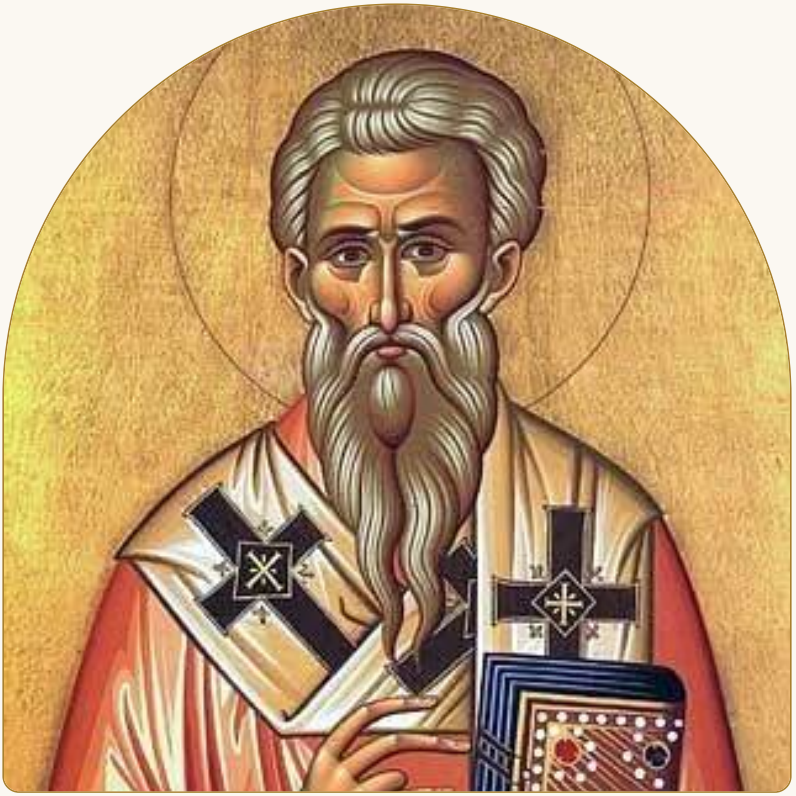


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint James the Just, Brother of the Lord

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint James the Just, Brother of the Lord

"brother of the Lord," leader of the Church in Jerusalem and martyr, to whom tradition attributes the Letter of James.

Feast day	May 3, October 23 (Eastern Churches)
Born	Late first century BC or early first century AD, Galilee
Died	62, Jerusalem
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	1st century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint James the Just, with the Letter of James

Novena to Saint James the Just

Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Rome, Relics of Saint James and Saint Philip

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint James the Just, Brother of the Lord

Saint James the Just is one of the major figures of the first Christian generation. Called "the brother of the Lord" in the New Testament, he became, after Peter's departure, the chief leader of the Church in Jerusalem. Saint Paul counts him among the "pillars" of the Church, and tradition attributes to him the Letter of James. He died a martyr in Jerusalem around the year 62. The Latin Church, which identifies him with the apostle James son of Alphaeus, celebrates him on May 3 together with Saint Philip; the Eastern Churches keep his feast on October 23.

Who was Saint James the Just?

The Gospels name James first among the "brothers" of Jesus, together with Joses, Simon and Jude (Mark 6:3). In biblical language, the word "brother" also refers to cousins and close relatives. Since Saint Jerome, the Latin tradition has seen James as a cousin of Jesus, while an ancient Eastern tradition makes him a son of Joseph by an earlier marriage. In both cases, the Church affirms the perpetual virginity of Mary.

During Jesus' public ministry, the Gospels suggest that His relatives did not yet believe in Him (John 7:5). Everything changed at Easter: Saint Paul reports that the risen Christ "appeared to James" (1 Corinthians 15:7). James then appears at the heart of the Jerusalem community, respected by all for his uprightness and his faithfulness to the Law of Moses. According to the early Christian historian Hegesippus, this reputation earned him the name "the Just."

Key dates in the life of Saint James the Just

- **Early first century**: Grows up in Galilee, among the relatives of Jesus.
- **c. 30**: After the Resurrection, the risen Christ appears to him.
- **c. 36**: Three years after his conversion, Paul meets Peter and "James, the brother of the Lord" in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18-19).
- **c. 43-44**: Freed from prison, Peter asks that "James and the brothers" be told (Acts 12:17).
- **c. 49**: At the Council of Jerusalem, James proposes not to impose circumcision on Gentile converts (Acts 15).
- **c. 57**: He receives Paul on his return from his missionary journeys (Acts 21:18).
- **62**: Martyred in Jerusalem on the orders of the high priest Ananus, according to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.

A pillar of the Church in Jerusalem

The Acts of the Apostles present James as a man of balance. At the Council of Jerusalem, around 49, the question was burning: did Gentiles have to become Jews in order to be Christians? After the testimony of Peter, Paul and Barnabas, it was James who drew the conclusion. Drawing on the prophets, he affirmed that God was calling the nations too, and proposed asking the newly baptized to keep only a few observances, so as to make common life easier with Christians of Jewish origin.

In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul names him with Peter and John among the "pillars" who gave him the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:9). The ancient tradition, gathered by Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century, makes him the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

The Letter of James

Among the letters of the New Testament is one that opens: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion." Tradition attributes it to the brother of the Lord. Historians debate its date and authorship, but the text clearly reflects the Jewish Christian world of which he was the leading figure.

It contains sentences that have become famous: faith "without works is dead"; the tongue is a small fire that can set a whole forest ablaze; pure religion is to visit orphans and widows in their distress. James vigorously defends the poor against the contempt of the rich. His letter also contains the passage on the anointing of the sick by the elders of the Church (James 5:14-15), which the Catholic Church recognizes as the biblical foundation of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.



Saint James the Less, from the series of apostles by Georges de La Tour (17th century), Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, Albi.

The martyrdom of the Just

The death of James is one of the few events of the early Church recorded by a non-Christian author. Flavius Josephus relates in his *Jewish Antiquities* (Book XX) that in 62, taking advantage of the gap between the death of the Roman governor Festus and the arrival of his successor Albinus, the high priest Ananus brought before the Sanhedrin "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ, whose name was James," and had him stoned along with some others.

Hegesippus, in the second century, gives a more colorful account, preserved by Eusebius. According to this tradition, James, a man of prayer whose knees had grown as hard as a camel's, was thrown down from the Temple for bearing witness to Christ, then stoned. He died praying for his executioners, like Stephen, before being finished off with a fuller's club.

James the Just and James the Less

The New Testament mentions several men named James: the apostle son of Zebedee, brother of John; the apostle son of Alphaeus; and the brother of the Lord. In the West, the brother of the Lord was very early identified with the son of Alphaeus, called "James the Less." That is why the Roman calendar celebrates "Saints Philip and James, Apostles" on May 3. Many biblical scholars now think these were two different people, and the Eastern Churches celebrate them separately; the question remains open.

Why do Christians pray to Saint James the Just?

Saint James is not tied to a particular patronage, but his letter has made him a guide for a faith that shows itself in action. Catholics pray to him for the sick, because of his teaching on the prayer of faith and the anointing of the sick, for those who must make a wise decision, and for unity among Christians.

He reminds us that sincere faith shows itself in life: persevering prayer, control of the tongue, care for the poor. Close to Jesus by blood, he still had to pass, like everyone, from familiarity to faith. As leader of a fragile community, he held together faithfulness to his roots and openness to newcomers.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint James the Just, or follow the novena to Saint James the Just, from April 24 to May 2, the eve of his feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint James the Just in art

- **The fuller's club**: the club with which, according to Hegesippus, he was finished off; it is his main emblem in Western art.
- **Bishop's vestments and the Gospel book**: in Orthodox icons, he appears as the first Bishop of Jerusalem.



The Armenian Cathedral of Saint James, in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Where to pray to Saint James the Just

- **Rome**: the Basilica of the Holy Twelve Apostles (Santi Apostoli), which keeps the venerated relics of Saint James and Saint Philip.
- **Jerusalem**: the Armenian Cathedral of Saint James, in the Armenian Quarter, where a tradition places the burial of the brother of the Lord.
- **Jerusalem**: the Kidron Valley, where an ancient tomb has been called the "Tomb of Saint James" since the Middle Ages.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint James the Just, with the Letter of James

No prayer composed by Saint James the Just has come down to us. But the Letter of James, which tradition attributes to him, speaks often of prayer: it invites us to ask for wisdom with confidence and to pray for one another. This page offers two passages from that letter, followed by an original prayer to Saint James for a faith that acts.

Asking for wisdom (James 1:5-6)

Translated from the Greek by Saintspedia; the original biblical text is in the public domain.

> *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*
>
> *But let him ask in faith, without doubting.*

Source: Letter of James, chapter 1, verses 5-6.

Prayer for the sick (James 5:13-16)

> *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.*
>
> *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*
>
> *The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.*
>
> *Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person has great power.*

Source: Letter of James, chapter 5, verses 13-16. For the Catholic Church, this passage is the biblical foundation of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Prayer to Saint James the Just

Saint James, brother of the Lord, you who knew Jesus in the closeness of His family and recognized Him risen from the dead, help me to move from habit to living faith.

You who were called the Just, teach me uprightness of heart and faithfulness in small things. Guard my tongue from gossip and anger, and let my words build up rather than wound.

You who defended the poor, open my eyes to those who lack everything, and make my faith active in charity. You who kept the Church of Jerusalem united, pray for the unity of all Christians.

I entrust to you the sick around me and my special intention: (name it in silence). You who died forgiving, obtain for me the grace to forgive in my turn. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

In the Roman calendar, Saint James is celebrated on May 3 together with Saint Philip; the Eastern Churches keep his feast on October 23. You can also pray to him at the bedside of a sick person, using the passage of his letter on the prayer of faith, or before an important decision, asking for wisdom. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint James the Just, and read the life of Saint James the Just.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint James the Just

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the Letter of James and by what the New Testament tells us about the brother of the Lord. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on May 3, begin on April 24; it ends on May 2. It can also be prayed at any time of year, especially for a sick person or for a decision that requires wisdom.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. The suggested act helps put into practice the word of James: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."



Saint James, brother of the Lord, church stained glass or statue.

Day 1: From familiarity to faith

James grew up close to Jesus, and yet it took him time to believe in Him. Knowing the things of faith since childhood does not spare us from discovering them anew. Familiarity can even become an obstacle, when we think we already know everything.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, do not let habit put my faith to sleep. Let me meet you each day as if for the first time.

Today: Slowly reread one of the Gospel accounts of the risen Christ appearing to His disciples.

Day 2: The risen Lord appears to him

Saint Paul reports that the risen Christ appeared to James. That encounter made him a witness. Every Christian life is born of an encounter with the Living One. James, who had doubted, became one of the pillars of the Church because he had seen the Lord alive.

Prayer: Risen Christ, show yourself to me in your Word, in the sacraments and in my brothers and sisters.

Today: Go to a weekday Mass, or spend some time before the Blessed Sacrament.

Day 3: Asking for wisdom

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God." James invites us to pray simply and without hesitation, knowing that we are heard. God does not scold those who ask; He gives generously.

Prayer: God, who give to all without reproach, grant me wisdom for the decision that weighs on me.

Today: Write down a decision you have to make and entrust it to God.

Day 4: A faith that acts

"Faith without works is dead." James does not oppose grace: he reminds us that a living faith necessarily shows itself in acts of charity. Our hands reveal what our hearts believe. A kind deed done in faith is itself a prayer.

Prayer: Lord, let my faith not remain mere words. Give me an opportunity to serve you concretely today.

Today: Do a quiet service for someone.

Day 5: Taming the tongue

James compares the tongue to a small fire that can set a whole forest ablaze. A word can wound for a long time; another word can lift someone up. Learning to be silent at the right moment is already a form of charity.

Prayer: Lord, set a guard over my lips. Let my words be true, gentle and helpful.

Today: Refrain all day from criticizing anyone who is absent.

Day 6: Showing no partiality

James rebukes Christians who welcome the rich man with honor and leave the poor man standing at the back. In the Church, everyone has a place. God's gaze does not stop at appearances. He has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith.

Prayer: Father of all, teach me to look at each person with your eyes, without favoring those who shine.

Today: Go and greet someone who is alone in your parish or neighborhood.

Day 7: Praying for the sick

"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church." James entrusts the sick to the prayer of the whole community. No one should suffer alone. The Church still answers this call today through the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those who suffer in body or mind. Raise them up and give them your peace.

Today: Visit or call someone who is sick.

Day 8: Building unity

At the Council of Jerusalem, James looked for the solution that would allow Christians of Jewish and Gentile origin to live together. Unity requires listening and discernment, and the humility to look for what serves everyone.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, make me a builder of unity in my family, my community and among Christians.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation with someone you disagree with.

Day 9: Dying while forgiving

According to tradition, James died praying for those who were stoning him. To the very end, the Just One resembled his Lord, who prayed on the cross for those who crucified Him.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint James, give me an upright heart, able to forgive. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for someone who has wronged you.

Closing prayer

Saint James, brother of the Lord and witness of His resurrection, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Obtain for me an active faith, a just word and a heart open to the poor. Pray for the Church in Jerusalem, for the Christians of the Holy Land and for the unity of all the disciples of Christ. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint James the Just and the prayer to Saint James the Just.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Rome, Relics of Saint James and Saint Philip

The Basilica of the Holy Apostles, in the center of Rome, has kept since the 6th century the venerated relics of Saint Philip and Saint James, whom the Latin tradition identifies with the brother of the Lord. It is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to Saint James the Just in the West, a short walk from Piazza Venezia.

A Basilica Founded in the 6th Century

The church was founded in the 6th century, as Rome was emerging from the wars between the Byzantines and the Goths. Begun under Pope Pelagius I and completed under John III, it was first dedicated to the apostles Philip and James, whose relics were placed beneath the altar, before taking the name of the Twelve Apostles. Often restored, it owes its present appearance to a reconstruction in the early 18th century, while its Renaissance portico opens onto the Piazza dei Santi Apostoli.



The Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Rome, facade and portico.

The Crypt of the Apostles

In the 19th century, work carried out beneath the high altar uncovered ancient remains attributed to the two apostles. A crypt was set up to receive them and present them for the veneration of the faithful. The basilica is entrusted to the Conventual Franciscans, who maintain prayer there. You can also see the tomb of Pope Clement XIV, a work by the sculptor Antonio Canova.

Praying Beside the Relics of Saint James

Before your visit, you might reread the life of Saint James the Just and a few verses of his epistle. In the crypt, a time of silence allows you to entrust an intention, especially for someone who is ill, by returning to the passage in James 5 on the prayer of faith. The prayer to Saint James the Just can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Rome, interior.

Other Places Associated with Saint James the Just

- **Jerusalem**: the Armenian Cathedral of Saint James, in the Armenian Quarter of the Old City; Armenian tradition places the burial of the brother of the Lord there.
- **Jerusalem**: the Kidron Valley, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, where a tomb cut into the rock has been called the "Tomb of Saint James" since the Middle Ages.
- **Jerusalem**: the Temple Mount, where the tradition reported by Hegesippus places his martyrdom.

Practical Information

The Basilica of the Holy Apostles is in the historic center of Rome, between Piazza Venezia and the Trevi Fountain, and is easily reached on foot. May 3, the feast of Saints Philip and James, is the basilica's great day. Check Mass times and access to the crypt with the Franciscan community before your visit.

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