

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Macrina the Elder

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 14

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IN BRIEF

Saint Macrina the Elder

Christian woman of Pontus, grandmother of Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

Feast day	January 14
Born	c. 270, Pontus (Asia Minor)
Died	c. 340, Pontus (Asia Minor)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Macrina the Elder

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Macrina the Elder

Saint Macrina the Elder was a Christian woman of Pontus, in Asia Minor, who lived from the late third century to the middle of the fourth. The paternal grandmother of Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Peter of Sebaste and Saint Macrina the Younger, she handed on to this whole family of saints the faith she had received from the teaching of Saint Gregory the Wonderworker. She survived the persecution of Maximinus by hiding in the forests. The Roman Martyrology celebrates her on January 14.

Who was Saint Macrina the Elder?

She is called "the Elder" to distinguish her from her granddaughter, Saint Macrina the Younger, Basil's elder sister. No *Life* devoted to her has come down to us. What we know of her comes from the writings of her grandchildren and of their friend Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. These testimonies are few but precious, because they come from people close to her who knew her or heard about her within the family. They allow us to draw a portrait that is sober but reliable: a woman of firm faith, tested by persecution, who became the memory of her Church for the generations that followed.

Macrina lived at Neocaesarea in Pontus, today Niksar in Turkey. That Church had been shaped a few decades earlier by the bishop Saint Gregory the Wonderworker (Gregory Thaumaturgus), one of the great evangelizers of Asia Minor and a disciple of Origen. Macrina faithfully kept his teaching and handed it on to her children and grandchildren.

Key dates

- **c. 270**: Born, probably in Pontus, shortly after the death of Saint Gregory the Wonderworker.

- **Early fourth century**: Wife of a Christian of Pontus whose name has not come down to us, she is the mother of Basil the Elder.
- **c. 305-311**: During the persecution of Maximinus Daia, she takes refuge with her husband in the forests of Pontus, where they live in hiding for seven years according to Gregory of Nazianzus.
- **c. 329-330**: Birth of her grandson Basil, whose education in the countryside she shares.
- **c. 340**: Dies at the end of a long life.

A confessor of the faith in the forests of Pontus

In his funeral oration for Saint Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus tells how his friend's paternal grandparents, at the time of the persecution, left everything rather than deny Christ. They lived for seven years in the forests and mountains of Pontus with a few servants, feeding on whatever they could find. Gregory adds that God sometimes fed them in unexpected ways, through game that let itself be caught. He sees them as true confessors of the faith: they did not shed their blood, but they lost everything for Christ. After peace came to the Church, they recovered part of their property.

The word "confessor" had a precise meaning in the early Church. It was given to Christians who had suffered for their faith, by prison, exile or loss of goods, without being put to death. Macrina belongs to this generation of believers who had known the last great persecution before the peace of Constantine.

The teacher of Saint Basil

Saint Basil himself mentions his grandmother in a letter to the people of Neocaesarea. He defends the soundness of his faith by recalling that he was taught from childhood by "the blessed Macrina," who had passed on to him

the words of Gregory the Wonderworker, preserved by oral tradition. It was on the family estate of Annisa, on the banks of the river Iris, that the young Basil spent part of his childhood with her.

Macrina's role was therefore decisive. Through her, the spiritual heritage of Gregory the Wonderworker reached Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, two of the three great Cappadocian Fathers, defenders of the faith of Nicaea against Arianism. Her son, Basil the Elder, and her daughter-in-law, Saint Emmelia, are also honored as saints, as are several of their children. Few families count so many saints in three generations.

Why is Saint Macrina the Elder a saint for grandparents?

No official patronage is attached to her, but Macrina is a natural intercessor for grandparents. She did not write books or found monasteries. She taught her grandchildren what she had received, and they became doctors of the Church and saints. In a time when many families find it hard to hand on the faith, her example shows how much a grandmother's words, prayers and stories can shape a whole generation. Her exile in the forests also shows a faith ready to lose everything rather than deny Christ. She can be prayed to for grandparents, for Christian families and for all who pass on the faith to children.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Macrina the Elder in art

Icons show her as an elderly veiled woman, sometimes holding a cross or a scroll, a sign of the tradition she handed on. She is venerated by the Catholic Church and by the Orthodox Churches on January 14. No tomb or relics have been identified with certainty, and her cult remains tied to that of Saint Basil's family. She is often remembered together with her grandchildren, in a single gaze on this household of saints.

To pray with her, use the prayer to Saint Macrina the Elder or the novena to Saint Macrina the Elder.

Where to pray to Saint Macrina the Elder

- **In the Eastern Churches**: her memory is celebrated on January 14 in the Churches of the Byzantine tradition.
- **Niksar** (Turkey): the ancient Neocaesarea, city of Saint Gregory the Wonderworker and of her family.
- **At home**: without an official shrine, she is readily prayed to at home, with children and grandparents.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Macrina the Elder for Grandparents

Saint Macrina the Elder, grandmother of Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, handed on to her grandchildren the faith she had received. No ancient prayer to her has come down to us, so Saintspedia offers here an original prayer for grandparents and families, inspired by what her grandchildren and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus tell of her.

Prayer to Saint Macrina the Elder for Grandparents

Saint Macrina, faithful grandmother, you kept the teaching you had received and handed it on to your children and grandchildren. Bless all grandparents, and give them the joy of passing on the faith with patience and love.

You lived for seven years hidden in the forests rather than deny Christ. Give me a faith that holds firm in trials, ready to lose everything rather than lose God.

You taught the young Basil the words of the Gospel and of the saints. Help parents and grandparents to speak of God to children simply, by their words and above all by their lives.

Watch over our families. Where faith has grown cold, rekindle it. Where generations no longer understand each other, bring them together. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence), and especially the children and grandchildren I carry in my heart.

Through your intercession, may our homes become, like yours, schools of faith and holiness. Amen.

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

A grandparent's short prayer

Lord, through the prayers of Saint Macrina, keep my grandchildren in your love, and let me be for them a living witness of your faithfulness. Amen.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Macrina the Elder is celebrated on January 14. Her prayer also fits the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, celebrated in the Catholic Church on the fourth Sunday of July, close to the feast of Saints Joachim and Anne on July 26. Grandparents can say it at a grandchild's baptism or first communion, or simply each day for their family.

Read the life of Saint Macrina the Elder, or pray the novena to Saint Macrina the Elder.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Macrina the Elder

This novena to Saint Macrina the Elder is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus tell of her. It is a novena for grandparents, for families and for all who hand on the faith to children. To end it on her feast day, January 14, begin on January 6, the solemnity of the Epiphany. It can also be prayed before the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, on the fourth Sunday of July.

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 the invocation: "Saint Macrina the Elder, faithful grandmother, pray for us." The act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into family life. Grandparents and grandchildren can pray it together, each reading a part. If you are praying for a particular family member, name them each day in your prayer; if you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

Day 1: A Church founded by a saint

Macrina grew up in Neocaesarea, a Church shaped by the bishop Saint Gregory the Wonderworker. She received his teaching and kept it faithfully. Our faith, too, comes to us from those who went before us.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who founded and built up the Church where I received the faith. Make me faithful to what I have received. Amen.

Today: Find out who founded your parish or diocese, and pray for them.

Day 2: Wife and mother

Macrina married a Christian of Pontus and became the mother of Basil the Elder. Her home was the first place where she lived and shared her faith.

Prayer: Lord, bless Christian homes. Make our families places of love, prayer and forgiveness. Amen.

Today: Pray a short prayer together as a family, at a meal or in the evening.

Day 3: Persecution

When persecution came under Maximinus Daia, Macrina and her husband refused to deny Christ. They chose faithfulness over safety and comfort.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen Christians who are persecuted today. Give me courage to stand by my faith when it costs me something. Amen.

Today: Pray for Christians in a country where faith is dangerous.

Day 4: Seven years in the forest

For seven years they lived hidden in the forests and mountains of Pontus, with a few servants, living on what they found. They had lost everything except God.

Prayer: Lord, when I lose what I hold dear, help me to remember that you remain. Be my true treasure. Amen.

Today: Give something you are attached to, or do without a comfort for the day.

Day 5: God provides

Gregory of Nazianzus tells that God sometimes fed them in unexpected ways, through game that let itself be caught. In hardship, Providence did not abandon them.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to trust in your providence, especially when I do not see how I will get through. Amen.

Today: Write down three ways God has provided for you in the past.

Day 6: A grandmother's lessons

At Annisa, on the banks of the Iris, the young Basil spent part of his childhood with his grandmother. She taught him the words of Gregory the Wonderworker that she had kept in her heart.

Prayer: Lord, bless grandparents who speak of you to their grandchildren. Give them patience, wisdom and joy. Amen.

Today: Tell a child a story of faith, or call your grandparents.

Day 7: Words that bear fruit

Years later, Basil, by then a bishop, defended the soundness of his faith by recalling the teaching of "the blessed Macrina." The seed she had sown in a child became the faith of a Doctor of the Church.

Prayer: Lord, make fruitful the seeds of faith sown in children, even when we do not see the harvest. Amen.

Today: Pray for a young person who seems far from God.

Day 8: A family of saints

Macrina's son Basil the Elder, her daughter-in-law Emmelia and several grandchildren, including Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sebaste and Macrina the Younger, are honored as saints. Holiness was passed on like an inheritance.

Prayer: Lord, call our families to holiness. May what is best in us be passed on to those who come after us. Amen.

Today: Pray for each member of your family by name.

Day 9: A long and faithful life

Macrina died around 340, after a long life. She had not written books or founded monasteries, but she had handed on the faith. That was her great work, and it continues each time the faith passes from one generation to the next.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Macrina the Elder, bless the elderly and help them know that their lives still bear fruit. I entrust to you the intention of this novena. Amen.

Today: Visit or call an elderly person who lives alone.

Closing prayer

Saint Macrina the Elder, faithful grandmother and confessor of the faith, you kept the teaching you received and handed it on to your grandchildren, who became saints. Watch over grandparents, parents and children. Rekindle faith in our families, and unite the generations. Present to the Lord the intention of these nine days. Amen.

Read also the life of Saint Macrina the Elder and the prayer to Saint Macrina the Elder.

Credits and sources

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