BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John the Warrior

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 30

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IN BRIEF

Saint John the Warrior

4th-century Roman soldier who protected the Christians persecuted by Emperor Julian.

Feast day	July 30
Born	4th century
Died	late 4th century
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	soldiers, victims of theft

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint John the Warrior, Protector of the Persecuted

Novena to Saint John the Warrior

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John the Warrior

Saint John the Warrior, also called John the Soldier, was a soldier of the Roman army in the 4th century. Sent, under Emperor Julian the Apostate, to hunt down Christians, he refused to harm them and protected them at the risk of his life. Much loved in the Christian East, he is also honored in the Catholic Church. His feast day is July 30.

Who was Saint John the Warrior?

John the Warrior is a saint much loved by Eastern Christians, but his life is known only through late, brief and sometimes differing accounts. Few things about him are certain: he served in the army of Julian, the emperor who, between 361 and 363, tried to restore paganism to its place in the Roman Empire and to push Christians to the margins. Charged with seeking them out, John chose instead to help them. The traditions disagree about what followed: according to some, he was imprisoned, then released at Julian's death, and ended his life in peace; according to others, taken up by some Western notices, he died a martyr. His story must therefore be read with the caution these sources require.

Key dates in the life of John

- **4th century**: John serves as a soldier in the Roman army; the date and place of his birth are unknown.
- **361**: Julian becomes sole emperor and seeks to weaken Christianity.
- **Between 361 and 363**: According to tradition, John is sent with other soldiers to arrest Christians; he secretly warns them and helps several escape.
- **Shortly after**: Denounced, he is thrown into prison and mistreated.

- **363**: Julian's death ends the persecution; according to Eastern tradition, John is released.
- **Late 4th century**: He devotes the end of his life to helping the poor, prisoners and travelers, then dies; other accounts say he died a martyr.
- **Today**: He is celebrated on July 30; some calendars give July 29 or August 12.

A soldier at the service of the persecuted

Julian, nephew of Constantine, had been raised in the Christian faith before abandoning it, hence his nickname, the Apostate. As emperor, he did not launch a bloody persecution like those of Diocletian, but he excluded Christians from teaching and from public office, and allowed violence against them. It is in this setting that John's story takes place.

According to the account handed down by tradition, John was one of the soldiers charged with seeking out Christians and bringing them before the judges. Instead of obeying, he used his position to warn them of danger, hide them and help them flee. He also visited those who had been arrested and brought them comfort. This choice cost him dearly: discovered, he was himself imprisoned and mistreated. The account does not say whether he was already baptized when he began his service; some notices speak of a conversion through contact with the Christians he was supposed to arrest.

The end of his life

Eastern tradition says that John was released at Julian's death in 363 and spent the rest of his life serving others: he helped the poor, visited prisoners and welcomed travelers, in great simplicity. He is said to have died in peace, though neither the exact date nor place is known. Other notices, especially in the West, present him as a martyr. The sources do not allow us to decide.

In the Eastern Churches, a particular devotion has developed: people call on Saint John the Warrior to recover stolen or lost objects, to obtain the conversion of those who have done wrong, and for protection in trials. He is also prayed to for soldiers and for those who must obey unjust orders.

Devotion and art

John the Warrior is celebrated by the Orthodox Churches and honored in the Catholic Church, which lists him in its calendars of saints. In icons, he appears as a warrior, dressed in armor, holding a spear or a sword and sometimes a cross. An icon of the 17th and 18th centuries, kept at the Yaroslavl Art Museum in Russia, shows him beside Saint Simeon the Stylite.

What can we learn from Saint John the Warrior?

John the Warrior reminds us that we can stay faithful to our conscience even when we are expected to obey. Placed in an institution that asked him to do harm, he chose to protect the weakest, quietly, and he paid the price. He is a model for soldiers, police officers and all who, in their work, must one day say no to an injustice. His life, then given to serving the poor and prisoners, also shows that the courage of a moment can continue in the charity of every day.

Where to pray to Saint John the Warrior

- **In your parish church**: no particular place of pilgrimage is linked to him in the West; you can pray to him anywhere.
- **In churches of Eastern tradition**: his icon is often found there, especially in the Slavic world.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John the Warrior, Protector of the Persecuted

Saint John the Warrior served in the army of Emperor Julian the Apostate in the 4th century. Ordered to hunt down Christians, he protected them and was imprisoned for it. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him those who must choose between obedience and conscience, soldiers, prisoners and those who have lost something.

Prayer to Saint John the Warrior

Saint John the Warrior,
sent to arrest the disciples of Christ,
you chose to protect them
at the cost of your freedom.
Give me the courage to follow my conscience
when I am asked to do wrong.

You who knew prison,
remember prisoners,
those who suffer for their faith,
and those whom no one visits.
Teach me to serve the poor
with the simplicity that was yours.

Watch over soldiers and their families,
help those who have been robbed or deceived,
and touch the hearts of those who have done wrong.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint John the Warrior

- On his feast day, July 30.
- When you must say no to an unjust demand, at work or elsewhere.
- For soldiers, police officers and those who bear arms.
- For persecuted Christians and for prisoners.
- After a theft or a loss, following a devotion widespread in the East.

A short invocation

> *Saint John the Warrior, protector of the persecuted,*
> *keep me faithful to Christ in all circumstances. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint John the Warrior from July 22 to 30, and read the life of Saint John the Warrior.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John the Warrior

This novena spends nine days with Saint John the Warrior, a 4th-century Roman soldier who protected the Christians persecuted by Emperor Julian. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, July 30, begin on July 22. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

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. End with: "Saint John the Warrior, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. His life is known only through brief, late accounts: the meditations keep to the essentials of the tradition.

Day 1: An ordinary soldier

John served in the Roman army, like many men of his time. God meets each person in their work and daily life.

Prayer: Lord, bless my work and help me live it as a Christian.

Act of the day: Offer your working day to God in the morning.

Day 2: A time of trial

Under Julian, Christians were pushed aside and threatened. Faith became a costly choice.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen my faith when it is mocked or rejected.

Act of the day: Make the Sign of the Cross before your meal, even in front of others.

Day 3: An unjust order

John received the order to arrest Christians. He understood that he could not obey it without betraying God.

Prayer: Lord, enlighten my conscience and give me the strength to refuse evil.

Act of the day: Think of a situation where you should say no, and entrust it to God.

Day 4: Protecting the weak

According to tradition, John warned the Christians and helped several escape. He used his position to protect rather than to harm.

Prayer: Lord, make me a protector of those who are threatened.

Act of the day: Stand up for someone who is criticized or left out.

Day 5: Visiting prisoners

John went to see those already arrested and comforted them. "I was in prison and you came to me," says Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you prisoners and those who visit them.

Act of the day: Pray for a prisoner, or support a prison ministry.

Day 6: Paying the price

Denounced, John was thrown into prison and mistreated. The good he had done brought him suffering, but he did not go back on his choice.

Prayer: Lord, sustain the Christians who are persecuted in the world today.

Act of the day: Learn about a persecuted Christian community and pray for it.

Day 7: Deliverance

At Julian's death, according to Eastern tradition, John regained his freedom. Trials come to an end, and God does not abandon his own.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you a trial I am going through. Help me hope for your deliverance.

Act of the day: Thank God for a past trial you came through.

Day 8: A life of service

Once free, John gave his days to the poor, to prisoners and to travelers. The courage of one day became the charity of a whole life.

Prayer: Lord, open my hands and my heart to those who need me.

Act of the day: Make a donation or do a service for someone in need.

Day 9: A faithful intercessor

Eastern Christians have called on him for centuries, especially to recover what has been lost or stolen. He remains close to those who call on him.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint John the Warrior, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and pray for soldiers and their families.

Closing prayer

Saint John the Warrior,
you who protected the disciples of Christ
and served the poor to the end,
present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me upright and courageous.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Credits and sources

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