

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Joel the Prophet

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 19

IN BRIEF

Saint Joel the Prophet

Second of the twelve minor prophets of the Bible, known as the prophet of Pentecost.

Feast day	October 19
Era	7th century BC

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Joel, Prophet of Conversion and of the Spirit

Novena to Saint Joel the Prophet

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Joel the Prophet

Saint Joel is one of the twelve "minor prophets" of the Bible and the author of the short book that bears his name. Very little is known about his life, but two of his texts hold a unique place in Christian worship: his call to repentance, "Return to me with all your heart," read every year on Ash Wednesday, and his prophecy of the Spirit poured out on the whole people, quoted by Saint Peter on the day of Pentecost. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on October 19.

Who was Saint Joel?

His name, *Yoel* in Hebrew, means "The Lord is God." The first verse of his book introduces him as "the son of Pethuel," with no further detail. He lived in Judah and seems deeply attached to the Temple in Jerusalem. He describes its liturgy of mourning and supplication with precision: the priests weeping between the porch and the altar, the fast, and the assembly called together by the sound of the trumpet. For this reason, many scholars see him as a prophet linked to worship, perhaps a member of the priesthood of the Temple rebuilt after the Exile.

The time in which he lived is still debated. Some Jewish traditions place him in the seventh century before Christ, under King Manasseh. Most scholars today date his book to around 400 BC, because it mentions no king, alludes to the Exile and the rebuilt Temple, and has links with other later prophets. We must honestly admit that the historical figure of Joel largely escapes us: we know him through his words rather than through a biography.

Key dates

- **c. 400 BC**: Most scholars date the Book of Joel to around this time, after the return from Exile and the rebuilding of the Temple; some Jewish traditions place him earlier, under King Manasseh.
- **Joel 1**: A plague of locusts devastates Judah, and Joel calls the whole people to fasting and repentance.
- **Joel 2:12-13**: He proclaims: "Return to me with all your heart," words now read every Ash Wednesday.
- **Joel 3:1**: He announces that God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh, sons and daughters, old and young.
- **c. AD 30**: On the day of Pentecost, Saint Peter declares that Joel's prophecy is being fulfilled (Acts 2:16-21).
- **1508-1512**: Michelangelo paints Joel among the prophets on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

What we know about Joel

- **His name**: Joel, "The Lord is God," son of Pethuel (Joel 1:1).
- **His region**: the kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem, with its Temple.
- **His time**: uncertain; most often placed around 400 BC, sometimes in the seventh century BC.
- **His work**: a short book, the second of the twelve minor prophets in the Hebrew Bible.
- **In the New Testament**: quoted by Saint Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21) and by Saint Paul (Romans 10:13).
- **His commemoration**: October 19 in the Roman Martyrology.



The prophet Joel on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

The locusts and the call to conversion

The first part of the book starts from a very real disaster for a people of farmers. A plague of locusts devastates Judah, destroying the vines, the fig trees and the harvests, so that offerings can no longer be brought to the Temple. Joel reads in it a warning, the announcement of the "Day of the Lord," and he calls the whole people, from the elders to the infants at the breast, to a great fast of repentance.

Here we find his most famous words: "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. Rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful" (Joel 2:12-13). The Lord answers by promising an end to the plague and the return of abundance, and even says he will restore "the years that the locust has eaten" (Joel 2:25).

The Church has made this passage the first reading of the Mass of Ash Wednesday. Every year, as ashes are placed on the foreheads of the faithful in parishes across the world, it is Joel who opens Lent.

The prophet of Pentecost

The second part of the book, more apocalyptic in style, announces the judgment of the nations and an extraordinary promise: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." The gift of the Spirit, once reserved to a few prophets, will be given to the whole people, even to male and female servants (Joel 3:1-2, numbered 2:28-29 in many English Bibles).

On the day of Pentecost, when the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke in various languages, some onlookers took them for drunkards. Saint Peter then stood up and explained: "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." For Christians, Joel's promise is fulfilled in the Church. That is why he is often called "the prophet of Pentecost." Saint Paul also takes up one of his sayings: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Why do Christians pray with Saint Joel?

Saint Joel is not the patron of a particular place or profession. He is the saint of a conversion that touches the heart and not only appearances. Faced with disaster, he does not look for someone to blame: he calls people back to God, reminding them that the Lord is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

He is also the prophet of a wide hope: God's Spirit promised to all, young and old, men and women, the powerful and servants alike. Christians can turn to him at the start of Lent, in times of collective hardship such as natural disasters,

crop failures or famine, and when asking for a renewal of the Holy Spirit in the Church, especially in the days before Pentecost.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Joel in art

Like most prophets, Joel is usually shown holding a scroll, the sign of the word of God entrusted to him. Medieval stained glass and Eastern icons often depict him as an elderly bearded man with a scroll or a banner bearing a verse of his book. The most famous image is Michelangelo's, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome: there Joel appears as a mature man, seated and absorbed in reading a scroll. Peter Paul Rubens also painted him. Locusts and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost are scenes that recall his message.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Joel, or follow the novena to Saint Joel the prophet.

Where to pray to Saint Joel

No tomb or major shrine of the prophet Joel is known to pilgrims today. The best place to meet him is the liturgy: his words are proclaimed in every Catholic church on Ash Wednesday, and his prophecy returns in the readings of Pentecost. In Rome, his portrait by Michelangelo can be seen in the Sistine Chapel. The Eastern Churches also honor him on October 19.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Joel, Prophet of Conversion and of the Spirit

The most beautiful prayers linked to the prophet Joel are his own words, which the Church proclaims every year at the beginning of Lent and rereads in the light of Pentecost. You will find them below with their biblical references, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia to Saint Joel.

Two passages from the Book of Joel to meditate on

> *"Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. Rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."*

Source: Book of Joel, chapter 2, verses 12-13 (Saintspedia translation), read as the first reading at the Mass of Ash Wednesday.

> *"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh: your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."*

Source: Book of Joel, chapter 3, verse 1 (chapter 2, verse 28 in many English Bibles), Saintspedia translation. Saint Peter quotes it in his Pentecost sermon (Acts of the Apostles 2:16-17).



The prophet Joel.

Prayer to Saint Joel

Saint Joel, prophet of conversion, you called a whole people to return to the Lord: help me to rend my heart and not my garments, so that my repentance may be true, without show or pride.

You saw the land laid waste and the harvests lost: be close to those struck by disasters, famines and shared misfortunes. Rekindle in them the hope that God can restore "the years that the locust has eaten."

Prophet of Pentecost, you announced the Spirit poured out on all. Pray that the Church may receive that fire again, and that young and old, men and women, may become witnesses of God.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

With you I call on the name of the Lord, for everyone who calls on him will be saved. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

The Roman Martyrology commemorates the prophet Joel on October 19. His words take on special meaning on Ash Wednesday, at the threshold of Lent, and in the days leading up to Pentecost, when the Church prays for the coming of the Holy Spirit. This prayer also suits times of natural disaster, drought or crop failure, or a personal season when you want to make a fresh start with God.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Joel the Prophet

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, built on the words of the Book of Joel. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his commemoration, begin on October 10; it ends on October 18, the day before October 19. It is also well suited to the first days of Lent, starting on Ash Wednesday, or to the nine days between the Ascension and Pentecost, when the Church traditionally prays for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

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 and a Hail Mary. If you can, open your Bible and read a few verses of the Book of Joel: it has only a few short chapters. The small act proposed for each day helps the word bear fruit in your life.



The prophet Joel by Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel.

Day 1: The Lord is God

Joel's name means "The Lord is God." His whole message flows from that conviction: God is the center, the one to whom everything returns. We know almost nothing else about him, and that is fitting: the prophet steps aside so that the word may be heard.

Prayer: Lord, be the first in my life. Free me from everything that takes your place.

Today: Begin your day with a moment of silence before God, before your phone or your work.

Day 2: The land laid waste

Joel starts from a disaster: locusts devouring the vines, the fig trees and the harvest. He does not pretend that suffering is unreal. He looks at it, names it and brings it before God.

Prayer: Lord, I bring before you the victims of disasters, droughts and famines. Do not forget them.

Today: Give to a relief organization working with victims of a recent disaster.

Day 3: Gathering the people

Joel calls everyone together: elders and children, the bride and the groom, priests and people. Conversion is not only a private matter; a whole community can turn back to God together. Each of us carries the others in prayer, and the others carry us when we are weak.

Prayer: Lord, unite my parish and my family in prayer, and make us one people turned toward you.

Today: Take part in a community prayer, or invite someone to pray with you.

Day 4: Return to me with all your heart

"Return to me with all your heart." God does not ask for half measures, nor for a perfect heart before we come back. He asks for the whole heart, just as it is, wounded and divided.

Prayer: Lord, here is my heart, all of it. Turn it back toward you.

Today: Go to confession, or prepare for it with an honest examination of conscience.

Day 5: Rend your hearts, not your garments

In ancient Israel, people tore their clothes as a sign of mourning. Joel asks for something deeper: an inner change rather than an outward display. Fasting and tears have value only if the heart is touched.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from a faith of appearances. Change me from within.

Today: Do a good deed discreetly, without anyone knowing.

Day 6: Gracious and merciful

Joel reminds the people who God is: "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Conversion is possible because God is good, not because we are strong.

Prayer: Merciful Father, I trust in your goodness more than in my own efforts.

Today: Forgive someone who has hurt you, at least in your prayer.

Day 7: The years the locust has eaten

God promises to restore "the years that the locust has eaten." No time is lost forever in his hands. Wasted years, failures and regrets can be taken up into a new story.

Prayer: Lord, I give you the lost years of my life. Restore what I cannot repair.

Today: Take one small step to repair a relationship or a project you had given up on.

Day 8: The Spirit on all flesh

"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." Young and old, men and women, servants and free: no one is excluded from the gift of God. On the day of Pentecost, Saint Peter recognized that promise being fulfilled.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Today: Pray for the young people you know, that they may discover the gifts God has given them.

Day 9: Calling on the name of the Lord

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Saint Paul takes up these words of Joel to proclaim that salvation is offered to all. Calling on the name of the Lord is the simplest prayer, and it is enough.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, at the end of this novena, I call on your name and place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Joel, save me and those I love. Amen.

Today: Repeat the name of Jesus slowly and lovingly several times during the day.

Closing prayer

Saint Joel, prophet of conversion and of the Spirit, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray that I may return to the Lord with all my heart, that the Church may be renewed by the Holy Spirit, and that those struck by misfortune may find hope again. Amen.

To go further: the life of the prophet Joel and the prayer to Saint Joel.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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