BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Malchus of Maronia

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 21

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IN BRIEF

Saint Malchus of Maronia

Syrian monk of the 4th century, known as the captive monk, whose life Saint Jerome wrote.

Feast day	October 21
Born	early 4th century, region of Nisibis (Mesopotamia)
Died	4th century, Maronia, near Antioch (Syria)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Malchus of Maronia

Saint Malchus, known as "the captive monk," was a Syrian monk of the 4th century whose life was told by Saint Jerome. A monk in the desert of Chalcis, he left his monastery against his abbot's advice, was captured by nomads and sold into slavery, then escaped and returned to monastic life. He ended his days at Maronia, near Antioch, where Jerome met him as a revered old man. His feast day is October 21.

Who was Saint Malchus?

We know Malchus through a single text, but a valuable one: the *Life of Malchus, the Captive Monk*, written by Saint Jerome around 390 in Bethlehem. Jerome relates that in his youth, when he was living as an ascetic in the desert of Chalcis, in Syria, around 375 - 377, he went to Maronia, an estate about fifty kilometers east of Antioch. He was told of an old man and an old woman whom the whole village revered. He went to see the old man, who told him his life himself. Jerome thus claims to report a direct testimony. His account is carefully composed, like a small literary work meant to praise chastity, but it rests on the meeting with a real man.

Key dates in the life of Malchus

- **Early 4th century**: Born in the region of Nisibis, the only son of a peasant couple.
- **Youth**: To escape the marriage his parents want for him, he runs away and joins the monks of the desert of Chalcis.
- **Years later**: Learning of his father's death, he leaves the monastery despite his abbot's pleading.

- **On the road to Edessa**: His caravan is attacked by nomads; he is sold as a slave together with a captive woman.
- **During his captivity**: Forced to live with this woman, he keeps a chaste life with her, as brother and sister.
- **Later**: He escapes with her, evades his master and reaches a Roman camp.
- **Afterward**: He settles at Maronia, he in a community of monks, she in a community of women.
- **c. 375 - 377**: Saint Jerome meets him at Maronia and gathers his story.
- **c. 390**: Jerome writes the *Life of Malchus* in Bethlehem.

The monk who wanted to go home

Malchus was the only son of a peasant family from the region of Nisibis. His parents wanted him to marry, but he felt called to monastic life. He ran away and joined a community of ascetics in the desert of Chalcis, southwest of Aleppo, where he lived by prayer and by working the land. Years later he learned of his father's death. He then decided to go back to his widowed mother and collect the small family inheritance.

His abbot begged him to stay. He saw this plan as a temptation: under good reasons, the monk was going back to what he had left. Nothing worked. According to Jerome, the abbot accompanied Malchus out of the monastery with sadness, as one follows a funeral procession.

Captivity

On the road to Edessa, Malchus traveled with a group of about seventy people. Nomad raiders attacked the convoy and carried off the captives. Malchus was sold, together with a woman, to a tribal chief who took them far into the desert. He tended the flocks and discovered, with some surprise, that this solitary life resembled that of a monk.

But his master wanted to marry him to his fellow captive. Malchus refused: she was already married, her husband having been taken elsewhere, and he himself was consecrated to God. The master flew into a violent rage. In despair, Malchus thought of taking his own life. It was the woman who prevented him: she proposed that they live together as brother and sister, while letting the master believe they were husband and wife. They lived this way, in chastity, throughout their captivity.

Escape and return

One day Malchus decided to escape with his companion. Pursued by their master, they hid in a cave where, without their knowing it, a lioness and her cub were sheltering. The servant and then the master, who went in to drag them out, were killed by the beast. The lioness then left with her cub, leaving the fugitives safe and sound. They took their pursuers' camels and, after ten days' journey through the desert, reached a Roman camp. Back at Chalcis, they learned that Malchus's former abbot had died. They then settled at Maronia: he joined a community of monks, she a community of women. It was there that Jerome met them, years later, revered as saints.

Devotion

Saint Malchus is listed in the Roman Martyrology on October 21; the Eastern Churches celebrate him on November 24. Thanks to Jerome's talent, his story was widely read in the Middle Ages. It was often illustrated by the scene of the cave and the lioness. No known shrine keeps his relics today.

What can we learn from Saint Malchus?

The story of Malchus is that of a man who made a mistake, suffered for it, and whom God brought back. It shows the value of a spiritual father's advice, and the strength of faithfulness in the harshest circumstances. It also shows a

beautiful chaste friendship between a man and a woman who supported each other in trial. We can pray to Saint Malchus for those tempted to turn back, for captives and hostages, and for those who seek to remain faithful to their commitments.

Where to pray to Saint Malchus

- **Anywhere**: no place of pilgrimage is dedicated to him today; you can pray to him while reading the Life written by Saint Jerome.
- **Bethlehem**: the grottoes of Saint Jerome, beneath the basilica of the Nativity, where Jerome wrote his story.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Malchus for Faithfulness and for Captives

Saint Malchus, a Syrian monk of the 4th century, left his monastery against his abbot's advice, knew slavery in the desert, kept chastity in captivity, then returned to God. Saint Jerome, who met him, told his life. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him those who are tempted to turn back and those who are held captive.

Prayer to Saint Malchus

Saint Malchus,
you had left everything to follow Christ
and one day you wanted to turn back.
You knew chains and exile,
and God brought you back to himself.
Pray for me when I am tempted to abandon my commitments.

In captivity you remained faithful,
and with your companion in misfortune you lived
a pure and brotherly friendship.
Teach us purity of heart
and respect for those who share our road.

Watch over captives, hostages and the enslaved of today;
may they find freedom and peace again.
And grant that we may listen to the advice
of those who guide us toward God.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Malchus

- On his feast day, October 21.
- When you are tempted to give up a commitment or a vocation.
- For people held hostage, captive or enslaved.
- To live chastity and upright friendships.
- For monks and nuns.

A short invocation

> *Saint Malchus, monk taken captive and set free,*
> *bring me back to the Lord when I go astray. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Malchus from October 13 to 21, and discover the life of Saint Malchus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Malchus of Maronia

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It follows the life of Saint Malchus, a Syrian monk of the 4th century, as Saint Jerome told it after meeting him. To finish it on his feast day, October 21, begin on October 13. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, make 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: "Saint Malchus, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A stronger call

His parents wanted him to marry, but Malchus felt called to monastic life. He left to join the monks of the desert of Chalcis.

Prayer: Lord, help me to recognize your call and to answer it generously.

Act of the day: Pray for young people discerning their vocation.

Day 2: Life in the desert

In the monastery, Malchus lived by prayer and by working the land. A simple and regular life opens the heart to God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to offer you my work and to pray in the midst of my days.

Act of the day: Say a short prayer before you start work.

Day 3: The temptation to go back

When his father died, Malchus wanted to go home and collect the inheritance. Good reasons sometimes hide a step backward.

Prayer: Lord, enlighten my choices. Do not let me go back on what you asked me to leave behind.

Act of the day: Examine before God a current plan, asking whether it comes from him.

Day 4: Advice refused

His abbot begged him to stay, but Malchus would not listen. Jerome says the abbot accompanied him as one follows a funeral procession.

Prayer: Lord, give me the humility to listen to those who advise me wisely.

Act of the day: Ask a trusted person for advice about a decision you must make.

Day 5: Captive

His caravan was attacked, and Malchus was sold as a slave in the desert. In the midst of his misfortune, he discovered that God remained close.

Prayer: Lord, watch over hostages, captives and all victims of modern slavery.

Act of the day: Learn about a form of slavery today and pray for its victims.

Day 6: Faithful in trial

His master wanted to force him to marry his fellow captive, who was already married. Malchus refused, even under threat.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to stay faithful to my commitments, even when everything pushes me to betray them.

Act of the day: Inwardly renew a commitment you have made: marriage, vows or a promise.

Day 7: A chaste friendship

In despair, Malchus thought of dying. His companion turned him away from it and proposed that they live as brother and sister. They supported each other in chastity.

Prayer: Lord, bless upright friendships and give us a pure heart. Support those who are tempted by despair.

Act of the day: Get in touch with someone who is going through a time of discouragement.

Day 8: Deliverance

As they fled, Malchus and his companion hid in a cave. Their pursuers were killed there by a lioness, while they were spared and regained their freedom.

Prayer: Lord, free me from what holds me captive, and open the way of freedom for me.

Act of the day: Entrust to God, in the sacrament of reconciliation if possible, what binds you.

Day 9: Return to God

Malchus returned to monastic life and ended his days at Maronia, revered by all. The one who had strayed became a witness.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for never tiring of calling me back to you. Through the intercession of Saint Malchus, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if you can, in thanksgiving for God's faithfulness.

Closing prayer

Saint Malchus,
monk of the desert, captive and set free,
present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me faithful to what I have promised,
set captives free,
and bring back to God those who go astray.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray at any time the prayer to Saint Malchus, and discover the life of Saint Malchus.

Credits and sources

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