

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Louis Bertrand

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint Louis Bertrand

Spanish Dominican, novice master in Valencia and missionary in New Granada, patron saint of Colombia.

Feast day	October 9
Born	January 1, 1526, Valencia, Spain
Died	October 9, 1581, Valencia, Spain
Canonized	April 12, 1671, by Pope Clement X
Era	16th century
Patron saint of	Colombia

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Louis Bertrand

Saint Louis Bertrand, in Spanish Luis Beltrán, was a sixteenth-century Spanish Dominican, born in Valencia in 1526 and died in the same city in 1581. A renowned novice master and an adviser to Saint Teresa of Ávila, he spent seven years as a missionary in present-day Colombia, of which he is the patron saint. Canonized in 1671, he is celebrated on October 9.

Who was Saint Louis Bertrand?

Louis Bertrand is one of the first great saints of the evangelization of South America. An ardent preacher and a man of prayer and penance, he combined two missions that seem opposed: the patient formation of young religious in a convent in Valencia, and the proclamation of the Gospel to the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean coast of New Granada. Everywhere, he showed great gentleness toward the poor and great firmness toward the powerful, to the point of publicly denouncing the violence of Spanish colonists.

He belongs to the great generation of Spanish saints of the Golden Age: he was ordained by Saint Thomas of Villanova, corresponded with Saint Teresa of Ávila and advised Saint John of Ribera, archbishop of Valencia.



Saint Louis Bertrand, by Francisco de Zurbarán.

Key dates

- **January 1, 1526**: Birth in Valencia, Spain; he is baptized at the same font as Saint Vincent Ferrer.
- **August 26, 1544**: He receives the habit at the Dominican convent of Valencia.
- **1547**: Ordained a priest by Archbishop Thomas of Villanova.
- **c. 1551**: He becomes novice master, an office he will hold for many years.
- **1562**: He sails for America and lands at Cartagena de Indias, in New Granada.
- **1562-1569**: Missionary in the Indigenous villages of the Caribbean region, then in other territories of the Caribbean Sea.
- **1569**: Return to Valencia, where he again becomes novice master, then prior.

- **October 9, 1581**: Death in Valencia, after a long illness.
- **June 19, 1608**: Beatified by Pope Paul V.
- **April 12, 1671**: Canonized by Pope Clement X, on the same day as Saint Rose of Lima.

A youth in Valencia

Louis was born on January 1, 1526, in Valencia, into a well-to-do Christian family. It was said that his family was related to that of Saint Vincent Ferrer, the great fifteenth-century Dominican preacher of Valencia, whose example he wanted to follow. He was even baptized at the same font as Vincent.

Drawn to prayer from an early age, he entered the convent of the Friars Preachers in his city despite his father's reluctance, and received the habit in 1544. Ordained a priest in 1547, he was extremely demanding of himself: fasting, vigils and penance.

The novice master

His superiors soon entrusted him with the formation of novices, in the convent of Valencia and then in other houses of the province, especially Llombai. He held this office with an authority that did not exclude tenderness: he is said to have wanted to have for his novices "the gentleness of a mother and the authority of a father."

During an epidemic of plague in Valencia, according to his biographers, he devoted himself to caring for the sick. His reputation for holiness and discernment grew. Saint Teresa of Ávila wrote to him to ask his advice about her plan to reform the Carmelite order, and he encouraged her to go ahead.

Seven years in New Granada

In 1562, Louis obtained permission to go on mission. He landed at Cartagena de Indias, on the Caribbean coast of present-day Colombia. For seven years, he traveled on foot through the Indigenous villages of the region, such as Tubará and Cipacoa, then went on to other territories around the Caribbean Sea. Accounts of his life credit him with thousands of baptisms.

At his canonization process, witnesses stated that he had the gift of tongues and made himself understood by peoples whose language he did not know; his biographers also report that he used interpreters.

Louis lived poorly, as close as possible to the Indigenous people. From the pulpit, he denounced the cruelty and greed of certain Spanish colonists and officials, which earned him strong enemies. A tradition says that a sorcerer tried to poison him: he drank the cup and did not die. This is the origin of his most common attribute, a chalice from which a serpent escapes. Another tradition tells that a man who threatened him with a firearm saw it change into a crucifix.

Weary of the opposition he met, and wishing to defend the Indigenous peoples before his superiors, he obtained permission to return to Spain in 1569.

His last years

Back in Valencia, Louis resumed the formation of novices and became prior. He was an adviser to Archbishop Saint John of Ribera and a much-followed preacher. He fell seriously ill in 1580 and died on October 9, 1581, at the age of fifty-five. He was buried in the church of the convent of Saint Dominic in Valencia.

Pope Paul V beatified him in 1608, and Clement X canonized him in 1671, together with Saint Rose of Lima, Saint Francis Borgia, Saint Cajetan and Saint Philip Benizi. In 1690, he was proclaimed patron of the New Kingdom

of Granada, present-day Colombia. During the Spanish Civil War, in 1936, his remains were desecrated and burned.

Why is Saint Louis Bertrand the patron saint of Colombia?

Louis Bertrand was one of the first missionaries to proclaim the Gospel on the Caribbean coast of what is now Colombia, and in 1690 he was officially proclaimed patron of the New Kingdom of Granada. He shows that one cannot proclaim Christ without defending the dignity of those to whom He is proclaimed. A tireless missionary, he refused to confuse the Gospel with the interests of the conquerors.

As a trainer of religious, he also reminds us that the Church needs patient teachers who accompany vocations. Christians pray to him for Colombia and Latin America, for missionaries, for those who form seminarians and novices, and for those who fight injustice against Indigenous peoples.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Louis Bertrand in art

- **The white and black Dominican habit**.
- **A chalice with a serpent**: a reminder of the poisoned cup he drank without harm.
- **A gun turning into a crucifix**: a less frequent scene drawn from another tradition.
- **A crucifix** held in his hand, as a preacher.



Saint Louis Bertrand, statue by Thibaud Maistrier, church of Saint-Exupère, Toulouse.

Where to pray to Saint Louis Bertrand

- **Valencia** (Spain): his hometown, where he spent most of his religious life and where he died.
- **Cartagena de Indias** (Colombia): the port where he landed and began his mission.
- **Colombia**: throughout the country, of which he is the patron saint, many parishes bear his name.
- **Toulouse** (France): the church of Saint-Exupère, which keeps a seventeenth-century statue of him.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Louis Bertrand and the novena to Saint Louis Bertrand.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Louis Bertrand, Patron of Colombia

Saint Louis Bertrand, Dominican of Valencia and sixteenth-century missionary in New Granada, is the patron saint of Colombia. To our knowledge, apart from the liturgical collect of his feast, there is no traditional prayer to him with a well-established source. This page offers a prayer inspired by his life. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

Prayer to Saint Louis Bertrand

Saint Louis Bertrand, you left everything
to carry the Gospel across the seas:
give me a missionary heart,
one that dares to speak of Jesus with simplicity and joy.

You lived poorly among the peoples of New Granada:
teach me respect for every person and every culture.
You denounced the violence and greed of the powerful:
obtain for me the courage to defend the little ones and the oppressed.

You patiently formed so many young religious:
watch over seminarians, novices and those who form them.
Give the Church shepherds after the heart of God.

You drank the poisoned cup without harm:
keep me from the evil that threatens my soul and my body.
Protect Colombia and all the peoples of Latin America;
grant them peace, justice and reconciliation.
I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Amen.



Saint Louis Bertrand, Dominican missionary.

Intentions to pray for with Saint Louis Bertrand

- Peace and reconciliation in Colombia.
- Missionaries and all who proclaim the Gospel in faraway lands.
- Indigenous peoples and respect for their dignity.
- Novices, seminarians and those who accompany them.
- Preachers, that they may speak with truth and charity.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Louis Bertrand is celebrated on October 9, the anniversary of his death in Valencia in 1581. You can also pray to him when leaving on a mission, when entering a novitiate or seminary, or for a country torn by violence. For nine days of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Louis Bertrand, and read the life of Saint Louis Bertrand.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Louis Bertrand

This novena to Saint Louis Bertrand is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the Dominican of Valencia from his youth to his mission in New Granada and his last years as a teacher of novices. To end on October 9, his feast day, begin it on October 1. You can also pray it at any time, for Colombia, for missionaries, or for a young person discerning a vocation.

How to pray this novena

Each day, take a few minutes of quiet. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Close with the small act suggested for the day. If you miss a day, do not be discouraged: simply continue.

You can pray this novena alone, with your family or with a parish group. Colombian communities around the world may wish to pray it together, entrusting their country to its patron saint. Before you begin, name the intention you want to place in his hands: a missionary you know, a young person in formation, a family in need of peace.

Day 1: Following a model

Louis grew up in Valencia in the memory of Saint Vincent Ferrer, the great Dominican preacher of his city, and wanted to follow his example. The saints inspire one another. We also need models who show us the way to Christ.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, help me to choose good examples and to become one for others. Amen.

Today: Read a few lines about a saint you admire.

Day 2: A call stronger than resistance

Louis entered the Dominican convent despite his father's reluctance. Following God's call sometimes means disappointing those we love, while continuing to love them. Faithfulness to God is the greatest gift we can give our families.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, give courage to young people who hear God's call, and peace to their families. Amen.

Today: Pray for a young person discerning a vocation.

Day 3: A mother's gentleness, a father's authority

As novice master, Louis wanted to have "the gentleness of a mother and the authority of a father." Forming others requires both tenderness and firmness. Parents, teachers and mentors know how hard this balance is.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, teach me to guide those entrusted to me with gentleness and firmness. Amen.

Today: Encourage someone you are responsible for with a sincere word of appreciation.

Day 4: Serving the sick

According to his biographers, when plague struck Valencia, Louis devoted himself to caring for the sick. Charity is not only words: it means being present when others are afraid.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, give me a heart ready to serve those who suffer. Amen.

Today: Contact a sick or lonely person.

Day 5: Crossing the sea

In 1562, Louis sailed for America and landed at Cartagena de Indias. He left his homeland, his language and his comfort to bring the Gospel to people he did not know. Every Christian is sent, even if not across the ocean.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, bless all missionaries and give me the courage to share my faith. Amen.

Today: Pray for a missionary, or support a mission through a gift.

Day 6: Walking with the poor

For seven years, Louis traveled on foot through Indigenous villages and lived poorly among the people. He did not proclaim Christ from a distance but shared the life of those he served.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, teach me respect for every person and every culture. Amen.

Today: Learn something about the history or culture of an Indigenous people.

Day 7: Speaking out against injustice

From the pulpit, Louis denounced the cruelty and greed of colonists and officials, and made strong enemies. The Gospel cannot be used to cover injustice. Defending the weak is part of proclaiming Christ.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, give me the courage to defend the little ones and the oppressed. Amen.

Today: Pray for peace and justice in Colombia and Latin America.

Day 8: Protected from evil

Tradition says that Louis drank a poisoned cup without dying. Whatever the details, his life shows that God keeps those who trust in him, even in danger. The chalice with the serpent reminds us that evil does not have the last word.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, keep me from the evil that threatens my soul and my body. Amen.

Today: Pray slowly the Our Father, dwelling on the words "deliver us from evil."

Day 9: Faithful to the end

Back in Valencia, Louis returned to forming novices, served as prior and preached until a long illness. He died on October 9, 1581. His life was a gift given to the end, in mission and in hidden service.

Prayer: Saint Louis Bertrand, intercede for me, that I may persevere in faith and charity all my life. Amen.

Today: Thank God for someone who helped you grow in faith.

Closing prayer

Lord our God, you gave Saint Louis Bertrand a burning love for the Gospel and a deep respect for the peoples to whom he brought it. Through his intercession, make us faithful witnesses of your Son, courageous defenders of the poor and patient guides for those you entrust to us. Bless Colombia, protect missionaries and hear the intention we have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Continue with the prayer to Saint Louis Bertrand or read his life.

CREDITS

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