

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Mark the Evangelist

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 25

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IN BRIEF

Saint Mark the Evangelist

Companion of Paul, Barnabas and Peter, to whom tradition attributes the second Gospel.

Feast day	April 25
Died	1st century (c. 68, according to tradition), Alexandria, Egypt, according to tradition
Canonized	pre-congregation saint (immemorial cult)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	Venice, notaries

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Mark: "Repent and Believe in the Gospel"

Novena to Saint Mark

Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice, Tomb of the Evangelist

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Mark the Evangelist

Saint Mark is, according to a tradition going back to the second century, the author of the second Gospel, the shortest of the four and, for most scholars, the oldest. The New Testament knows him as John Mark: companion of Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas, then close to Saint Peter in Rome. Tradition makes him the founder of the Church of Alexandria, where he is said to have died a martyr. His symbol is the lion, his relics have rested in Venice since 828, and his feast is on April 25.

Who was Saint Mark?

Mark had two names: a Jewish name, John (*Yohanan*), and a Latin surname, *Marcus*, common in the Roman Empire. The Acts of the Apostles mention the house of his mother, Mary, in Jerusalem: it was there that the community was gathered in prayer when Peter, miraculously freed from prison, came knocking at the door (Acts 12:12). Mark therefore came from a Jewish family in Jerusalem, well-off enough to host meetings, and the Letter to the Colossians tells us he was the cousin of Barnabas.

Some commentators have suggested that Mark is the young man, mentioned only in his Gospel, who ran away naked when Jesus was arrested, leaving behind the linen cloth he was wearing (Mark 14:51-52). It is an old and appealing hypothesis, but it cannot be verified.

Key dates in the life of Saint Mark

- **Early 1st century**: Born, probably in Jerusalem.
- **c. 44**: Peter, freed from prison, goes to his mother's house (Acts 12:12).
- **c. 46**: He accompanies Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus, then leaves them at Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13).

- **c. 49-50**: Paul refuses to take him again; Mark sails for Cyprus with Barnabas (Acts 15:37-39).
- **c. 60**: He is with Paul in prison (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24).
- **The 60s**: In Rome with Peter, who calls him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13).
- **c. 65-70**: Writes his Gospel, according to the most common dating.
- **c. 68**: Martyrdom in Alexandria, according to Egyptian tradition.
- **828**: Two Venetian merchants bring his relics from Alexandria to Venice.
- **1968**: Paul VI gives a relic of Saint Mark to the Coptic Orthodox Church for its new cathedral in Cairo.

A disciple who knew failure

Mark's life, as Acts tells it, was anything but a straight line. He set out full of enthusiasm with Paul and Barnabas on the first great mission, to Cyprus. But on reaching Perga, on the coast of present-day Turkey, he left them and went home to Jerusalem. Luke does not say why. A few years later, when Barnabas suggested taking him along again, Paul flatly refused: the disagreement was so sharp that the two missionaries parted ways. Barnabas left with Mark, and Paul with Silas.

The story does not end there. About ten years later, Mark was at the side of Paul in prison, and Paul recommended him to the communities. In the Second Letter to Timothy, Paul even asks: "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). The young man who had given up had become a valued co-worker. Mark is the saint of second chances and reconciliation.



Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria by Gentile and Giovanni Bellini (1504-1507), Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

The Gospel according to Saint Mark

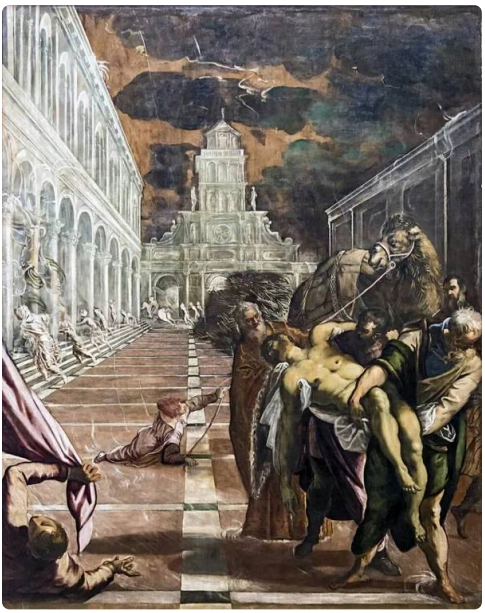
Around 130, Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, reports a tradition he received from an elder: Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, what he remembered of the Lord's words and deeds. This is the oldest testimony on the origin of a Gospel. Modern scholarship debates the exact nature of this link with Peter, but most scholars regard Mark's Gospel as the first to be written, and as a source used by Matthew and Luke.

It is a fast-moving, vivid account that opens without an infancy narrative: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The word "immediately" comes back again and again. Mark stresses how hard it was for the disciples to understand who Jesus was, the silence Jesus imposed on those he healed, and the cross: it is a Roman centurion, at the foot of the Crucified, who is the first to proclaim, "Truly this man was the Son of God." The original account ends with the women's fear before the empty tomb, as if inviting the reader to take up the witness.

Alexandria, Venice and the lion

Eusebius of Caesarea reports in the fourth century that Mark was the first to preach the Gospel in Egypt and to found churches in Alexandria. Later accounts tell of his martyrdom: dragged through the streets of the city by pagans, he is said to have died around 68. The Coptic Church, whose patriarch presents himself as his successor, venerates him as its founder.

In 828, two Venetian merchants, Buono of Malamocco and Rustico of Torcello, carried his body away from Alexandria, then under Muslim rule; legend has it that they hid it under pork to discourage inspection. Venice made Mark its patron and built him a church, which would become the Basilica of Saint Mark. The winged lion, the evangelist's symbol since Saint Jerome, became the emblem of the Republic of Venice. The symbol refers to the opening of his Gospel, where the voice of John the Baptist rings out in the desert like a roar.



The Removal of the Body of Saint Mark by Tintoretto (1562-1566), Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Why is Saint Mark the patron saint of Venice?

Venice adopted Mark as its patron when his relics arrived in 828, replacing its earlier patron, and from then on the city identified itself with him: his basilica, his lion and his name became the symbols of the Republic for a thousand years. He is also the patron of notaries, a patronage usually explained by his role as the one who faithfully set Peter's preaching down in writing. More deeply, Mark reminds us that a first failure disqualifies no one. He left the mission, he was turned down, then he came back and made himself useful. He also knew how to put himself at the service of someone else's word, Peter's, to hand on what matters most: the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

To pray with him, you can read the opening words of his Gospel, or follow the novena to Saint Mark from April 16 to 24, so that it ends on the eve of his feast. In the older Roman liturgy, April 25 was also the day of the "Greater Litanies," a procession of prayer for the harvest.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Mark in art

- **The winged lion**: his symbol among the four evangelists, often shown beside him or alone with an open book.
- **The book or scroll**: his Gospel, sometimes being written at a desk.
- **The pen**: the evangelist at work, faithful scribe of Peter's preaching.
- **Venice in the background**: in Venetian painting, scenes of his relics and miracles.



Inside Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice, where the evangelist's relics rest beneath the high altar.

Where to pray to Saint Mark

- **Venice**: Saint Mark's Basilica, where his relics rest beneath the high altar.
- **Cairo**: the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral of Saint Mark, which keeps the relic given by Paul VI in 1968.
- **Alexandria**: the Coptic church of Saint Mark, historic seat of the patriarchate, on the traditional site of his martyrdom.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of San Marco near Piazza Venezia, founded in the fourth century.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Mark: "Repent and Believe in the Gospel"

Saint Mark did not leave a prayer as such: he left a Gospel. The best way to pray with him is therefore to read his own words, those with which he opens his account and those that close it. This page presents these two passages, followed by an original prayer to Saint Mark.

The beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1:1-3, 14-15)

Translated from the Greek by Saintspedia.

> *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*
>
> *As it is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way. A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."*
>
> *After John had been handed over, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God and saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe in the gospel."*

Source: Gospel according to Saint Mark, chapter 1, verses 1 to 3 and 14 to 15. According to Saint Jerome's interpretation, this "voice crying in the wilderness" is the origin of the lion, the evangelist's symbol.



Saint Mark the Evangelist at prayer.

The sending out on mission (Mark 16:15)

> *"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."*

Source: Gospel according to Saint Mark, chapter 16, verse 15. This verse belongs to the ending of the Gospel (16:9-20), probably added to the original text as early as the second century but received by the Church as an integral part of Scripture. Translation by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Mark

Saint Mark, you who set down in writing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, pray for me.

You who abandoned the mission at Perga, then came back until you became "very useful for ministry," obtain for me the grace to begin again after my failures, without shame and without discouragement.

You who listened to Peter and faithfully handed on his word, teach me to receive the Gospel as it is given to me, and to pass it on without weighing it down.

Help me to turn back to God each day, and to believe that the kingdom of God has come near, even in the midst of my fears. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Pray for those who proclaim the Gospel, for those who write and translate it, for the Church of Venice and for the Church of Egypt, which venerates you as its father. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Mark's feast is on April 25, often during the Easter season. Another way to pray with him is to read his Gospel in one sitting: it takes less than two hours. Writers, translators, catechists and all who need a fresh start can turn to him at any time of year. For a longer time of prayer, you can follow the novena to Saint Mark from April 16 to 24, and read more about the life of Saint Mark.

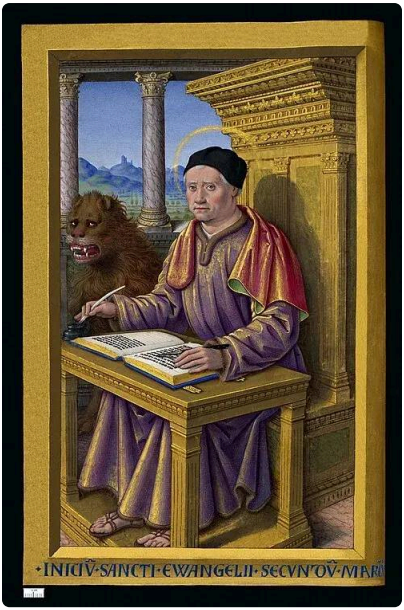
NOVENA

Novena to Saint Mark

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Mark and by his Gospel. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on April 16; it ends on April 24. It follows Mark's journey, from his mother's open house in Jerusalem to the confession of the centurion at the foot of the cross, and lets his own failures and new beginnings shed light on ours.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. If you can, also read one or two chapters of the Gospel according to Saint Mark: in nine days you will have read almost all of it.



Saint Mark the Evangelist, church statue or stained glass.

Day 1: An open house

The house of Mary, Mark's mother, welcomed the community at prayer in Jerusalem. It was there that Peter came knocking after his release from prison. Mark's faith grew up in an open house, where prayer and hospitality went together.

Prayer: Lord, make my home a place of welcome and prayer, where anyone may knock at the door.

Today: Invite someone to share a meal or a cup of coffee.

Day 2: The beginning

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark does not tell of Jesus' childhood: he goes straight to the heart of the matter. Every day can be a beginning, a fresh start offered by God. Yesterday's mistakes do not

have the last word.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, make this day a new beginning with you.

Today: Read Mark 1:1-20.

Day 3: Repent

The first words of Jesus in Mark are a call: "Repent, and believe in the gospel." To repent is to turn around toward the one who has come near. It is not first a matter of effort, but of looking toward the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, show me what needs to change in me, and help me believe that your kingdom is near.

Today: Make an examination of conscience or prepare for confession.

Day 4: Immediately

In Mark's Gospel everything moves quickly: Jesus calls, and "immediately" people follow him. The word of God sometimes asks for an answer without delay, before our hesitations take over.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from putting off until later what you are asking of me today.

Today: Do right away a service or a task you have been postponing.

Day 5: Setting out, then giving up

At Perga, Mark left Paul and Barnabas. We do not know why: fear, fatigue, homesickness. Every disciple knows moments of letting go, when the road seems too long. Scripture does not hide Mark's weakness; it records it so that we may know that God does not choose the perfect, but those he patiently transforms.

Prayer: Lord, you know the times I have given up. Do not let me shut myself up in the memory of my failures.

Today: Write down a failure that still weighs on you, and entrust it to God.

Day 6: A second chance

Paul refused to take Mark back; Barnabas trusted him. Thanks to his cousin, Mark could set out again. God often uses someone close to us to lift us up. Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," saw in Mark what others no longer saw. Sometimes one person's trust is enough to give a whole life a new direction.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who trusted me when I did not deserve it. Make me, in turn, a Barnabas for others.

Today: Give a second chance to someone who has disappointed you.



Praying with Saint Mark the Evangelist.

Day 7: Reconciled

Years later, Paul wrote: "Bring Mark, he is very useful to me." Wounds between disciples are not final. Reconciliation is part of the Gospel, and it often takes time.

Prayer: Lord, heal the broken relationships in my life, and give me the humility to take the first step.

Today: Get back in touch with someone from whom you have drifted apart.

Day 8: Peter's son

Peter called Mark "my son." Mark listened to the apostle's testimony, with his falls and his denial, and handed it on. The Gospel reaches us through a chain of witnesses, and we are now one of its links.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who passed the faith on to me. Bless them, living or departed.

Today: Thank someone who helped you come to know Christ.

Day 9: Truly, he was the Son of God

At the foot of the cross, it is a pagan centurion who recognizes Jesus. Mark's whole Gospel leads to this confession, made before the Crucified. Faith sees the glory of God where the world sees only defeat, and it does not stop at the tomb.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Mark, help me to recognize you, even in the cross, and to proclaim your Gospel. Amen.

Today: Read Mark 15:33-39, then 16:1-8.

Closing prayer

Saint Mark, evangelist, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for me, for all who need to begin again and for all who proclaim the Gospel. Obtain for us the grace to believe the Good News and to live it every day. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Mark and pray with the opening words of his Gospel.

PILGRIMAGE

Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice, Tomb of the Evangelist

Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice, on the square that bears his name, was built to receive the body of the evangelist, brought from Alexandria in 828. The chapel of the doges for nearly a thousand years and the cathedral of Venice since 1807, it is both one of the most visited monuments in Europe and a place of prayer where the tomb of Saint Mark is venerated.

How the body of Saint Mark came to Venice

In 828, two Venetian merchants, Buono da Malamocco and Rustico da Torcello, carried off from Alexandria the body of the evangelist, kept until then in a church in the city. Doge Giustiniano Participazio had a first church built for him, next to the Doge's Palace. Venice, a young maritime power, thus gave itself an apostolic patron and symbolically freed itself from the old patronage of Saint Theodore. The lion of Saint Mark became the emblem of the Republic.



Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice, tomb of the evangelist.

The present basilica

After a fire at the end of the 10th century, the church was rebuilt starting in the mid-11th century on the model of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, with a Greek-cross plan topped by five domes. It was consecrated in 1094. According to a Venetian tradition, the evangelist's body, whose exact location had been lost during the construction work, then miraculously revealed itself in a pillar: this is the "apparition" of Saint Mark, still celebrated in Venice.

The interior is covered with gold-ground mosaics, made mostly between the 12th and 13th centuries, which tell the story of salvation and the life of Saint Mark. On the facade, the lunette of the left portal preserves a medieval mosaic showing the arrival of the saint's body in the basilica. Behind the high altar shines the Pala d'Oro, a Byzantine goldwork altarpiece enriched over the centuries with enamels and precious stones.

The tomb of the evangelist

The relics of Saint Mark rested for a long time in the crypt. Since the 19th century, they have been placed beneath the high altar, in the choir of the basilica. That is where the prayer of pilgrims and the great celebrations of April 25, presided over by the Patriarch of Venice, are focused.

Praying at the tomb of Saint Mark

Before your visit, you may reread the life of Saint Mark or the first chapter of his Gospel. In the basilica, despite the crowds, a time of silence before the choir lets you entrust an intention, for example for a fresh start after a failure. The prayer to Saint Mark can accompany this moment. Attending Mass is also the best way to experience the basilica as a place of prayer. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice, tomb of the evangelist, the interior.

Other places of Saint Mark

- **Alexandria** (Egypt): the Coptic Church of Saint Mark, historic seat of the Coptic patriarchate, on the traditional site of his martyrdom.
- **Cairo**: the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral of Saint Mark, which keeps the relic given by Paul VI in 1968.
- **Jerusalem**: the Syriac Orthodox Monastery of Saint Mark, in the Old City, which its monks identify with the house of Mary, mother of Mark.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of San Marco, at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, founded in the 4th century by Pope Mark.

Practical information

The basilica is on Piazza San Marco, in the heart of Venice, reachable on foot or by vaporetto. It is very crowded for much of the year: dress covering shoulders and knees is required, and large bags are not allowed inside. Masses are celebrated every day; their times, like those of visits, should be checked with the basilica before you come. On April 25, Venice celebrates both its patron and the liberation of 1945; local tradition also has it that on this day a rosebud, the *bocolo*, is given to the woman one loves.

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