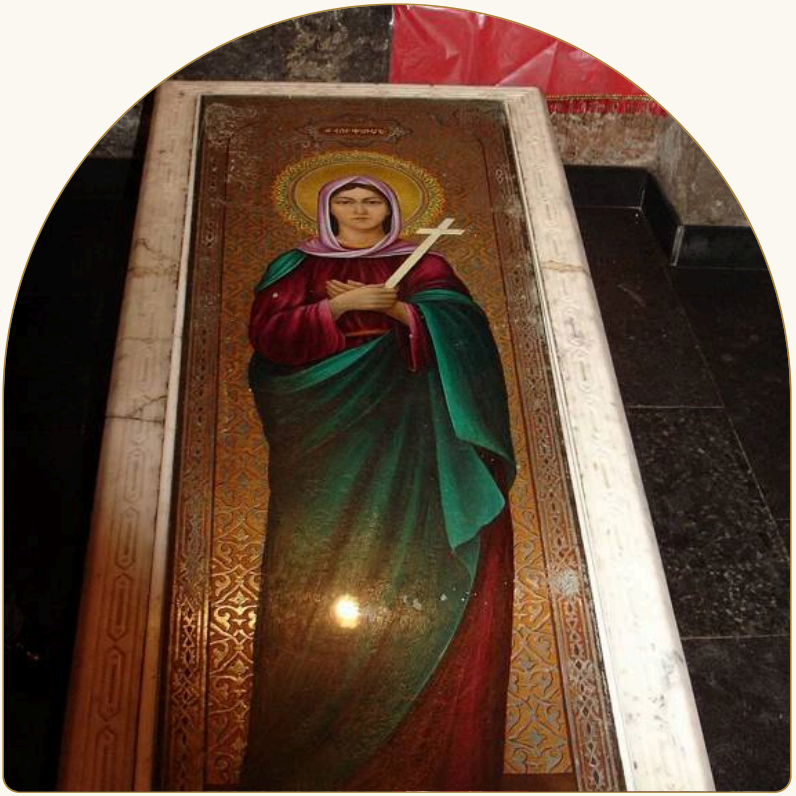


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Hripsime

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 29

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IN BRIEF

Saint Hripsime

Christian virgin martyred in Armenia around 301 with the abbess Gayane and their companions.

Feast day	September 29
Died	c. 301, Vagharshapat, Armenia
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Hripsime for Women in Danger and Armenia

Novena to Saint Hripsime

Church of Saint Hripsime in Vagharshapat, Armenia

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Hripsime

Saint Hripsime, also spelled Rhipsime, was a young Christian virgin martyred in Armenia around the year 301, together with the abbess Gayane and their companions. According to Armenian tradition, their deaths, followed by the conversion of King Tiridates through Saint Gregory the Illuminator, led to the conversion of Armenia, the first kingdom to adopt Christianity officially. With Gregory and Gayane, she is one of the most beloved saints of the Armenian people. The Catholic Church celebrates her on September 29.

Who was Saint Hripsime?

Our main source is the *History of the Armenians* attributed to Agathangelos, written in the fifth century, which tells the story of the conversion of the kingdom. This account blends historical memories with many legendary features. It presents Hripsime and her companions as "Roman" virgins; historians think rather that they came from an eastern province of the Roman Empire, perhaps Cappadocia or Syria. Their number varies according to the traditions: thirty-two, thirty-five or forty.

The central fact is well attested by the oldest tradition: a group of consecrated women who had taken refuge in Armenia was put to death there at the beginning of the fourth century, and their tombs very soon became places of worship near Vagharshapat, the ancient capital, known today as Etchmiadzin.

Key dates according to tradition

- **Late 3rd century**: Hripsime lives in a community of virgins led by the abbess Gayane.
- **c. 300**: To escape the persecution of Diocletian, the community flees to Armenia.

- **c. 301**: King Tiridates wants to marry Hripsime; when she refuses, he has her tortured and put to death, along with Gayane and their companions.
- **Soon afterward**: The king is converted and the kingdom is baptized by Saint Gregory the Illuminator.
- **618**: The church of Saint Hripsime in Vagharshapat is built by the Catholicos Komitas.

The flight to Armenia

According to Agathangelos, the emperor Diocletian, looking for a wife, had the most beautiful young woman in the Empire sought out, and his choice fell on Hripsime, who lived in a community of consecrated virgins. To escape this marriage and the persecution, the community, led by the abbess Gayane, fled east and found refuge in Armenia, near Vagharshapat. There the women lived poorly from the work of their hands.

The refusal and the martyrdom

When he learned of their presence, the king of Armenia, Tiridates, still a pagan and a persecutor of Christians, wanted in his turn to make Hripsime his wife. She refused, declaring that she belonged to Christ. The account says that she resisted him with surprising strength. In his fury, the king had her tortured and killed, then had Gayane and the other companions executed. The details of their sufferings handed down by tradition are terrible, and they underline the steadfastness of the martyrs.

The rest of the story is full of wonders. The king was struck by a strange illness that made him like a wild boar, and he was healed only by Gregory, a Christian he had thrown into a pit years before. Gregory buried the martyrs, and the king was converted along with his people. This was the beginning of the Church of Armenia, of which Gregory became the first Catholicos.

A devotion that has crossed the centuries

Gregory raised a shrine, a *martyrium*, on the place where Hripsime was martyred. In the seventh century, the Catholicos Komitas replaced it with the present church, completed in 618, a masterpiece of classical Armenian architecture. The saint's tomb lies in the crypt. Another church, Saint Gayane, built in 630, honors the abbess at the place of her martyrdom.

Devotion to Hripsime spread far beyond Armenia. In Ethiopia she is venerated with great fervor under the name of Arsema, and several churches and monasteries are dedicated to her, including one on an island in Lake Tana. In the Catholic Church she is celebrated with her companions on September 29; the Armenian Church commemorates her on a movable date after Pentecost.

History and legend

How should we read the story of Saint Hripsime today? The account of Agathangelos was written more than a century after the events, to tell how Armenia became Christian, and it uses the language of wonder that was common in the lives of the saints. The beauty contest organized by Diocletian, the king turned into a boar and Gregory's long years in the pit belong to this narrative style. The heart of the story, however, rests on a solid foundation: the early veneration of the tombs of these women martyrs at Vagharshapat, the churches built over them and the unbroken memory of the Armenian people.

Why is Saint Hripsime invoked for young women and refugees?

Saint Hripsime has no official patronage, but her story speaks directly to several intentions. Beyond the legend, her memory is that of a woman who refused to let herself be possessed by the powerful, in the name of her freedom as one consecrated to Christ. She was also a refugee, who fled persecution and found shelter in a foreign land. For Armenians, her blood is the seed of the

faith of a whole nation, which has kept that faith at the cost of many trials. She is therefore prayed to for young women, for people threatened with violence, for refugees and for the Armenian people.

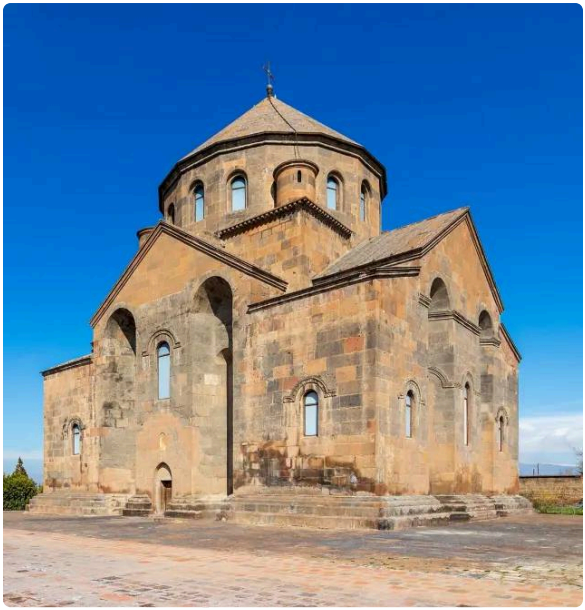
Symbols and how to recognize Saint Hripsime in art

Saint Hripsime is usually shown as a young woman, often crowned, holding the palm of martyrdom or a cross. In Armenian icons she frequently appears alongside Saint Gayane and Saint Gregory the Illuminator. In Ethiopian art, as Saint Arsema, she is painted in the bright colors typical of the churches of that country.

Where to pray to Saint Hripsime

- **Vagharshapat** (Etchmiadzin, Armenia): the church of Saint Hripsime, built over her tomb, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- **Vagharshapat**: the nearby church of Saint Gayane and the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin.
- **Ethiopia**: the churches and monasteries of Saint Arsema, especially on Lake Tana.

To pray with her, use the prayer to Saint Hripsime or the novena to Saint Hripsime.



The church of Saint Hripsime, built over her tomb.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Hripsime for Women in Danger and Armenia

For centuries Armenians have sung hymns in honor of Saint Hripsime and her companions, notably a famous hymn attributed to the Catholicos Komitas, who built her church. These texts are little known in English. Saintspedia offers an original prayer inspired by what tradition remembers of the martyr: the young consecrated woman who refused to belong to a king, the refugee who found shelter in Armenia, the seed of the faith of a whole people.

A saint of freedom and courage

According to tradition, Hripsime fled two powerful men who wanted to make her their wife: the emperor Diocletian, then King Tiridates of Armenia. She preferred death to betraying her consecration to Christ. Her martyrdom opened the way to the conversion of Armenia.

Prayer to Saint Hripsime for women in danger and for Armenia

> *Saint Hripsime, you left your homeland to remain faithful to Christ: I entrust to you refugees and all who flee violence and persecution. May they find, as you did, a land that welcomes them.*
>
> *You refused to become the possession of a king: protect girls and women whose dignity and freedom are threatened. Give them the courage to say no, and surround them with people who will defend them.*
>
> *Your blood prepared the conversion of a whole people: pray for Armenia and for the Christians of the Middle East, who have suffered so much for their faith. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).*
>
> *In the midst of my fears, obtain for me a simple and strong faithfulness to Christ, my only Lord. Amen.*

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

When to pray this prayer

In the Catholic Church, Saint Hripsime and her companions are celebrated on September 29. The Armenian Church commemorates them on a movable date a few weeks after Pentecost, and the Ethiopian Church honors Saint Arsema in early October. This prayer also fits:

- for a young woman in danger or a victim of violence;
- for refugees and displaced people;
- for Armenia and for persecuted Christians;
- when you need the courage to stay faithful under pressure.

A short invocation

> *Saint Hripsime, virgin and martyr, faithful to Christ unto death, pray for us. Amen.*

To get to know her better, read the life of Saint Hripsime, or pray the novena to Saint Hripsime.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Hripsime

This novena to Saint Hripsime is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the young virgin who, according to Armenian tradition, fled persecution, refused the advances of a king and gave her life for Christ around the year 301, opening the way to the conversion of Armenia. To end on her feast day in the Catholic Church, September 29, begin it on September 21. You can also pray it at any time, especially for a woman in danger, for refugees or for the Armenian people.

How to pray this novena

Each day, take a quiet moment. Make the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act proposed. The episodes recalled here come from the traditional account of Agathangelos, which mixes history and legend; what matters is the faith they express.

Day 1: A life given to Christ

Hripsime lived in a community of consecrated virgins led by the abbess Gayane. She had given her heart to Christ, and everything that followed flowed from that first gift. Her courage in the hour of trial was rooted in this daily, hidden love.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, help me to give my life to Christ without holding anything back. Amen.

Today: Begin your day by offering it to God in a short prayer.

Day 2: A sisterhood of faith

Hripsime did not walk alone. She lived, fled and died with her sisters and their abbess. Faith is lived in a community that supports and strengthens us. No one becomes a saint alone, and no one should have to carry a heavy cross without friends.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, bless my family, my parish and my friends, and make us a support for one another. Amen.

Today: Encourage someone who is going through a hard time.

Day 3: Fleeing persecution

To escape Diocletian and his persecution, the community left everything and set off toward the east. Many people today are forced to make the same journey, leaving behind their homes, their language and their loved ones.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, watch over refugees and displaced people, and soften the hearts of those who can welcome them. Amen.

Today: Learn about, or support, an organization that helps refugees.

Day 4: Living from the work of their hands

In Armenia, near Vagharshapat, the women lived poorly from their work. Far from home, they kept praying and serving God in humble daily life. Holiness is not reserved for great moments; it grows in ordinary days.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, teach me to find God in ordinary work and in a simple life. Amen.

Today: Do your daily work carefully, as an offering to God.

Day 5: Saying no to the powerful

King Tiridates wanted to take Hripsime as his wife. She refused, declaring that she belonged to Christ. Her no was a yes to her deepest freedom. No one has the right to treat another person as a possession.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, protect girls and women threatened in their dignity, and give them the courage to say no. Amen.

Today: Pray for victims of violence and human trafficking.

Day 6: Strength in weakness

The account says that Hripsime resisted the king with surprising strength. Grace gives courage to those who seem weakest in the eyes of the world. God's strength is made perfect in weakness, as Saint Paul wrote.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, when I am afraid, obtain for me the strength that comes from God. Amen.

Today: Face, with trust, a situation you have been avoiding.

Day 7: Faithful unto death

Hripsime, Gayane and their companions were tortured and put to death. They preferred to lose their lives rather than betray Christ. Their witness still speaks today, wherever Christians pay a price for their faith.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, pray for Christians who are persecuted for their faith, and make me faithful in small trials. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Christians of the Middle East.

Day 8: The seed of a Christian nation

After their deaths, King Tiridates was healed by Gregory the Illuminator and converted with his people. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the faith of all Armenia. What looked like a defeat became the birth of a Christian nation.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, pray for Armenia and for all Armenians throughout the world, that they may remain faithful to their ancient faith. Amen.

Today: Learn something about the history of the Armenian Church.

Day 9: A sanctuary over her tomb

Gregory buried the martyrs and built a shrine where Hripsime died. Since 618, her stone church has stood over her tomb, and pilgrims still come to pray there. Her story did not end in death, but in the life of a whole Church.

Prayer: Saint Hripsime, present to Christ the intention I have carried through this novena, and lead me one day to the joy of heaven. Amen.

Today: Visit a church and pray in silence for a few minutes.

Closing prayer

> *Lord Jesus Christ, you gave Saint Hripsime and her companions the strength to remain faithful to you unto death. Through their intercession, protect women in danger, welcome refugees, strengthen persecuted Christians and bless the Armenian people. Give us a love for you that no fear can overcome. Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.*

Read more in the life of Saint Hripsime, or say the prayer to Saint Hripsime.

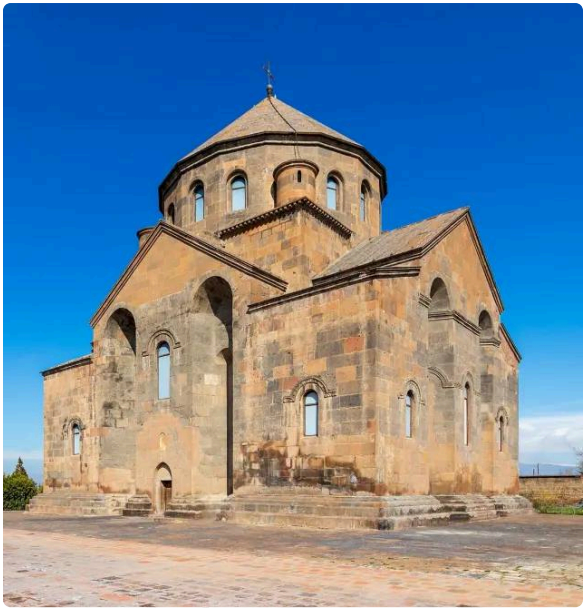
PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint Hripsime in Vagharshapat, Armenia

At the entrance to Vagharshapat, the holy city of Etchmiadzin, about twelve miles west of Yerevan, the Church of Saint Hripsime stands on the spot where, according to tradition, the young martyr was killed around 301. Built in 618, it is one of the masterpieces of Armenian architecture and is among the churches of Etchmiadzin inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church.

From Gregory's Martyrium to Komitas's Church

According to Agathangelos, Saint Gregory the Illuminator had a small sanctuary, a *martyrium*, built on the site of Hripsime's martyrdom. In the 7th century, the Catholicos Komitas had it replaced by the present church, completed in 618, as an inscription records. He also composed, according to tradition, a famous hymn in honor of the holy virgin martyrs. The church has been restored several times, notably in the 17th century, but it keeps its original structure.



The Church of Saint Hripsime, completed in 618.

Remarkable Architecture

The church is built on a plan known as a "tetraconch with corner niches": four apses arranged in a cross, between which niches open to support a central dome. This type of plan, of great harmony, served as a model for many Armenian and Georgian churches. On the outside, the compact volumes of tuff stone, pierced by deep triangular niches, give the building a sober and powerful silhouette.

The Saint's Tomb

Beneath the church, a crypt houses the tomb of Saint Hripsime. Pilgrims go down to pray and light candles. Not far away, the Church of Saint Gayane, built in 630, honors the abbess martyred with her, and the Cathedral of

Etchmiadzin, seat of the Catholicos of All Armenians, completes this sacred complex.

Praying at Saint Hripsime

Before you come, you might reread the life of Saint Hripsime. In the crypt, a time of silence before her tomb allows you to entrust to her a young woman in danger, a refugee, or the Armenian people. The prayer to Saint Hripsime can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia; please respect the customs of the Armenian Church that welcomes visitors.

Practical Information

Vagharshapat is about twelve miles west of Yerevan, reached by taxi, minibus or organized excursion. The Church of Saint Hripsime is at the eastern entrance of the town, a few minutes from the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin and the Church of Saint Gayane, which are often visited together. Modest dress is required. Check service and visiting times on the spot before you come.

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