

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Jerome Emiliani

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 8

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IN BRIEF

Saint Jerome Emiliani

Venetian nobleman, converted soldier, founder of the Somascan Fathers and patron saint of orphans.

Feast day	February 8
Born	1486, Venice, Italy
Died	February 8, 1537, Somasca (Lombardy), Italy
Canonized	July 16, 1767, by Pope Clement XIII
Era	16th century
Patron saint of	orphans, abandoned youth

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Novena to Saint Jerome Emiliani

Sanctuary of Saint Jerome Emiliani in Somasca

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Jerome Emiliani

Saint Jerome Emiliani (Girolamo Miani) was a Venetian nobleman and soldier of the Renaissance who became the "father of orphans." Taken prisoner during the wars that tore Italy apart, he turned to God, and after his release he gave the rest of his life to the poor, the sick and above all to abandoned children, for whom he opened homes across northern Italy. He founded the Company of the Servants of the Poor, which became the Order of Clerics Regular of Somasca, known as the Somascan Fathers. He died of the plague in Somasca in 1537 while caring for the sick. He is the patron saint of orphans and abandoned young people, and his feast day is February 8.

Who was Saint Jerome Emiliani?

Girolamo was born in Venice in 1486 into a family of the Republic's nobility. Like many young patricians, he was destined for a military career and public office. His father died while he was still young, and he grew up in a rich and powerful city that was shaken by the wars sweeping across Italy at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

During the War of the League of Cambrai, which pitted Venice against a coalition of European powers, he was given command of the fortress of Castelnuovo, in the Piave valley. In 1511 the fortress fell to the enemy, and Jerome was thrown into prison in chains. It was there that his conversion began.

Key dates

- **1486**: Born in Venice.
- **1511**: Taken prisoner when the fortress of Castelnuovo falls.

- **After 1511**: Once free, he goes to the shrine of the Madonna Grande in Treviso.
- **1528**: During famine and plague in Venice, he takes in orphans and sells his goods to feed them.
- **1532-1534**: He founds homes in Lombardy and settles in Somasca, near Lecco.
- **February 8, 1537**: Dies in Somasca, having caught the plague while caring for the sick.
- **1540**: Pope Paul III approves the Company of the Servants of the Poor.
- **1568**: Pope Pius V raises it to a religious order, the Clerics Regular of Somasca.
- **1747**: Beatified by Pope Benedict XIV.
- **July 16, 1767**: Canonized by Pope Clement XIII.
- **March 14, 1928**: Pope Pius XI proclaims him patron of orphans and abandoned youth.

The prisoner set free

In his cell, Jerome turned to God and to the Virgin Mary. According to the tradition of the Somascan Fathers, Our Lady appeared to him and freed him from his chains, allowing him to escape. He then walked to the shrine of the Madonna Grande in Treviso, where he left his chains as an offering of thanksgiving.

Whatever the exact details of his escape, the ordeal transformed the former soldier. He continued for a time to hold responsibilities in the service of Venice, but his life now had a new center. He placed himself under the guidance of reforming priests of his day, prayed, went to confession and began to spend time with the poor and the sick of the city. He remained a layman all his life.

The father of orphans

In 1528 Venice was struck by famine and then by plague. The streets filled with beggars and abandoned children. Jerome sold his furniture and his clothes to feed them, opened his house to orphans and nursed the sick himself, so closely that he caught the disease, from which he recovered. He then gave up the dress of a nobleman for poor clothing and devoted himself entirely to these children.

He did not stop at feeding them. He taught them to pray, to read and to work, so that one day they could earn their own living. With a few companions, he founded homes for orphans in Bergamo, Brescia, Como, Milan and elsewhere, as well as refuges for women leaving prostitution.

In 1532 he and his friends formed the Company of the Servants of the Poor. He then settled in Somasca, a village above the lake of Lecco, which became the heart of his work and later gave its name to the order.



Saint Jerome Emiliani, by Giandomenico Tiepolo (Ca' Rezzonico, Venice).

Dying in service

Early in 1537 an epidemic broke out in the valley of Somasca. Jerome nursed the sick, buried the dead and comforted the dying until he too was struck down. He died on February 8, 1537, at about fifty years of age, surrounded by his orphans and companions, whom he urged to remain faithful to the service of the poor.

His work outlived him. Approved by Pope Paul III in 1540, the Company became in 1568, under Pope Saint Pius V, the Order of Clerics Regular of Somasca. The Somascan Fathers are still at work today among young people in difficulty.

Why is Saint Jerome Emiliani the patron saint of orphans?

On March 14, 1928, four hundred years after he first gathered the orphans of Venice, Pope Pius XI declared him the universal patron of orphans and abandoned young people. The choice honored a man who saw in every street child a son to love. Jerome had first known prison and abandonment himself, and his compassion grew out of that experience.

He was also a pioneer of what we would now call education for the poor: he wanted children not only to be fed but to learn a trade and stand on their own feet. For this reason he is prayed to by orphans and foster children, by educators and adoptive families, and by anyone who is trying to start again after a failure.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Jerome Emiliani in art

Artists show him in the plain, dark clothing he adopted after giving up the dress of a Venetian nobleman, often with children gathered around him. The chains he left at Treviso recall his imprisonment and his liberation, which the

Somascan tradition attributes to the Virgin Mary. Giandomenico Tiepolo painted him in a fresco from the family villa at Zianigo, now kept at Ca' Rezzonico in Venice.



The shrine of Saint Jerome Emiliani in Somasca.

What his holiness teaches

Jerome Emiliani is the story of a man who knew power and arms, then the humiliation of prison, and who found in that fall the starting point of a life given away. As a layman, he was one of the great reformers of charity in the Renaissance, concerned not only with relief but with education and with restoring dignity to children.

To pray with him, you can say the prayer to Saint Jerome Emiliani or follow the novena to Saint Jerome Emiliani from January 31 to February 8.

Where to pray to Saint Jerome Emiliani

- **Somasca** (Lombardy, Italy): the shrine of Saint Jerome Emiliani, where he is buried.
- **Treviso**: the shrine of the Madonna Grande, linked to his liberation from prison.
- **Venice**: his native city, where he first took in orphans.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Jerome Emiliani for Orphans and Abandoned Children

Saint Jerome Emiliani has been invoked for centuries by the Somascan Fathers and by the children's homes they run. Saintspedia offers here an original prayer inspired by his life as the father of orphans, for children without a family, for those who care for them, and for anyone who needs the grace to start again.

The witness of his life

When Pope Pius XI declared him universal patron of orphans and abandoned youth on March 14, 1928, he honored a man who saw in every street child a son to love. Jerome Emiliani had first known prison and abandonment himself, and his compassion was born of that experience.

Prayer to Saint Jerome Emiliani for orphans and abandoned children

Saint Jerome Emiliani, you knew the chains of prison and found there the way to God. Remember all those who are bound by their sins, their fears or their addictions. Obtain for them the grace to rise again.

Father of orphans, you sold your goods to feed abandoned children. Watch over children without a family, children in foster care, unaccompanied minors and all who grow up without love. May they meet adults who protect them and love them.

Bless educators, foster families, adoptive parents and everyone who cares for young people in difficulty. Give them patience, tenderness and perseverance.

You died while nursing the sick: teach me to serve without counting the cost, wherever God has placed me.

I also entrust to you my own intention (name it in silence). Through your prayer, may I recognize Christ in the least of my brothers and sisters. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, February 8, the anniversary of his death in 1537.
- For a child who has lost a parent, or who is waiting for a family.
- Before taking on a foster child, an adoption or a mission with young people.
- For a teacher, youth worker or educator who is tired or discouraged.

- When you feel trapped by a past mistake and want to start again, as Jerome did after his imprisonment.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Jerome Emiliani from January 31 to February 8, and read the life of Saint Jerome Emiliani.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Jerome Emiliani

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Jerome Emiliani. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on January 31: it ends on February 8, the anniversary of his death. You can also pray it at any time of the year, for an orphaned or vulnerable child, for a foster or adoptive family, or for your own conversion.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. The nine days follow Jerome's path, from the prison of Castelnuovo to his death among the sick of Somasca.

This novena can be prayed alone, as a family or with a parish group. Many people pray it for a particular child: a child who has lost a parent, a child in foster care, a young person who has run away or fallen into bad company. Others pray it for themselves, when they feel bound by an old mistake and want the courage Jerome found in his prison cell. If you work with children, as a teacher, social worker or youth leader, you can also offer it for those entrusted to you.

Day 1: A life without God

As a young nobleman and soldier, Jerome lived first for his career and his honor. God did not have much place in his life. His story reminds us that it is never too late to turn toward the Lord, whatever our past.

Prayer: Lord, show me what in my life comes before you, and give me the courage to put you first.

Today: Take five minutes this evening to look back over your day in the presence of God.

Day 2: The chains

Taken prisoner in 1511, Jerome was put in chains. In that darkness he cried out to God and to Mary. The ordeal became the place of his conversion. What looks like the end can be a beginning.

Prayer: Lord, free me from whatever binds me and that I cannot break on my own.

Today: Pray for prisoners and for their families.

Day 3: Mary who sets free

According to tradition, it was the Virgin Mary who helped him escape. He walked to Treviso and laid his chains at the feet of Our Lady as a sign of gratitude. Thanksgiving is the first fruit of grace.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, I lay before you my chains and my fears. Lead me to your Son.

Today: Pray one decade of the Rosary in thanksgiving for a grace you have received.

Day 4: Letting yourself be guided

Once converted, Jerome did not walk alone. He placed himself under the guidance of wise priests, went to confession and learned to pray. Every conversion needs companions on the road.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the humility to ask for advice and to listen.

Today: Go to confession, or set a date to do so.

Day 5: Seeing the poor

In 1528 famine and plague filled the streets of Venice with the hungry. Jerome did not look away: he sold his goods to feed them. Charity begins with the decision to see.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to those who are hungry around me.

Today: Give to a food bank or share a meal with someone in need.

Day 6: A father to orphans

He took abandoned children into his home, fed them, nursed them and taught them to pray and to work. For children who had no one, he became a father.

Prayer: Father of all, watch over children without a family and give them adults who love them.

Today: Support a charity that welcomes children or young people in difficulty.

Day 7: Educating to lift up

Jerome did not want only to rescue children: he wanted them one day to live by their own work, standing on their own feet. Education is a deep form of charity.

Prayer: Lord, bless teachers and all who help a young person find their place in the world.

Today: Encourage a young person in their studies or their search for work.

Day 8: Serving together

With his companions, he founded the Company of the Servants of the Poor. Charity grows when it is lived together, and his small company became a religious order that still serves the young today.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who serve alongside me and make us a true community.

Today: Offer your help to a parish group or a local charity.

Day 9: Giving one's life

In Somasca, in 1537, he nursed the plague victims until he too was carried off by the disease. His life ended as it had been transformed: in self-giving.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Jerome Emiliani, teach me to lay down my life for my brothers and sisters. Amen.

Today: Visit someone who is sick, or pray for nurses and caregivers.

Closing prayer

Saint Jerome Emiliani, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for orphans and abandoned children, for those who welcome them, and for all who are trying to rise again. Obtain for us the heart of a father and of a brother. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Jerome Emiliani and pray the prayer to Saint Jerome Emiliani.

PILGRIMAGE

Sanctuary of Saint Jerome Emiliani in Somasca

Somasca is a small village in Lombardy, in the municipality of Vercurago, above the shore of Lake Lecco. It was here that Saint Jerome Emiliani set up the center of his work for orphans, here that he died on February 8, 1537, and here that his remains rest. The sanctuary dedicated to him remains the spiritual heart of the Somascan Fathers and a pilgrimage site for families.

The village of the father of orphans

Jerome Emiliani arrived in Somasca in the 1530s with his companions and his orphans. The isolated, poor village offered him the quiet needed for prayer and community life. He made Somasca the anchor of the Company of the Servants of the Poor, whose members would later take the name "Somascans." It was here that he cared for the sick during the epidemic of 1537, before dying of it.



The sanctuary of Saint Jerome Emiliani in Somasca.

The sanctuary and the tomb

The sanctuary church keeps the urn containing the saint's remains, toward which pilgrims converge. Above the village, a pilgrimage path climbs to the Valletta, the little valley where Jerome liked to retreat to pray. There are several chapels, a Scala Santa that the faithful climb on their knees, and the hermitage where, according to tradition, he spent nights in prayer. Higher still stand the ruins of an old fortress, the Rocca, which overlooks the Adda valley.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Jerome Emiliani. Before his urn, entrust to him a child, a young person in difficulty, or someone trying to get back on their feet, then say the prayer to Saint Jerome Emiliani. The climb to

the Valletta can be lived as a little path of conversion, in silence. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Jerome Emiliani

- **Treviso** (Veneto): the shrine of the Madonna Grande, where he left his chains after his release.
- **Venice**: his birthplace, where he took in his first orphans during the famine of 1528.
- **Bergamo**, **Brescia**, **Como**, and **Milan**: the cities where he founded homes for orphans.

Practical information

Somasca is a few miles south of Lecco, on the road to Bergamo, and about an hour from Milan. The climb to the Valletta is on foot, along a sloping path: good shoes are useful. Opening hours for the sanctuary and Mass times vary: check the official website of the Somascan Fathers or the sanctuary before you come.

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