BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Boste

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 24

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IN BRIEF

Saint John Boste

English priest, secret missionary in the north of England, martyred at Durham in 1594.

Feast day	July 24
Born	c. 1544, Dufton (Westmorland, England)
Died	July 24, 1594, Dryburn, near Durham (England)
Canonized	October 25, 1970, by Pope Paul VI
Era	16th century

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Boste

Saint John Boste was an English Catholic priest martyred at Durham on July 24, 1594, during the reign of Elizabeth I. A brilliant Oxford scholar who became a Catholic in 1576, he was ordained a priest at Reims and served the Catholics of northern England for twelve years, always on the run. Betrayed and tortured in London, he was executed at Dryburn, near Durham. Canonized in 1970, he is celebrated on July 24.

Who was Saint John Boste?

John Boste belonged to the group of priests trained at the English College in Reims who secretly returned to England to support the Catholics who had remained faithful to "the old faith." In the north of the country, across Westmorland, Durham and Northumberland, he became one of the priests most wanted by the authorities. His life is known through the memoirs of the martyrs gathered in the 18th century by Bishop Richard Challoner and through the records of his trial.

Key dates

- **Around 1544**: Born at Dufton, in Westmorland, into a family of well-to-do landowners.
- **1569-1572**: Studies at Queen's College, Oxford, where he becomes a fellow (a member of the teaching staff).
- **1574**: For a time he runs the school at Appleby, where he had studied himself.
- **1576**: He is received into the Catholic Church at Brome, in Suffolk.
- **1580**: He gives up his place at Oxford and goes to the English College at Reims.

- **March 4, 1581**: Ordained a priest at Reims; in April, he sets out again for England.
- **1581-1593**: He carries out his ministry in secret in the north of England, under an assumed name.
- **July 5, 1593**: Betrayed by an informer, he is arrested at Waterhouses, near Durham, in the house of William Claxton, hidden behind a fireplace.
- **1593-1594**: Taken to London, he is tortured several times without giving up a single name.
- **July 1594**: Tried at Durham, he is condemned for high treason because he is a Catholic priest.
- **July 24, 1594**: He is executed at Dryburn, just outside Durham.
- **October 25, 1970**: Canonized by Saint Paul VI, with thirty-nine other martyrs of England and Wales.

From Oxford to Reims

The son of a well-to-do Westmorland family, John Boste did brilliantly in his studies at Oxford and became a fellow of Queen's College. He first served in the Church of England. We do not know in detail the path that led him, in 1576, to enter the Catholic Church. That choice came at a price: he had to give up his academic career. In 1580, he went to the English College at Reims, founded by the future Cardinal William Allen to train priests for England. He was ordained there in 1581 and left again almost at once.

Twelve years of secret ministry

In the north of England, many families remained attached to Catholicism despite fines and threats. Boste went from house to house, under a false name, often by night, to celebrate Mass, hear confessions, baptize and bring comfort.

Several times he narrowly escaped those searching for him. The authorities considered him one of the most influential priests in the region. His ministry, carried on for more than twelve years, helped many families keep the faith.

Arrest and torture

On July 5, 1593, an informer betrayed him. Soldiers surrounded the house of William Claxton at Waterhouses, in the parish of Brancepeth, and found him in a hiding place behind the fireplace. He was taken to London, where he was put on the rack several times, the instrument of torture that pulls the limbs out of joint, to make him give the names of the families and priests who had helped him. He said nothing.

Sent back to Durham for trial, he remained firm and calm. Another accused man, George Swallowell, a former Anglican minister who had become Catholic, had denied his faith out of fear. Boste encouraged him, and Swallowell publicly repented; Boste gave him absolution in front of the court. Grace Claxton, in whose house he had been arrested, was condemned with him, then spared because she was expecting a child.

Martyrdom at Dryburn

On July 24, 1594, he was led to Dryburn, outside Durham. As he climbed the ladder of the gallows, he prayed the Angelus. Barely hanged, he was cut down while still alive and put to death with great cruelty. Other Catholics were executed in the region that same year, such as the priest John Ingram, tried with him, George Swallowell and the layman John Speed.

Veneration and iconography

John Boste is listed in the Roman Martyrology on July 24. Beatified by Pius XI on December 15, 1929, he was canonized by Saint Paul VI on October 25, 1970, together with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, who are also

honored together. He is shown as a priest, with the palm of martyrdom, sometimes with the rope or the ladder.

What can we learn from Saint John Boste?

John Boste left a brilliant career to serve hidden families at the risk of his life. Under torture, he protected those who had welcomed him. Before the court, he still found the strength to lift up a companion who had faltered. He is a model for priests, for scholars searching for the truth and for all who must stay faithful without giving up charity.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint John Boste and the novena to Saint John Boste.

Where to pray to Saint John Boste

- **Durham** (England): the city of his trial and of his martyrdom at Dryburn.
- **Brancepeth** (County Durham): the parish that includes Waterhouses, where he was arrested.
- **London**: Tyburn Convent, a shrine dedicated to the Catholic martyrs of England.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Boste for Priests and Faithfulness

Saint John Boste, an Oxford scholar who became a Catholic, was ordained a priest at Reims and secretly served the Catholics of northern England for twelve years. Betrayed and tortured, he gave up no one and died at Durham in 1594 praying the Angelus. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life; it is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him priests, families who keep the faith, and those who have faltered.

Prayer to Saint John Boste

Saint John Boste,
you left the honors of Oxford
to follow the truth you had come to know,
and you became a priest to serve your own people.

From house to house, by night and in secret,
you brought Christ to faithful families.
Under torture, you protected them by your silence.
Before the court, you lifted up your brother who had faltered.

Pray for priests,
that they may be courageous shepherds, close to their people.
Pray for families who pass on the faith,
for those who search for the truth,
and for those who denied their faith out of fear and long to return.

You climbed the gallows greeting Mary;
teach us to say yes to God as she did.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint John Boste

- On his feast day, July 24.
- For a priest, especially one who ministers in difficult conditions.
- For a student or teacher searching for the truth.
- For someone who has denied their faith and would like to come back.
- While praying the Angelus, as he did at the hour of his death.

The Angelus with Saint John Boste

Saint John Boste prayed the Angelus as he climbed the ladder of the gallows. You can pray the Angelus in the morning, at noon or in the evening, and end with these words:

> *Lord, like Mary, I want to say yes to you,*
> *in peaceful hours as in hours of trial.*
> *Saint John Boste, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint John Boste from July 16 to 24, and read the life of Saint John Boste.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Boste

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint John Boste, an English priest martyred at Durham in 1594. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, July 24, begin on July 16. It is well suited to praying for priests, for families who keep the faith and for all who are going through a trial. You can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Saint John Boste, pray for us." The act suggested for each day helps you live the novena in a concrete way.

Day 1: Seeking the truth

At Oxford, John Boste was a man of learning. His search for the truth led him, in 1576, to enter the Catholic Church. The mind can be a path to God.

Prayer: Lord, you who are the Truth, enlighten my mind. Bless students, teachers and researchers.

Today: Read a page of the Gospel or of the Catechism, taking the time to understand it.

Day 2: The price of a choice

Becoming a Catholic cost Boste his career and his safety. He left Oxford for Reims. Following Christ sometimes means giving up what the world admires.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to choose what is right, even when it costs me.

Today: Make a right decision you have been putting off for fear of what others will think.

Day 3: Becoming a priest

Ordained at Reims in 1581, Boste knew that the priesthood would most likely lead him to his death. He accepted, out of love for Christ and for the Catholics of his country.

Prayer: Lord, bless priests and seminarians. Raise up generous vocations.

Today: Thank a priest for his ministry.

Day 4: From house to house

For twelve years, Boste went from house to house to celebrate Mass and give the sacraments. He went to those who could not come to him.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to reach out to those who are isolated, sick or far away.

Today: Visit someone who can no longer get out.

Day 5: Faithful families

Families like the Claxtons welcomed priests at the risk of their lives. It was thanks to them that the faith was passed on in secret.

Prayer: Lord, bless the families who pass on the faith. Make our homes places of prayer and welcome.

Today: Pray as a family, or say grace with those who share your table.

Day 6: Betrayed

Boste was handed over by an informer. Betrayal is one of the deepest wounds. Jesus himself knew it.

Prayer: Lord, heal in me the wounds of betrayal. Give me the strength to forgive.

Today: Pray for someone who has disappointed or hurt you.

Day 7: The silence that protects

Tortured in London, Boste gave up no names. His silence saved the lives of those who had welcomed him. There are words that kill and silences that protect.

Prayer: Lord, keep my tongue from gossip. Teach me to protect the good name of others.

Today: Refuse to join in criticism or spread a rumor.

Day 8: Lifting up a brother

At his trial, Boste encouraged George Swallowell, who had denied his faith out of fear. Swallowell repented and received absolution. Even on the threshold of death, Boste remained a shepherd.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those who have faltered in their faith. Give me the words to encourage them without judging them.

Today: Encourage someone who is discouraged with a message or a visit.

Day 9: The Angelus at the foot of the gallows

On July 24, 1594, Boste climbed the ladder of the gallows praying the Angelus. Like Mary, he said yes to God to the very end.

Prayer: Lord, may my last word be a yes to your will. Through the intercession of Saint John Boste, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray the Angelus at noon, and make a habit of praying it every day.

Living the novena with Saint John Boste

This novena falls in the middle of summer, often during vacation time. It is a chance to pray for priests, whom we sometimes meet in other parishes, and to give thanks for the freedom to practice our faith. If you are worried about a loved one who has drifted away from the Church, entrust them each day to Saint John Boste: he who lifted up a fallen brother will know how to walk with them. And if you are going through a trial yourself, learn with him to pray the Angelus, Mary's yes that brings peace.

Closing prayer

> *Saint John Boste,*
> *faithful priest and martyr of Christ,*
> *you served the families of your country in secret,*
> *you protected them by your silence*
> *and you lifted up your brother who had faltered.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have carried through these nine days.*
> *Obtain for me the courage of the truth,*
> *charity toward those who fall*
> *and the peace of one who says yes to God.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint John Boste at any time, and read the life of Saint John Boste.

Credits and sources

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