BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Nicholas Tavelić

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 14

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IN BRIEF

Saint Nicholas Tavelić

Croatian Franciscan friar, missionary in Bosnia, martyred in Jerusalem in 1391.

Feast day	November 14
Born	c. 1340, Šibenik (Croatia), according to most sources
Died	November 14, 1391, Jerusalem
Canonized	June 21, 1970 by Paul VI (cult confirmed by Leo XIII in 1889)
Era	14th century
Patron saint of	Croatia

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Nicholas Tavelić

Saint Nicholas Tavelić (Nikola Tavelić in Croatian) was a Franciscan friar born around 1340 in Dalmatia, probably at Šibenik. After years of mission in Bosnia, he went to the Holy Land and died a martyr in Jerusalem on November 14, 1391, together with three other friars. Canonized by Paul VI in 1970, he is the first Croatian saint. His feast day is November 14.

Who was Saint Nicholas Tavelić?

Nicholas Tavelić belongs to the great family of the Friars Minor founded by Saint Francis of Assisi. His life unfolded in the 14th century, between the Dalmatian coast, the mountains of Bosnia and Jerusalem, where the Franciscans had for several decades been guarding the holy places. We know the end of his life best, thanks to the account of a witness, Brother Gérard Chalvet, who made his martyrdom known throughout Europe. For the rest, information is scarcer, and some details, such as his exact birthplace, are still debated. His figure is that of a missionary who wanted to proclaim Christ to the very end, at the cost of his life.

Key dates in the life of Nicholas Tavelić

- **c. 1340**: Born in Dalmatia, at Šibenik according to most sources; some suggest the village of Velim, near Stankovci.
- **1365**: He joins the Franciscans at the friary of Bribir, the seat of the powerful Šubić family.
- **1370s - 1380s**: Sent to Bosnia with other friars at the request of Pope Gregory XI, he preaches there for about twelve years.
- **1384**: He goes to Jerusalem and lives at the Franciscan friary on Mount Zion.

- **November 14, 1391**: After publicly proclaiming the Gospel before the qadi, he is put to death near the Jaffa Gate with Deodat of Rodez, Peter of Narbonne and Stephen of Cuneo.
- **1880**: The bishop of Šibenik, Antun Josip Fosco, opens the process for his beatification.
- **1889**: Pope Leo XIII confirms his cult for the diocese of Šibenik, then for the whole Franciscan order in 1898.
- **June 21, 1970**: Paul VI canonizes him in Rome with his three companions, before some twenty thousand Croatians.

A Franciscan from Dalmatia

Nicholas was born around 1340 in a Dalmatia then joined to the kingdom of Croatia and Hungary. Most authors say he came from Šibenik, a port town on the Adriatic, but another tradition places his birth at Velim, in the hinterland. In 1365, he joined the Friars Minor at Bribir, a friary under the protection of the Šubić family. There he received the Franciscan formation: prayer, poverty, fraternal life and preaching. He became a priest.

Missionary in Bosnia

In the 14th century, Bosnia was a land where the Catholic faith was fragile and where dissident religious movements were spreading. Pope Gregory XI asked the Franciscans to send missionaries there. Nicholas was one of sixty priests who came from various provinces of the order. He worked there for about twelve years, preaching, teaching the catechism and accompanying communities. The Franciscan vicar of Bosnia later wrote to the pope that these missionaries had brought a very large number of people back to the Church. For Nicholas, these years were no doubt a school of patience and courage.

The martyrdom in Jerusalem

In 1384, Nicholas left for the Holy Land. In Jerusalem, he lived at the friary on Mount Zion, where the Franciscans welcomed pilgrims and prayed near the Cenacle. There he became close to three friars: Deodat of Rodez, Peter of Narbonne and Stephen of Cuneo. Together they visited the holy places, learned Arabic and deepened their theology.

After several years, the four friars decided to proclaim Christ publicly. In November 1391, they went before the qadi, the Muslim judge of the city, and set out the Christian faith before him. They were arrested, ordered to retract their words, and refused. On November 14, 1391, they were put to death near the Jaffa Gate; tradition reports that their bodies were given to the fire, which explains the pyre sometimes shown at their feet. Brother Gérard Chalvet, of the friary of Saint Saviour, who witnessed the events with another friar from Šibenik, wrote an account that he sent to Rome and to several cities in Europe. Historians today study this account with caution, since it also helped the order to shape the memory of its martyrs; but the death of the four friars in Jerusalem is not in doubt.

From local memory to canonization

After his death, Nicholas was venerated as a Franciscan martyr, especially in Dalmatia. Yet it was only at the end of the 19th century that an official process began. In 1880, the bishop of Šibenik opened the cause; Leo XIII confirmed his cult in 1889 for the diocese, in 1898 for the Franciscan order, and then for the Holy Land. Between the two world wars, devotion to him grew strongly in Croatia. On June 21, 1970, Paul VI canonized him in Rome with his companions: together they now form the group of the four Franciscan martyrs of the Holy Land, celebrated together on November 14.

In Croatia, many churches are dedicated to him, in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and in many villages. The church of Saint Francis in Šibenik has become the national shrine of Saint Nicholas Tavelić. Croatian emigrants also carried his cult abroad: there are churches under his name in Argentina, Canada and Australia. He is shown in the Franciscan habit, sometimes with the palm of martyrdom or the flames of the pyre.

What can we learn from Saint Nicholas Tavelić?

Nicholas Tavelić spent his life proclaiming the Gospel, first on the roads of Bosnia, then in the city where Christ died and rose again. He did not seek death, but he would not keep his faith silent. His example speaks to all who, even today, bear witness to Christ where it is difficult. You can pray to him for Croatia, for the Christians of the Holy Land, for missionaries and for persecuted Christians.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Nicholas Tavelić and the novena to Saint Nicholas Tavelić.

Where to pray to Saint Nicholas Tavelić

- **Šibenik** (Croatia): the church of Saint Francis, the national shrine dedicated to him.
- **Jerusalem**: the friary on Mount Zion, where he lived, and the places kept by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land.
- **Croatia**: many parish churches placed under his patronage, especially in Zagreb, Split and Rijeka.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Nicholas Tavelić for Missionaries and Persecuted Christians

Saint Nicholas Tavelić, a Franciscan from Dalmatia, preached the Gospel in Bosnia before dying a martyr in Jerusalem on November 14, 1391. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him those who proclaim Christ, the Christians of the Holy Land and the Croatian people.

Prayer to Saint Nicholas Tavelić

Saint Nicholas Tavelić,
son of Saint Francis and child of Dalmatia,
you left your land to carry the Gospel
along the roads of Bosnia
and as far as the holy city of Jerusalem.
Give me the heart of a disciple,
poor, joyful and ready to serve.

You were not ashamed of the name of Jesus,
and you confessed it to the point of giving your life.
Obtain for me the courage to bear witness to my faith
gently and without fear,
at work, in my family and wherever I live.

Watch over the Christians of the Holy Land
and over those who suffer because of Christ.
Bless the Croatian people and all the families
who call on you far from their homeland.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Nicholas Tavelić

- On his feast day, November 14, with his fellow martyrs of the Holy Land.
- For missionaries and all who proclaim the Gospel in difficult conditions.
- For persecuted Christians and for peace in Jerusalem.
- For Croatia and for Croatians living abroad.
- When you lack the courage to speak about your faith.

A prayer for persecuted Christians

> *Lord Jesus, sustain those who suffer for your name.*
> *Saint Nicholas Tavelić and you, martyrs of Jerusalem,*
> *pray for them and for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Nicholas Tavelić from November 6 to 14, and discover the life of Saint Nicholas Tavelić.

Novena to Saint Nicholas Tavelić

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Nicholas Tavelić, a Franciscan friar from Dalmatia, missionary in Bosnia and martyr in Jerusalem in 1391. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, November 14, begin on November 6. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

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: "Saint Nicholas Tavelić, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A child of the Dalmatian coast

Nicholas was born around 1340, probably at Šibenik, on the Adriatic. It was in this Christian land that he received the faith he would later carry very far.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the land and the family where I received the faith. Keep them in your peace.

Act of the day: Pray for your hometown and for those who live there.

Day 2: Choosing the poverty of Francis

In 1365, Nicholas joined the Friars Minor. He chose the poor and fraternal life that Saint Francis had learned from the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, make me free with regard to possessions, so that my heart may belong wholly to you and to my brothers and sisters.

Act of the day: Give away a useful object you do not really need.

Day 3: Sent on mission

At the pope's call, Nicholas left for Bosnia with other friars. He obeyed and left what he knew to go where the Church needed him.

Prayer: Lord, make me available to your calls, even when they move me from my place.

Act of the day: Pray for missionaries and, if you can, support a missionary work.

Day 4: Twelve years of patience

For about twelve years, Nicholas preached and accompanied the communities of Bosnia. Proclaiming the Gospel takes time, constancy and great humility.

Prayer: Lord, give me the patience to sow without seeing the harvest right away.

Act of the day: Take up again, with perseverance, a task you had given up.

Day 5: Pilgrim to Jerusalem

In 1384, Nicholas reached the Holy Land. He lived on Mount Zion and prayed in the places where Jesus lived, suffered and rose again.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, draw me to you, and make me love your Word and the places of your earthly life.

Act of the day: Slowly read a passage from the Gospel of the Passion.

Day 6: Brothers for the road

In Jerusalem, Nicholas became close to Deodat, Peter and Stephen. Together they prayed, studied and learned Arabic. Mission is not lived alone.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the friends who help me believe. Bless them and keep our friendship in you.

Act of the day: Get in touch with a friend in the faith.

Day 7: Learning the language of others

To speak with the people of Jerusalem, the friars learned their language. Proclaiming the Gospel begins with respect and listening to those we address.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to listen before I speak, and to respect those who do not share my faith.

Act of the day: Truly listen to someone today, without interrupting.

Day 8: Confessing Christ

Before the judge of the city, the four friars proclaimed their faith in Jesus and refused to deny it. They knew what it might cost them.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength never to deny your name, and sustain those who are persecuted for you.

Act of the day: Pray for persecuted Christians throughout the world.

Day 9: The gift of life

On November 14, 1391, Nicholas and his companions died near the Jaffa Gate. More than five centuries later, the Church proclaimed them saints.

Prayer: Lord, may my life be a gift for you and for my brothers and sisters. Through the intercession of Saint Nicholas Tavelić, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if possible, and pray for peace in Jerusalem.

Living the novena with Saint Nicholas Tavelić

Nicholas Tavelić lived as a missionary, between Dalmatia, Bosnia and Jerusalem. During these nine days, you can carry missionaries, the Christians of the Holy Land, persecuted believers and the Croatian people. If you can, visit a church dedicated to him, or pray with a Franciscan community.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Nicholas Tavelić,*
> *Friar Minor and martyr of Jerusalem,*
> *you carried the Gospel to the end of the road.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Give me a poor and courageous heart,*
> *and watch over those who suffer for Christ.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Shrine of Saint Nicholas Tavelić, Šibenik

The Shrine of Saint Nicholas Tavelić stands in Šibenik, on the Dalmatian coast of Croatia, the town that most sources give as the birthplace of Saint Nicholas Tavelić. It brings together the church and friary of the Franciscans, dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi. Since the early 2020s, the Croatian Bishops' Conference has made it the national shrine of the first Croatian saint.

A Franciscan friary nearly eight centuries old

According to tradition, the friary of Saint Francis in Šibenik was founded in 1221, during the lifetime of Saint Francis himself; in any case it is attested in 1264. So it was in a town where the Friars Minor had long been present that Nicholas grew up, before entering the order himself in 1365, at the friary of Bribir. The present church was begun in the second half of the 14th century, in Nicholas's own time, and several of its parts were reworked in the following century.

After Paul VI canonized the saint in 1970, the devotion of Croatians turned naturally toward his hometown. For the fiftieth anniversary of the canonization, the church of Saint Francis was proclaimed the first national shrine of Saint Nicholas Tavelić. Pilgrims come here to entrust to the saint their families, their country and the Christians of the Holy Land.

What to see

The church, modest in size, keeps the simplicity of Franciscan churches. Note the organ built in 1762 by Petar Nakić, one of the great names of organ building in Dalmatia. The friary houses a museum, opened in 2015, which

presents part of the friars' heritage. In the town, the cathedral of Saint James also has a statue of Saint Nicholas Tavelić.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Nicholas Tavelić. In the church of Saint Francis, entrust to him missionaries, persecuted Christians and peace in Jerusalem, then say the prayer to Saint Nicholas Tavelić. November 14, his feast day, is the most fitting time for a pilgrimage. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Nicholas Tavelić

- **Bribir** (Croatia): the place where he joined the Franciscans in 1365.
- **Jerusalem**: Mount Zion, where he lived with his companions, and the Jaffa Gate, near which he was put to death.
- **Zagreb, Split, Rijeka** (Croatia): churches dedicated to him.

Practical information

Šibenik lies on the Adriatic coast, between Zadar and Split, and is easily reached by road. The church of Saint Francis is a place of prayer: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Mass times and the conditions for visiting the museum may vary by season: check with the friars or the Šibenik tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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