

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Neumann

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: January 5

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IN BRIEF

Saint John Neumann

Redemptorist priest born in Bohemia, Bishop of Philadelphia, apostle of immigrants and of Catholic schools in the United States.

Feast day	January 5
Born	March 28, 1811, Prachatice, Bohemia (Czech Republic)
Died	January 5, 1860, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Canonized	June 19, 1977, by Pope Paul VI
Era	19th century
Patron saint of	immigrants, sick children, Catholic education

In this booklet

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Prayer to Saint John Neumann for Immigrants and Children

Novena to Saint John Neumann

National Shrine of Saint John Neumann in Philadelphia

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Neumann

Saint John Neumann (John Nepomucene Neumann) was a Redemptorist priest born in Bohemia in 1811 who died as Bishop of Philadelphia in 1860. Turned away from ordination at home because there were too many priests, he crossed the Atlantic with almost nothing, gave himself to German-speaking immigrants and became one of the great builders of Catholic schools in America. Canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1977, he was the first bishop of the United States to be declared a saint. His feast day is January 5.

Who was Saint John Neumann?

Jan Nepomuk Neumann was born on March 28, 1811, in Prachatitz, today Prachatice, in southern Bohemia, then part of the Austrian Empire. He grew up between the German of his father and the Czech of his mother, and showed an early gift for languages. After studies in Budweis, he entered the seminary in 1831 and went on to study theology at the University of Prague.

He wanted to be a priest, but Bohemia then had more priests than it could employ. His bishop postponed ordinations, and other European bishops he approached also said no. The young man, who had learned English, partly by talking with workers, wrote to the bishops of the United States. In 1836 he sailed for New York with almost no money, without even knowing whether anyone would receive him.

Key dates in the life of Saint John Neumann

- **March 28, 1811**: Born in Prachatitz, Bohemia.
- **1831**: Enters the seminary in Budweis, then studies theology in Prague.
- **1836**: Leaves for America; ordained a priest in New York a few weeks after his arrival.

- **1836-1840**: Missionary among the settlers of the Buffalo area, in western New York.
- **1840**: Joins the Redemptorists, becoming one of the first to make vows in America.
- **March 28, 1852**: Consecrated the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia.
- **January 5, 1860**: Dies suddenly on a Philadelphia street, aged 48.
- **October 13, 1963**: Beatified by Pope Paul VI.
- **June 19, 1977**: Canonized by Pope Paul VI.

Missionary to the immigrants

Ordained in New York in 1836, Neumann was sent to the western part of the state, near Niagara Falls. His parish was huge and full of German, Irish and other immigrants, many of them very poor. He covered it on foot or on horseback, celebrated Mass in homes and barns, taught the catechism to children and visited the sick. This lonely life wore him out and made him long for a community.

In 1840 he joined the Redemptorists, the congregation founded by Saint Alphonsus Liguori to bring the Gospel to the most abandoned. He took his vows in Baltimore and then served in several cities, including Pittsburgh and Baltimore, before being put in charge of the Redemptorists in the United States. He spoke several languages, which allowed him to hear confessions and preach to the faithful from all over Europe.

Bishop of Philadelphia

In 1852 the pope named him Bishop of Philadelphia, then one of the largest dioceses in the country. Short, simple and ill at ease in society, he puzzled, according to his biographers, part of the city's Catholic elite. But he proved a

tireless shepherd. He visited the most remote parishes, had many churches built and organized the first diocesan system of Catholic schools in the United States: within a few years the number of pupils grew from 500 to about 9,000.

To staff these schools he called on teaching congregations and supported the birth of new religious communities, including a congregation of Franciscan sisters. He also wrote catechisms in German. Deeply devoted to the Eucharist, he spread the Forty Hours devotion through his whole diocese: the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed for three days in each parish in turn.

On January 5, 1860, returning from an errand in town, he collapsed in the street, struck down by a heart attack. He was 48. His reputation for holiness spread at once among the faithful of Philadelphia.

A saint for America

The cause for his beatification was opened at the end of the nineteenth century. On October 13, 1963, during the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI declared him Blessed, and he canonized him on June 19, 1977. John Neumann was the first bishop of the United States to be canonized, and the first male American citizen to be declared a saint. Many American parishes, schools and Catholic institutions bear his name today.

His memory has even reached France: a monumental marble and bronze statue by the sculptor Ipoustéguy, designed for America but turned down by those who commissioned it, found a home in the church of Dun-sur-Meuse.

Why is Saint John Neumann the patron saint of immigrants and Catholic education?

He was an immigrant himself, and his whole priestly life was spent among uprooted families who had come from every corner of Europe. As bishop he made Catholic schools a priority and gave American Catholics their first

diocesan school system. Catholics also invoke him for sick children, entrusting them to the bishop who cared so much for the young.

Outwardly, John Neumann had nothing extraordinary: no great eloquence, no prestige, no iron health. His holiness lay in a stubborn faithfulness to his vocation, pursued through every refusal, and in tireless service of the humblest, beginning with immigrants and children. He reminds us that Christian education is a work of charity in its own right. People pray to him for migrants, for sick children, for Catholic schools and for anyone who has to start life over in a foreign country.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint John Neumann in art

Saint John Neumann is usually shown as a nineteenth-century bishop, small in stature, with a round face, wearing a pectoral cross. Statues often show him in episcopal dress, sometimes with his hand raised in blessing. Stained-glass windows in American churches sometimes place him among children, a reminder of the schools he founded.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint John Neumann and the novena to Saint John Neumann, prayed from December 27 to January 4.

Where to pray to Saint John Neumann

- **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**: the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann, in Saint Peter the Apostle Church, a church built by the Redemptorists for German-speaking Catholics. His body rests there, beneath the altar of the shrine chapel, in a glass reliquary, clothed in his bishop's vestments.
- **Prachatice, Czech Republic**: his hometown in South Bohemia, which honors his memory.
- **New York and the Buffalo area**: the city where he was ordained in 1836, and the Niagara region, his first mission field.

- **Dun-sur-Meuse, France**: the church holds a monumental statue of the saint by Ipoustéguy.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Neumann for Immigrants and Children

Saint John Neumann did not leave a prayer that became traditional. Yet this bishop of immigrants, builder of schools and lover of the Eucharist is invoked by many Catholics, especially in the United States and above all in Philadelphia, where his body rests. Here is an original prayer to entrust your intentions to him.

A saint invoked for immigrants and children

Arriving alone in New York in 1836, John Neumann spent his life serving uprooted families. As Bishop of Philadelphia he opened schools for their children and spread the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to every parish. He is invoked as patron of immigrants, of sick children and of Catholic education.



Saint John Neumann, church statue.

Prayer to Saint John Neumann

Saint John Neumann, you crossed the ocean to answer God's call: pray for all who leave their homeland. May they find a brotherly welcome on their way, and a Church that opens its doors to them.

You walked and rode for miles to visit the most isolated families: give our pastors your zeal and your simplicity.

You opened so many schools: watch over children and over those who teach them. Protect sick children and comfort their parents.

You loved Christ present in the Eucharist with all your heart: teach me to stay close to him in adoration.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Obtain for me the grace to remain faithful to what God asks of me, even when doors seem to close. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

You can pray it for a family member who has emigrated or is settling in a new country, for a sick child, for a Catholic school, a teacher or a student, or when your own plans meet a closed door and you need perseverance. It also suits a moment of Eucharistic adoration.

Saint John Neumann's feast day is January 5, the day of his death in Philadelphia in 1860. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint John Neumann, from December 27 to January 4, and read the life of Saint John Neumann.

Where to pray to him

The main place of pilgrimage is the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann, in Saint Peter the Apostle Church in Philadelphia, where his body rests beneath the altar of the shrine chapel. Many pilgrims entrust sick children, relatives who have emigrated or major life decisions to him there.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Neumann

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint John Nepomucene Neumann. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast day, begin it on December 27: it ends on January 4, the day before his feast on January 5.

You can pray it for a migrant or a family settling in a new country, for a sick child, for a Catholic school, for your own vocation or for any intention you carry. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. What matters is not perfection but the desire to turn to God each day, as this humble bishop did amid a crushing workload.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry your prayer into daily life. Because this novena runs through the Christmas season, it can easily be prayed as a family, in front of the Nativity scene.

Day 1: A vocation that holds firm

In Bohemia he was refused ordination because there were too many priests. John Neumann did not give up: he looked elsewhere for the place where God was waiting for him. A closed door is not always the end of a call; sometimes it points to another road.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from losing heart when my plans run into closed doors. Show me the way you have prepared for me.

Today: Pray for someone who is searching for their path in life.

Day 2: Setting out without guarantees

In 1836 he sailed for America with almost no money, not knowing whether he would be accepted. He placed his future in God's hands. Trust does not mean having every answer, but taking the next step with God.

Prayer: Father, teach me to trust you for tomorrow, and to take today's step in peace.

Today: Entrust one specific worry to God, in writing or in silence.

Day 3: Welcoming the stranger

His first parishioners were poor immigrants from all over Europe. He met them in their own languages and shared their poverty. For him, no one was a foreigner in the Church.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you knew exile in Egypt: make me attentive to the strangers who live near me.

Today: Greet, help or support someone who has recently arrived in your neighborhood or your country.

Day 4: Walking the roads

Near Niagara, he visited families scattered over an immense territory, on foot and on horseback. No family was too far away for him. The Good Shepherd goes looking for the one who is alone.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to go toward those who are isolated.

Today: Visit or call someone who lives alone.

Day 5: Living in community

Worn out by solitude, he joined the Redemptorists. He understood that no one can carry the mission alone. Humility also means accepting help and becoming part of a community.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, teach me to ask for help and to support others.

Today: Thank someone who helps you in your life of faith.



A statue of Saint John Neumann in the United States.

Day 6: Teaching the children

As Bishop of Philadelphia he made Catholic schools a priority. For him, teaching a child was already proclaiming the Gospel. In a few years, thousands of children found a place to learn and to grow in faith.

Prayer: Lord, bless children, their parents and their teachers. Protect sick children and give strength to those who care for them.

Today: Pray for a school, or help a child with homework.

Day 7: Adoring Christ

He spread the Forty Hours adoration throughout his diocese. In the middle of a thousand tasks, he drew his strength from the Blessed Sacrament. Silent time with the Lord is never wasted time.

Prayer: Jesus, present in the Eucharist, draw me close to you.

Today: Spend a few minutes in silence before the tabernacle of a church.

Day 8: Simplicity

Small, modest and indifferent to honors, he did not impress anyone. He served with all his heart without seeking admiration. God looks at the heart, not at appearances.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the need to impress others and make me humble.

Today: Do someone a favor without telling anyone.

Day 9: Being ready

He died suddenly on a Philadelphia street, in the middle of ordinary errands. His whole life had already been given. Holiness is built in faithfulness to everyday tasks.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint John Neumann, keep me faithful each day. Amen.

Today: Pray for the sick and the dying of this day.

On January 5, his feast day, you may attend Mass if you can, or visit a church named after him. Many parishes and schools in the United States bear his name.

Closing prayer

Saint John Neumann, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for migrants, for sick children and for schools. Obtain for us a simple, faithful and generous heart, and lead us closer to Christ in the Eucharist. Help us, like you, to be faithful in small things and generous toward those who arrive among us with nothing. Amen.

Saint John Neumann, pray for us.

To go further: the life of Saint John Neumann and the prayer to Saint John Neumann.

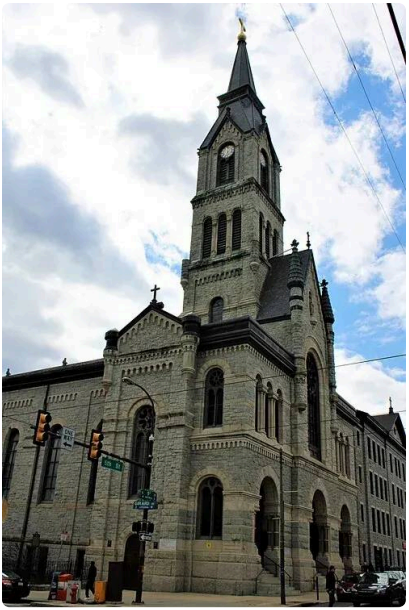
PILGRIMAGE

National Shrine of Saint John Neumann in Philadelphia

The National Shrine of Saint John Neumann is in Saint Peter the Apostle Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The bishop's body has rested there since his death in 1860. Recognized as a national shrine by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, it is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to the first American bishop to be canonized.

An Immigrants' Church

Saint Peter the Apostle Church was built between 1842 and 1847 by the Redemptorists for the German-speaking Catholics of Philadelphia. John Neumann, himself a Redemptorist, was devoted to this community. When he died on January 5, 1860, he was buried in the lower church, beside his fellow Redemptorists. Very soon the faithful came to pray at his grave, and the bishop's reputation for holiness kept growing until his beatification in 1963 and his canonization in 1977.



Saint Peter the Apostle Church in Philadelphia.

Visiting the Shrine

The body of Saint John Neumann is displayed beneath the altar of the shrine chapel, in a glass case, dressed in his bishop's vestments. The shrine also includes an area devoted to his life, with personal items and mementos of his ministry. The upper church, still a parish, allows you to extend your prayer.

Praying on the Spot

Before your visit, you might read the life of Saint John Neumann. Before his shrine, many pilgrims entrust sick children, immigrant relatives or life plans. You can say the prayer to Saint John Neumann, or begin the novena. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The shrine of Saint John Neumann in the Philadelphia sanctuary.

Other Places Associated with Saint John Neumann

- **Prachatice** (South Bohemia, Czech Republic): his birthplace, which honors his memory.
- **New York**: the city where he was ordained a priest in 1836, shortly after arriving in America.
- **The Buffalo and Niagara region**: his first mission field, from 1836 to 1840.
- **Dun-sur-Meuse** (Meuse, France): a monumental statue of the saint by Ipoustéguy in the church.

Practical Information

The shrine is north of downtown Philadelphia and receives pilgrims throughout the year, especially around January 5. Mass, tour and confession times are posted on the official website of the National Shrine: consult it before you come.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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