

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Jones

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 12

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IN BRIEF

Saint John Jones

Welsh priest who became a Franciscan, martyred in London in 1598, one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

Feast day	July 12
Born	c. 1530, Clynnog Fawr (Gwynedd, Wales)
Died	July 12, 1598, Southwark (London)
Canonized	beatified in 1929 by Pius XI, canonized on October 25, 1970, by Paul VI
Era	16th century

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint John Jones

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Jones

Saint John Jones was a Welsh Catholic priest, born around 1530 at Clynnog Fawr, in North Wales. Ordained on the continent, he came back secretly to minister in England, joined the Franciscans at sixty, and was then arrested, tortured and executed at Southwark, in London, on July 12, 1598, during the reign of Elizabeth I. Canonized in 1970 among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, he is celebrated on July 12.

Who was Saint John Jones?

John Jones was born into a Welsh family that stayed faithful to the Catholic Church at the time when England and Wales were turning Anglican. Under Elizabeth I, being a Catholic priest ordained abroad and returning to the kingdom was a crime of high treason. Like many priests of his time, he therefore lived in hiding, changed names and was constantly on the move. He is also known as Robert Buckley, John Griffith or Griffith Jones, and, in religious life, as Brother Godfrey Maurice. The sources on his life, mainly accounts of the martyrs gathered after his death, leave some dates uncertain.

Key dates

- **Around 1530**: Born at Clynnog Fawr, in Caernarfonshire, Wales.
- **1580s**: After studies on the continent, he is a priest and returns secretly to England under the name Robert Buckley; he ministers mostly in London.
- **1585**: Arrested, he is imprisoned in the Marshalsea, in London.
- **Summer 1586**: Released on bail, he is later confined at Wisbech Castle.
- **1590**: Back in France, he joins the Conventual Franciscans at Pontoise, at about sixty years old.

- **After 1590**: He lives at the friary of Ara Coeli, in Rome, then obtains his superiors' permission to go back on mission.
- **1592**: He returns to London, in disguise and under a false name, and ministers in hiding for four years.
- **1596**: He is captured; he will spend nearly two years in prison and be tortured there.
- **July 3, 1598**: Tried and condemned for high treason because he is a priest ordained by the authority of Rome.
- **July 12, 1598**: He is hanged and quartered at Southwark.
- **1929**: Beatified by Pope Pius XI.
- **October 25, 1970**: Canonized by Pope Paul VI, with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

A priest in hiding

In the England of Elizabeth I, the Catholic Mass was forbidden. Families who remained faithful to Rome secretly sheltered priests trained in the seminaries of the continent, such as the one at Reims. John Jones was one of those priests. Back in England under a false name, he celebrated Mass, heard confessions and supported the Catholics of London, knowing that he was risking his life.

In 1585, he was discovered and locked up in the Marshalsea, one of the prisons of London. Released on bail the following year, he was then held at Wisbech Castle, where many Catholic priests were detained. He eventually made his way back to France, having escaped or been exiled depending on the sources.

A Franciscan at sixty

In 1590, at about sixty years old, John Jones joined the Conventual Franciscans at Pontoise. He took the name Brother Godfrey Maurice. He then lived at the Franciscan friary of Ara Coeli, on the Capitoline Hill, in Rome. He

could have stayed there in safety. But he asked to go back to England, and his superiors eventually agreed.

In 1592, he returned to London in disguise. For four years, he traveled a great deal and lived in hiding, serving Catholics. He was arrested in 1596 and spent nearly two years in prison, where he was tortured. There he shared captivity with John Rigby, a Catholic layman who would also be executed for his faith, in 1600, and canonized with him.

Trial and martyrdom

On July 3, 1598, he was tried for being a priest ordained abroad by the authority of Rome and returning to England against the law. He was found guilty of high treason and sentenced to the punishment reserved for traitors: to be dragged on a hurdle to the gallows, hanged and quartered. The sentence was carried out on July 12, 1598, at Southwark, south of the Thames. Accounts of his martyrdom say that he used a delay in the preparations to speak to the crowd and declare that he was dying for his Catholic faith.

Veneration and iconography

Declared venerable under Leo XIII, John Jones was beatified by Pius XI in 1929, then canonized by Paul VI on October 25, 1970, with thirty-nine other martyrs of England and Wales, priests, religious and lay people who died between 1535 and 1679. He is celebrated on July 12, the day of his death, and honored with his companions on October 25 in Wales and on May 4 in England. He is shown in a Franciscan habit, with the palm of martyrdom.

What can we learn from Saint John Jones?

John Jones lived his faith in fear and secrecy, but he did not give it up. He knew prison and exile, and then began a new religious life at an age when others retire. And he chose to go back to where he was in danger, because Catholics

needed priests. He reminds us that it is never too late to give ourselves, and that faithfulness to Christ can cost us our lives. You can pray to him for Christians persecuted today, for priests who minister in difficult conditions and for Christian unity.

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

Where to pray to Saint John Jones

- **Clynnog Fawr** (Gwynedd, Wales): his home village.
- **London**: Southwark, south of the Thames, where he was executed, and the churches that honor the martyrs of England and Wales.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli, on the Capitoline Hill, linked to the Franciscan friary where he lived.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Jones for Persecuted Christians

Saint John Jones, a Welsh priest who became a Franciscan at sixty, chose to go back to England to serve persecuted Catholics. Arrested and tortured, he was executed in London on July 12, 1598. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life; it is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him persecuted Christians, priests and our own faithfulness.

Prayer to Saint John Jones

Saint John Jones,
son of Wales and priest of Christ,
you celebrated Mass in secret
and brought the sacraments to those who hungered for them,
at the risk of your life.

You knew prison and exile,
and at sixty you put on the habit of Saint Francis.
When you could have lived in peace in Rome,
you asked to go back to those who needed you.
Teach me that it is never too late to give myself.

Pray for Christians persecuted today,
for priests who serve in hiding,
and for those who suffer because of their faith.
Give me a little of your courage
to stay faithful to Christ in small trials and great ones.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint John Jones

- On his feast day, July 12.
- For persecuted Christians and for those imprisoned because of their faith.
- For priests, especially those who minister in danger.
- When you hesitate to start something new because of your age.
- For Wales, for England and for Christian unity.

An invocation for the persecuted

You can simply say:

> *Lord, uphold those who suffer for your name,*
> *and give them peace in the midst of trial.*
> *Saint John Jones, pray for them. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint John Jones from July 4 to 12, and read the life of Saint John Jones.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Jones

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint John Jones, Welsh priest and Franciscan, martyred in London on July 12, 1598. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, July 12, begin on July 4. You can also pray it at any time of the year, especially for persecuted Christians.

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 Jones, pray for us." The act suggested for each day helps you live the novena in a concrete way.

Day 1: A faithful family

John Jones was born around 1530 in Wales, into a family that stayed Catholic while the country was changing religion. He first received his faith from his own people.

Prayer: Lord, bless the families who pass on the faith in difficult conditions. Thank you for those who passed it on to me.

Today: Pray for your family, living and departed.

Day 2: The call to the priesthood

He became a priest at a time when being a Catholic priest in England was a crime. Even so, he answered God's call.

Prayer: Lord, send priests to your Church, and give them the courage to follow you to the end.

Today: Pray for a priest you know, or thank him.

Day 3: Mass in secret

Back in England under a false name, he celebrated Mass in hiding for the Catholics of London. For him, the Eucharist was worth every risk.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, never let me take for granted the Mass I can celebrate freely.

Today: Go to a weekday Mass, or spend some time in adoration.

Day 4: Prison

In 1585, he was arrested and imprisoned in the Marshalsea. He knew humiliation and uncertainty.

Prayer: Lord, remember prisoners, those who are locked up unjustly and those who are paying for their wrongs. Visit them with your grace.

Today: Pray for prisoners, or support a prison ministry.

Day 5: Starting over at sixty

In 1590, at about sixty, he joined the Franciscans. He began a new life at an age when many people slow down.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from thinking it is too late. Give me a young heart to follow you today.

Today: Start a good resolution you have been putting off for a long time.

Day 6: Choosing to go back

In Rome, at the friary of Ara Coeli, he was safe. Yet he asked to return to England, where Catholics had no priests.

Prayer: Lord, help me to prefer serving others to my own peace and quiet.

Today: Step out of your comfort zone to do a favor that costs you something.

Day 7: Living in hiding

For four years, he traveled in disguise, changed names and lived in the shadows. His ministry was humble and hidden, but it kept the faith alive.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to do good without seeking to be seen, under your gaze alone.

Today: Do a good deed in secret.

Day 8: Torture and faithfulness

Arrested in 1596, he spent nearly two years in prison and was tortured. He shared his captivity with John Rigby, who would also die for his faith.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen those who are tortured today because of their faith. Help me to be faithful in small trials.

Today: Learn about a country where Christians are persecuted, and pray for them.

Day 9: Witness to the end

On July 12, 1598, he was executed at Southwark. He died proclaiming his Catholic faith, like so many other martyrs of his time.

Prayer: Lord, give me a heart that is faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint John Jones, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: If you can, go to Mass and pray for all the martyrs of today.

Living the novena with Saint John Jones

The martyrs of England and Wales lived at a time when people fought one another in the name of faith. Praying to Saint John Jones does not mean reviving those divisions, but giving thanks for his courage and praying for Christian unity. During these nine days, you can carry in prayer persecuted Christians around the world, prisoners, and priests who minister in danger.

Closing prayer

Saint John Jones,
priest, Franciscan and martyr,
you served Christ in hiding
and gave your life for him.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Obtain for me courage in the faith,
generosity in service
and peace in times of trial.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Credits and sources

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