

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Joseph Pignatelli

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 15

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IN BRIEF

Saint Joseph Pignatelli

Spanish Jesuit priest, exiled, regarded as the restorer of the Society of Jesus.

Feast day	November 15
Born	December 27, 1737, Zaragoza, Spain
Died	November 15, 1811, Rome, Italy
Canonized	June 12, 1954, by Pope Pius XII
Era	19th century

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Novena to Saint Joseph Pignatelli

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Joseph Pignatelli

Saint Joseph Pignatelli (in Spanish *José Pignatelli*, in Italian *Giuseppe Pignatelli*) was a Jesuit priest born in Zaragoza in 1737 who died in Rome in 1811. Exiled with his brothers when the Jesuits were expelled from Spain, he lived through the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773 without ever giving up his vocation, and he patiently prepared its rebirth. He is often called the "restorer" of the Society. Canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1954, he is commemorated on November 15 in the Roman Martyrology.

Who was Saint Joseph Pignatelli?

Joseph Pignatelli came from one of the great aristocratic families of Europe. His father, Antonio Pignatelli, was an Italian nobleman from the Kingdom of Naples; his mother, Francesca Moncayo, came from a line of Spanish grandees. Nothing seemed to destine him for exile and poverty. Yet his life was marked by one of the greatest trials in the history of the modern Church: the disappearance, for forty-one years, of the order founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

During those years he had neither glory nor power. He kept his brothers united, encouraged them, helped them live their faith without community or ministry, and kept alive the hope of a restoration he would not see himself. His holiness is the holiness of faithfulness in the dark.



Saint Joseph Pignatelli, Jesuit, restorer of the Society of Jesus.

Key dates

- **December 27, 1737**: Born in Zaragoza, in Aragon.
- **Around 1741**: His mother dies; he is partly raised in Naples and grows up speaking Spanish and Italian.
- **May 5, 1753**: He enters the Jesuit novitiate in Tarragona.
- **1762**: Ordained a priest; he then teaches at the Jesuit college in Zaragoza.
- **1767**: King Charles III expels the Jesuits from Spain; exile in Corsica, then in Italy.
- **1771**: Solemn profession in Ferrara.
- **July 21, 1773**: Pope Clement XIV suppresses the Society of Jesus. Pignatelli settles in Bologna.
- **1797**: He renews his religious profession, joining the Jesuits who survived in Russia.

- **1804**: The Society is restored in the Kingdom of Naples, and he becomes its provincial.
- **November 15, 1811**: He dies in Rome.
- **1814**: Pope Pius VII restores the Society of Jesus throughout the world.
- **May 21, 1933**: Beatified by Pope Pius XI.
- **June 12, 1954**: Canonized by Pope Pius XII.

A young Jesuit in Zaragoza

Joseph entered the Society of Jesus very young and studied letters, philosophy and theology in the Jesuit colleges of Aragon and Catalonia. Ordained a priest in 1762, he taught the humanities in Zaragoza. A tradition holds that the young Francisco de Goya was among his pupils.

Besides teaching, he taught catechism to street children and visited the sick and prisoners. His health was fragile all his life, but it did not stop him from spending himself for the poor.

Exile and suppression

In 1767 King Charles III expelled the Jesuits from all his territories. Joseph Pignatelli could have obtained an exception because of his birth, but he chose to leave with his brothers. Alongside his provincial, he became the mainstay of the whole group of Aragonese Jesuits. After an exhausting journey at sea, the exiles landed in Corsica. But the island passed to France in 1768, and they had to leave again. They found refuge in Ferrara, in the Papal States.

On July 21, 1773, Pope Clement XIV, under pressure from the Catholic courts of Europe, suppressed the Society of Jesus. The communities were dissolved. Joseph settled in Bologna. There he led a simple and prayerful life, gathered around him former Spanish Jesuits who had lost everything, organized spiritual and intellectual gatherings and helped them hold on.

He practiced and recommended "spiritual conversation," the Jesuit art of speaking about God from heart to heart. A cultured man, he was also welcomed by noble families of Bologna, and he brought several of their members back to the faith.

Preparing the rebirth

The Society had not entirely vanished. In White Russia, Empress Catherine II refused to promulgate the brief of suppression, and a few Jesuits carried on their life there. In 1797 Joseph Pignatelli renewed his profession by joining them.

With prudence and perseverance he worked to obtain recognition of the Society wherever it was possible. With the support of the Duke of Parma, the Society was restored in that duchy, and in 1804 Pope Pius VII authorized it in the Kingdom of Naples. Joseph was named provincial. He opened houses, welcomed novices and trained a new generation.

The Napoleonic wars overturned everything. In 1806 the arrival of French troops in Naples led to a new expulsion. Joseph withdrew to Rome, where he went on receiving vocations, and he also supported the restoration of the Society in Sardinia. Worn out, he died in Rome on November 15, 1811.

Three years later, in 1814, Pius VII, back from his captivity, restored the Society of Jesus throughout the world. Pignatelli was the living bridge between the old Society and the new.

Devotion and feast day

Beatified by Pius XI in 1933, he was canonized by Pius XII on June 12, 1954. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on November 15, the day of his death; the Society of Jesus celebrates him in its own calendar on November 14.

His remains are venerated in Rome, in the Church of the Gesù, the mother church of the Jesuits.

Why pray to Saint Joseph Pignatelli?

Saint Joseph Pignatelli has no traditional patronage, but he teaches us how to remain faithful when everything seems lost. He did not try to force history. He kept his brothers in hope, prayed, waited and seized every opportunity. He can be invoked for communities in crisis, for discouraged priests and religious, for exiles, and for all who are going through a long trial. Jesuits and those formed in Ignatian spirituality see in him a witness of loyalty to their vocation.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Joseph Pignatelli in art

He is usually shown in the plain black habit of the Jesuits, with a thin and serious face, as in his portraits. He has no widely known personal attribute: what identifies him is the Jesuit habit and the memory of the Society he helped to keep alive.

Where to pray to Saint Joseph Pignatelli

- **Rome**: the Church of the Gesù, where his remains rest, not far from the tomb of Saint Ignatius.
- **Zaragoza** (Spain): his home city, where Jesuit places keep his memory.
- **Bologna** (Italy): the city where he lived through the years of the suppression.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Joseph Pignatelli or the novena to Saint Joseph Pignatelli.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Joseph Pignatelli for Hope in Trials

Saint Joseph Pignatelli, a Spanish Jesuit, went through exile and the suppression of the Society of Jesus without losing hope, and he prepared its rebirth. He is an intercessor for all who are living through a long trial. We know of no widely used traditional prayer to him, so here is an original prayer by Saintspedia, followed by the Ignatian prayer of self-offering that shaped his life.

Prayer to Saint Joseph Pignatelli

Saint Joseph Pignatelli, you left everything to follow your brothers into exile: teach me faithfulness when human supports fall away.

You saw your order suppressed and your vocation seemingly broken, yet you never stopped living as a religious: keep me in hope when my plans collapse.

You upheld your discouraged companions by your words, your prayer and your friendship: make me a brother or sister who lifts others up and encourages them.

You patiently prepared a rebirth that you did not live to see: teach me to sow without demanding to reap. I entrust to you especially: (name your intention). May everything in my life be for the greater glory of God. Amen.

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



The Church of the Gesù in Rome, where the remains of Saint Joseph Pignatelli rest.

Prayer of Saint Ignatius: "Take, O Lord, and Receive"

Joseph Pignatelli lived to the full the offering that Saint Ignatius of Loyola proposes at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*. You can pray it with him:

> *Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me; to Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.*

Source: Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 234 (Contemplation to Attain Love), traditional English translation.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Joseph Pignatelli

- Religious communities and parishes in crisis.

- Discouraged priests and religious.
- Exiles and people driven from their country.
- Those going through a trial that lasts.
- The Jesuits and all who live by Ignatian spirituality.

When to pray this prayer

The Roman Martyrology commemorates Saint Joseph Pignatelli on November 15; the Society of Jesus celebrates him on November 14. Pray to him whenever a trial seems endless, when a work you love is threatened, or when you need courage to wait for God's time. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Joseph Pignatelli, and read the life of Saint Joseph Pignatelli.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Joseph Pignatelli

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Joseph Pignatelli, the Spanish Jesuit who kept faith through exile and the suppression of his order and prepared its restoration. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on November 15, the day the Roman Martyrology commemorates him, begin on November 7 (Jesuit communities, who celebrate him on November 14, can begin on November 6). It is especially suited to anyone going through a long trial.

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, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day. You may also pray it with a community, a parish group or a family facing a difficult season.

Day 1: Rich, yet free

Joseph Pignatelli was born in 1737 into a great noble family of Spain and Naples. He could have had a brilliant career at court. Instead, he chose to follow Christ in the Society of Jesus. True freedom is to put God before every advantage.

Prayer: Lord, free my heart from attachment to wealth, status and comfort, so that I may follow you freely. Amen.

Today: Give away something you do not need.

Day 2: Teaching the little ones

As a young priest in Zaragoza, he taught the humanities, but also gave catechism to street children and visited the sick and prisoners. Learning and charity went together in his life.

Prayer: Lord, bless teachers and catechists, and help me to share my faith simply with those around me. Amen.

Today: Pray for a teacher or catechist who helped you, or for children who have no one to teach them.

Day 3: Choosing to stay with one's brothers

In 1767, when the Jesuits were expelled from Spain, his noble birth could have spared him. He refused an exception and left with his brothers. Love does not abandon others in the hour of trial.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to remain faithful to those who share my life when times are hard. Amen.

Today: Stand by someone who is going through a difficult time.

Day 4: Exiles on the sea

The Spanish Jesuits wandered at sea, landed in Corsica, had to leave again, and finally found refuge in Ferrara. Exile teaches that our true home is in God.

Prayer: Lord, protect refugees and exiles, give them a place of welcome, and make me attentive to the stranger. Amen.

Today: Pray for refugees, or support an organization that welcomes them.

Day 5: When everything collapses

On July 21, 1773, the Society of Jesus was suppressed. The work of a lifetime seemed destroyed. Joseph did not rebel and did not despair. He went on living his vocation in poverty in Bologna.

Prayer: Lord, when what I have built falls apart, keep me in peace and in trust. You remain when everything else passes. Amen.

Today: Entrust to God a project or a hope that seems lost.

Day 6: Lifting up the discouraged

In Bologna, Pignatelli gathered former Jesuits who had lost everything. He encouraged them through prayer, friendship and spiritual conversation. Sometimes the greatest work is simply to help others hold on.

Prayer: Lord, make me a source of encouragement for those who are tired and discouraged. Amen.

Today: Call or visit someone who feels alone or forgotten.

Day 7: Patient hope

For decades he watched for every opportunity: the survival of the Jesuits in Russia, the restoration in Parma, then in Naples in 1804. He did not force history, but he never stopped preparing for the future.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to wait for your time, without discouragement and without idleness. Amen.

Today: Take one small, concrete step toward a good goal you have postponed.

Day 8: Forming a new generation

As provincial in Naples and later in Rome, Joseph welcomed novices and trained them. He passed on to young men the spirit of the old Society. Every faithful life hands something on.

Prayer: Lord, raise up vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and bless those who form them. Amen.

Today: Pray for a seminarian, a novice or a young person discerning their vocation.

Day 9: Sowing without reaping

Joseph Pignatelli died on November 15, 1811. Three years later, Pope Pius VII restored the Society of Jesus throughout the world. He did not see the harvest, but he had sown it. God completes what we offer him.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Joseph Pignatelli, keep me faithful in the trial and make fruitful what I sow, even if I do not see the harvest. Amen.

Today: Pray the "Take, O Lord, and receive" of Saint Ignatius slowly, offering God your whole life.

Closing prayer

Saint Joseph Pignatelli, faithful in exile and patient in hope, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for communities in crisis, for discouraged priests and religious, for exiles and for all who are going through a long trial. Obtain for us the grace to remain faithful in the night and to work, as you did, for the greater glory of God. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Joseph Pignatelli and pray the prayer to Saint Joseph Pignatelli.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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