: Lord, enlarge my heart, so that I may pray and act for the good of all, and not only for my own. Amen.

Today: Do a concrete service for a neighbor.

Day 9: The fire of God's love

Florian is invoked against the fire that destroys. But there is a fire that does not destroy: the fire of the Holy Spirit, which burned in the martyr's heart.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Florian, kindle in me the fire of your love. Amen.

Today: Light a candle in church or at home and entrust your loved ones to God.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Florian, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Protect our homes and those who come to our rescue. Obtain for us the courage to remain faithful to Christ and never to abandon our brothers and sisters. Lord God, through his intercession, keep us from fire and disaster, and let the flame of your love burn in us for ever. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Saint Florian Abbey (Stift Sankt Florian), Upper Austria

The Abbey of Saint Florian (Stift Sankt Florian), about nine miles southeast of Linz in Upper Austria, stands, according to tradition, over the tomb of the martyr Florian, who was drowned in the Enns around 304. A monastery of Augustinian canons regular since the 11th century, it is one of the largest Baroque complexes in Austria and the main pilgrimage site linked to the saint.

A Monastery over the Martyr's Tomb

According to the account of his passion, Florian's body was gathered up by a Christian woman named Valeria and buried a few miles from Lauriacum, present-day Enns. A sanctuary grew up around this burial place. In 1071, canons regular of Saint Augustine settled there; their community still lives there more than nine centuries later. Tradition holds that part of the relics was later taken to Rome, then to Kraków.



Saint Florian Abbey, seen from the outside.

A Baroque Masterpiece

The present buildings date mostly from the great reconstruction carried out from 1686 to 1751 by the architects Carlo Antonio Carlone and then Jakob Prandtauer. The abbey basilica is richly decorated with stucco and frescoes. The abbey is also famous for its great organ and for the memory of the composer Anton Bruckner, who was a choirboy and then organist there, and who rests in the crypt, beneath the organ.

Visiting the Abbey

The basilica is open to the faithful for prayer and for the community's services. The monastic areas, such as the library, the Imperial Apartments and the crypt, are generally seen on guided tours. Around May 4, the feast of Saint Florian often draws firefighters from across the region.

Praying on the Spot

Before your visit, you might read the life of Saint Florian. In the basilica or in the crypt, you can entrust to God those who risk their lives to rescue others, pray for the protection of your home, then say the prayer to Saint Florian. For a longer devotion, the novena to Saint Florian can prepare you for the pilgrimage. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The interior of the basilica of Saint Florian Abbey.

Other Places Associated with Saint Florian

- **Enns** (Upper Austria): ancient Lauriacum, the city of his martyrdom, on the Enns River, about six miles from the abbey.
- **Kraków** (Poland): the Church of Saint Florian in the Kleparz district, built to receive his relics in the late 12th century, where the young Karol Wojtyła served as a curate.

- **Austria and Bavaria**: countless chapels, fountains and facades adorned with his statue.

Practical Information

Sankt Florian can be reached from Linz by road or regional transit. Guided tours of the abbey run on a seasonal schedule, and access to some rooms may be limited during services or concerts. For times, tours and celebrations, consult the official website of the abbey (Stift St. Florian) before you come.

Credits and sources

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