BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Francisco Blanco

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: February 6

IN BRIEF

Saint Francisco Blanco

Spanish Franciscan priest, missionary to Japan, crucified at Nagasaki in 1597 with the twenty-six martyrs.

Feast day	February 6
Born	September 1570, O Tameirón, A Gudiña (Galicia, Spain)
Died	February 5, 1597, Nagasaki (Japan)
Canonized	June 8, 1862, by Pius IX
Era	16th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Francisco Blanco for Missionaries

Novena to Saint Francisco Blanco

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Francisco Blanco

Saint Francisco Blanco (François Blanco in French) was a Franciscan priest born in Galicia in 1570 who died a martyr at Nagasaki, Japan, on February 5, 1597. A missionary in Mexico, the Philippines and then Japan, he was crucified on Nishizaka hill together with twenty-five other Christians. Canonized in 1862 with his companions, he is celebrated with them on February 6.

Who was Saint Francisco Blanco?

Francisco Blanco belongs to the group of the twenty-six martyrs of Japan, the best known of whom is the Japanese Jesuit Saint Paul Miki. The group brought together religious from Europe, Mexico and India, and Japanese lay people, among them three young boys. Blanco was one of the six Franciscans of the group. What we know of him is mainly the great stages of his journey: a youth in Galicia, a religious vocation, a long missionary voyage that took him as far as Japan, then arrest and the cross. His life was short, he was twenty-six years old, but it has stayed alive in the memory of his homeland, which still keeps relics of him.

Key dates in the life of Francisco Blanco

- **September 1570**: Born in Galicia, in the province of Ourense, in the village of O Tameirón, in the municipality of A Gudiña; sources hesitate between September 18 and 28.
- **Youth**: He first studies with the Jesuits of Monterrei, in Galicia.
- **1590s**: In Castile, he enters the Franciscan novitiate at Villalpando.
- **Before 1593**: He leaves for Mexico, where he is ordained a priest.
- **1593**: He reaches the Philippines, then under Spanish rule.

- **1596**: He goes to Japan with the Franciscan Martín de la Ascensión Aguirre.
- **December 1596**: He is arrested in Kyoto with other Christians, on the orders of Toyotomi Hideyoshi.
- **February 5, 1597**: After a long forced march to Nagasaki, he is crucified on Nishizaka hill.
- **1627**: Beatified by Pope Urban VIII.
- **June 8, 1862**: Canonized by Pope Pius IX, with his twenty-five companions.

From Galicia to distant missions

Francisco Blanco was born in 1570 in a mountain village in southern Galicia, near the Portuguese border. He began his studies with the Jesuits of Monterrei, then left Galicia for Castile. It was at Villalpando that he joined the Friars Minor, the sons of Saint Francis of Assisi. There he discovered a life of poverty, prayer and preaching, open to the missions.

Like many young Spanish religious of his time, he answered the call of the missions. He crossed the Atlantic to Mexico, where he was ordained a priest. In 1593 he moved on to the Philippines, the base from which the Franciscans prepared the mission to Japan. In 1596 he finally left for Japan with another Spanish Franciscan, Martín de la Ascensión Aguirre, who would also be martyred at his side.

The arrest and the march to Nagasaki

At the end of the 16th century, Japan was dominated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Worried by the growing influence of the Europeans, he turned against the Christians. In December 1596, several missionaries and faithful were arrested in Kyoto and Osaka. Francisco Blanco was among them. Part of the prisoners'

left ear was cut off, and they were then led on foot, in the middle of winter, from town to town to Nagasaki, a journey of nearly a thousand kilometers meant to strike fear into people.

The group reached Nagasaki at the beginning of February 1597. On February 5, the twenty-six condemned were bound to crosses on Nishizaka hill, facing the bay, then pierced with lances. Their only crime, according to the sentence, was to have preached the Christian faith. Their bodies remained exposed for several days, and many Christians came to pray at the place.

Devotion, relics and art

The twenty-six martyrs were beatified by Urban VIII in 1627, then canonized by Pius IX on June 8, 1862. The Church celebrates them together on February 6, the day after their death; some Franciscan calendars keep the date of February 5. For the centenary of the canonization, in 1962, a monument and a museum were inaugurated on Nishizaka hill.

In Galicia, Saint Francisco Blanco has remained much loved. A relic of his skull is venerated in the parish of Outarelo, in O Barco de Valdeorras, in the province of Ourense, and a bone from his little finger is kept in his native village. He is shown in the Franciscan habit, on the cross, often with two crossed lances, a reminder of his death. A ceramic altarpiece in Lima, Peru, shows his crucifixion.

What can we learn from Saint Francisco Blanco?

Francisco Blanco left his native Galicia to go ever farther: Castile, Mexico, the Philippines, Japan. He spent only a few months in the country he wanted to evangelize, but he gave there the strongest witness, that of his life. With his companions, religious and lay, European and Japanese, he reminds us that mission is the work of the whole Church. You can pray to him for missionaries, for persecuted Christians and for young people who hesitate to answer a call.

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

Where to pray to Saint Francisco Blanco

- **Nagasaki** (Japan): Nishizaka hill, the place of the martyrdom, with the monument and museum of the twenty-six martyrs.
- **Outarelo**, in O Barco de Valdeorras (Galicia, Spain): the parish that venerates a relic of his skull.
- **A Gudiña** (Galicia, Spain): his native village, which keeps another relic.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Francisco Blanco for Missionaries

Saint Francisco Blanco, a Franciscan from Galicia, left his country to proclaim the Gospel in Mexico, the Philippines and Japan, where he was crucified at Nagasaki on February 5, 1597, at the age of twenty-six. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him missionaries, persecuted Christians and young people seeking their vocation.

Prayer to Saint Francisco Blanco

Saint Francisco Blanco,
son of Galicia and brother of Saint Francis,
you left everything to follow the poor Christ
and to carry his name to the ends of the earth.
Give me a free and willing heart,
ready to go wherever God sends me.

On the road from Kyoto to Nagasaki,
wounded, humiliated, walking in the cold,
you kept peace and hope.
Uphold those who suffer for their faith,
and those who carry a burden too heavy for them.

You who gave your life on the cross,
beside your Japanese and European brothers,
obtain for the Church unity and the courage to bear witness.
Bless missionaries, bless your native land,
and keep us faithful to the end.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Francisco Blanco

- On February 6, feast of the twenty-six martyrs of Japan, or on February 5, the day of his death.
- For missionaries who have gone far from their country.
- For Christians persecuted because of their faith.
- For a young person discerning a religious or priestly vocation.
- In a long trial, when the road seems endless.

A short invocation

> *Saint Francisco Blanco and you, holy martyrs of Japan,*
> *pray for those who proclaim the Gospel today. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Francisco Blanco from January 29 to February 6, and read the life of Saint Francisco Blanco.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Francisco Blanco

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Francisco Blanco, a Franciscan priest from Galicia crucified at Nagasaki in 1597 with the twenty-six martyrs of Japan. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the feast of the martyrs of Japan, February 6, begin on January 29. 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 Francisco Blanco, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A child of Galicia

Francisco was born in 1570 in a mountain village in Galicia. It was in this rugged and believing land that he received the faith. His native region still remembers him with affection.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the land and the family where I received the faith. Bless the villages and parishes that hand it on.

Act of the day: Pray for the parish of your baptism and for those who made God known to you.

Day 2: The time of study

The young Francisco first studied with the Jesuits of Monterrei. He took time to be formed before choosing his path. Faith needs understanding and patience.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind and give me the desire to know your word better.

Act of the day: Read a passage of the Gospel slowly and keep one sentence from it.

Day 3: Following the poor Christ

At Villalpando, Francisco joined the Franciscans. He chose poverty, fraternal life and preaching, in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you who became poor, free me from what weighs me down and teach me the joy of giving.

Act of the day: Give away a useful object you can do without.

Day 4: Crossing the ocean

Francisco left for Mexico, where he was ordained a priest. He left his language, his country and his family to serve the Gospel in a new world.

Prayer: Lord, bless the priests and missionaries who have gone far from home. Give them courage and consolation.

Act of the day: Pray for a priest or missionary you know, or write him a note.

Day 5: Ever farther

In 1593 Francisco reached the Philippines, then Japan in 1596. His life was a journey toward those who had not yet heard of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, widen my heart to the size of the world, and make me attentive to those who do not know you.

Act of the day: Pray for the Christians of Asia, and for the Church in Japan.

Day 6: Arrested for his faith

In December 1596, Francisco was arrested in Kyoto with other Christians. They were mutilated and exposed to mockery. He denied nothing.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen the Christians who are persecuted today. May they feel your presence at the heart of the trial.

Act of the day: Learn about a persecuted Christian community and pray for it.

Day 7: The long march

The prisoners walked in the middle of winter from Kyoto to Nagasaki, nearly a thousand kilometers. Francisco went forward with his brothers, religious and lay, young and old.

Prayer: Lord, when the road is long and cold, keep me in peace and give me companions in faith.

Act of the day: Visit or call someone who is going through a long trial.

Day 8: Twenty-six witnesses

The martyrs came from Spain, Mexico, India and Japan. Together they show that the Church is a family without borders.

Prayer: Lord, make us one in faith, beyond languages and cultures, and make our communities welcoming families.

Act of the day: Welcome kindly someone from another culture.

Day 9: The cross of Nishizaka

On February 5, 1597, Francisco was crucified on Nishizaka hill, facing the sea. He died like his Master, giving his life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you who gave your life on the cross, grant me to be faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Francisco Blanco, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Spend a moment before a crucifix and, if possible, attend Mass.

Living the novena with Saint Francisco Blanco

The life of Francisco Blanco comes down to a few stages, but it says what matters: a young man left everything for Christ, went to the end of the known world and gave his life with his brothers. During these nine days, you can carry missionaries, persecuted Christians, young people looking for their vocation, and the Church in Japan.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Francisco Blanco,*
> *missionary and martyr,*
> *you followed Christ to the cross.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Give me a free heart to serve,*
> *and keep me faithful in trial.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

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