

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Plessington

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 19

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IN BRIEF

Saint John Plessington

English priest trained at Valladolid, martyred at Chester in 1679 during the Popish Plot.

Feast day	July 19
Born	c. 1637, Dimples Hall, near Garstang, Lancashire, England
Died	July 19, 1679, Boughton, near Chester, England
Canonized	October 25, 1970, by Pope Paul VI
Era	17th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint John Plessington for Priests and the Persecuted

Novena to Saint John Plessington

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Plessington

Saint John Plessington was a seventeenth-century English Catholic priest. Trained in Spain, he served the faithful in secret near Chester, working as a tutor in a Catholic family. Arrested during the panic of the "Popish Plot," he was executed near Chester on July 19, 1679, for the sole crime of being a priest. Canonized in 1970 with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, he is celebrated on July 19. This page is an original composition inspired by his life.

Who was Saint John Plessington?

John Plessington was born in Lancashire into a Catholic family that stayed faithful despite the laws that then forbade Mass in England and punished Catholic priests ordained abroad with death. Like many young English Catholics, he went to the continent to be trained, then came back home to serve the faithful in secret. After fifteen years of quiet ministry, he was caught up in the wave of persecution set off in 1678 by the false accusations of Titus Oates. He died forgiving those who had accused him.

Key dates

- **c. 1637**: Born at Dimples Hall, near Garstang (Lancashire), into a Catholic and royalist family.
- **1650s**: Studies with the Jesuits, then at the Jesuit college of Saint-Omer in France.
- **1655**: Enters the English College of Saint Alban in Valladolid, Spain, to prepare for the priesthood.
- **March 25, 1662**: Ordained a priest at Segovia.
- **1663**: Returns to England and works in secret under the name William Scarisbrick.

- **1670s**: As tutor to the children of the Massey family at Puddington Old Hall, near Chester, he is in fact the chaplain of the household and of the Catholics nearby.
- **1678**: Titus Oates invents a so-called "Popish Plot," and a violent persecution of priests begins.
- **December 28, 1678**: Arrested at Puddington and imprisoned in Chester Castle.
- **July 19, 1679**: Hanged, drawn and quartered at Boughton, near Chester.
- **1929**: Beatified by Pope Pius XI.
- **October 25, 1970**: Canonized by Pope Paul VI, with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

A Catholic youth in a time of persecution

The Plessington family belonged to the Catholic minority of Lancashire that kept the faith despite fines and constant surveillance. John's father had fought for the king in the Civil War. The young John was taught by the Jesuits, and then crossed to the continent, as everyone did who wanted to become a priest: in England no Catholic seminary was possible. After the college at Saint-Omer, he joined the English College of Saint Alban in Valladolid, founded to train priests for the English mission. He was ordained a priest at Segovia on March 25, 1662.

A hidden priest near Chester

Back in England in 1663, John Plessington took an assumed name, William Scarisbrick. For years he celebrated Mass and gave the sacraments in secret. He eventually settled at Puddington Old Hall, on the Wirral peninsula near Chester, with the Catholic Massey family. Officially he was the children's

tutor. In reality he was the chaplain of the house and of the Catholics of the area, who came there to receive the sacraments. The house had a hiding place near the chimney, to conceal the priest in case of a search.

The Popish Plot and martyrdom

In 1678, Titus Oates spread the tale of a Catholic plot to assassinate King Charles II. England was seized by panic, and the hunt for priests resumed with violence. On December 28, 1678, the house at Puddington was searched. Despite the hiding place, John Plessington was found and arrested. He spent several months in prison at Chester Castle.

No evidence linked him to any plot. He was condemned only because he was a Catholic priest, which the law then punished as treason. Witnesses declared they had seen him exercise his ministry. He had prepared in writing the speech he gave on the scaffold, which was printed afterward. In it he declared that he was dying for his faith and his priesthood, and not for any plot. Tradition says he forgave by name those who had testified against him. He was executed on July 19, 1679, at Boughton, at the gates of Chester, the usual place of execution.

Devotion and iconography

John Plessington was beatified by Pius XI in 1929 and canonized by Paul VI on October 25, 1970, among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. He is celebrated on July 19, and on October 25 with the other martyrs. A Catholic school in Bebington, on the Wirral peninsula not far from Puddington, bears his name. He is shown as a priest, with a stole and the palm of martyrdom.

What can we learn from Saint John Plessington?

John Plessington lived his priesthood quietly and in danger, serving a handful of families. He sought neither glory nor martyrdom, but he did not deny who he was. Falsely accused, he answered with the truth and with forgiveness. He reminds us of the price of the Mass and the sacraments, which so many Catholics received at the risk of their lives. We can pray to him for priests, for persecuted Christians and for those who are victims of false accusations.

Where to pray to Saint John Plessington

- **Chester** (Cheshire, England): the Boughton area, where he was executed, and the city where he was imprisoned.
- **Puddington** (Cheshire): the village of Puddington Old Hall, the house where he carried out his ministry.
- **Valladolid** (Spain): the English College of Saint Alban, where he prepared for the priesthood.

To pray with him at home, you can use the prayer to Saint John Plessington or the novena to Saint John Plessington.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Plessington for Priests and the Persecuted

Saint John Plessington was a hidden priest in seventeenth-century England. A tutor in a Catholic family near Chester, he celebrated Mass in secret. Arrested during the panic of the "Popish Plot," he died a martyr in 1679, forgiving his accusers. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life; it is not an official liturgical text.

Prayer to Saint John Plessington

Saint John Plessington,
you left your country to become a priest,
and you came back, knowing the danger,
to bring the faithful the Mass and the sacraments.

Hidden under another name,
you humbly served a family and a region,
teaching children and feeding souls.

Falsely accused, you did not deny your priesthood,
and on the scaffold you forgave those who had betrayed you.
Pray for our priests, that they may be faithful and courageous.
Pray for Christians who practice their faith in secret,
and for those who are victims of false accusations.

Teach us the value of the Eucharist
and the strength of forgiveness.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint John Plessington

- On his feast day, July 19, or on October 25 with the martyrs of England and Wales.
- For priests and for priestly vocations.
- For a person who has been falsely accused.
- When you find it hard to forgive.
- For Christians who cannot live their faith freely.

A short prayer for forgiveness

> *Saint John Plessington, you who forgave your accusers,*
> *help me to forgive those who have wronged me.*
> *Lord, heal my heart. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint John Plessington from July 11 to July 19, and learn about the life of Saint John Plessington.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Plessington

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint John Plessington, an English priest executed near Chester on July 19, 1679. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, July 19, begin on July 11. You can also pray it at any time, for priests or for a situation of injustice.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present 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 Plessington, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A faithful family

John was born into a Catholic family of Lancashire that had kept the faith despite fines and dangers. The faithfulness of a family prepares the faithfulness of its children.

Prayer: Lord, bless the families who pass on the faith in difficult times. Make mine faithful.

Today: Pray for your family and for those who handed the faith on to you.

Day 2: Leaving to be formed

To become a priest, John had to leave England and be trained at Saint-Omer, then at Valladolid. Answering God's call sometimes means going far away.

Prayer: Lord, bless seminarians and those who form them. Give them generosity and perseverance.

Today: Pray for the seminarians of your diocese.

Day 3: A priest forever

On March 25, 1662, the feast of the Annunciation, John was ordained a priest at Segovia. Like Mary, he said yes to God without knowing what that yes would cost him.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gift of the priesthood. Keep our priests in the joy of their yes.

Today: Thank a priest for his ministry.

Day 4: Returning despite the danger

In 1663 John returned to England, where Catholic priests risked death. He knew the danger, but the faithful needed the Mass.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to do what is right, even when I am afraid.

Today: Take a step you have been putting off out of fear.

Day 5: A hidden ministry

Under the name William Scarisbrick, a tutor at Puddington, John served in the shadows. His ministry was humble and discreet, but it nourished the faith of a whole region.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve without seeking to be seen.

Today: Do someone a quiet favor, without telling anyone.

Day 6: The price of the Mass

To celebrate Mass, John risked his life, and the families who welcomed him risked their property. For them the Eucharist was a treasure more precious than their safety.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, help me to receive you with faith and gratitude.

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

Day 7: Falsely accused

Arrested during the panic over the false plot invented by Titus Oates, John was condemned without proof of any crime. Christ himself was condemned on false testimony.

Prayer: Lord, support those who are accused unjustly. Let the truth come to light.

Today: Refuse every rumor and bit of gossip today.

Day 8: In prison at Chester

John spent several months in prison in Chester Castle. He prepared for death in prayer and wrote the words he would speak on the scaffold.

Prayer: Lord, be close to prisoners and to those awaiting death. Give them your peace.

Today: Pray for those condemned to death and for the abolition of the death penalty.

Day 9: Dying in forgiveness

On July 19, 1679, at Boughton, John declared that he was dying for his faith and his priesthood, and he forgave those who had accused him. In this he followed Christ, who prayed for his executioners.

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

Today: Forgive in your heart someone who has hurt you, and pray for that person.

Living the novena with Saint John Plessington

Saint John Plessington did not seek the spotlight: he was a quiet priest serving a handful of families, faithful to the end. During these nine days, you can entrust to him the priests of your parish, Christians who live their faith in secret, and people who are victims of unjust accusations. Ask also, for yourself, the grace of forgiveness.

Closing prayer

> *Saint John Plessington,*
> *faithful priest and martyr of Chester,*
> *present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Obtain for me a love of the Eucharist,*
> *the courage of truth*
> *and the grace to forgive.*
> *Watch over the priests of the Church.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint John Plessington at any time, and learn about the life of Saint John Plessington.

Credits and sources

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