

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Frumentius

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 27

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IN BRIEF

Saint Frumentius

Apostle of Ethiopia and first bishop of Aksum in the fourth century.

Feast day	October 27
Born	c. 315, Tyre (present-day Lebanon)
Died	Between 380 and 383, Aksum, Ethiopia
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Ethiopia

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Frumentius

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Frumentius

Saint Frumentius is the apostle of Ethiopia. Born in Tyre, in today's Lebanon, early in the fourth century, he was brought as a young captive to the kingdom of Aksum, rose to become an adviser at its court, gathered the first Christian communities of the country and became their first bishop, consecrated by Saint Athanasius of Alexandria. Ethiopians call him *Abba Salama*, "Father of Peace." The Catholic Church celebrates him on October 27.

Who was Saint Frumentius?

Frumentius was a Greek-speaking young man from Syria, born around 315 in Tyre. We know his story from the *Ecclesiastical History* of Rufinus of Aquileia, written at the end of the fourth century and later taken up by the Greek historians Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret. Rufinus says he heard the account from Aedesius, Frumentius's own brother, who had become a priest in Tyre.

A second, independent witness comes from Athanasius himself. For a figure of that period, this is unusually good documentation, and it allows us to follow the main lines of his life with some confidence.

Key dates

- **c. 315**: Birth in Tyre, in Phoenicia.
- **Around the 330s**: The voyage of his uncle Meropius ends in disaster on the Red Sea coast; Frumentius and his brother Aedesius are taken to the court of Aksum.
- **The following years**: Freed, he helps the queen govern during the childhood of King Ezana and gathers the Christians of the kingdom.

- **c. 346 or earlier**: In Alexandria, he is consecrated bishop by Saint Athanasius and sent back to Aksum.
- **356**: Emperor Constantius II demands that he be sent to Alexandria to the Arian bishop George; the request is not carried out.
- **Between 380 and 383**: Death in Aksum.

From slavery to the palace of Aksum

According to Rufinus, the philosopher Meropius of Tyre set out on a voyage to "India," meaning the distant shores of the Red Sea, taking his two young nephews, Frumentius and Aedesius, with him. On the way back, their ship put in at a port of the kingdom of Aksum, which was then in conflict with Rome. The crew was massacred. Only the two boys were spared because of their youth, and they were brought to the king.

Aedesius became the king's cupbearer and Frumentius his secretary. Before he died, the king set them free. The queen, left alone with a son too young to reign, begged them to stay, and Frumentius took on a leading role in governing the kingdom.

It was then that he began to gather the Christians living in the kingdom, mostly merchants from the Roman Empire. He obtained places of prayer for them and had the first churches built. Ethiopian tradition adds that he was the tutor of the young King Ezana, who would become the first Christian ruler of Aksum.

Bishop of Aksum

When Ezana came of age, Aedesius went home to Tyre. Frumentius, however, went to Alexandria to see Bishop Athanasius. He described the communities that had grown up in Aksum and asked him to send them a shepherd. After

consulting his bishops, Athanasius replied that he knew no one more worthy than Frumentius himself. He consecrated him bishop and sent him back to Ethiopia.

This decision tied the Ethiopian Church to the patriarchate of Alexandria for sixteen centuries: Alexandria supplied Ethiopia with its bishops until the twentieth century.

A witness from Athanasius

Athanasius's own writings confirm how strong this bond was. In 356, driven from his see, he quoted a letter from Emperor Constantius II to the rulers of Aksum, Ezana and his brother Saizana. The emperor, who favored the Arians, demanded that Frumentius be sent to Alexandria to be "instructed" by George of Cappadocia, the Arian bishop imposed in place of Athanasius. The letter shows that Frumentius had remained faithful to the faith of Nicaea, and that his mission was known as far as the imperial court.



The stelae of Aksum, capital of the kingdom evangelized by Frumentius.

Questions of chronology

Rufinus writes that Frumentius met Athanasius shortly after the start of his time as bishop, which began in 328. That would place the shipwreck around 310. Other clues, noted as early as the seventeenth century by the historian Le Nain de Tillemont, point to a later date: the voyage of Meropius would rather belong to the 330s, and Frumentius's consecration would have taken place around 346. Historians remain divided. The core of the story, however, is not disputed.

What does his holiness teach us?

Frumentius turned a trial, captivity in a foreign land, into the starting point of a mission. He first served loyally those who had enslaved him. Then he put the trust he had earned at the service of the faith, imposing nothing, beginning

simply by gathering the Christians who were already there. Finally, he chose not to go home when he could have.

His Ethiopian name, "Father of Peace," sums up the way he sowed the Gospel. For Christians who live far from home, for migrants and for those who have to serve in a place they did not choose, he remains a close and encouraging figure.

Why is Saint Frumentius the patron saint of Ethiopia?

Frumentius is honored as the patron of Ethiopia because he was the first bishop of the Aksumite kingdom, the heart of ancient Ethiopia, and because the Church of the country traces its organized life back to his mission. Through him, Ethiopia became one of the oldest Christian nations in the world. His memory is shared by Catholics and by the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches.

To entrust the Churches of Ethiopia and Christians living far from home to him, you can say the prayer to Saint Frumentius or follow the novena to Saint Frumentius.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Frumentius in art

Saint Frumentius is usually shown as a bishop, holding a book of the Gospels and raising his hand in blessing. Ethiopian paintings also depict him in prayer, wearing a bishop's robes. The book recalls his mission of teaching, and the bishop's dress his consecration by Saint Athanasius.

Where to pray to Saint Frumentius

Aksum, in northern Ethiopia, remains the historic heart of Ethiopian Christianity. Frumentius is venerated there by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which celebrates him in December. The Orthodox Churches

celebrate him on November 30. In the Catholic Church, his memory is especially alive in the Catholic communities of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and among the Ethiopian and Eritrean faithful living abroad.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Frumentius for Ethiopia and the Uprooted

Saint Frumentius left no writings, and no ancient Latin prayer in his honor has become part of Catholic usage. Saintspedia offers here an original prayer drawn from the story of his life as Rufinus of Aquileia handed it down: his captivity, his loyal service at the court of Aksum, his mission and his fidelity to the faith of Nicaea.

Prayer to Saint Frumentius for Ethiopia and the uprooted

Saint Frumentius, you were torn from your family as a child and taken captive to an unknown land: watch over uprooted children, the enslaved of our own day and all who live far from home.

You served faithfully those who had enslaved you: teach me to do good where I am, even when I did not choose my place.

You gathered scattered Christians and built for them the first churches of Aksum: pray for the Churches of Ethiopia and Eritrea, for their priests and for their faithful who are being tested.

You whom they call "Father of Peace," obtain peace for the peoples of the Horn of Africa, and receive the intention I entrust to you: (name it in silence).

Keep me faithful to the faith received from the apostles, as you were in the face of the emperor's pressure. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

You can say this prayer on his feast day, October 27, when the Catholic Church remembers him. The Orthodox Churches celebrate him on November 30, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in December. It also suits many moments of the year:

- when you pray for Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Horn of Africa, especially in times of war or famine;
- for migrants, refugees, victims of human trafficking and anyone living far from home;
- when you have to work or serve in a place you did not choose;
- for missionaries and for Christians who are a small minority where they live.

A short invocation

> *Saint Frumentius, Father of Peace, apostle of Ethiopia, pray for us.*

To get to know him better, read the life of Saint Frumentius, or continue with the novena to Saint Frumentius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Frumentius

This novena to Saint Frumentius is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the young man from Tyre who was taken captive to the kingdom of Aksum, served at its court, gathered its first Christians and became the first bishop of Ethiopia. To end on his feast day, October 27, begin it on October 19. You can also pray it at any time of the year, especially for Ethiopia and Eritrea, for migrants and for all who live far from home.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. 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 proposed for the day. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: A boy from Tyre

Frumentius was born around 315 in Tyre, a port city on the Mediterranean coast. As a boy, he set out with his uncle Meropius and his brother Aedesius on a long voyage to the Red Sea. Nothing in that journey suggested that God was preparing an apostle. Our lives, too, often begin in ordinary ways.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, help me to trust that God is at work in the ordinary beginnings of my life and of the lives of those I love. Amen.

Today: Thank God for one person who shaped your childhood.

Day 2: The shipwreck of hope

On the way home, the ship put in at a port of Aksum. The crew was killed, and only the two boys were spared because they were young. In a single day, Frumentius lost his uncle, his freedom and his way home. Many people today know such sudden ruin.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, stay close to all who have lost everything in a single day, through war, violence or disaster. Amen.

Today: Pray for the victims of a recent tragedy in the news.

Day 3: Serving where we did not choose to be

Brought to the king, Frumentius became his secretary and Aedesius his cupbearer. He did not choose this service, yet he carried it out loyally and well. His faithfulness in small things prepared the trust that would later open doors for the Gospel.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, teach me to do my work well, even when it is not the work I would have chosen. Amen.

Today: Do one task you find tiresome with care and without complaint.

Day 4: Freedom used for others

Before he died, the king set the two brothers free. The queen, left with a son too young to reign, begged them to stay. Frumentius could have gone home; instead he stayed and helped govern the kingdom. He used his freedom to serve.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, help me to use my freedom not only for myself but for those who need me. Amen.

Today: Offer your time to someone who is carrying a heavy load.

Day 5: Gathering the scattered

In Aksum, Frumentius sought out the Christians living there, mostly merchants from the Roman Empire. He obtained places of prayer for them and had the first churches built. He did not begin by imposing anything: he began by gathering those who already believed.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, make me attentive to the Christians around me who are isolated, and help me to build community. Amen.

Today: Welcome a newcomer in your parish or neighborhood.

Day 6: Asking for a shepherd

When the young King Ezana came of age, Frumentius went to Alexandria and asked Saint Athanasius to send a bishop to Aksum. He was not seeking honor; he was seeking a shepherd for the flock he had gathered. Athanasius answered that no one was more worthy than Frumentius himself.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, pray for bishops and priests, and for vocations in the Churches of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Amen.

Today: Pray for your bishop by name.

Day 7: Faithful under pressure

In 356, Emperor Constantius II, who favored the Arians, demanded that Frumentius be sent to Alexandria to be "instructed" by an Arian bishop. Frumentius remained faithful to the faith of Nicaea, the faith in Christ true God and true man.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, keep me faithful to the faith of the Church when the world pressures me to dilute it. Amen.

Today: Pray the Nicene Creed slowly.

Day 8: Father of Peace

Ethiopians call Frumentius *Abba Salama*, "Father of Peace." The Gospel he brought did not come by force, but through trust, service and patience. The peoples of the Horn of Africa still long for that peace.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, Father of Peace, obtain peace for Ethiopia, Eritrea and all the Horn of Africa. Amen.

Today: Make peace with someone, or take a first step toward it.

Day 9: A Church that endures

Frumentius died in Aksum between 380 and 383. The Church he served has lasted more than sixteen centuries, through many trials. His mission reminds us that what is built in faith and patience can bear fruit far beyond our own lifetime.

Prayer: Saint Frumentius, apostle of Ethiopia, present to the Lord the intention I have carried through this novena, and help me to persevere. Amen.

Today: Support a work that helps the Christians of Ethiopia or Eritrea, or migrants near you.

Closing prayer

> *Lord our God, you led Saint Frumentius from captivity to the service of your Gospel and made him the shepherd of a whole people. Through his intercession, keep the Churches of Ethiopia and Eritrea in faith and peace, watch over all who live far from home, and grant that we may serve you faithfully wherever you place us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read more in the life of Saint Frumentius, or pray the prayer to Saint Frumentius.

CREDITS

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