BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Chrysostom

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: September 13

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IN BRIEF

Saint John Chrysostom

Priest of Antioch and Archbishop of Constantinople, great preacher who died in exile in 407, Father and Doctor of the Church.

Feast day	September 13
Born	between 344 and 349, Antioch (today Antakya, Turkey)
Died	September 14, 407, near Comana, in Pontus (present-day Turkey)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	5th century
Patron saint of	preachers, orators

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint John Chrysostom for Those Who Proclaim the Gospel

Novena to Saint John Chrysostom

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Chrysostom

Saint John Chrysostom was born in Antioch, in Syria, around the middle of the 4th century, and died in exile in 407, near Comana in Pontus. A priest of Antioch and then Archbishop of Constantinople, he was the greatest preacher of Christian antiquity: his Greek surname, Chrysostom, means "golden mouth". A Father and Doctor of the Church, he is celebrated by the Catholic Church on September 13.

Who was Saint John Chrysostom?

John was a child of Antioch, one of the great cities of the Roman East. Trained in rhetoric, drawn for a time to the law courts and the theater, he turned fully to Christ by receiving baptism, then sought God in monastic life. Ordained a priest, he became for twelve years the voice of the Church of Antioch, before being chosen in 397 for the see of Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Empire. A demanding bishop and a friend of the poor, he denounced without restraint the luxury of the powerful and the lukewarmness of the clergy. This freedom earned him two condemnations and an exile in which he died exhausted. His homilies on Scripture, preserved in thousands of pages, are one of the treasures of Christian tradition. The Churches of the East and the Catholic Church venerate him together.

Key dates in the life of John Chrysostom

- **Between 344 and 349**: Born in Antioch into a Christian family; his father, Secundus, an officer, dies early and his mother Anthusa raises him alone.
- **c. 369-372**: He receives baptism after meeting Bishop Meletius, and studies Scripture under Diodore of Tarsus.

- **c. 374-380**: He lives as a monk, first in a community, then as a hermit in the mountains near Antioch.
- **Winter 380-381**: He is ordained a deacon by Meletius.
- **386**: Bishop Flavian ordains him a priest; he becomes the official preacher of Antioch.
- **387**: After the riot against the emperor's statues, he delivers the homilies On the Statues.
- **397-398**: He is chosen as Archbishop of Constantinople.
- **403**: The Synod of the Oak, near Chalcedon, deposes him; he is exiled, then recalled almost at once.
- **404**: A new condemnation and exile to Cucusus, in Armenia; Pope Innocent I supports him.
- **September 14, 407**: He dies near Comana, on the road to a more distant exile, saying: "Glory to God for all things."

From rhetoric to the desert

John grew up with his mother, Anthusa, widowed very young. He received a solid Greek education and learned the art of speaking; some ancient authors name the famous rhetorician Libanius as his teacher, though this is not certain. He later admitted that he had loved the pleasures of the world, the theater and the contests of the courtroom. Around the age of twenty-four, the reading of Scripture took hold of him. He asked for baptism, became a lector and followed the teaching of Diodore of Tarsus, master of the school of Antioch, who was attached to the literal sense of the Bible. The Gospels, especially Matthew, and the letters of Saint Paul would be his books for the rest of his life.

He wanted to go to the desert, but first stayed so as not to grieve his mother, and lived as an ascetic in his own house. After Anthusa's death, he joined a community of monks, then lived alone in a cave. These years of fasting and

vigils ruined his health and forced him to return to the city around 380. He kept from them a conviction: holiness is not reserved for monks, and it is in the heart of the city that Christians must live the Gospel.

The preacher of Antioch

Ordained a priest in 386, John preached almost every day in the churches of Antioch. In 387, a revolt against a new tax turned into a riot: the crowd threw down the statues of Emperor Theodosius and his family. The city trembled before the emperor's revenge, while Bishop Flavian set out to beg for pardon in Constantinople. During that Lent of anguish, John sustained the people with a famous series of sermons, the homilies On the Statues. He then commented, book after book, on Genesis, the Psalms, the Gospels and the letters of Paul. His listeners took notes and sometimes applauded, and he corrected them with humor. In his treatise On the Priesthood, he describes the word as the remedy of the physician of souls.

Archbishop of Constantinople

When Archbishop Nectarius died, Emperor Arcadius brought John to Constantinople, where he was consecrated at the beginning of 398. He preached seated on the ambo, in the middle of the crowd. He reformed the clergy, deposed bishops he judged unworthy, sent wandering monks back to their monasteries and cut the expenses of his household to support hospitals and the poor. He ate alone and frugally, which some held against him. His sermons against greed and the luxury of the great, without sparing Empress Eudoxia, earned him powerful enemies. His very harsh words against the Jews, in the polemical language of his time, are also recognized today as a painful part of his legacy.

In 403, Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, gathered a synod against him at the villa of the Oak, near Chalcedon. John was deposed and driven out, then recalled after a few days, because the people were angry and the empress saw an accident as a warning from heaven. Peace did not last. At Easter 404, soldiers burst into the baptistery where he was about to baptize the catechumens. He was exiled to Cucusus, on the borders of Armenia. Pope Innocent I refused to recognize his deposition and wrote to comfort him.

Exile and death

From Cucusus, John wrote many letters; 238 have come down to us, 17 of them addressed to Saint Olympias, deaconess of Constantinople and his faithful friend. In them he consoles, encourages missions and worries about the Isaurian brigands who made the roads dangerous. Because visitors flocked to him, the emperor ordered in 407 that he be sent farther away, to Pityus, on the Black Sea. He was forced to walk under the burning sun. Ill, he died on the way, near Comana, on September 14, 407. His last words repeated the prayer he often said: "Glory to God for all things. Amen."

Cult, relics and iconography

In 438, Emperor Theodosius II had his body brought back to Constantinople, to the Church of the Holy Apostles. During the Fourth Crusade, in 1204, his relics were carried to the West and then venerated in Rome, in St. Peter's Basilica. In 2004, Pope John Paul II gave a large part of them to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, as a sign of reconciliation between Catholics and Orthodox. Counted among the great Doctors of the Eastern Church, he is traditionally invoked as patron of preachers. His feast, set on September 13 in the Roman calendar, comes the day before his death, which is the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The Eastern Churches celebrate him on November 13 and, with Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, on

January 30. The most widely celebrated liturgy of the East bears his name. He is depicted as an Eastern bishop, Gospel in hand, with a thin face and a high forehead.

What can we learn from Saint John Chrysostom?

John Chrysostom put all his eloquence at the service of the Word of God. He forcefully reminded Christians that Christ is met in the Eucharist and also in the poor man at the door. He paid with his life for his freedom of speech before the powerful. We can pray to him for preachers and catechists, for those who suffer injustice or exile, and to learn to say in times of trial: "Glory to God for all things."

Where to pray to Saint John Chrysostom

- **St. Peter's Basilica** (Rome): his relics were venerated there for centuries, in the Choir Chapel.
- **Church of St. George at the Phanar** (Istanbul): seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, where the relics returned by Rome have been kept since 2004.
- In any church, by listening to the Word of God or reading one of his homilies.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Chrysostom for Those Who Proclaim the Gospel

Saint John Chrysostom, a priest of Antioch and then Archbishop of Constantinople, devoted his life to proclaiming the Word of God and defending the poor, until he died in exile in 407. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him those who proclaim the Gospel, those who suffer injustice and all who seek to give thanks in the midst of trials.

Prayer to Saint John Chrysostom

Saint John Chrysostom,
you whom people called "golden mouth",
you put your eloquence at the service of the Word
and fed the people of God with the Scriptures.
Open my heart to the Gospel,
so that I may hear it and put it into practice.

You recognized Christ in the poor man at the door
as in the bread of the altar.
Teach me not to separate prayer and charity,
to share what I have received
and not to close my eyes to those who are hungry.

Driven from your Church and sent into exile,
you kept your peace and your trust.
Sustain those who suffer for the truth,
exiles, the slandered, prisoners.
Give priests and catechists a word that is just and courageous,
and teach me to say with you, in all things:
"Glory to God for all things."
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint John Chrysostom

- On his feast day, September 13, or on September 14, the anniversary of his death.
- Before preaching, teaching catechism or speaking in public.
- For bishops and priests, that they may serve with courage and simplicity.
- When you are the victim of an injustice, a slander or a forced separation.

- To learn to share with the poor and to live more simply.

An invocation for every trial

These are the last words that tradition attributes to Saint John Chrysostom. You can repeat them in joy as in sorrow:

> *Glory to God for all things. Amen.*
> *Saint John Chrysostom, pray for us.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint John Chrysostom from September 5 to 13, and read the life of Saint John Chrysostom.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Chrysostom

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It follows the main stages in the life of Saint John Chrysostom, preacher of Antioch, Archbishop of Constantinople and Doctor of the Church. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, September 13, begin on September 5. You can also pray it at any other time of the year, especially for someone who suffers injustice or for those who proclaim the Gospel.

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 Chrysostom, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. If you can, also read a short passage from the Gospel of Saint Matthew or from a letter of Saint Paul, the texts he loved most.

Day 1: A mother who passes on the faith

John lost his father very young. His mother, Anthusa, widowed early in life, raised him alone. From her he received the faith and a taste for effort.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the mothers and fathers who pass on the faith in loneliness or hardship. Support parents who raise their children alone.

Act of the day: Pray for a single-parent family you know, or do them a practical service.

Day 2: Converted by the Word

A brilliant student of rhetoric, John loved the theater and court pleadings. But the reading of Scripture overwhelmed him. Around the age of twenty-four, he asked for baptism and decided to live for Christ.

Prayer: Lord, may your Word touch my heart and convert me. Grant that I may prefer your Gospel to all the speeches of the world.

Act of the day: Slowly read a chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

Day 3: The silence of the desert

John lived for several years as a monk, then as a hermit in the mountains of Antioch. There he discovered that the hardest thing is not manual labor, but bearing with oneself and acknowledging one's weaknesses.

Prayer: Lord, teach me inner silence. Grant that I may look at my weaknesses truthfully and abandon myself to your mercy.

Act of the day: Take ten minutes of silence, without screens, to be alone before God.

Day 4: Holiness in the heart of the city

Back in Antioch, John wished that the goodness of Christians in the cities might be such that no one would need to flee to the desert any more. Holiness is also lived in the midst of work, family and neighbors.

Prayer: Lord, make me a witness of your love where I live. May my home and my workplace become places of the Gospel.

Act of the day: Do a discreet act of kindness for a neighbor or a colleague.

Day 5: Comforting a city in anguish

In 387, Antioch feared the emperor's anger after the riot against his statues. Throughout a whole Lent, John preached to reassure the people and call them to conversion. His word became a refuge.

Prayer: Lord, come to the aid of cities and countries that are afraid. Give your Church shepherds who comfort and enlighten.

Act of the day: Call or visit a worried person, and take the time to listen.

Day 6: Christ in the poor

John repeated that whoever honors the body of Christ at the altar must also honor it in the poor who are cold and hungry. As archbishop, he cut the expenses of his household to support hospitals and the needy.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open my eyes to recognize you in those who need me. Free me from greed and from the taste for what is superfluous.

Act of the day: Give to a charity what you would have spent on a needless pleasure.

Day 7: A free word before the powerful

In Constantinople, John denounced the luxury of the court and the injustice done to widows. He knew this freedom would cost him dearly. He preferred the truth to the favor of the great.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the courage to speak the truth with charity, even when it disturbs. Keep me from flattery and from fear.

Act of the day: Stand up for an absent person who is being spoken ill of.

Day 8: Exile and faithfulness

Unjustly deposed, John was sent into exile at Cucusus. He never stopped writing to his friends, especially to Saint Olympias, to encourage them. Pope Innocent I remained faithful to him.

Prayer: Lord, sustain exiles, refugees and those who suffer an unjust condemnation. Make us faithful friends in times of trial.

Act of the day: Write a message of support to someone far away or isolated.

Day 9: "Glory to God for all things"

Exhausted by a forced march, John died near Comana on September 14, 407. His last words were an act of thanksgiving: "Glory to God for all things." They sum up his whole life.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to give you thanks in every circumstance. Through the intercession of Saint John Chrysostom, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Write a list of ten reasons to thank God, and take part in Mass if you can.

Living the novena with Saint John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom was not only an admired orator. He lived what he preached: simplicity, sharing, faithfulness to the truth. During these nine days, you can carry in your prayer priests and catechists, the poor of your town, exiles and all who suffer for having spoken the truth. His feast, on September 13, falls on the eve of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: it is also a chance to look at the cross as the place where God's love triumphed.

Concluding prayer

Saint John Chrysostom,
preacher of the Word and friend of the poor,
you loved Christ even unto exile.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Give me a heart that listens,
hands that share
and lips that give thanks in all things.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Credits and sources

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