

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Galgano Guidotti

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Galgano Guidotti

Tuscan knight who became a hermit at Montesiepi, famous for the sword he drove into the rock.

Feast day	December 3
Born	c. 1148, Chiusdino, Tuscany, Italy
Died	December 3, 1181, Montesiepi, Chiusdino, Italy
Canonized	Inquiry opened in 1185; canonization traditionally attributed to Pope Lucius III
Era	12th century
Patron saint of	Chiusdino

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Galgano, Knight of Christ

Novena to Saint Galgano

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Galgano Guidotti

Saint Galgano (also called Galgan) was a twelfth-century Tuscan knight who became a hermit. Born around 1148 at Chiusdino, near Siena, he gave up arms after visions of the Archangel Michael and, according to tradition, thrust his sword into a rock as a sign of his conversion. He lived a little more than a year as a hermit on the hill of Montesiepi, where he died in 1181. The sword can still be seen in the round chapel built over his hermitage. His feast is on December 3.

Who was Saint Galgano?

Galgano is one of the most unusual saints of Tuscany. His life is known mainly from the records of the inquiry held in 1185, only four years after his death, with a view to his canonization. Witnesses who had known him, including his mother Dionisia, describe his conversion and his miracles. It is one of the oldest canonization processes whose documents have survived.

Later accounts, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, added legendary episodes. The family name Guidotti, under which he is often cited, does not appear until the sixteenth century.

His sword in the stone has fascinated historians and writers, who have compared it with the legend of King Arthur. The debate remains open, but the weapon itself has been analyzed, and its composition is consistent with the twelfth century.



The sword in the stone, Montesiepi chapel.

Key dates in the life of Saint Galgano

- **c. 1148**: Born at Chiusdino into a family of minor nobility linked to the bishops of Volterra.
- **Youth**: As a knight, he leads, according to the accounts, a violent and dissolute life.
- **c. 1180**: Visions of the Archangel Michael call him to conversion.
- **Christmas 1180**: According to tradition, he withdraws to the hill of Montesiepi and drives his sword into the rock.
- **1181**: He goes to Rome, where, according to the accounts, he is received by Pope Alexander III.
- **December 3, 1181**: Dies at Montesiepi after about a year of hermit life.
- **1185**: Canonical inquiry at Montesiepi and start of construction of the round chapel.

- **1220s**: The Cistercians begin building the Abbey of San Galgano in the plain below.

The knight converted

Galgano grew up in the world of Tuscan knights, a world of rivalries, fights and feasts. Witnesses at the inquiry said that he was visited by the Archangel Michael, who invited him to follow him. In a dream, the angel led him to a hill where the twelve apostles were waiting for him in a round building.

His mother wanted him to marry. He hesitated. Then, according to the story, his horse refused to go on and carried him to Montesiepi instead.

The sword that became a cross

At the top of the hill, Galgano wanted to make a cross to pray before. Having no wood, he took his sword and drove it into the rocky ground. The blade went in, and the hilt formed a cross. The knight had become a soldier of Christ. He gave away his goods and lived there in a hut, in prayer and penance, surrounded by a few disciples.

A hermit for one year

Galgano's life as a hermit was very short: a little over a year. He went to Rome to meet the pope, and tradition reports that during his absence jealous men tried to destroy his hermitage and pull out the sword. At Montesiepi two mummified hands are still shown, which legend attributes to one of these attackers, punished by wolves.

Galgano died on December 3, 1181. Miracles multiplied at his tomb, and the Bishop of Volterra soon opened an inquiry.



The Montesiepi rotunda, built over Saint Galgano's hermitage.

Canonization and cult

The 1185 process was carefully conducted, and his canonization is traditionally attributed to Pope Lucius III, although the papal bull has not survived. The round chapel of Montesiepi was built over the sword and the tomb.

The Cistercians, called in by the bishop, settled on the site and in the thirteenth century built a large Gothic abbey dedicated to the saint in the valley. Today it is famous for its roofless ruins open to the sky. The Hermits of Saint Augustine also claimed him as one of their own. In Siena his cult became very popular, and part of his relics, including his head, was venerated there.

Why is Saint Galgano invoked by soldiers and those seeking conversion?

Saint Galgano is the patron of his native village, Chiusdino. Because he turned a weapon into a cross, people pray to him for soldiers, police officers and all who use force to protect others. Because he left a violent life behind, he is also invoked for people struggling with anger or violence, for young people looking for meaning and for peace.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Galgano in art

Saint Galgano is shown as a young knight or as a hermit, kneeling before his sword planted in the rock, sometimes with the Archangel Michael. Around 1336 Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted frescoes of his life in the side chapel at Montesiepi. The sword in the stone is his unmistakable sign.

What can we learn from Saint Galgano?

Galgano turned a weapon into a cross. His gesture reminds us that conversion is always possible, even for a violent man, and that it can be radical. His short life as a hermit shows that holiness does not depend on how long we live, but on how completely we give ourselves.

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

Where to pray to Saint Galgano

- **Montesiepi** (Chiusdino, province of Siena, Italy): the rotunda of the hermitage, with the sword in the stone.
- **Abbey of San Galgano**: the ruins of the Cistercian abbey at the foot of the hill.
- **Chiusdino**: his native village and the house tradition attributes to him.

- **Siena**: the church of the Santuccio, which kept his cloak.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Galgano, Knight of Christ

Saint Galgano, the Tuscan knight who became a hermit, drove his sword into the rock to make it a cross. His example speaks to those who want to change their lives, to those who use force in their work and to all who long for peace. As far as we know, there is no widely used traditional prayer to him in English. Here is an original prayer by Saintspedia.



Saint Galgano before his sword, fresco at Montesiepi.

Prayer to Saint Galgano

Saint Galgano, you heard the call of the Archangel Michael in the middle of a restless life. Help me to recognize God's voice when he calls me to change.

You drove your sword into the rock to make it a cross. Teach me to lay down my own weapons: anger, resentment and the desire to dominate. May my strength become service, and my battles be fought for what is good.

Watch over soldiers, police officers and all who bear arms to protect others: may they remain just and humane. Touch the hearts of the violent, and give peace to countries at war.

On the hill of Montesiepi you gave everything in a short time. Teach me that it is never too late to be converted, and that no life is too short for holiness.

Saint Galgano, I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Present it to Christ, to whom you gave your sword and your life. Amen.

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

A short invocation

Saint Galgano, knight of Christ, pray for us and obtain peace for us.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Galgano

- People who want to change their lives.
- Soldiers, police officers and security forces.
- Young people searching for meaning.

- People struggling with anger or violence.
- Peace in the world and an end to violence.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Galgano is celebrated on December 3, the anniversary of his death in 1181. You can pray to him at a moment of decision, at the start of a conversion, or for a loved one caught in violence. His feast falls early in Advent, a season of conversion and waiting.

To pray with him over nine days, see the novena to Saint Galgano, and discover the life of Saint Galgano.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Galgano

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Galgano, the Tuscan knight who became a hermit at Montesiepi, as told by the witnesses of the 1185 inquiry. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, December 3, begin it on November 25. It can also be prayed at any time, especially at a moment of decision or conversion.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you live in the spirit of the knight who turned his sword into a cross. You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group. Because it ends in the first days of Advent, it can also help you enter that season with a converted heart.



The Montesiepi rotunda, where Saint Galgano lived as a hermit.

Day 1: A restless life

Galgano grew up among knights, in a world of rivalries, fights and feasts. According to the accounts, his youth was violent and dissolute. God does not wait for us to be perfect before calling us. He comes to find us where we are, in the middle of our noise and our mistakes.

Prayer: Lord, look on me as I am, and call me to follow you.

Today: Examine your conscience honestly before God for a few minutes.

Day 2: The call of the archangel

The Archangel Michael appeared to Galgano and invited him to follow him. God's call can come in many ways: a word, a meeting, an event. The question is whether we listen.

Prayer: Saint Michael the Archangel, help me to hear the call of God and to answer it.

Today: Pray the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel.

Day 3: Hesitation

Galgano hesitated. His mother wanted him to marry, and the old life still held him. Conversion is rarely instant. God is patient with our hesitations, but he keeps calling.

Prayer: Lord, you know my hesitations. Give me the courage to take the next step.

Today: Identify one decision you have been putting off and take a first step.

Day 4: Laying down arms

On the hill of Montesiepi, Galgano drove his sword into the rock, and it became a cross. We all carry weapons: harsh words, grudges, the will to win at all costs. To follow Christ, we must lay them down.

Prayer: Lord, take my weapons and turn them into instruments of peace.

Today: Give up a harsh word or a grudge you are holding.

Day 5: Strength as service

The knight did not lose his strength; he gave it a new purpose. Soldiers, police officers and all who use force to protect others need the grace to remain just and humane.

Prayer: Lord, bless soldiers, police officers and security forces, and keep them just in the use of their strength.

Today: Pray for someone who serves in the armed forces or the police.

Day 6: Giving everything

Galgano gave away his goods and lived in a hut, in prayer and penance. Detachment frees the heart. We cannot all leave everything, but we can all give more than we do.

Prayer: Lord, free me from what I cling to, and make me generous.

Today: Give away something you do not need to someone who does.

Day 7: Facing opposition

While Galgano was in Rome, jealous men tried to destroy his hermitage and pull out the sword. Those who change their lives sometimes meet misunderstanding and hostility, even from those close to them.

Prayer: Lord, support those whose conversion is mocked or opposed, and give them perseverance.

Today: Encourage someone who is trying to change their life.

Day 8: A life short and full

Galgano lived only a little more than a year as a hermit. Holiness is not measured by length of time but by the totality of the gift. It is never too late to begin.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to give myself fully today, without waiting for tomorrow.

Today: Pray for young people who have died, and for their families.

Day 9: Peace

On December 3, 1181, Galgano died at Montesiepi. The sword in the stone still stands as a silent call to peace. On his feast day, we pray that all weapons may give way to the cross of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayer of Saint Galgano, give peace to the world, to our families and to our hearts.

Today: If you can, attend Mass, and pray for a country at war.

Closing prayer

At the end of these nine days, you may wish to make a concrete resolution: one habit to drop, one reconciliation to seek, one service to offer. Galgano's sword is still in the rock at Montesiepi. Let your resolution be the weapon you lay down before the cross.

> *Saint Galgano, knight of Christ, you heard the call of the archangel and laid down your sword to make it a cross. Pray for those who want to change their lives, for soldiers and police officers, for young people searching for meaning and for all who live with violence. Teach us that it is never too late to be converted. Present to Christ the intentions we have carried during these nine days. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Galgano and the prayer to Saint Galgano.

CREDITS

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