

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Jacques Berthieu

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: June 8

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IN BRIEF

Saint Jacques Berthieu

French Jesuit priest from Auvergne, missionary in Madagascar, martyred in 1896 during the Menalamba uprising.

Feast day	June 8
Born	November 27, 1838, Polminhac (Cantal), France
Died	June 8, 1896, Ambiatibe, Madagascar
Canonized	October 21, 2012, by Pope Benedict XVI
Era	19th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Jacques Berthieu, Sower of the Gospel

Novena to Saint Jacques Berthieu

Credits and sources

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LIFE

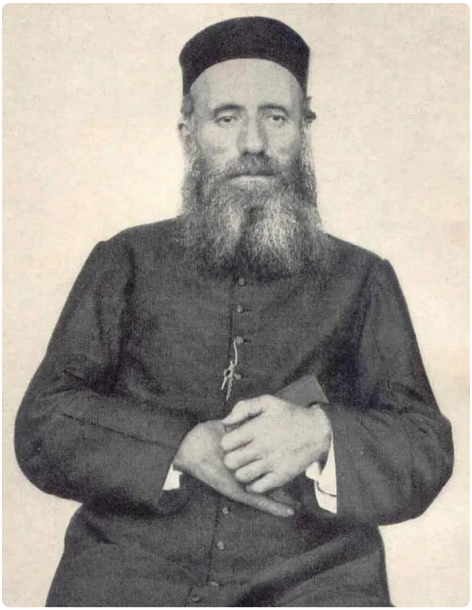
Saint Jacques Berthieu

Saint Jacques Berthieu was a French Jesuit priest, born in Auvergne in 1838 and martyred in Madagascar on June 8, 1896. The son of farmers from the Cantal, he was first a diocesan priest of Saint-Flour before entering the Society of Jesus at thirty-five in order to go on mission. For some twenty years he served the Christian communities of Réunion, the island of Sainte-Marie and the main island of Madagascar, until he was killed by insurgents for refusing to deny his faith. Beatified in 1965 and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012, he is celebrated on June 8.

Who was Saint Jacques Berthieu?

Jacques Berthieu belongs to the great generation of nineteenth-century French missionaries. Nothing seemed to destine him for adventure: he was first a solid, patient country priest, trained in the seminaries of his diocese. But the desire for faraway missions grew in him. As a Jesuit, he spent the rest of his life serving the people of Madagascar, learning their language, opening schools and mission stations, and standing by Christians through the wars and unrest that shook the island at the end of the century.

His death during the *Menalamba* uprising of 1896 made him the first martyr of Madagascar recognized by the Church. He did not die as a political hero: several times he was offered his life if he would give up his religion, and he refused. He is a witness of simple faithfulness, to the very end, to the people entrusted to him.



Father Jacques Berthieu, Jesuit missionary in Madagascar.

Key dates

- **November 27, 1838**: Born on the Montlogis farm in Polminhac (Cantal, France), into a farming family.
- **May 21, 1864**: Ordained a priest for the diocese of Saint-Flour; appointed curate at Roannes-Saint-Mary.
- **October 31, 1873**: Enters the Jesuit novitiate in Pau.
- **1875**: Sent on mission to Réunion, then to the island of Sainte-Marie, off Madagascar.
- **1880**: Expelled from Sainte-Marie with the Jesuits, he moves to the main island of Madagascar.
- **1886-1891**: Heads the mission of the Ambositra district, where the number of stations grows from six to fifteen.
- **1891**: Appointed north of Antananarivo, at Andrainarivo.

- **June 7, 1896**: Captured by *Menalamba* insurgents while accompanying a column of Christians.
- **June 8, 1896**: Shot near the village of Ambiatibe; his body is thrown into the river.
- **October 17, 1965**: Beatified by Paul VI, during the Second Vatican Council.
- **October 21, 2012**: Canonized by Benedict XVI on World Mission Sunday.

A priest from Auvergne

Jacques Berthieu was born into a family of austere and devout farmers in the Cantal, in the mountains of central France. He studied at the minor seminary of Pleaux, then at the major seminary of Saint-Flour. Ordained in 1864, he was sent as curate to Roannes-Saint-Mary. The parish priest, who had been expecting someone else, received him coldly; the young priest did not complain and adapted. This patience in difficult situations remained a mark of his character.

For nine years he ministered in his diocese. But he wanted to go to mission lands. Just as his bishop was thinking of making him a parish priest, he asked to join the Jesuits. He was thirty-five when he began his novitiate in Pau in 1873. At the Jesuit house of studies in Vals, near Le Puy, he deepened his devotion to the Sacred Heart under the influence of Father Henri Ramière, a great promoter of the Apostleship of Prayer.

Missionary in the Indian Ocean

In 1875 Father Berthieu left for Réunion, then for the island of Sainte-Marie, today Nosy Boraha, off the east coast of Madagascar. There he learned Malagasy and worked with two other Jesuits and the Sisters of Saint Joseph of

Cluny. In 1880 French laws expelling religious congregations struck the Jesuits in all French territories, including Sainte-Marie. The missionary then moved to the main island, which was still an independent kingdom.

He worked first among the Betsileo, south of Antananarivo. During the first Franco-Malagasy war, the French were gathered at Toamasina (Tamatave), and he volunteered as a military chaplain. Afterward he was sent to the Ambositra district, which he led from 1886 to 1891. He multiplied mission stations and cared especially about education: for him, school was the path to dignity and faith. He wrote in a letter:

> *"The mission is progressing, although in many places the fruits are still only a hope and in others barely visible. But what does it matter to us, as long as we are good sowers: God will make things grow in his own time."*

In the heart of the storm

In 1891 he was appointed north of Antananarivo. Tensions ran high there: rivalry between Protestants and Catholics and growing colonial pressure from France. The war of 1894-1895 led to a French protectorate over the island, then to the abolition of the monarchy. The missionary had to withdraw to Réunion for a time before returning.

In 1896 the *Menalamba* ("red shawls") uprising broke out, directed both against French rule and against Christianity, seen as a threat to traditional religion. Father Berthieu tried to bring his Christians to safety. He refused to abandon them and led a column of villagers falling back toward Antananarivo. Poorly protected, the column was attacked on June 7, 1896. The priest was captured, stripped and beaten.



The Ambiatibe memorial, on the site of his martyrdom.

The martyrdom of Ambiatibe

The insurgents led him toward their chief's camp. For the wounded priest, the march was a true Way of the Cross. Several times he was offered the chance to abandon his religion and become one of their leaders. He answered: "I cannot consent to that; I would rather die." Passing the church of Ambohitra, where he had often celebrated Mass, he asked to go in; his guards refused. He knelt at the door and prayed the Our Father aloud.

On the evening of June 8, near the village of Ambiatibe, about sixty kilometers (forty miles) from Antananarivo, he was shot. As he still seemed to be looking at them, on his knees, he was finished off with a club. His body was thrown into the Mananara River and never found. Later, Father Théophile Weber, missionary of that district, heard the confession of one of his killers and baptized two others.

The first saint of Madagascar

Paul VI beatified him on October 17, 1965, during a session of the Second Vatican Council. Benedict XVI canonized him on October 21, 2012, World Mission Sunday, together with six other saints. In Madagascar his memory is alive: pilgrimages and Stations of the Cross are held on the places of his passion, between Ambohitra and Ambiatibe. In Auvergne, his home parish of Polminhac also keeps his memory.

The Jesuits in France commemorate him on June 8; according to Jesuit sources, the other provinces of the Society of Jesus remember him on February 4.

Why is Saint Jacques Berthieu a model for missionaries?

Saint Jacques Berthieu has no official patronage, but he is a natural intercessor for missionaries, for the Church in Madagascar, for late vocations and for persecuted Christians. A man rooted in his native soil, he became a man of the world. He loved his Auvergne deeply, yet he wrote that he loved "far more still these uncultivated fields of Madagascar." He reminds us that mission is not first of all visible success, but seed entrusted to God. He is also the model of the shepherd who does not flee when danger comes and stays with his flock.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Jacques Berthieu in art

Saint Jacques Berthieu is known mainly from nineteenth-century photographs: a priest in a cassock. Images made for his beatification and canonization often show him in Madagascar among the people he served, sometimes kneeling in prayer, recalling the Our Father he prayed at the door of the church of Ambohitra.



Polminhac, in the Cantal, home village of Saint Jacques Berthieu.

Where to pray to Saint Jacques Berthieu

- **Ambiatibe** (Madagascar): the memorial on the site of his martyrdom, a place of pilgrimage.
- **Ambohitra** (Madagascar): the church at whose door he prayed the Our Father during his last march.
- **Polminhac** (Cantal, France): his home village and its parish church.
- **Saint-Flour** (Cantal, France): the town of his major seminary and home diocese.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Jacques Berthieu and the novena to Saint Jacques Berthieu, from May 30 to June 7.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Jacques Berthieu, Sower of the Gospel

Saint Jacques Berthieu, a priest from Auvergne who became a Jesuit and a missionary in Madagascar, gave his life in 1896 rather than deny his faith. As far as we know, there is no widely used traditional prayer in his honor in English. This page offers an original Saintspedia prayer, inspired by his life and his letters.

Prayer to Saint Jacques Berthieu, sower of the Gospel

Saint Jacques Berthieu, son of the farmlands of Auvergne, you left your country and your parish to proclaim Christ in Madagascar: teach me to love those God places on my path, even when they are far from my habits and my culture.

You wanted to be a good sower without yet seeing the harvest: give me the patience to do good without waiting for results, and the trust that God will make grow in his own time what I sow today.

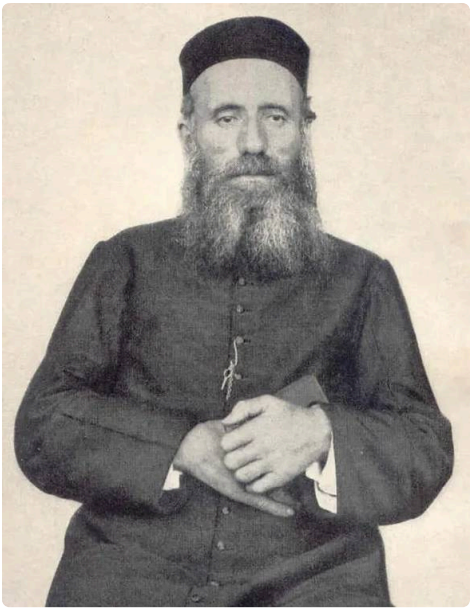
You did not abandon your Christians in danger: obtain for the shepherds of the Church the courage to stay with their people, and for each of us faithfulness in our commitments.

Captive and wounded, you knelt at the door of a church to pray the Our Father: teach me to pray in times of trial and to place my life in the hands of the Father.

You chose to die rather than deny Jesus: strengthen persecuted Christians, support missionaries and watch over the Church in Madagascar. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may I be, wherever I live, a humble and joyful witness of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Amen.

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



Saint Jacques Berthieu, martyr of Madagascar.

A short invocation

> *Saint Jacques Berthieu, good sower of the Gospel, faithful unto martyrdom, pray for us and for all missionaries.*

Original prayer by Saintspedia.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Jacques Berthieu

- Missionaries and all who leave home to proclaim the Gospel.
- The Church in Madagascar and peace on the island.
- Late vocations, since he became a Jesuit at thirty-five.
- Christians persecuted for their faith.
- Teachers and schools, which he promoted in his missions.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Jacques Berthieu is celebrated on June 8, the anniversary of his martyrdom at Ambiatibe in 1896. You can also pray to him in October, the month of the missions, since he was canonized on World Mission Sunday in 2012.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Jacques Berthieu, and read the life of Saint Jacques Berthieu.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Jacques Berthieu

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and letters of Saint Jacques Berthieu, Jesuit missionary and martyr in Madagascar. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast day, June 8, begin it on May 30. It is also well suited to October, the month of the missions, or to any time you want to pray for missionaries and persecuted Christians.

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. Since Jacques Berthieu prayed the Our Father aloud on his way to martyrdom, you may want to pray it slowly, word by word. The small act suggested for the day carries the prayer into your daily life.

Day 1: Rooted in the land

Jacques Berthieu grew up among devout farmers in the mountains of the Cantal. The patience of farm work shaped his soul: one sows, waits and trusts. God often prepares great missions in very ordinary homes.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the place and the family where I received life and faith; help me honor them by the way I live.

Today: Thank God for one concrete gift from your childhood.

Day 2: Patience in a cold welcome

When he arrived as a young curate, the parish priest received him coldly. Jacques did not complain; he adapted and served. Patience in small frustrations prepares us for greater trials.

Prayer: Lord, give me a patient heart when I am misunderstood or poorly received.

Today: Respond with kindness to someone who has been unpleasant to you.

Day 3: A late vocation

At thirty-five, after nine years as a diocesan priest, he entered the Jesuit novitiate to become a missionary. It is never too late to answer a new call from God. He left the security of a familiar ministry, a bishop who valued him and the hills of home, trusting that God would provide.

Prayer: Lord, keep me open to your calls at every age, and bless all who change course to follow you.

Today: Pray for those who are discerning a vocation, especially later in life.

Day 4: The Sacred Heart

At Vals, he deepened his devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Apostleship of Prayer. His whole mission flowed from this love. Every apostolate begins in the heart of Christ.

Prayer: Heart of Jesus, burning with love, make my heart like yours.

Today: Offer your day to God in the morning, in the spirit of the Apostleship of Prayer.

Day 5: Learning another language

On the island of Sainte-Marie, he learned Malagasy so that he could speak to people in their own words. Love takes the trouble to understand others, their language and their culture.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to listen and to understand those who are different from me.

Today: Take time to truly listen to someone whose background differs from yours.

Day 6: A good sower

"As long as we are good sowers: God will make things grow in his own time," he wrote. He opened schools and mission stations without seeing many fruits. Faithfulness matters more than visible success. Parents, teachers and catechists know this well: what we sow today may only flower long after we are gone.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the need for results, and let me sow your Word with trust.

Today: Do one good thing whose fruit you will never see.

Day 7: Staying with the flock

When the uprising broke out, he refused to abandon his Christians and led them toward safety. The good shepherd does not flee when the wolf comes. He stays with those entrusted to him.

Prayer: Lord, give pastors the courage to stay with their people, and give me faithfulness to those who depend on me.

Today: Keep a promise or commitment you have been tempted to drop.

Day 8: The Our Father at the church door

Captured and beaten, he asked to enter the church of Ambohitra; refused, he knelt at the door and prayed the Our Father aloud. Even in the worst moments, we can turn to the Father.

Prayer: Our Father, in my trials, let me always find the way to you.

Today: Pray the Our Father slowly, kneeling if you can.

Day 9: Rather die

Offered his life if he renounced his religion, he answered: "I would rather die." He was shot at Ambiatibe on June 8, 1896, and his body was never found. His witness became the seed of the Church in Madagascar. Later, one of his killers asked for confession and two others were baptized: grace had the last word.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Jacques Berthieu, strengthen persecuted Christians and make me faithful to the end. Amen.

Today: Pray for Christians who are persecuted today, or support an organization that helps them.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Jacques Berthieu, son of Auvergne and apostle of Madagascar, good sower and faithful shepherd, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Watch over missionaries, over the Church in Madagascar and over all who suffer for their faith. Obtain for me a patient heart, a generous spirit and fidelity to the end. Amen.*

To go further, read the life of Saint Jacques Berthieu and the prayer to Saint Jacques Berthieu.

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