

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Macrina the Younger

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 19

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IN BRIEF

Saint Macrina the Younger

Consecrated virgin of fourth-century Cappadocia, sister of Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

Feast day	July 19
Born	between 324 and 330
Died	379, Annesi, Pontus (northern Turkey)
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Macrina the Younger for Families

Novena to Saint Macrina the Younger

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Macrina the Younger

Saint Macrina the Younger was a fourth-century Christian woman of Cappadocia and Pontus, in present-day Turkey, and the eldest child of a family of saints: she was the sister of Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Peter of Sebaste. Consecrated to God after the death of her fiancé, she founded with her mother a community of virgins at Annesi, on the banks of the river Iris. Her brother Gregory wrote the story of her life and death. She died in 379, and her feast day is July 19.

Who was Saint Macrina the Younger?

Macrina was born between 324 and 330 into a fervent Christian family of Asia Minor. She is called "the Younger" to distinguish her from her grandmother, Saint Macrina the Elder, who had lived through the persecutions. Her father, Basil the Elder, was a well-known teacher of rhetoric, and her mother, Saint Emmelia, raised her in the faith. The eldest of ten children, she was the big sister of three saintly bishops: Basil of Caesarea, known as Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Peter of Sebaste.

We know her mainly through two works by her brother Gregory of Nyssa: a *Life of Saint Macrina*, written shortly after her death, and the *Dialogue on the Soul and the Resurrection*, in which he presents their last conversation. Gregory calls her his "teacher" in the spiritual life. His account is that of a brother who loved and admired her, and it should be read as such, but it lets us step into the daily life of a family of saints.

Key dates in the life of Saint Macrina

- **Between 324 and 330**: Birth, the eldest of ten children.

- **Adolescence**: Engaged to be married, she loses her fiancé and chooses to consecrate herself to God.
- **After her father's death**: She follows her mother, who leads a monastic life at Annesi, in Pontus.
- **c. 356-357**: She encourages her brother Basil to give himself entirely to God; he is baptized and founds a community of men near the women's community.
- **After Emmelia's death**: She becomes superior of the women's community.
- **379**: Death at Annesi, with her brother Gregory at her side.

A young woman consecrated to God

Macrina's mother gave her an education centered on Scripture, especially the Psalms and the Book of Wisdom. She was engaged at a very young age, but her fiancé died before the wedding. She then refused other marriage plans and chose to consecrate her life to God.

She stayed with her mother and helped raise her brothers and sisters, especially the youngest, Peter, for whom she became something like a second mother.

A household becomes a community

When her father died, Emmelia decided to lead a retired life on the family estate at Annesi, in Pontus, on the banks of the river Iris. Macrina drew her into an ever simpler way of life. According to Gregory, the servants of the house became sisters, sharing the same table, the same prayer and the same work. Little by little, the family home was transformed into a community of virgins and widows.

The sister who converted Basil

Gregory tells how their brother Basil came home from his studies in Athens brilliant and full of himself, proud of his eloquence. Macrina led him to give up worldly glory for a life consecrated to God. Basil was baptized and in his turn founded a community of men facing the women's community, on the other side of the Iris. The two communities thus formed a kind of double monastery.

Basil went on to become bishop of Caesarea and one of the great lawgivers of monastic life in the East. The monastic tradition that bears his name owes something to the example of his older sister.

After her mother's death, Macrina became superior of the women's community. She lived there in prayer, work and poverty and, according to her brother, took in people in need, notably during a famine.

A death full of hope

In 379, a few months after Basil's death, Gregory came to see his sister at Annesi. He found her gravely ill, lying on a plank on the bare ground. Despite her weakness, she spoke with him at length about the soul, death and the resurrection. Gregory recorded this conversation in his *Dialogue on the Soul and the Resurrection*, one of the great texts of Christian thought on the life to come.

Gregory then describes her last prayer, a long thanksgiving in which she commended her soul to God, and her peaceful death. While preparing her body for burial, he discovered that she owned almost nothing. She was buried beside her parents. His account is one of the most beautiful testimonies of Christian antiquity on the death of a saint.

Why is Saint Macrina invoked for families and the dying?

Macrina was a quiet but decisive presence at the heart of her family. Without any official office in the Church, she formed bishops, turned a house into a community and showed by her death what Christian hope is. She is a reminder of the place of women in handing on the faith and in the beginnings of monastic life.

For these reasons she is prayed to:

- for families, and especially for brothers and sisters;
- for older siblings who help raise the younger ones;
- for religious communities, especially communities of women;
- for those who are approaching death, and for those who accompany them.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Macrina in art

Saint Macrina is venerated above all in the icons of the Eastern tradition. She is shown as a nun dressed in dark robes, with her head covered, often holding a cross, the sign of her consecrated life and of her faith in the resurrection.

Where to pray to Saint Macrina

- **Pontus** (northern Turkey): the valley of the Iris, today the Yeşilırmak, where the community of Annesi stood.
- **Anywhere**: by reading Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Saint Macrina*, a short text available in several English translations.

To pray with her, follow the prayer to Saint Macrina the Younger or the novena to Saint Macrina.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Macrina the Younger for Families

There is no widely used traditional prayer to Saint Macrina the Younger in English. Her own last prayer, a long thanksgiving recorded by her brother Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Saint Macrina*, remains one of the most moving prayers of the early Church, and it is well worth reading in full. Saintspedia offers here an original prayer inspired by her life, for families and for those who are approaching death.

Who was Saint Macrina?

Macrina was the eldest of ten children in a family of saints in fourth-century Cappadocia. Consecrated to God after the death of her fiancé, she helped raise her younger brothers and sisters, led her brother Basil, the future Saint Basil the Great, to give his life to God, and turned the family home at Annesi into a community of virgins and widows. On her deathbed in 379, she spoke with her brother Gregory about the soul and the resurrection, then gave her soul to God in peace.

Prayer to Saint Macrina the Younger for Families

Saint Macrina, eldest daughter and big sister, you who helped raise your brothers and sisters and led them toward God, watch over my family. Keep the bonds between brothers and sisters strong, heal what has been wounded, and bring back to faith those who have drifted away.

You who turned your home into a house of prayer, where servants became sisters, teach us to welcome one another as equals and to share our table with the poor.

You who had the courage to correct your brother Basil when he was proud of his success, give me the right word, spoken with love, for those I care about.

You who met death with thanksgiving and spoke of the resurrection with joy, be close to all who are dying today and to those who keep watch beside them. Free us from the fear of death and strengthen our hope in eternal life.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Saint Macrina, pray for us. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Macrina's feast day is July 19. You can pray to her at any time:

- for your family, and especially for your brothers and sisters;
- when you are the eldest and feel responsible for the others;
- for a relative who has drifted away from the faith;
- for a religious community, or for a woman discerning a consecrated life;

- at the bedside of a dying person, or when you are grieving.

To go further, read the life of Saint Macrina the Younger or pray the novena to Saint Macrina.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Macrina the Younger

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the *Life of Saint Macrina* written by her brother Gregory of Nyssa. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, July 19, begin on July 11. You can also pray it at any time of the year, for your family, for a religious community or for someone who is nearing the end of life.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into ordinary life. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

You can pray it alone, but it also suits a family or a small group: Macrina's whole story is about faith lived together, around one table and in one house. If you pray it for someone who is dying, you may simply read one meditation aloud each day at the bedside.

Day 1: A family of saints

Macrina grew up in a family where faith was handed down from one generation to the next: from her grandmother Macrina the Elder, who had lived through persecution, to her mother Emmelia, and then to her own brothers and sisters. Faith is often received at home before it is learned anywhere else.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who handed on the faith to me. Bless my family and make it a home of faith.

Today: Thank a parent, grandparent or godparent who taught you to pray.

Day 2: Nourished by Scripture

Macrina's mother taught her the Psalms and the Book of Wisdom. According to Gregory, the Psalms accompanied her through every hour of the day. The Word of God shapes the heart slowly, like water shaping stone.

Prayer: Lord, let your Word dwell in me and guide my days.

Today: Pray one psalm slowly, perhaps Psalm 23.

Day 3: A broken plan

Macrina was engaged, but her fiancé died before the wedding. Out of that loss she chose to give her whole life to God. Our plans sometimes collapse, and God can bring a new calling out of what seemed to be an ending.

Prayer: Lord, when my plans fall apart, help me to discover the path you are opening.

Today: Entrust to God a disappointment you still carry.

Day 4: The big sister

Macrina helped her mother raise her younger brothers and sisters, especially little Peter, for whom she became like a second mother. Older siblings often carry quiet responsibilities that no one notices.

Prayer: Lord, bless all brothers and sisters, and heal the wounds between them.

Today: Call or write to a brother, sister or cousin.

Day 5: Servants become sisters

At Annesi, Gregory says, the servants of the household became sisters, sharing the same table, the same prayer and the same work. In Christ, the differences of rank that the world holds so dear lose their power.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the desire to be above others, and teach me to serve.

Today: Do a humble household task that someone else usually does.

Day 6: A word of truth to a brother

When Basil came home from Athens proud of his eloquence, Macrina led him to give up worldly glory for God. It takes love and courage to tell someone close to us what they need to hear.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak the truth with love, and the humility to accept it from others.

Today: Listen without defending yourself to a remark someone makes to you.

Day 7: Open to the poor

As superior of the community, Macrina lived in poverty and, according to her brother, took in people in need during a famine. A community of prayer is never closed in on itself.

Prayer: Lord, make my home and my heart open to those who are hungry.

Today: Give food or a donation to a food bank or soup kitchen.

Day 8: Speaking of the resurrection

On her deathbed, weak and lying on a plank, Macrina spoke with Gregory about the soul, death and the resurrection. Grieving the recent death of Basil, Gregory found comfort in his sister's hope. Faith in the resurrection is not a vague wish but a certainty rooted in Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, strengthen my hope in eternal life.

Today: Pray for a loved one who has died, by name.

Day 9: Dying in thanksgiving

Macrina's last prayer was a long thanksgiving. When Gregory prepared her body, he found that she owned almost nothing. She went to God with empty hands and a grateful heart.

Prayer: Lord, at the hour of my death, receive me in your mercy, and teach me to live each day in gratitude.

Today: Visit or call someone who is sick or elderly, or pray for the dying.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Macrina, daughter of a family of saints, consecrated virgin and big sister, you who led your brothers to God and welcomed death with thanksgiving, I entrust to you the intention of this novena. Watch over my family and over all families. Pray for religious communities and for those who serve the poor. Be close to those who are dying and to those who mourn, and obtain for us the hope that does not disappoint. Amen.*

To learn more about her, read the life of Saint Macrina the Younger or pray the prayer to Saint Macrina.

CREDITS

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