

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Francis de Geronimo

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 11

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IN BRIEF

Saint Francis de Geronimo

Jesuit priest from Apulia, popular missionary in Naples and throughout the kingdom for forty years.

Feast day	May 11
Born	December 17, 1642, Grottaglie, Apulia, Italy
Died	May 11, 1716, Naples, Italy
Canonized	May 26, 1839, by Pope Gregory XVI
Era	18th century
Patron saint of	Grottaglie

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Francis de Geronimo

Saint Francis de Geronimo (in Italian *Francesco De Geronimo*, sometimes called Francis Jerome in English) was a Jesuit priest born in Grottaglie, in the Apulia region of southern Italy, in 1642, who died in Naples in 1716. For forty years he preached in the squares and alleys of Naples and aboard the galleys of its harbor, seeking out the poor, prisoners and sinners whom no one else reached. Tradition attributes to him the Marian hymn *Dio vi salvi Regina*, which became the anthem of Corsica. Canonized in 1839, he is celebrated on May 11.

Who was Saint Francis de Geronimo?

Francis de Geronimo is one of the great popular missionaries of Baroque Italy, sometimes called "the apostle of Naples." At a time when the capital of the Kingdom of Naples was one of the largest cities in Europe, with splendid palaces and miserable slums, he chose to bring the Gospel to where the poorest lived.

He was not a polished orator, but a preacher who touched hearts, and his contemporaries already regarded him as a saint. His body was first buried in the church of the Gesù Nuovo in Naples, and Grottaglie, his hometown, built a shrine in his honor.

Key dates

- **December 17, 1642**: Born in Grottaglie, near Taranto, the eldest of eleven children.
- **c. 1653**: Lives with the Theatine Fathers of his town as sacristan and catechist.
- **1659**: Student at the Jesuit college of Taranto.
- **1665**: Studies civil and canon law in Naples.

- **March 20, 1666**: Ordained a priest at Pozzuoli.
- **July 1, 1670**: Enters the novitiate of the Society of Jesus.
- **1671-1674**: Popular missions in Apulia, based in Lecce.
- **From about 1674**: Assigned to the mission of Naples, where he will spend forty years.
- **1688-1694**: Years of misunderstanding and restrictions placed on his apostolate.
- **1702**: Begins dividing his time between Naples and missions in the countryside of the kingdom.
- **May 11, 1716**: Dies in Naples, aged seventy-three.
- **May 2, 1806**: Beatified by Pope Pius VII.
- **May 26, 1839**: Canonized by Pope Gregory XVI, on the same day as Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

From the Theatines to the Jesuits

The eldest child of a large family in Grottaglie, Francis received his first education in his hometown. At eleven he went to live with the Theatine Fathers, serving them as sacristan while continuing his studies, and he already accompanied them as a catechist on their missions through the countryside.

Admitted to the Jesuit college of Taranto, he studied humanities and philosophy, then went to Naples to study civil and canon law. His degree opened the way to a comfortable career in the Church. Ordained a priest on March 20, 1666, he became a prefect at the Jesuit college of Naples for young noblemen. Living alongside the Jesuit Fathers every day, he discovered their way of life and their apostolic zeal, and asked to join the Society of Jesus. He began his novitiate on July 1, 1670.

The apostle of the streets of Naples

In 1671 he was sent to Lecce, from where he accompanied a missionary through the countryside of Apulia for three years. Then he was assigned to the mission of Naples, where he remained for the rest of his life.

As director of the Marian congregation of artisans, he made its members partners in his apostolate. On Sundays and feast days he preached in the public squares rather than in churches; twice a week he went out to the suburbs. He encouraged frequent Communion, prepared by Confession, and on the third Sunday of every month he organized a great general Communion that drew huge crowds.

He visited the slaves and convicts chained on the galleys of the harbor, entered the most disreputable districts, and sought out prostitutes and criminals to speak to them of God's forgiveness. Many changed their lives. Day and night he visited the sick and the dying, and blessed them with a relic of Saint Cyrus, the physician martyr, to whom he had great devotion. Healings were reported, which he always attributed to the saint.

The trial of misunderstanding

His success stirred up jealousy. Some clergy pointed out to the archbishop that it was not fitting for a priest who preached retreats to the clergy and to nuns to mix so familiarly with the underworld. The archbishop ordered him to limit his apostolate to the church of the Gesù Nuovo. Francis then spent hours in the confessional, where penitents flocked to him, and the archbishop eventually acknowledged his mistake.

Later his own superior, judging his outings too frequent, required him to ask permission for each one, and often refused it. Francis obeyed without bitterness. He came to see those years, from 1688 to 1694, as a time of spiritual growth.

Missionary of the kingdom

From 1702, he spent six months a year in Naples and six months on mission in the towns and villages of southern Italy. His reputation spread throughout the kingdom. For his missions he composed, or had people sing, hymns in Italian that ordinary people could understand.

Tradition attributes to him the *Dio vi salvi Regina*, a popular adaptation of the *Salve Regina* (Hail, Holy Queen), which spread widely and was adopted by the Corsicans in the eighteenth century as their national anthem. He preached his last mission in 1715 and his last third-Sunday sermon in March 1716. Stricken with pleurisy, he died on May 11, 1716, at the Jesuit residence in Naples. Tens of thousands of people came to pray beside his body.

Why is Saint Francis de Geronimo a patron of missions and prisoners?

Saint Francis de Geronimo is the patron of Grottaglie, his hometown. He is also a natural intercessor for missionaries and preachers, for prisoners, for people caught in prostitution or exploitation, for those who live in difficult neighborhoods, and for the city of Naples.

He was a priest who did not wait for people to come to church, but went out to find them in the street. He united preaching, the confessional and works of charity, and he passed through humiliation without losing his peace.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Francis de Geronimo in art

He is shown in the black cassock of a Jesuit, preaching to the people with a crucifix in his hand. This is how he appears in paintings and in the statue venerated in his shrine at Grottaglie.

Where to pray to Saint Francis de Geronimo

- **Grottaglie** (Apulia, Italy): the shrine dedicated to him near his birthplace, which keeps a reliquary urn with his remains.
- **Naples**: the church of the Gesù Nuovo, where he lived, heard confessions and was first buried.
- **Corsica**: every church where the *Dio vi salvi Regina* attributed to him is sung.

To pray with him, use our prayer to Saint Francis de Geronimo or the novena to Saint Francis de Geronimo, which ends on his feast day.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Francis de Geronimo, Missionary of Naples

Saint Francis de Geronimo, Jesuit and missionary of the streets of Naples, is invoked in southern Italy, especially in Grottaglie and Naples. Tradition attributes to him the hymn *Dio vi salvi Regina*, still sung in Corsica. This page offers an original prayer by Saintspedia to Saint Francis de Geronimo, followed by an invocation to the Virgin Mary in the spirit of that hymn.

Prayer to Saint Francis de Geronimo

Saint Francis, you left a comfortable career
to follow Christ in the Society of Jesus:
teach me to prefer the Gospel to my own ambitions.

You preached in the squares, in the alleys and on the galleys of the harbor;
you went in search of prisoners, slaves and sinners whom everyone rejected:
give me a missionary heart that judges no one
and dares to go toward those who are far away.

You spent long hours in the confessional to offer God's forgiveness:
help me return to him with confidence,
and believe that no one is shut out of his mercy.

You accepted without bitterness the misunderstanding of your superiors:
teach me humble obedience and patience in setbacks.

Watch over prisoners, over those who are exploited,
and over all who live in poverty.
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.



Saint Francis de Geronimo, venerated at Grottaglie.

Invocation to Our Lady in the spirit of the Dio vi salvi Regina

> *Hail, Queen and Mother of mercy, joy of sinners and refuge of the afflicted. Through the intercession of Saint Francis de Geronimo, who taught the people to love you so much, turn your eyes toward us, protect our families and our cities, and lead us to Jesus, your Son. Amen.*

Original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by the traditional hymn. You can also pray the *Hail, Holy Queen* (*Salve Regina*), of which the *Dio vi salvi Regina* is a popular Italian adaptation.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Francis de Geronimo is celebrated on May 11, the anniversary of his death in Naples. You can pray to him for a parish mission, for a loved one who has drifted from the faith, for prisoners and their families, or for priests who hear confessions. For nine days of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Francis de Geronimo, and read the life of Saint Francis de Geronimo.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Francis de Geronimo

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Francis de Geronimo, Jesuit missionary of the streets of Naples. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, May 11, begin on May 3. You can also pray it at any time of year, for a parish mission, for a loved one far from the faith, or for prisoners and the exploited.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

Since the novena falls in May, the month of Mary, you may end each day with the *Hail, Holy Queen*, in memory of the *Dio vi salvi Regina* that tradition attributes to him. The meditations follow the main stages of his life, from his childhood in Grottaglie to his death in Naples.

Day 1: The eldest of eleven

Francis was born in Grottaglie, the eldest of eleven children. In a large family he learned early to share, to serve and to look after others. Holiness often begins in ordinary family life.

Prayer: Lord, bless large families and all who carry responsibility for brothers and sisters. Make our homes schools of generosity. Amen.

Today: Do a service for a member of your family without being asked.

Day 2: A young sacristan

At eleven, Francis served the Theatine Fathers as sacristan and went with them as a catechist on their missions. Small tasks around the altar prepared him for a great mission.

Prayer: Lord, bless altar servers, sacristans and catechists. Let their humble service lead them closer to you. Amen.

Today: Offer to help in your parish, even for a small task.

Day 3: Leaving a comfortable career

With his law degree, Francis could have had a comfortable career in the Church. Seeing the zeal of the Jesuits, he chose instead a life of poverty and mission.

Prayer: Lord, free me from ambition and comfort, and let me choose what serves your Kingdom. Amen.

Today: Ask yourself what you are holding on to, and offer it to God.

Day 4: Preaching in the squares

In Naples, Francis preached in the public squares rather than in churches. He did not wait for people to come to him; he went out to find them.

Prayer: Lord, make your Church a Church that goes out, and give me the courage to speak of you where I live and work. Amen.

Today: Share a word of faith or hope with someone outside church.

Day 5: On the galleys

Francis went down to the harbor to visit the slaves and convicts chained on the galleys. He brought them dignity, comfort and the hope of God's forgiveness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you who said "I was in prison and you visited me," bless prisoners, their families and prison chaplains. Amen.

Today: Pray for a prisoner, or support a prison ministry.

Day 6: No one beyond mercy

Francis entered the most disreputable districts and sought out prostitutes and criminals. Many changed their lives because someone believed they could. He did not excuse sin, but he never gave up on a sinner. His gaze reflected the gaze of Christ, who came to call not the righteous but sinners.

Prayer: Lord, protect all who are exploited, and give every sinner, beginning with me, the grace of conversion. Amen.

Today: Refuse to write anyone off; pray for someone you have judged harshly.

Day 7: Hours in the confessional

When he was forbidden to preach outside, Francis spent hours in the confessional, and penitents flocked to him. God's forgiveness was the heart of his mission.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your mercy. Bless priests who hear confessions, and draw me back to you. Amen.

Today: Make a careful examination of conscience, and plan to go to Confession.

Day 8: Obedience without bitterness

From 1688 to 1694, his superiors restricted his outings and often refused permission. Francis obeyed without bitterness and later saw those years as a time of growth.

Prayer: Lord, when I am misunderstood or held back, give me peace, humility and trust in your hidden work. Amen.

Today: Accept a limitation or a refusal without complaining.

Day 9: A life given to the end

Francis preached his last mission in 1715 and died in Naples on May 11, 1716. Tens of thousands came to pray beside his body. On his feast, we give thanks for his tireless love.

Prayer: Saint Francis de Geronimo, apostle of Naples, obtain for me a missionary heart and present to the Lord the intention I have carried during this novena. Amen.

Today: Pray the *Hail, Holy Queen* for the poor of your city.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God, you sent Saint Francis de Geronimo into the streets, the harbor and the prisons of Naples to proclaim your mercy to the poor and to sinners. Through his intercession, give us his missionary zeal, his love for the forgotten and his patience in trials, and lead us, with Mary our Mother, to your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Francis de Geronimo or read his life on the page Saint Francis de Geronimo.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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