

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Lazarus of Bethany

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 29

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Lazarus of Bethany

Brother of Martha and Mary, friend of Jesus, who raised him to life at Bethany.

Feast day	July 29
Born	early 1st century, Bethany, near Jerusalem
Died	1st century, Cyprus or Marseille, according to different traditions
Canonized	pre-congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	lepers, the sick

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Lazarus, the Friend of Jesus

Novena to Saint Lazarus of Bethany

Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Lazarus of Bethany

Saint Lazarus of Bethany is the friend of Jesus whom the Gospel of John shows being raised to life after four days in the tomb. The brother of Martha and Mary, he lived in Bethany, a village near Jerusalem where Jesus liked to stay. His raising, the last great sign of Jesus before his Passion, foreshadows the Resurrection of Christ himself. Since 2021, the Church has celebrated him on July 29 together with his two sisters. Later traditions say he died as a bishop, either in Cyprus or in Provence.

Who was Saint Lazarus?

Lazarus appears only in the Gospel of John, in chapters 11 and 12. His name is the Greek form of the Hebrew Eleazar, meaning "God has helped." He lived with his sisters Martha and Mary in Bethany, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles from Jerusalem. The evangelist insists on one point: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Lazarus is thus one of the few people in the Gospels who is introduced first of all as a friend of Jesus.

He should not be confused with the poor Lazarus in the parable of the rich man in the Gospel of Luke (16:19-31), who is a character in a story told by Jesus. In the Middle Ages the two figures were sometimes blended, which explains why the name of Lazarus was given to leper houses, known as "lazarettos" or "lazar houses."



The Raising of Lazarus, fresco by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua (c. 1305).

Key dates

- **c. 30**: Lazarus falls ill; his sisters send word to Jesus, who is beyond the Jordan.
- **A few days later**: Jesus arrives in Bethany when Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days, and calls him back to life.
- **Shortly afterward**: The chief priests decide to put Jesus to death, and plan to kill Lazarus as well.
- **Six days before Passover**: A meal in Bethany, where Lazarus sits at table with Jesus and Mary anoints his feet with perfume.
- **c. 890**: According to Eastern tradition, a tomb bearing his name is discovered at Kition (Larnaca, Cyprus).
- **1130**: Consecration of the cathedral of Autun, built to house relics attributed to Saint Lazarus.

- **2021**: Pope Francis adds Lazarus to the Roman calendar, with Martha and Mary, on July 29.

"Lazarus, come out!"

When Lazarus falls ill, Martha and Mary send word to Jesus: "Lord, the one you love is ill." Yet Jesus waits two days before setting out. When he arrives, Lazarus has been buried for four days. Martha comes to meet him and tells him of her grief, but also of her faith. Jesus answers her: "I am the resurrection and the life." Martha then proclaims that he is the Christ, the Son of God.

At the tomb, Jesus weeps. Then he has the stone taken away, prays aloud to his Father and cries out: "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man comes out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, his face wrapped in a cloth. "Unbind him, and let him go," says Jesus.

For the evangelist, this sign shows that Jesus is master of life. Lazarus, however, would have to die again. His raising was a return to earthly life, different from the Resurrection of Christ, who enters a new and definitive life.

An awkward witness

The sign had immediate consequences. Many of those who saw it believed in Jesus, and the authorities in Jerusalem decided to put him to death. The Gospel adds that the chief priests also planned to kill Lazarus, because on his account many were coming to believe in Jesus.

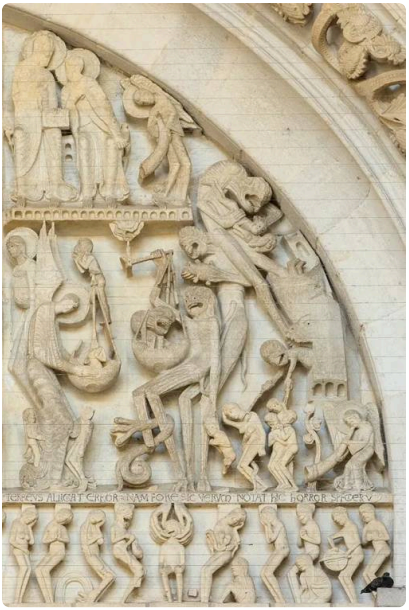
A few days before Passover, a meal was given in Bethany: Martha served, Lazarus was at table, and Mary poured very costly perfume on the feet of Jesus. Then Lazarus disappears from the Gospel story.

The traditions of Cyprus and Provence

What follows no longer comes from the Gospel but from later traditions. The Eastern Churches tell that Lazarus, threatened in Jerusalem, left for Cyprus, where he became bishop of Kition, today's Larnaca, and lived for thirty more years. Around 890, a tomb was found there with the inscription "Lazarus, the friend of Christ." The Byzantine emperor Leo VI had part of the relics taken to Constantinople and built a church in Larnaca, rebuilt several times, which still bears his name.

In the West, a Provençal tradition that developed from the 11th century onward tells that Lazarus, his sisters, Mary Magdalene and other disciples, driven out of Judea, landed in Provence. Lazarus is said to have become the first bishop of Marseille and to have died there as a martyr; his relics were then supposedly moved to Autun.

Historians think this tradition may have grown from the memory of a 5th-century bishop of Aix, also named Lazarus, who was buried in Marseille. Either way, it left a deep mark on the devotion and art of Provence and Burgundy.



The Last Judgment tympanum of the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun, signed by the sculptor Gislebertus (12th century).

Why is Saint Lazarus invoked for the sick and the grieving?

Lazarus does not speak a single word in the Gospel. His holiness lies in the friendship Jesus has for him and in the life he receives from him. He reminds us that no one is too far away, or too shut up in their own tombs, to hear the voice of Christ calling them to come out.

He is prayed to for the sick, for the dead, for those going through grief, and for those who need to come back to life in a spiritual sense. Because of the medieval confusion with the poor Lazarus of the parable, he has also long been associated with lepers and the hospitals that cared for them. With his sisters, he is the model of a home open to welcome the Lord.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Lazarus or follow the novena to Saint Lazarus, from July 20 to 28, the eve of his feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Lazarus in art

- **The burial cloths**: he is most often shown wrapped in bands of linen, rising at the entrance of the tomb at the call of Christ.
- **The open tomb and the stone**: a rock tomb or a sarcophagus, with bystanders sometimes covering their noses.
- **His sisters**: Martha and Mary kneeling before Jesus, as in Giotto's fresco in Padua.
- **The bishop's miter and crozier**: in Provence, Burgundy and Cyprus, he is also shown as a bishop, following the later traditions.

Where to pray to Saint Lazarus

- **Bethany** (al-Eizariya, West Bank): the tomb of Lazarus, venerated since antiquity, and the Franciscan church nearby.
- **Larnaca** (Cyprus): the Church of Saint Lazarus, built over the tomb that Eastern tradition attributes to him.
- **Autun** (Burgundy, France): the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare, a masterpiece of Burgundian Romanesque art.
- **Marseille**: the Abbey of Saint-Victor, whose crypts are linked to the Provençal tradition, and the old cathedral of La Major.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Lazarus, the Friend of Jesus

Saint Lazarus does not say a word in the Gospel, so there is no prayer or text written by him. But the account of his raising, in chapter 11 of the Gospel of John, contains one of the strongest sayings of Jesus, which can be prayed just as it is. This page presents it, then offers an original prayer to Saint Lazarus.

"I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25-27)

Martha comes out to meet Jesus four days after her brother's death. She tells him of her grief and of her faith. Translation by Saintspedia.

> *Jesus said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*
>
> *She said to him: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."*

Source: Gospel of John, chapter 11, verses 25-27. This passage is often read at Christian funerals.

Another word to meditate on

> *"Lazarus, come out!" [...] "Unbind him, and let him go."*

Source: Gospel of John, chapter 11, verses 43-44. The call of Jesus and the order he gives to the crowd remind us that new life is received from God, but that it also needs the help of others to be freed from what binds it.

Prayer to Saint Lazarus, the friend of Jesus

Saint Lazarus, friend of Jesus, you whom he wept for and called back to life, pray for me.

When I am ill, discouraged or shut in by my fears, remind me that the Lord knows my name and can call me to come out. When I mourn someone I love, obtain for me the faith of your sister Martha: to believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

You who welcomed Christ into your home at Bethany, help me to make my home a place of friendship and welcome. I entrust to you the sick, the dying, those who grieve, and also my intention: (name it in silence).

May I in turn help my brothers and sisters to be freed from what binds them, so that they may walk freely toward life. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Since 2021, Saint Lazarus has been celebrated on July 29 together with his sisters, Saint Martha and Saint Mary. The Eastern Churches celebrate his raising on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, called "Lazarus Saturday." You can also pray to him at the bedside of someone who is ill, in a time of mourning, or during Lent, when the Church reads this Gospel on the Fifth Sunday of Lent (Year A).

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Lazarus, from July 20 to 28, and read the life of Saint Lazarus.

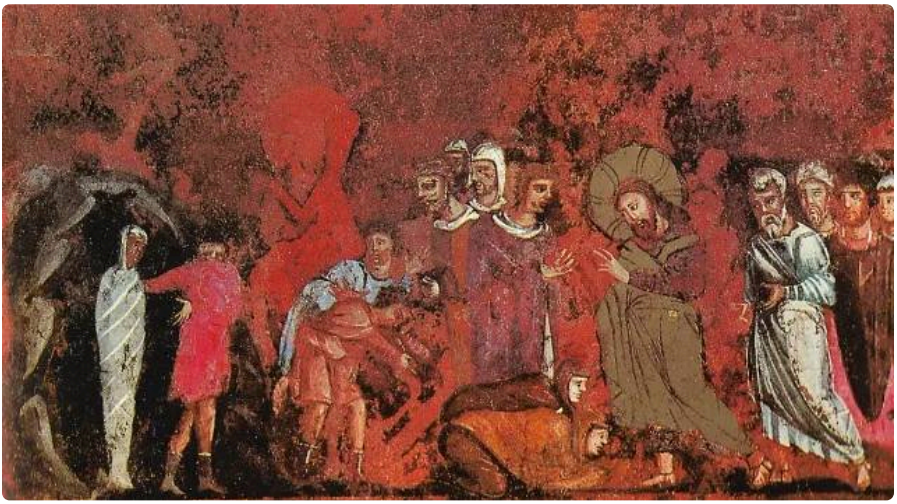
NOVENA

Novena to Saint Lazarus of Bethany

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia that follows the account of the raising of Lazarus in the Gospel of John (chapters 11 and 12). It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on July 20; it ends on July 28, the day before the feast of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus on July 29. It can also be prayed for someone who is ill or in a time of mourning, at any point in the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. At the start of the novena, you may wish to read the whole of chapter 11 of the Gospel of John. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.



Saint Lazarus of Bethany, in a church statue or stained glass window.

Day 1: The friend of Jesus

"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Before any miracle, there is a friendship. Lazarus is first of all the one whom Jesus loves. Bethany was a house where Jesus could rest among friends, a few miles from the city where he would be rejected. The Gospel does not tell us of any great deed he accomplished; it simply tells us that he was loved.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to believe that you love me too, as a friend, and not because of what I achieve.

Today: Take a moment of simple prayer, like a conversation with a friend.

Day 2: The one you love is ill

Martha and Mary do not tell Jesus what to do. They simply entrust their brother to him: "Lord, the one you love is ill." That is already a prayer, and perhaps the most trusting kind.

Prayer: Lord, the one you love is ill: I entrust (name a person) to you with confidence.

Today: Call or visit someone who is sick.

Day 3: The waiting

Jesus is slow to come. For the two sisters, this silence is a trial. God does not always answer at the moment we hope for, and his delays can feel like absence. Yet he has not forgotten Bethany.

Prayer: Lord, when you seem far away, keep me in trust and give me the patience to wait for you.

Today: Entrust to God a prayer that seems to have gone unanswered.

Day 4: If you had been here

Martha tells Jesus her grief: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." We can tell God everything, even our reproaches. He prefers an honest heart to polite silence.

Prayer: Lord, I tell you my sorrow plainly. Receive it and turn it into faith.

Today: Write down for God what makes you suffer, then offer it to him.

Day 5: I am the resurrection

To Martha's grief, Jesus answers: "I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?" Martha responds with an act of faith that has echoed through the centuries: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Prayer: Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. Increase my faith.

Today: Pray the Creed slowly, pausing on each line.

Day 6: Jesus wept

Before the tomb of his friend, Jesus weeps. He is not indifferent to our pain; he shares it. The God who is about to raise Lazarus first stands beside the grieving and cries with them.

Prayer: Jesus, you who wept for your friend, comfort those who mourn and stay close to them.

Today: Pray for the deceased members of your family, or visit a grave.



Praying with Saint Lazarus of Bethany.

Day 7: Take away the stone

Jesus asks for the stone to be rolled away. He waits for us to open what is closed within us, even if it frightens us. Martha hesitates, but she lets it be done.

Prayer: Lord, help me to roll away the stones that shut in my heart, and to let you come in.

Today: Prepare for or receive the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Day 8: Come out

"Lazarus, come out!" The voice of Jesus reaches through death itself. It can also call us out of discouragement, addiction or despair. He calls each person by name, and no tomb is too dark for his voice to reach.

Prayer: Lord, call me by my name and bring me out of whatever holds me captive.

Today: Take one concrete step to get out of a situation that confines you.

Day 9: Unbind him

Jesus asks those present to unbind Lazarus. The life he gives needs the hands of brothers and sisters to be fully set free. We are called to help one another out of our bonds. Jesus could have untied Lazarus himself; he chose to involve the community, so that new life would be received together.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Lazarus, Saint Martha and Saint Mary, give me life and make me someone who helps set others free. Amen.

Today: Help someone in a practical way to carry a burden.

Closing prayer

Saint Lazarus, friend of Jesus, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for me, for the sick, for the dying and for those who weep. Obtain for us the grace to believe that Christ is the resurrection and the life, and to open our homes to his presence. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Lazarus and the prayer to Saint Lazarus.

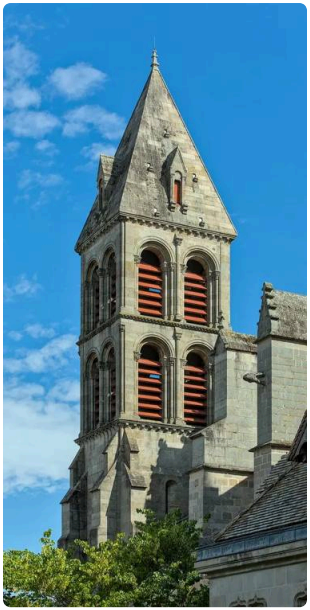
PILGRIMAGE

Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun

The Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun, in Burgundy, was built in the 12th century to house relics venerated as those of Saint Lazarus, the friend of Jesus. Famous around the world for its Last Judgment tympanum and its carved capitals, it is one of the masterpieces of Romanesque art. It also remains the main place in France associated with devotion to Saint Lazarus.

A church for the pilgrims of Saint Lazarus

In the 11th century, Autun already had a cathedral dedicated to Saint Nazarius, and relics attributed to Saint Lazarus were venerated there, drawing many pilgrims. To receive them, the bishop had a new neighboring church built around 1120. It was consecrated in 1130 by Pope Innocent II, and the relics were solemnly transferred there in 1146. Only later did it officially become the city's cathedral. The devotion to Saint Lazarus at Autun is linked to the Provençal tradition, according to which Lazarus was bishop of Marseille. As with any tradition of this kind, the exact origin of these relics cannot be established historically.



Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun.

Gislebertus's tympanum and the capitals

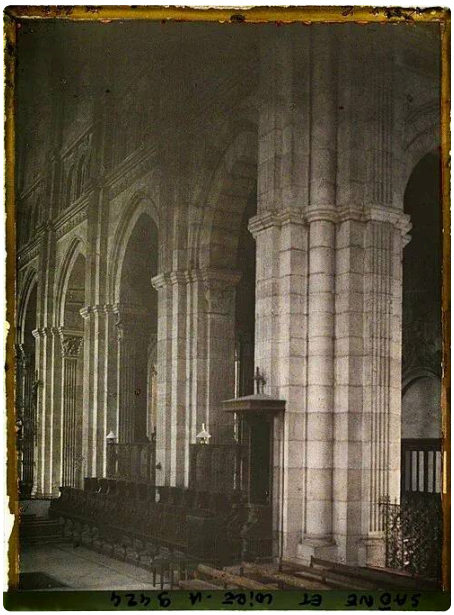
Above the main portal, the great Last Judgment tympanum bears a Latin inscription: "Gislebertus hoc fecit," "Gislebertus made this." Christ in glory welcomes the elect and casts out the damned, in a striking composition. In the 18th century, judged out of fashion, the tympanum was covered with plaster, which protected it; it was rediscovered in the 19th century. Inside, the carved capitals tell biblical scenes, including the famous "Dream of the Magi," visible in the chapter room, where an angel wakes the three kings by showing them the star.

The vanished tomb of Saint Lazarus

The relics once rested in a great marble mausoleum placed behind the high altar, in the form of a small church adorned with statues of Lazarus, his sisters, and the apostles. It was dismantled in the 18th century during alterations to the choir. A few sculptures from it are kept at the nearby Musée Rolin, which also holds Gislebertus's famous "Eve," from the former north portal.

Praying at Autun

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Lazarus and chapter 11 of the Gospel according to Saint John. On site, a time of silence in the nave lets you entrust someone who is ill, a deceased loved one, or a person who needs to find life again. The prayer to Saint Lazarus can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun, interior.

Other places of Saint Lazarus

- **Bethany** (al-Eizariya, West Bank): the tomb of Lazarus, venerated since the earliest centuries, and the Franciscan Church of Saint Lazarus.
- **Larnaca** (Cyprus): the Church of Saint Lazarus, over the tomb that Eastern tradition attributes to him.
- **Marseille**: the Abbey of Saint-Victor and its crypts, linked to the Provençal tradition, and the old Cathedral of La Major.
- **Tarascon** and **Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer** (Provence): places of the tradition of the arrival of Lazarus and his sisters, with the Collegiate Church of Sainte-Marthe in Tarascon.

Practical information

The cathedral is in the upper town of Autun, in Saône-et-Loire, near the Musée Rolin. It is both a working place of worship, served by the Diocese of Autun, and a heavily visited monument. Check Mass and visiting times with the parish or the tourist office before you come.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: Andrija12345678, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The Raising of Lazarus, fresco by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua (c. 1305).: Image: Giotto, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The Last Judgment tympanum of the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun, signed by the sculptor Gislebertus (12th century).: Image: Benjamin Smith, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Lazarus of Bethany, in a church statue or stained glass window.: Image: Unknown author, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source
- Praying with Saint Lazarus of Bethany.: Image: Vyacheslav Argenberg, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun.: Image: Benjamin Smith, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun, interior.: Image: Chevalier Georges, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com