

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Cantius

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: December 23

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint John Cantius

Polish priest, professor of theology at the University of Kraków, famous for his charity, patron saint of students.

Feast day	December 23
Born	c. 1390, Kęty, Poland
Died	December 24, 1473, Kraków, Poland
Canonized	July 16, 1767, by Pope Clement XIII
Era	15th century
Patron saint of	Poland, Kraków, students, teachers

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint John Cantius for Students and Teachers

Novena to Saint John Cantius

Saint Anne's Church in Kraków, Tomb of Saint John Cantius

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint John Cantius

Saint John Cantius, also called John of Kanty (in Polish, Jan Kanty), was a priest and professor of theology at the University of Kraków in the fifteenth century. Born in Kęty around 1390 and died in Kraków on Christmas Eve 1473, he joined teaching, prayer and boundless charity toward the poor throughout his life. Patron saint of Poland, of students and of teachers, he was canonized in 1767. His feast day is December 23.

Who was Saint John Cantius?

John was born around 1390 in Kęty, a small town between Kraków and Silesia, to parents named Stanislaus and Anne. The name "Cantius" is the Latin form of "of Kęty," his hometown. Poland was then living a time of growth under the Jagiellonian dynasty, after its union with Lithuania.

The University of Kraków, founded in 1364, had just been restored in 1400 thanks to Queen Saint Hedwig (Jadwiga) of Poland. John would become one of its students, then one of its most respected teachers.

What we know of him comes from the university archives, from testimonies gathered for his beatification and from edifying stories handed down by his biographers. Some episodes of his life have the features of legend, but his reputation for kindness and rigor is attested very early.

Key dates

- **c. 1390**: Born in Kęty, in the diocese of Kraków.
- **c. 1413-1418**: Studies at the University of Kraków, up to the master of arts degree.
- **1420s**: Ordained a priest; teaches at the school of the abbey of Miechów.

- **c. 1429**: Returns to Kraków to teach at the university.
- **c. 1439**: Parish priest of Olkusz for a few years, then back to teaching.
- **1440s-1450s**: Doctor and professor of theology; pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem.
- **December 24, 1473**: Dies in Kraków; buried in the university church of Saint Anne.
- **September 27, 1680**: Beatified by Pope Innocent XI.
- **July 16, 1767**: Canonized by Pope Clement XIII.

The professor of Kraków

John studied philosophy and then theology at the University of Kraków. After his ordination, he first taught at the monastic school of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre at Miechów, before returning to the university, where he taught for decades.

He copied many manuscripts by hand, several of which are still kept at the Jagiellonian Library. He lived very simply in the Collegium Maius, the building where the masters lived.

Tradition says he had two Latin lines written on the wall of his room: "Beware of wounding, for it is hard to make peace; beware of slander, for it is painful to repair." His colleagues and students admired his integrity, his humility and his refusal of all gossip.

Parish priest of Olkusz

Around 1439, he was appointed parish priest of Olkusz, a small mining town northwest of Kraków. He took his duties very seriously: he preached, visited his people and helped the poor. But the responsibility for souls weighed heavily on

him, and he felt he was not equal to it. After a few years, he obtained permission to return to the university, where he was convinced he could serve the Church better.

The charity of a scholar

John gave away almost everything he had. His biographers tell that he sometimes came home barefoot, having given away his shoes, and that his long cassock hid what he lacked. One legend, close to the story of Saint Martin, says he gave his cloak to a beggar shivering with cold.

Another story tells that he was attacked by robbers on the road to Rome and told them he had nothing left. Then, remembering a few coins sewn into his clothes, he ran after them to give them these as well. The robbers, ashamed, gave everything back.

He made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and went several times to Rome on foot. He led an austere life: he slept little, gave up meat and spent long hours in prayer, especially before the Passion of Christ. He died on December 24, 1473, at over eighty years of age. His body was laid in the church of Saint Anne, the university church, and his tomb at once became a place of pilgrimage.

Why is Saint John Cantius the patron saint of students?

John spent most of his life at the university, as a student and then as a teacher, and never separated study from prayer and from service to the poor. For this reason he is the patron saint of students, teachers and Polish universities, and one of the patrons of Poland and of Kraków. Many young Poles entrust their exams to him. He is also invoked by those who want to learn not to wound others with their words.

Polish immigrants carried his devotion to North America. In Chicago, the church of Saint John Cantius, built by Polish Catholics, is today known for its beautiful liturgy and sacred music.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint John Cantius in art

Saint John Cantius is shown as a priest and professor, wearing the academic gown and a biretta. He is often depicted giving his cloak to a poor man, in memory of his charity, or with a book, the sign of his teaching.

Where to pray to Saint John Cantius

- **Kraków**: Saint Anne's Church, the church of the Jagiellonian University, a masterpiece of Polish Baroque rebuilt between about 1689 and 1703 after his beatification. His mausoleum, by the stucco artist Baldassare Fontana, shows his sarcophagus carried by four allegorical figures representing the faculties of the old university: theology, philosophy, law and medicine. The Collegium Maius, where he lived and taught, is a few steps away.
- **Kęty**: his hometown, about fifty kilometers southwest of Kraków, where a church is dedicated to him.
- **Olkusz**: the basilica of Saint Andrew, the church where he was parish priest.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint John Cantius or the novena to Saint John Cantius.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Cantius for Students and Teachers

To pray with Saint John Cantius, Saintspedia offers the collect of his Mass on December 23, the maxim that tradition says he had written on the wall of his room, and an original prayer for students and teachers.

The collect of the Mass of Saint John Cantius

This prayer, called the "collect," is said at the beginning of the Mass of his memorial on December 23 in the Roman Missal. Translation from the Latin by Saintspedia.

> *Grant, we pray, almighty God, that following the example of Saint John, priest, we may advance in the knowledge of the saints and, by showing mercy to all, obtain forgiveness from you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Source: Roman Missal, memorial of Saint John of Kanty, priest (December 23), collect ("Da, quaesumus, omnipotens Deus, ut, sancti Ioannis presbyteri exemplo...").

A maxim to meditate on

> *"Beware of wounding, for it is hard to make peace; beware of slander, for it is painful to repair."*

Source: Latin verses ("Conturbare cave, non est placare suave; infamare cave, nam revocare grave") that tradition says Saint John Cantius had written on the wall of his room at the University of Kraków. Translation by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint John Cantius for Students and Teachers

Saint John Cantius, teacher of Kraków,
you loved study without ever forgetting the poor.
Bless students, teachers and researchers:
give them a love of truth and patience in their work.

You guarded your tongue from all slander:
teach me to speak with kindness
and never to harm the good name of others.

You gave your cloak and your shoes to those who were cold:
open my eyes and my hands to the needs of those around me.

I entrust to you those preparing for an exam,
those who doubt their abilities,
and my own intention: (name it in silence).

Watch over Poland and over all universities,
and make our knowledge become service and charity. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia and may be freely used for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

- On December 23, his feast day, on the threshold of Christmas; he died on Christmas Eve 1473.
- Before an exam, a test or a thesis defense.

- At the start of a school or university year.
- When you are tempted to criticize or gossip about others.
- For teachers, professors and all who work in schools and universities.

To know him better, read the life of Saint John Cantius or pray the novena to Saint John Cantius, from December 15 to December 23.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Cantius

This novena to Saint John Cantius is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the Polish priest and professor who loved learning, refused all gossip, gave away his cloak and his shoes, and walked as a pilgrim to Rome and Jerusalem. To end on December 23, his feast day, begin it on December 15: it then accompanies the last days of Advent. You can also pray it before exams, at the start of a school year or at any time you need his help.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act proposed for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: A child of Kęty

John was born around 1390 in the small town of Kęty, to Stanislaus and Anne. From a modest place, God led him to the great university of Kraków. No beginning is too small for God's plans, and the faith received at home can bear fruit far away.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, help me to trust that God has a plan for my life, wherever I come from. Amen.

Today: Thank God for your parents and for the place where you grew up.

Day 2: The joy of study

John studied philosophy and theology at Kraków, a university just restored by Queen Hedwig. For him, study was a way to seek the truth, and therefore to seek God.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, pray for all students, that they may work with joy, perseverance and honesty. Amen.

Today: Offer your work or study of the day to God before you begin.

Day 3: A patient teacher

For decades, John taught at Miechów and then at the university. He copied many manuscripts by hand. His students admired his rigor and his humility.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, bless teachers and professors, and give them patience and love for their students. Amen.

Today: Thank a teacher who has helped you, or pray for them by name.

Day 4: Guarding the tongue

On the wall of his room, John wrote: "Beware of wounding, for it is hard to make peace; beware of slander, for it is painful to repair." He refused all gossip. A word can heal or wound; once spoken, it is hard to take back.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, help me to guard my tongue and to speak well of others. Amen.

Today: Do not say anything negative about anyone all day, and say something good about someone.

Day 5: Feeling unequal to the task

As parish priest of Olkusz, John felt the weight of responsibility for souls and thought he was not equal to it. He humbly returned to the work where he could serve better.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, when I feel overwhelmed, help me to know my limits with humility and to find my true place. Amen.

Today: Entrust to God a responsibility that weighs on you.

Day 6: The cloak and the shoes

John gave away almost everything. His biographers say he came home barefoot, having given away his shoes, and that he gave his cloak to a beggar shivering with cold.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, open my heart to the poor, and teach me to give, not only from my surplus. Amen.

Today: Give warm clothing or a meal to someone in need, or to a charity that helps the homeless.

Day 7: Honest to the end

Robbed on the road to Rome, John told the robbers he had nothing left. Then he remembered a few coins sewn into his clothes and ran to give them as well. Ashamed, the robbers returned everything.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, make me truthful in small things as in great ones. Amen.

Today: Correct a small lie or an exaggeration you have told.

Day 8: A pilgrim on foot

John went to Jerusalem and several times to Rome, on foot. He spent long hours in prayer before the Passion of Christ. His whole life was a journey toward God, and every step, even a tired one, brought him closer to the Lord he loved.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, help me to keep my eyes fixed on Christ crucified and risen, all along the road of my life. Amen.

Today: Spend a few minutes in prayer before a crucifix.

Day 9: On the eve of Christmas

John died on December 24, 1473, on the eve of the Nativity, at over eighty years of age. Students and professors still come to pray at his tomb in Saint Anne's Church in Kraków. He who had given so much went to meet the Child of Bethlehem, who gave himself entirely.

Prayer: Saint John Cantius, prepare my heart to welcome Christ at Christmas, and pray for Poland, for its young people and for all universities. Amen.

Today: Prepare a gift for someone who will be alone at Christmas.

Closing prayer

> *Almighty God, you gave Saint John Cantius the grace to unite learning and love of the poor. Through his prayers, help us to grow in the knowledge of the saints, to guard our words, and to show mercy to all. Bless students and teachers, and grant us the grace we ask in this novena, if it is according to your will. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read the life of Saint John Cantius or pray the prayer to Saint John Cantius.

PILGRIMAGE

Saint Anne's Church in Kraków, Tomb of Saint John Cantius

In the heart of Kraków's Old Town, a few steps from the Collegium Maius, Saint Anne's Church is the church of the Jagiellonian University. A masterpiece of Polish Baroque, it houses the tomb of Saint John Cantius, a professor at this university in the 15th century, patron of students and one of the patrons of Poland.

The university church

A church of Saint Anne already stood on this site in the Middle Ages, and it was attached to the university in the 15th century. John Cantius was buried here after his death on December 24, 1473. His tomb quickly drew pilgrims. At the end of the 17th century, after his beatification in 1680, the university had the church rebuilt in the Baroque style, to plans by the architect Tylman van Gameren, between about 1689 and 1703, to give the future saint a worthy setting.



Saint Anne's Church in Kraków.

The tomb of Saint John Cantius

In the transept, the saint's mausoleum is one of the church's masterpieces. Made by the stuccoist Baldassare Fontana, it shows a sarcophagus carried by four allegorical figures representing the faculties of the old university: theology, philosophy, law and medicine. The walls and vaults of the church are covered with white stucco and Baroque paintings, creating a bright and solemn atmosphere.

A living church

Saint Anne's remains a university church today, where students and professors come to pray. Many young Poles entrust their exams to Saint John Cantius here. The young Karol Wojtyła, the future John Paul II, a student at the Jagiellonian University before the war, also frequented this university district.



The Baroque interior of Saint Anne's in Kraków.

Praying at Saint Anne's

Before you come, you can reread the life of Saint John Cantius. At his tomb, a time of silence lets you entrust to him your studies, an exam, or someone who teaches. The prayer to Saint John Cantius can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint John Cantius

- **The Collegium Maius**, very close by, the oldest building of the university, where he lived and taught.
- **Kęty**, his native town, about thirty miles southwest of Kraków.
- **Olkusz**, where he was a parish priest.

Practical information

Saint Anne's Church is on Saint Anne Street (ulica św. Anny), in Kraków's Old Town, a few minutes' walk from the Main Market Square. It is reachable on foot from anywhere in the historic center. Since it is a parish and university church, check Mass and opening times before you come, especially around December 23.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: Unknown author, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Anne's Church in Kraków.: Image: Unknown author, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The Baroque interior of Saint Anne's in Kraków.: Image: Ondraness, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com