BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John the Silent

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 13

IN BRIEF

Saint John the Silent

Bishop of Colonia in Armenia who became a recluse in the laura of Saint Sabbas (454-c. 558).

Feast day	May 13, December 7
Born	454, Nicopolis (Armenia)
Died	c. 557-558, laura of Saint Sabbas, near Jerusalem
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint John the Silent for Silence and Humility

Novena to Saint John the Silent

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John the Silent

Saint John the Silent, also called John the Hesychast, was a monk and bishop of the East in the 5th and 6th centuries. Born in 454 at Nicopolis, in Armenia, he was bishop of Colonia, then gave up his office to live as a recluse in the great laura of Saint Sabbas, near Jerusalem, where he died at over a hundred years of age. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on May 13; he is also celebrated on December 7 in France and on December 3 in the Orthodox Churches.

Who was Saint John the Silent?

John owes his name to what marked his life: silence. A bishop before the age of thirty, he chose to become a simple monk again and spent several decades shut in a cell, in prayer. His life is known to us mainly through Cyril of Scythopolis, a monk and historian of the monasteries of Palestine in the 6th century, who met him in his old age and wrote his story. The figures given in this account, especially his great age, are those of tradition; they vary somewhat between authors.

Key dates in the life of John the Silent

- **454**: Born at Nicopolis, in Armenia, into a wealthy family.
- **c. 472**: Still young, he uses his inheritance to found a monastery of about ten monks.
- **c. 482**: He becomes bishop of Colonia, in Armenia.
- **c. 491**: After about ten years as bishop, he gives up his office and leaves for Jerusalem.
- **Shortly after**: He enters the great laura founded by Saint Sabbas, where he lives as a simple monk and then as a recluse.

- **c. 557-558**: Dies in the laura of Saint Sabbas, at about one hundred and four years of age.
- **6th century**: Cyril of Scythopolis, who knew him, writes his Life.

A young founder and a bishop

John was born at Nicopolis, in Roman Armenia, into a family that left him a large inheritance. Very young, at about eighteen or twenty, he used it to found a monastery where he lived with about ten companions. His reputation for wisdom led to his being chosen as bishop of Colonia, a city in the same region.

He governed his diocese for about ten years. According to tradition, conflicts with the governor of the country, who was his brother-in-law, led him to give up his office: rather than enter a power struggle that would have wounded the Church and his family, he preferred to withdraw. He then left his country and went to Jerusalem, without saying who he was.

The recluse of the laura of Saint Sabbas

In Palestine, John entered the great laura founded by Saint Sabbas, in the Judean desert, between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. He was received there as a simple monk and performed the ordinary services of the community. He then obtained permission to live as a recluse, in a cell, devoted to prayer and silence. According to Cyril of Scythopolis, his past as a bishop only became known later, when there was a wish to have him ordained a priest.

John remained in the laura until his death, around 557 or 558, at an exceptional age: tradition speaks of one hundred and four years, about sixty of them spent in the desert. Monks and visitors came to ask his advice. Cyril of Scythopolis, then a young monk, met him and gathered his memories.

Devotion

John the Silent is honored in the East as in the West. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on May 13; the French Nominis calendar celebrates him on December 7, and the Orthodox Churches on December 3. No shrine keeping his relics is known, but the laura of Saint Sabbas, today the Orthodox monastery of Mar Saba, still stands in the Judean desert.

What can we learn from Saint John the Silent?

John gave up honor and power to avoid conflict, and he chose the last place. His long silence was not an escape, but a way of standing before God and carrying the world in prayer. You can pray to him to learn to be silent, for those who hold responsibility, and for monks and nuns who live in silence.

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

Where to pray to Saint John the Silent

- **Mar Saba Monastery** (Judean desert, West Bank): the laura of Saint Sabbas, where he lived and died.
- **Jerusalem**: the holy city where he arrived after leaving his diocese.
- In silence, at home or in a church, during a time of prayer.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John the Silent for Silence and Humility

Saint John the Silent gave up his office as bishop to live as a recluse in the laura of Saint Sabbas, near Jerusalem, where he died at over a hundred years of age. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It asks him for a love of silence, humility and peace.

Prayer to Saint John the Silent

Saint John the Silent,
bishop who became a simple monk,
you left honors behind
to seek God in silence.
Teach me to quiet within me
noise, pride and anxiety.

You who preferred to withdraw
rather than enter the struggle for power,
help those who hold responsibility
to serve without seeking to dominate,
and to know how to yield when peace requires it.

You who prayed for long years
in your cell in the desert,
carry before God those who no longer have time to pray,
monks and nuns,
and all who seek his face.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint John the Silent

- On his commemoration, May 13, or on December 7.
- When you need silence and inner calm.
- Before taking on or leaving a responsibility.
- In a conflict where you should know how to give way for the sake of peace.
- For the very elderly, and for monks and nuns.

A short invocation

> *Saint John the Silent, teach me to be silent so as to listen to God. Pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint John the Silent from May 5 to 13, and discover the life of Saint John the Silent.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John the Silent

This novena spends nine days with Saint John the Silent, a bishop of Armenia who became a recluse in the laura of Saint Sabbas. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his commemoration in the Roman Martyrology, May 13, begin it on May 5. If you celebrate him on December 7, begin it on November 29.

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. Then keep a few minutes of silence, following the example of Saint John. End with: "Saint John the Silent, pray for us."

Day 1: An inheritance given to God

While still young, John used his inheritance to found a monastery. He did not keep his wealth for himself: he put it at the service of prayer.

Prayer: Lord, all that I have comes from you. Teach me to share and to put my goods at the service of good.

Act of the day: Make a donation to a religious community or a charity.

Day 2: A bishop who serves

Chosen as bishop of Colonia, John governed his diocese for about ten years. He accepted the office without having sought it.

Prayer: Lord, bless our bishop and all who bear responsibility in the Church.

Act of the day: Pray for your bishop and for those in charge of you.

Day 3: Giving up for the sake of peace

Rather than enter into conflict with the governor, his brother-in-law, John gave up his office. He preferred peace to his own honor.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to know how to give way when peace requires it, and not to cling to my place.

Act of the day: Let an unimportant disagreement pass today.

Day 4: Leaving without fuss

John left his country and arrived in Jerusalem without saying who he was. He accepted to become a stranger again.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the need to be recognized. May your gaze be enough for me.

Act of the day: Do a service without telling anyone.

Day 5: A simple monk in the laura

In the laura of Saint Sabbas, the former bishop performed the ordinary services of the community. Humility is lived in small tasks.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to love simple tasks and to do them for you.

Act of the day: Carefully carry out a household chore you usually avoid.

Day 6: Choosing silence

John obtained permission to live as a recluse. In his cell, he was silent in order to listen to God. Silence is not emptiness, but presence.

Prayer: Lord, teach me inner silence. Quiet in me whatever keeps me from hearing you.

Act of the day: Turn off screens for an hour and pray in silence for a few minutes.

Day 7: Carrying the world in prayer

Monks and visitors came to ask the recluse for advice. Withdrawn from the world, he still carried it before God.

Prayer: Lord, make my prayer a place where I carry others. Today I entrust to you those who suffer.

Act of the day: Pray by name for five people.

Day 8: A long faithfulness

According to tradition, John lived more than a hundred years, about sixty of them in the desert. His holiness is that of perseverance.

Prayer: Lord, give me perseverance. Bless the elderly and make their old age a time of peace.

Act of the day: Visit or call an elderly person.

Day 9: Entering the peace of God

John died in the laura of Saint Sabbas, after a long life of prayer. The silence he sought ended in the encounter with God.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to live and die in your peace. Through the intercession of Saint John the Silent, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if possible, and pray for the dead.

Closing prayer

Saint John the Silent,
humble bishop and monk of the desert,
you chose the last place
and silence before God.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Teach me humility and peace,
and keep me in his presence.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Credits and sources

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