

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Ogilvie

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 10

IN BRIEF

Saint John Ogilvie

Scottish Jesuit priest, convert from Calvinism, martyred in Glasgow in 1615.

Feast day	March 10
Born	1579, Drumnakeith, near Keith, Scotland
Died	March 10, 1615, Glasgow, Scotland
Canonized	October 17, 1976, by Pope Paul VI
Era	17th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint John Ogilvie for Freedom of Conscience

Novena to Saint John Ogilvie

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Ogilvie

Saint John Ogilvie was a Scottish Jesuit priest, born in 1579 into a Calvinist family and hanged in Glasgow on March 10, 1615. He became a Catholic while studying on the continent and returned secretly to Scotland to serve persecuted Catholics. Arrested and tortured, he refused to recognize the king's authority in spiritual matters. Canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1976, he is the only Scottish martyr of the Reformation era to have been canonized. His feast day is March 10.

Who was Saint John Ogilvie?

John Ogilvie was born in 1579 at Drumnakeith, near Keith, in Banffshire, in the northeast of Scotland. His family belonged to the minor nobility and had embraced Calvinism, which had become the official religion of the kingdom. At the age of twelve or thirteen, like many young Scottish noblemen, he was sent to study on the continent. There he discovered a Europe divided by religious controversy between Catholics and Protestants.

Troubled by these debates, he studied the arguments on both sides. He was moved by the idea that the Catholic Church welcomes people of every condition into her fold: the learned and the unlearned, the rich and the poor. In 1596, at the age of seventeen, he was received into the Catholic Church at the Scots College in Louvain.

Key dates

- **1579**: Born at Drumnakeith, near Keith, Scotland.
- **c. 1592**: Leaves to study on the continent.
- **1596**: Received into the Catholic Church in Louvain.
- **November 5, 1599**: Enters the Jesuit novitiate in Brno, Moravia.

- **1610**: Ordained a priest in Paris; ministry in Rouen.
- **November 1613**: Returns secretly to Scotland under the name John Watson.
- **October 14, 1614**: Arrested in Glasgow.
- **March 10, 1615**: Hanged in Glasgow, at the age of thirty-five.
- **December 22, 1929**: Beatified by Pope Pius XI.
- **October 17, 1976**: Canonized by Pope Paul VI.

A Jesuit in central Europe

After Louvain, John studied with the Scottish Benedictines in Regensburg, then at the Jesuit college in Olomouc, in Moravia. There he came to know the Society of Jesus and asked to be admitted. On November 5, 1599, he entered the novitiate in Brno. He went on to study philosophy in Graz, Austria, and theology in Olomouc. He taught in the order's colleges and looked after a Marian sodality of young people, on whom he left a deep impression.

But his heart remained turned toward Scotland. He asked his superiors several times to be sent there. Ordained a priest in Paris in 1610, he first ministered in Rouen. In 1613 he finally received permission to return to his homeland.

A priest in hiding

In Scotland the Mass was forbidden and Catholic priests were hunted. John came back under a false name, John Watson, passing himself off as a horse dealer or a soldier returning from the wars. He celebrated Mass secretly in private homes, heard confessions and comforted isolated Catholics, first around Edinburgh and then around Glasgow. His ministry lasted less than a year.

On October 14, 1614, he was betrayed by a man who had pretended to want to become a Catholic. He was arrested in Glasgow and brought before the Protestant archbishop, John Spottiswoode.

Trial and martyrdom

Torture and a clear conscience

For months John was questioned and tortured. He was kept from sleeping for days on end to make him give up the names of the Catholics he had visited, which he refused to do. Above all, the authorities wanted him to acknowledge that King James VI had authority over the Church, including in spiritual matters.

John declared his loyalty to the king in temporal affairs, but refused to grant him any authority over the faith, which belonged to the pope. While in prison, he wrote an account of his captivity and interrogations, which has been preserved and published.

The rosary thrown into the crowd

Condemned for high treason, he was hanged in Glasgow on March 10, 1615. According to tradition, at the moment of his death he threw his rosary into the crowd. A young Calvinist passing through the city caught it, later became a Catholic, and attributed his conversion to that gesture.

The saint of Scotland

Beatified in 1929, John Ogilvie was canonized by Pope Paul VI on October 17, 1976, after the recognition of the unexplained healing of a Glasgow man, John Fagan, who had been suffering from cancer. He was the first Scottish saint canonized since the Middle Ages. His memory is especially alive in Glasgow, where a statue and several churches and schools bear his name, and in the Diocese of Aberdeen, near his birthplace.

Why is Saint John Ogilvie a patron of conscience and of Scotland?

John Ogilvie has no long list of official patronages, but Scottish Catholics see him as their own martyr, and many invoke him as a patron of freedom of conscience. He respected the king's authority, yet refused to hand over to him what belongs to God. A convert by conviction, he chose to return to a country where he knew he was risking his life, so that his fellow Catholics would not be left without a priest.

His gesture with the rosary, on the threshold of death, shows that he hoped to touch hearts until the very end. He can be invoked for Scotland, for Christian unity, for religious freedom, and for all who are searching for the truth.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint John Ogilvie in art

He is usually shown as a young Jesuit in a black cassock, holding the palm of martyrdom. Some images show him with a cross, as in his statue in Glasgow, or with a rosary, recalling the one he threw to the crowd before he died.

Where to pray to Saint John Ogilvie

- **Glasgow**: Saint Andrew's Catholic Cathedral and the churches dedicated to him, in the city of his martyrdom.
- **Keith** (Moray): his hometown, where the Catholic community keeps his memory alive.
- **Everywhere**: in the houses of the Society of Jesus, which honors him as one of its martyrs.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Ogilvie for Freedom of Conscience

Scottish Catholics pray to Saint John Ogilvie in many ways, but there is no single fixed traditional prayer to him. The prayer below draws on his life: his conversion after a sincere search for the truth, his secret return to Scotland to serve persecuted Catholics, his steadfastness under torture, and the rosary he threw into the crowd as he died.

Loyal to the king, faithful to God

Before his judges, John Ogilvie declared his loyalty to the king in matters of state, but refused to grant him authority over the faith. He died at thirty-five for remaining faithful to his conscience and to the Church.

Prayer to Saint John Ogilvie for freedom of conscience

Saint John Ogilvie, you found the truth at the end of a sincere search: pray for those who are seeking God and do not yet know where to find him.

You came back to your country to serve Christians deprived of priests: pray for priests, and for communities who live their faith in hiding or under persecution.

You stood firm under torture without betraying anyone: give me the strength to remain faithful to my conscience, with respect for those in authority and without denying my faith.

You threw your rosary to the crowd as you died: teach me never to give up hope for anyone, and to pray for those who are hostile to me.

Pray for Scotland, for the unity of Christians and for religious freedom throughout the world.

I entrust to you my intention (name it in silence). Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint John Ogilvie's feast is March 10, the day of his martyrdom in 1615. You can also pray to him:

- during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, in January;
- for a friend or relative who is searching for God;
- for priests and Christians who are persecuted for their faith today;
- when you face pressure to act against your conscience at work or in public life;

- for the Church in Scotland.

A short prayer with the rosary

> *Saint John Ogilvie, your last gesture was to give your rosary away, hoping it would lead someone to Christ. As I pray this rosary, I offer it for those who are far from God. Pray for them, and pray for me. Amen.*

To pray with him over nine days, see the novena to Saint John Ogilvie, or read more about his life.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Ogilvie

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint John Ogilvie. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, March 10, begin it on March 2. As his feast usually falls during Lent, the novena can become a way of living this season with the courage of the martyrs. You can also pray it at any time, for a person searching for God or for religious freedom.

John Ogilvie lived in a time of bitter division between Christians. Praying with him today is not a way of reopening old wounds, but of asking for the courage to be faithful and the grace of unity among all who believe in Christ.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. If you can, pray one decade of the rosary as well, in memory of the rosary John Ogilvie threw to the crowd. The small act suggested for each day helps you live in his spirit.

Day 1: A young man searching

Sent abroad to study at twelve or thirteen, John found a Europe torn by religious arguments. Instead of turning away, he studied the questions seriously. God is not afraid of our honest questions.

Prayer: Lord, give me a heart that searches for the truth with honesty, and the humility to follow it when I find it.

Today: Take time to read about a question of faith that troubles you.

Day 2: A Church for everyone

What touched John was that the Catholic Church welcomes people of every condition, learned and unlearned, rich and poor. In 1596 he was received into the Church at Louvain. The Church is a home for all.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your Church. Make me welcoming to everyone, whatever their background.

Today: Greet someone at Mass you have never spoken to.

Day 3: The call of the Society of Jesus

At Olomouc, John discovered the Jesuits, and on November 5, 1599, he entered the novitiate in Brno. He gave his life to God in the spirit of Saint Ignatius: to seek and find God in all things.

Prayer: Lord, help me to recognize your call in my life and to answer it generously.

Today: At the end of the day, take five minutes to review where you met God.

Day 4: Forming the young

As a young Jesuit, John taught in colleges and guided a Marian sodality of young people, who remembered him long after. Faith grows through friendship and example.

Prayer: Lord, bless young people searching for their way. Give them good guides and true friends.

Today: Encourage a young person you know.

Day 5: Longing for home

Ordained in Paris in 1610 and serving in Rouen, John asked again and again to be sent to Scotland, where Catholics had no priests. He did not seek safety, but the place where he was most needed.

Prayer: Lord, give your Church priests ready to go where they are most needed.

Today: Pray for a priest in a difficult mission.

Day 6: Mass in secret

Under the name John Watson, he celebrated Mass in hidden rooms, heard confessions and comforted Catholics living in fear. For less than a year he brought them the sacraments at the risk of his life.

Prayer: Lord, help me to value the Mass and the sacraments that so many have risked their lives to receive.

Today: Go to Mass on a weekday, or make a good confession.

Day 7: Betrayed

On October 14, 1614, he was betrayed by a man who pretended to want to convert. Like Jesus, he knew the pain of a betrayal by someone who came close. He did not answer with hatred.

Prayer: Lord, heal the wounds left by those who have betrayed me, and give me the grace to forgive.

Today: Pray for someone who has hurt you.

Day 8: A free conscience

Deprived of sleep and tortured, John refused to give up the names of other Catholics. He was loyal to the king in temporal matters, but would not give him authority over the faith. Conscience, formed by the truth, is a place where only God is master.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen all who suffer for their conscience, and give me courage when my faith is put to the test.

Today: Pray for Christians persecuted in the world today.

Day 9: The rosary thrown to the crowd

On March 10, 1615, John was hanged in Glasgow. Before he died, he threw his rosary into the crowd, and a young Calvinist who caught it later became a Catholic. To the very end, he hoped to bring others to Christ.

Prayer: Saint John Ogilvie, pray for Scotland, for the unity of Christians, and for all who are searching for God.

Today: Pray a rosary for someone who is far from the faith.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God, you gave Saint John Ogilvie the courage to serve your people in danger and to lay down his life rather than deny the faith. Through his intercession, strengthen all who suffer for their conscience, bring together the divided followers of Christ, and grant the intention I have entrusted to you in this novena. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can continue with the prayer to Saint John Ogilvie, or read about his life.

CREDITS

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