

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Luke Kirby

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 30

IN BRIEF

Saint Luke Kirby

English priest, martyred at Tyburn in 1582, one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

Feast day	May 30
Born	c. 1549, northern England
Died	May 30, 1582, Tyburn, London
Canonized	canonized October 25, 1970, by Paul VI
Era	16th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Luke Kirby for Persecuted Christians

Novena to Saint Luke Kirby

Tyburn Convent in London

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Luke Kirby

Saint Luke Kirby was an English Catholic priest of the 16th century. A convert to Catholicism, trained at Douai and Rome, he returned in secret to England in 1580 and was arrested as soon as he landed at Dover. Tortured in the Tower of London and condemned along with Saint Edmund Campion, he was executed at Tyburn on May 30, 1582. Canonized in 1970 among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, he is celebrated on May 30.

Who was Saint Luke Kirby?

Luke Kirby was born around 1549 in the north of England. It was the time when Queen Elizabeth I was imposing a Church of England separated from Rome, and the Catholic Mass was forbidden. Priests trained abroad who returned to the country were treated as traitors. Kirby was one of those young men who, knowing the danger, chose to become priests in order to support English Catholics. He was known in Rome for his charity toward his countrymen in need. His life was short, and it ended on the scaffold.

Key dates

- **c. 1549**: Born in the north of England.
- **1570s**: After studies, probably at Cambridge, he becomes a Catholic at Louvain.
- **1576**: Enters the English college founded by William Allen to train priests for England.
- **September 1577**: Ordained a priest at Cambrai.
- **April 23, 1579**: Takes the oath of the English College in Rome, promising to go on mission to England.

- **April 14, 1580**: Leaves Rome with Edmund Campion and Ralph Sherwin.
- **June 1580**: Arrested as he lands at Dover, he is imprisoned in the Gatehouse prison in Westminster.
- **December 1580**: Transferred to the Tower of London, where he is tortured.
- **November 1581**: Tried with Edmund Campion, he is condemned to death for high treason.
- **May 30, 1582**: Executed at Tyburn, in London, with other priests.
- **1886**: Beatified by Leo XIII.
- **October 25, 1970**: Canonized by Paul VI among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

Conversion and formation

Kirby pursued higher studies in England, probably at Cambridge. It was at Louvain, in the Spanish Netherlands, that he embraced the Catholic faith. He then joined the English college founded by William Allen, first established at Douai and later at Reims, where priests were trained for the secret mission to England. Ordained a priest at Cambrai in 1577, he set out for England a first time in 1578, but soon returned and went to Rome.

At the English College in Rome, he took the oath in 1579 to go on mission. He was noticed there for his charity: with his small purse, he helped English travelers passing through Rome who were in poverty, Catholic or not. It was also in Rome that he met Anthony Munday, a spy who would later testify falsely against him.

Arrested on arrival

In the spring of 1580, Kirby left Rome with the group of Edmund Campion and Ralph Sherwin. He crossed France on foot, passing through Reims, Douai and Dunkirk, then sailed for England. But in June 1580 he was arrested as soon as he arrived at Dover. He was locked up in the Gatehouse prison in Westminster, then transferred in December to the Tower of London.

There he suffered a terrible torture known as "the scavenger's daughter," which compressed the whole body in an iron hoop. He endured this torment for more than an hour without denying his faith.

The trial and martyrdom

In November 1581, Kirby was tried with Edmund Campion and other priests, accused of plotting against the queen. The charge was false: their only crime was being Catholic priests. All were condemned to death. Campion was executed on December 1, 1581, but Kirby's execution was postponed. For his last months, he was kept in irons.

On May 30, 1582, he was taken to Tyburn, London's place of public executions, with the priests William Filby, Thomas Cottam and Laurence Richardson. He was hanged, then drawn and quartered, the punishment reserved for traitors. He died as a witness to Christ, at about thirty-three.

Devotion and recognition

Luke Kirby was beatified in 1886 by Pope Leo XIII, with many other English martyrs. On October 25, 1970, Pope Paul VI canonized him among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, with Edmund Campion, Ralph Sherwin and Margaret Clitherow. He is celebrated on May 30, the day of his martyrdom. He is also honored together with all the martyrs of England and Wales. He is shown as a priest, with the palm of martyrdom.

What should we remember about Saint Luke Kirby?

Luke Kirby knew what awaited him in England. He went anyway, so that the Catholics of his country would not be left without the sacraments. Arrested at once, he was barely able to carry out his ministry: his witness was that of prison, torture and death. He reminds us that faithfulness matters more than effectiveness. We can pray to him for persecuted Christians, for prisoners and for priests, and for reconciliation between divided Christians.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Luke Kirby and the novena to Saint Luke Kirby.

Where to pray to Saint Luke Kirby

- **London**: Tyburn Convent, near Marble Arch, a shrine to the martyrs executed at Tyburn.
- **London**: the Tower of London, where he was imprisoned and tortured.
- **Rome**: the English College, where he prepared for the mission and where its martyred alumni are honored.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Luke Kirby for Persecuted Christians

Saint Luke Kirby, an English priest and convert to Catholicism, returned secretly to his country in 1580 to serve persecuted Catholics. Arrested as soon as he arrived and tortured in the Tower of London, he was executed at Tyburn on May 30, 1582. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to his intercession persecuted Christians, prisoners and priests.

Prayer to Saint Luke Kirby

Saint Luke Kirby,
you sought the truth and found Christ in his Church.
You wanted to become a priest
to bring the sacraments to your people, deprived of Mass,
knowing what it might cost you.

Arrested the moment you returned,
you were barely able to carry out your ministry.
Your prison and your sufferings became your offering,
and your blood made the faith of your country bear fruit.

Pray for Christians who are persecuted today,
for those in prison because of their faith,
for those who are tortured or unjustly condemned.
Pray for priests and for those preparing to become priests.
Give us your charity toward the poor
and your faithfulness to the end.

Obtain for divided Christians the grace of forgiveness and unity.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Luke Kirby

- On his feast day, May 30.
- For persecuted Christians around the world.
- For a prisoner, or for someone falsely accused.
- For seminarians and priests.
- When your efforts seem to bear no visible fruit.

A short invocation

In times of trial, you can pray:

> *Lord Jesus, keep me faithful to you whatever happens.*
> *Saint Luke Kirby, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Luke Kirby from May 22 to 30, and read the life of Saint Luke Kirby.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Luke Kirby

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Luke Kirby, an English priest martyred at Tyburn in 1582. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, May 30, begin on May 22. It is suited to entrusting persecuted Christians, prisoners or a personal trial, and you can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and bring your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Finish with: "Saint Luke Kirby, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena in a concrete way.

Day 1: Seeking the truth

Luke Kirby studied, reflected, searched. At Louvain, he entered the Catholic Church. Conversion is often the fruit of a long and honest search.

Prayer: Lord, give me a mind that seeks the truth and a heart ready to follow it.

Today: Read a passage of the Gospel and meditate on it for a few minutes.

Day 2: Answering the call

Kirby became a priest at the English college, to serve a country where the Mass was forbidden. He answered a risky call with generosity.

Prayer: Lord, call young people to follow you as priests, and give them the strength to say yes.

Today: Pray for a seminarian or a priest you know.

Day 3: The oath

In Rome, Kirby swore an oath to go on mission to England. He was committing his whole life. Promises made to God are acts of trust.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be faithful to the commitments I have made, in my baptism, in my marriage or in my vocation.

Today: Silently renew your baptismal promises.

Day 4: Charity in Rome

At the college in Rome, Kirby used his small purse to help poor English travelers passing through, Catholic or not. His charity made no distinctions.

Prayer: Lord, open my heart and my hands to those in need, whoever they may be.

Today: Give practical help to a stranger or a visitor.

Day 5: Arrested at the first step

Kirby had barely landed at Dover when he was arrested. Everything he had prepared seemed lost. But God does not look at our results: he looks at our hearts.

Prayer: Lord, when my plans fail from the start, keep me in peace and trust.

Today: Offer God a recent failure or disappointment.

Day 6: In prison

Kirby spent nearly two years in prison, at the Gatehouse and then in the Tower of London. His cell became his place of prayer and offering.

Prayer: Lord, be close to prisoners. Visit them by your grace and through those who accompany them.

Today: Pray for inmates and prison chaplains.

Day 7: Torture

In the Tower of London, Kirby was tortured for more than an hour. He did not deny his faith. Even today, Christians suffer violence for the name of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, sustain persecuted Christians. Give them strength and do not abandon them.

Today: Learn about a persecuted Church and pray for it.

Day 8: Falsely accused

A false witness, Anthony Munday, testified against Kirby. He was condemned as a traitor when all he had done was be a priest. Jesus too was condemned on false testimony.

Prayer: Lord, protect those who are unjustly accused. Help me never to slander anyone.

Today: Stand up for someone who is being spoken of badly.

Day 9: Martyrdom at Tyburn

On May 30, 1582, Kirby died at Tyburn with other priests. He gave his life for Christ and for his people. The Church counts him among her saints.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Luke Kirby, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for the unity of Christians and for reconciliation between Catholics and Anglicans.

Living the novena with Saint Luke Kirby

The life of Saint Luke Kirby is that of a mission that seems to have failed: arrested on the first day, he knew only prison. Yet the Church celebrates him. During these nine days, ask for the grace of faithfulness more than that of success. Think also of Christians who live today in countries where faith is forbidden, and of those imprisoned for it. Their silent faithfulness is a treasure for the whole Church.

Closing prayer

Saint Luke Kirby,
priest and martyr of Christ,
you gave everything for your people, deprived of the sacraments,
and you stayed faithful in prison and under torture.
Present to God the intention I have carried these nine days.
Obtain for me the strength of faithfulness,
charity toward all,
and peace of heart in trial.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Tyburn Convent in London

Tyburn Convent stands in London, near Marble Arch, at the northeast corner of Hyde Park. It was built close to the spot where the Tyburn gallows stood, London's place of public executions for centuries. More than a hundred Catholic martyrs were put to death there between the 16th and 17th centuries, among them Saint Luke Kirby, on May 30, 1582. The convent is now a shrine dedicated to their memory.

From gallows to shrine

The "Tyburn Tree," a gallows with three beams, stood at the end of Oxford Street, at the present site of Marble Arch. A plaque set in the ground on a traffic island marks the spot. Many Catholic priests and lay people were executed there under Elizabeth I and her successors, including Edmund Campion and Luke Kirby.

In the early 20th century, a community of Benedictine nuns, founded in France by Mother Marie-Adèle Garnier, settled nearby to pray on the very site of the martyrdom. The sisters keep perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and look after the martyrs' shrine.



Tyburn Convent, in London.

Visiting the shrine

In the crypt of the convent is the martyrs' shrine, with a replica of the old Tyburn gallows above the altar, as well as relics and mementos of the English and Welsh martyrs. The nuns regularly offer guided tours of the crypt. The chapel, where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, is open for prayer.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Luke Kirby. In the chapel or in the crypt, entrust to him persecuted Christians, prisoners and priests, then recite the prayer to Saint Luke Kirby. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Luke Kirby

- **The Tower of London**: where he was imprisoned and tortured.
- **Rome**: the English College, where he prepared for his mission.
- **Dover**: the port where he was arrested in June 1580.

Practical information

The convent is on Bayswater Road, a few steps from Marble Arch tube station. It is a contemplative monastery: silence is requested in the chapel. Times for guided tours of the crypt and for services may vary: check directly with the convent before you come.

Credits and sources

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