

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gemma Galgani

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 11

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IN BRIEF

Saint Gemma Galgani

Young lay mystic of Lucca, united to the Passion of Christ, who died at twenty-five.

Feast day	April 11, May 16
Born	March 12, 1878, Borgo Nuovo di Camigliano, Capannori, Tuscany, Italy
Died	April 11, 1903, Lucca, Italy
Canonized	May 2, 1940, by Pope Pius XII
Era	20th century
Patron saint of	pharmacists, students, people who have lost their parents, the sick

In this booklet

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Shrine of Saint Gemma Galgani in Lucca

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Gemma Galgani

Saint Gemma Galgani was a young laywoman of Lucca, in Tuscany, who died of tuberculosis in 1903 at the age of twenty-five. She was never able to enter a convent, but while living with a family who took her in, she led an intense mystical life centered on the Passion of Christ, marked, according to those close to her and her spiritual directors, by ecstasies and the stigmata. Spiritually linked to the Passionists and canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1940, she is listed in the Roman Martyrology on April 11 and celebrated on May 16 by the Passionist family and the Diocese of Lucca.

Who was Saint Gemma Galgani?

Gemma was born on March 12, 1878, in Borgo Nuovo di Camigliano, in the countryside near Lucca. She was the fifth of eight children and the first daughter. She was confirmed on May 26, 1885, at the age of seven; a few months later, in September, her mother died. On June 19, 1887, the feast of the Sacred Heart, she made her First Communion, which she later described as the moment her desire to become a religious sister was born.

As a pupil of the Oblates of the Holy Spirit, she was taught by Elena Guerra, the founder of that congregation. Seeing Gemma's attraction to the Passion of Christ, her teacher had her meditate each day on one of its episodes. As a teenager, Gemma was very generous toward the poor of the city. The death of her brother Gino in 1894 affected her deeply; she fell ill and left school. In 1897, the death of her father left the family in great poverty.



Gemma Galgani, photographed shortly before her death.

Key dates in the life of Saint Gemma Galgani

- **March 12, 1878**: Born in Borgo Nuovo di Camigliano, near Lucca.
- **September 1885**: Death of her mother.
- **June 19, 1887**: First Communion.
- **1897**: Death of her father; the family falls into poverty.
- **March 3, 1899**: Healed of a grave illness, which she attributes to the intercession of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque.
- **June 8, 1899**: First stigmata, according to her own account and that of those close to her.
- **1900**: Taken in by the Giannini family; beginning of her spiritual direction by Father Germano, a Passionist.
- **April 11, 1903**: Dies in Lucca on Holy Saturday, at twenty-five.
- **May 14, 1933**: Beatified by Pope Pius XI.

- **May 2, 1940**: Canonized by Pope Pius XII.

A mystical life

In 1898-1899, Gemma suffered from an illness considered fatal. During this time of trial, she said she was visited by Saint Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows, a young Passionist religious who had died in 1862, and who accompanied her in prayer. On March 3, 1899, at the end of a novena to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, she found herself healed. She then tried to enter the Visitation nuns, without success: the desire for religious life, always thwarted, would mark the rest of her life.

On June 8, 1899, the eve of the feast of the Sacred Heart, wounds like those of Christ appeared on her hands and feet. According to witnesses, these stigmata then returned every week, from Thursday evening to Friday afternoon. Her ecstasies, during which she spoke aloud, were written down by those around her.

In canonizing her, the Church recognized the heroic character of her virtues; it did not pronounce on each of these phenomena, which during her lifetime prompted caution in her confessors.

With the Gianninis: a hidden holiness

From 1900, Gemma lived with the Gianninis, a family of Lucca who welcomed her as a daughter. She shared simply in the life of the household. Her confessor, Bishop Volpi, and then the Passionist Father Germano of Saint Stanislaus, whom she met in September 1900, guided her spiritual life. At their request she wrote a diary and then an autobiography, and kept up an abundant correspondence with Father Germano, who remained in Rome. These writings, published after her death, made her inner journey known.

Her prayer was entirely turned toward the Passion of Jesus, toward reparation offered to the Sacred Heart and toward intercession for priests. In 1902 her health became worrying; in September the first signs of tuberculosis appeared. Moved to a small room near the Giannini house, she died on April 11, 1903, Holy Saturday, around midday.



The Shrine of Saint Gemma in Lucca.

The Passionist nuns of Lucca

Gemma had hoped for the foundation in Lucca of a monastery of Passionist nuns, which she wished to enter. At the time there were only two Passionist monasteries of nuns in the world, at Corneto (today Tarquinia) in Italy and at Mamers in France. The Lucca foundation was made in March 1905, two years after her death, by sisters who came from Corneto. Their successors now care

for the shrine where the saint rests. Her biographers report something she is said to have said shortly before she died: the Passionists had not wanted her alive, but they would have her dead.

Why do people pray to Saint Gemma Galgani?

Gemma Galgani founded no work and never wore a religious habit. She lived most of her life in poverty, illness and obedience to her spiritual directors, in a house that was not her own. Her holiness is that of a young woman who united her sufferings with those of Christ and prayed for others, especially for sinners and for priests.

She is readily invoked in sickness, in thwarted vocations and in inner trials. Popular devotion also names her a patron of pharmacists, since her father practiced that profession, of students, and of those who have lost their parents, as she lost hers young. Her writings, translated into English, have made her well known among English-speaking Catholics, particularly through the Passionists.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Gemma Galgani and follow the novena to Saint Gemma Galgani from April 2 to 10.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Gemma Galgani in art

Because she lived in the age of photography, Gemma is often recognized from the photograph taken shortly before her death: a young woman dressed in black, with her eyes lowered. Devotional images and statues usually show her in prayer, with her eyes raised and her hands joined on her breast, sometimes gazing at a crucifix or bearing the marks of the stigmata. The black dress recalls the simple clothing she wore in Lucca.

Where to pray to Saint Gemma Galgani

- **Lucca** (Tuscany): the Shrine of Saint Gemma, cared for by the Passionist nuns, where she rests. Celebrations draw more pilgrims on April 11 and especially May 16.
- **Lucca**: the city where she lived, especially with the Giannini family, from 1900 until her death.
- **Borgo Nuovo di Camigliano** (Capannori): her native village, in the countryside near Lucca.
- **Camaiore**: the small town where she stayed for a few months with an aunt after her father's death.



Lucca, the city where Saint Gemma lived and died.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gemma Galgani for the Sick and Those in Trial

Saint Gemma Galgani left a diary, an autobiography and many letters, written at the request of her spiritual directors. Below you will find a passage from her autobiography, followed by an original prayer to Saint Gemma.

Words of Gemma Galgani to meditate on

> *"In those moments I understood that the delights of Heaven are not like those of earth. (...) It was on that morning that Jesus gave me the great desire to be a religious."*

Source: Gemma Galgani, *Autobiography*, written around 1900 at the request of Father Germano of Saint Stanislaus, about her First Communion on June 19, 1887. Translation by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Gemma Galgani for the sick and those in trial

Saint Gemma, you loved Jesus crucified so much that you shared his sufferings: teach me to look at the cross without fear and to recognize in it the love of God.

You knew sickness, poverty and grief: support those who suffer in body or in heart, and those who feel alone in their trials.

You longed for religious life without being able to embrace it: comfort those whose plans have been thwarted, and help them find the place God is preparing for them.

You prayed for priests and for sinners: intercede for them, and for my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me simplicity, trusting obedience and a heart wholly given to God. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Gemma Galgani is listed in the Roman Martyrology on April 11, the day of her death in 1903, and celebrated on May 16 by the Passionist family and the Diocese of Lucca. Her April date often falls in Lent or Eastertide, which suits a saint so devoted to the Passion of Christ.

You can pray to her at any time when you are ill or caring for someone who is ill, when a door you hoped would open has closed, when you are grieving a parent, or when you want to pray for priests. Her own life shows that a hidden, ordinary existence, lived with love, can become a path to holiness.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Gemma Galgani, and discover the life of Saint Gemma Galgani.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gemma Galgani

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and writings of Saint Gemma Galgani. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast on April 11, begin on April 2. Depending on the year, it falls during Lent or Eastertide, which suits this saint of the Passion well. You can also pray it from May 7 to 15, before the Passionist feast on May 16.

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. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.

The nine days follow Gemma's life: grief, First Communion, the Passion, the poor, illness, a thwarted vocation, obedience, prayer for priests and the way to Easter. You can pray it alone or with others, especially for someone who is sick or going through a difficult time.



Statue of Saint Gemma Galgani.

Day 1: A child's grief

Gemma lost her mother at the age of seven. She later recounted that she offered this sacrifice to God, already turned toward him. Grief can close a heart; in her, it opened a deeper trust.

Prayer: Lord, comfort children who have lost a parent, and all who are grieving.

Today: Pray for a deceased member of your family.

Day 2: First Communion

On June 19, 1887, Gemma received Jesus for the first time. That day she understood that the joy of Heaven is not the joy of earth. It was on that morning, she wrote, that Jesus gave her the great desire to belong entirely to him. Every Communion can renew that first desire in us.

Prayer: Jesus, grant that I may receive you with the fervor of Saint Gemma.

Today: Prepare carefully for your next Communion.

Day 3: Meditating on the Passion

At school, her teacher had her meditate each day on one episode of the Passion. In it Gemma discovered the love of Christ for each person. The cross was not, for her, a symbol of defeat, but the place where God shows how far his love will go.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to contemplate your Passion and to read your love in it.

Today: Slowly read an account of the Passion in the Gospel.

Day 4: Giving to the poor

As a teenager, Gemma gave the poor of Lucca all she could. She cared little for her own clothes and much for others. Later, after her father's death, she herself would know poverty, and she would depend on the generosity of others. Giving and receiving are two sides of the same charity.

Prayer: Lord, make my heart generous toward those who lack everything.

Today: Make a donation or do a concrete service for someone in need.

Day 5: In sickness

In 1898-1899, Gemma was gravely ill. She prayed, surrounded by her family, and said she found comfort in Saint Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows. On March 3, 1899, at the end of a novena to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, she was healed. Healing is a gift; the trust that comes before it is already a grace.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the sick, especially the young. Give them strength and peace.

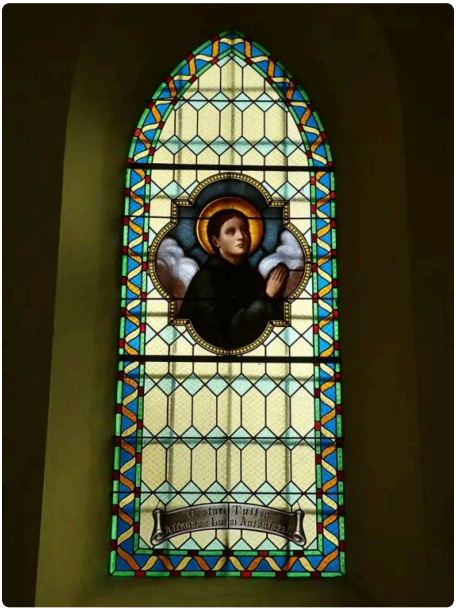
Today: Visit someone who is sick, or send them a message.

Day 6: A thwarted vocation

Gemma wanted to enter a convent, but every door closed. She remained faithful where God left her, in a family home in Lucca. Her holiness grew not in a cloister but in the ordinary life of a household, in small services and hidden prayer.

Prayer: Lord, help me accept the doors that close and to seek you where I am.

Today: Pray for someone going through a disappointment or a failure.



Saint Gemma Galgani in a stained glass window.

Day 7: Trusting obedience

Gemma wrote her diary and her autobiography because her directors asked her to. She accepted being guided and tested, without insisting on her own judgment. Her extraordinary experiences were examined with caution, and she accepted it in peace. True mystical life is never proud.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the humility to let myself be advised.

Today: Ask advice from someone you trust.

Day 8: Praying for priests

In 1902, Gemma offered her sufferings and her prayer in reparation and for the clergy. She carried priests in her heart. Her prayer reminds us that every priest needs the support of those he serves.

Prayer: Lord, keep your priests faithful and joyful, and give your Church shepherds after your own heart.

Today: Pray for your parish priest, or tell him you are grateful.

Day 9: Toward Easter

Gemma died on Holy Saturday 1903, on the eve of Easter. Her life, united to the cross, ended at the dawn of the Resurrection. For the Christian, suffering never has the last word: the cross opens onto the empty tomb.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Gemma Galgani, lead me from the cross to the joy of Easter. Amen.

Today: Spend a time of silence before a crucifix.

Closing prayer

Saint Gemma, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for the sick, for those who suffer in silence and for priests. Obtain for us the grace to love Jesus with a simple heart, wholly given. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Gemma Galgani and the prayer to Saint Gemma Galgani.

PILGRIMAGE

Shrine of Saint Gemma Galgani in Lucca

Saint Gemma Galgani rests in Lucca, in Tuscany, in the shrine that bears her name, kept by the Passionist nuns. It is the main pilgrimage site connected with the saint, in the very city where she spent her last years and where she died, on Holy Saturday 1903.

A monastery Gemma wanted

During her lifetime, Gemma hoped that a monastery of Passionist nuns would be founded in Lucca, and she hoped to enter it. At the time there were only two Passionist monasteries in the world: Corneto in Italy, now Tarquinia, and Mamers in France. The Lucca foundation came into being in March 1905, two years after her death, with the arrival of nuns from Corneto. Their successors today keep the shrine where the saint's remains rest.

Her biographers report that shortly before she died she had foretold that the Passionists, who had not received her alive, would have her in death. For pilgrims, the shrine is the fulfillment of that wish.



The Shrine of Saint Gemma Galgani in Lucca.

Visiting the shrine

The shrine is an active place of prayer, connected with a contemplative monastery. Pilgrims come to pray beside the saint, to entrust sick people, young people or vocations to her, and to take part in the liturgy. The feasts of Saint Gemma, April 11 and especially May 16 for the Passionist family and the diocese, gather more worshippers here.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Gemma Galgani. Once there, take time to entrust your intention in silence, then say the prayer to Saint Gemma Galgani. To prepare for the pilgrimage, you can begin the novena to Saint Gemma Galgani nine days beforehand. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Gemma Galgani

- **Borgo Nuovo di Camigliano** (municipality of Capannori): her native village, in the countryside around Lucca.
- **Lucca, the Giannini family's neighborhood**: the city where she lived, taken in by the Giannini family, from 1900 until her death.
- **Camaiore**: the small town where she stayed for a few months with an aunt after her father's death.

Practical information

Lucca is in Tuscany, about twelve miles from Pisa, and is easy to visit on foot within its city walls. Since the shrine is connected with a monastery, opening hours and celebration times may be limited: check with the shrine or on its official website before you come. Modest dress and silence are expected.

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