

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Leonardi

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint John Leonardi

Tuscan priest and former pharmacist, founder of the Clerics Regular of the Mother of God and patron saint of pharmacists.

Feast day	October 9
Born	1541, Diecimo, Tuscany, Italy
Died	October 9, 1609, Rome, Italy
Canonized	1938, by Pope Pius XI
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	pharmacists

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint John Leonardi

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Leonardi

Saint John Leonardi was a sixteenth-century Tuscan priest, a former pharmacist who became one of the builders of the Catholic Reformation in Italy. He founded the Clerics Regular of the Mother of God in Lucca, reformed religious communities at the request of the popes, and helped prepare the missionary college of Propaganda Fide. He died in Rome in 1609 while nursing his sick brothers, was canonized in 1938, and was proclaimed patron saint of pharmacists by Pope Benedict XVI. His feast day is October 9.

Who was Saint John Leonardi?

Giovanni Leonardi was born in 1541 in Diecimo, a village of the small Republic of Lucca, in Tuscany, into a family of modest landowners. As a young man he went to Lucca to train as a pharmacist, a trade he practiced for about ten years. There he joined a group of young lay people, guided by a Dominican friar, who wanted to live the Gospel radically. Little by little, he understood that God was calling him to the priesthood.

He lived in the years just after the Council of Trent, when the Church was working to renew parish life, the formation of the faithful and religious life. Like Saint Charles Borromeo in Milan or Saint Philip Neri in Rome, who was his friend, John Leonardi was one of the agents of this renewal.

Key dates in the life of John Leonardi

- **1541**: Born in Diecimo, in the Republic of Lucca.
- **Youth**: Trains and works as a pharmacist in Lucca.
- **1567**: Leaves pharmacy to study theology.
- **1572**: Ordained a priest.

- **September 1, 1574**: Beginning of his community of reformed priests, the future Clerics Regular of the Mother of God.
- **1580s-1590s**: Facing hostility from the authorities of Lucca, he has to leave his city.
- **1601**: His community receives the church of Santa Maria in Portico in Rome, today Santa Maria in Campitelli.
- **Early seventeenth century**: With the Spaniard Juan Bautista Vives, he lays the groundwork for the missionary seminary of Propaganda Fide.
- **October 9, 1609**: Dies in Rome during an epidemic.
- **1861**: Beatified; **1938**: canonized by Pope Pius XI.
- **August 8, 2006**: Pope Benedict XVI proclaims him patron saint of pharmacists.

From pharmacist to priest

During his years as a pharmacist, John Leonardi learned to prepare remedies, to know medicinal plants and to serve the sick. From this trade he kept a love of precision and attention to people. In a 2009 catechesis, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out the link: the man who had cared for bodies became a physician of souls. In 1567 he left the pharmacy to study theology, and he was ordained a priest in 1572.

The catechist of Lucca

As a young priest, he devoted himself to the Christian formation of the children and young people of his parish. He founded a Company of Christian Doctrine to bring the teaching of the Council of Trent into ordinary parish life through the catechism. Companions joined him, and on September 1, 1574, a community of reformed priests was born, which would become the Clerics Regular of the Mother of God. They spread devotion to the Virgin Mary, the Forty Hours adoration and frequent Communion.

His reforming zeal earned him the hostility of some leading citizens of Lucca, and he had to leave his native city. He found support, on the other hand, from the popes, especially Clement VIII.

In the service of the popes

In Rome, Pope Clement VIII, who valued his firmness and discernment, entrusted him with delicate missions, such as reforming religious communities in difficulty, notably the Benedictine congregation of Montevergine. John Leonardi also managed the donations for building the shrine of the Madonna dell'Arco, near Naples. In 1601 his clerics received the church of Santa Maria in Portico, where they revived devotion around an ancient icon of the Virgin.

He also cared deeply about the missions. With the Spanish priest Juan Bautista Vives, he planned a college to train priests for the evangelization of distant peoples. After his death, this project prepared the way for the founding of the Congregation and College of Propaganda Fide, responsible for the missions of the Church.

Death in the service of his brothers

In 1609 an influenza epidemic struck Rome. John Leonardi nursed his sick brothers, caught the disease and died on October 9. He left two houses, in Lucca and in Rome; his congregation was approved in 1614. Beatified in 1861 and canonized in 1938, he rests in the church of Santa Maria in Campitelli.

Why is Saint John Leonardi the patron saint of pharmacists?

On August 8, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed him patron saint of pharmacists. The choice recalls the ten years he spent preparing remedies in Lucca before becoming a priest. He brought to the Church the qualities of a good pharmacist: precision, patience and the desire to heal. He believed that

the renewal of the Church depended on the formation of the faithful, catechism, a life of prayer and missionary zeal. Today he can be invoked by pharmacists and pharmacy students, by all who care for the sick, and by catechists and missionaries.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint John Leonardi in art

He is usually shown as a priest dressed in black, the habit of the clerics regular, often holding a crucifix. Some modern images, linked to his patronage, place him among the jars and instruments of an old pharmacy.

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

Where to pray to Saint John Leonardi

- **Rome**: the church of Santa Maria in Campitelli, where his body rests.
- **Lucca** (Tuscany): the city of his beginnings and the cradle of his congregation.
- **Diecimo**: his native village, near Borgo a Mozzano.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Leonardi for Pharmacists and the Sick

Saint John Leonardi left letters and writings for his religious, but we know of no traditional prayer addressed to him whose text is reliable. Saintspedia offers an original prayer inspired by his life as a pharmacist turned priest, catechist and missionary.

The patron saint of pharmacists

Before he became a priest, John Leonardi spent years preparing remedies in Lucca. As a founder, he wanted to care for souls with the same attention: through catechism, prayer, frequent Communion and the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. He died while nursing his sick brothers. In 2006 Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed him patron saint of pharmacists.

Prayer to Saint John Leonardi for pharmacists and the sick

Saint John Leonardi, you prepared remedies before you served at the altar. Bless pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, researchers and all who work to relieve suffering.

Give them skill, honesty and patience, and help them to see in every sick person a brother or sister to serve.

You taught the catechism to the children of Lucca: support catechists, parents and all who hand on the faith.

You dreamed of missionaries for the whole world: awaken missionary vocations in the Church. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may I be a remedy for those who suffer and a witness to the goodness of God. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint John Leonardi is celebrated on October 9, the day of his death in Rome. You can pray to him:

- at the start of pharmacy studies or before an exam;
- at the beginning of a shift in a pharmacy, a hospital or a laboratory;
- during an illness, for yourself or a loved one;
- for catechists, parents and the missions of the Church.

You can also pray over nine days with the novena to Saint John Leonardi. To get to know him better, read the life of Saint John Leonardi.

Novena to Saint John Leonardi

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint John Leonardi, the pharmacist who became a priest, founder and patron saint of pharmacists. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, October 9, begin on October 1. You can also pray it at any time: for a sick person, for those who work in health care, for a student, or for the missions.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

Day 1: A village in Tuscany

John Leonardi was born in 1541 in Diecimo, a village of the Republic of Lucca, into a family of modest landowners. Nothing about his beginnings was remarkable. God often prepares great works in ordinary places.

Prayer: Lord, you see the value of hidden lives. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, help me to serve you faithfully where I am, without seeking to be noticed. Amen.

Today: Do your usual work with special care, offering it to God.

Day 2: The pharmacist

For about ten years he prepared remedies in Lucca. He learned precision, patience and attention to the sick. Pope Benedict XVI noted that the man who cared for bodies became a physician of souls.

Prayer: Lord, bless pharmacists and all who prepare medicines. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, give them competence, honesty and kindness. Amen.

Today: Thank a pharmacist, nurse or doctor who has helped you or your family.

Day 3: A friend to young Christians

In Lucca he joined a group of young lay people, guided by a Dominican friar, who wanted to live the Gospel radically. In that company of friends, his vocation slowly became clear.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for friends who lead us to you. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, give young people companions who help them grow in faith. Amen.

Today: Encourage a young person in their faith with a word or a small gift.

Day 4: Leaving everything

In 1567 he left the pharmacy to study theology, and he was ordained a priest in 1572. He did not despise his trade, but he followed a call that asked for more.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to follow you when you call me to change. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, help me to discern your will and to say yes. Amen.

Today: Spend ten minutes in silence asking what the Lord expects of you now.

Day 5: The catechism

As a young priest he taught children and young people the faith and founded a Company of Christian Doctrine. For him, the renewal of the Church began with the patient teaching of the faith in ordinary parishes.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, bless catechists, teachers and parents. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, help them to hand on the faith clearly and with love. Amen.

Today: Read a page of the Catechism, or thank a catechist in your parish.

Day 6: Mary, Mother of God

On September 1, 1574, his community of reformed priests was born, the future Clerics Regular of the Mother of God. They spread devotion to the Virgin, the Forty Hours adoration and frequent Communion.

Prayer: Holy Mary, Mother of God, teach me to love your Son in the Eucharist. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, draw me closer to Him. Amen.

Today: Spend a few minutes before the Blessed Sacrament, or pray a decade of the Rosary.

Day 7: Misunderstood at home

His reforming zeal earned him the hostility of some leading citizens of Lucca, and he had to leave his native city. He did not give up, and found support from the popes in Rome.

Prayer: Lord, you were rejected in your own town. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, help me to bear misunderstanding without bitterness and to keep doing good. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who has opposed or misjudged you.

Day 8: A heart for the missions

With Juan Bautista Vives, he planned a college to train priests for distant peoples. This project helped prepare the founding of Propaganda Fide, which would serve the missions of the Church.

Prayer: Lord of the harvest, send missionaries to every people. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, make me generous toward the missions, by prayer and by giving. Amen.

Today: Pray for a missionary, or make a small donation to the missions.

Day 9: Dying while caring for others

In 1609 an epidemic struck Rome. John Leonardi nursed his sick brothers, caught the disease and died on October 9. His life ended as it had begun: in the care of the sick.

Prayer: Lord, comfort the sick and those who care for them. Through the intercession of Saint John Leonardi, grant healing according to your will, and strength to all caregivers. Amen.

Today: Visit, call or write to someone who is sick.

Closing prayer

Saint John Leonardi, pharmacist and priest, catechist and founder, you cared for bodies and for souls with the same patience. Watch over pharmacists and all who serve the sick, support those who hand on the faith, and awaken missionary vocations in the Church. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried through these nine days, and obtain for me the grace to trust in Him. Amen.

CREDITS

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