BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: June 2

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IN BRIEF

Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim

Young Greek pilgrim of the 11th century, fool for Christ, who died in Trani at nineteen.

Feast day	June 2
Born	c. 1075, Stiri (Boeotia, Greece)
Died	June 2, 1094, Trani (Apulia, Italy)
Canonized	1098, holiness confirmed by Pope Urban II
Era	11th century
Patron saint of	Trani, archdiocese of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim

Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim, also called Nicholas of Trani, was a young Greek of the 11th century. Born at Stiri, in Boeotia, around 1075, he wandered through Apulia as a pilgrim, a cross in his hand, ceaselessly repeating "Kyrie eleison." He died in Trani on June 2, 1094, at the age of nineteen, and was recognized as a saint a few years later, under Pope Urban II. His feast day is June 2, and he rests in the crypt of Trani Cathedral.

Who was Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim?

Nicholas is one of the most surprising figures of medieval holiness. The son of poor peasants, without education, he lived a prayer reduced to a few words, repeated day and night: "Kyrie eleison," "Lord, have mercy." Many took him for a madman, others for a saint. Eastern tradition knows this kind of holiness under the name of "fool for Christ": a person who accepts appearing foolish in the eyes of the world in order to follow Christ in humility. His life is known to us through several early accounts, which do not agree on every detail. His cult, however, was immediate and very strong in Trani, which built its cathedral to honor him.

Key dates in the life of Nicholas

- **c. 1075**: Born at Stiri, in Boeotia, into a family of poor peasants.
- **c. 1083**: At eight years old, his mother takes him out of school; he becomes a shepherd.
- **c. 1087**: At twelve, sent away by his mother, he takes refuge in a cave on Mount Helicon.
- **The following years**: A monk introduces him to monastic life; according to some accounts, he spends time at the monastery of Hosios Loukas.

- **1092**: He sails from Lepanto and lands at Otranto, in Italy, before going to Rome.
- **1092-1094**: He wanders through Apulia as a pilgrim, notably Lecce and Taranto.
- **May 20, 1094**: He arrives exhausted in Trani, where Archbishop Byzantius welcomes him.
- **June 2, 1094**: He dies in Trani, at the age of nineteen.
- **1098**: Pope Urban II, informed at the Council of Bari, confirms his holiness.
- **1099**: Construction of Trani Cathedral begins; his body rests in its crypt.

A shepherd who prayed without ceasing

Nicholas's parents were poor farmers. At eight, his mother took him out of school, and he became a shepherd. Alone with his flock, he began to pray by tirelessly repeating the "Kyrie eleison." This continual prayer, which seemed obsessive, made him the laughingstock of his village, where people considered him deranged. His exasperated mother finally drove him away when he was twelve. He took refuge in a cave on Mount Helicon.

There he met a monk who taught him the basics of monastic life. The accounts then diverge. According to one of them, he lived for some time at the monastery of Hosios Loukas, where the monks at first wanted to exorcise him, before concluding that he was a fool for Christ. He then felt prompted to go on pilgrimage to Rome.

A pilgrim in Apulia

Setting out from Lepanto, Nicholas landed at Otranto in 1092. He met a monk named Bartholomew, who accompanied him for part of the way. After Rome, he returned to Apulia and traveled all over it, a cross in his hand, always

singing his "Kyrie eleison." Some venerated him; others found him disturbing. The accounts credit him with a few miracles. In Lecce and Taranto he was badly received: the bishop distrusted him, and he was beaten.

On May 20, 1094, he arrived in Trani, very weak. His repeated prayer again brought him trouble, until the day the city's archbishop, Byzantius, wanted to question him personally. Struck by the young man's simplicity and innocence, he offered him hospitality in his house.

His death and cult

On May 23, Nicholas fell ill. Many children and adults, who had come to love him, visited him. The accounts report that shortly before dying, he changed the water in the glass he was drinking into fragrant wine, as Jesus did at the wedding at Cana. He died on June 2, 1094, at the age of nineteen.

Miracles were very soon reported at his tomb. At the initiative of Archbishop Byzantius, Pope Urban II, met at the Council of Bari in 1098, recognized his holiness, which he later confirmed at a council held in Rome. In 1099, work began on the great Romanesque cathedral of Trani, which is dedicated to him and whose crypt houses his body. The archbishop's house where he died became the church of Saint Nicholas. In the 18th century, under Pope Benedict XIV, he was entered in the Roman Martyrology. He is one of the patrons of the archdiocese of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie. His liturgical feast is June 2, and the patronal feast of Trani takes place on the last weekend of July. He is shown with a banner bearing a cross and the pilgrim's bag.

What can we learn from Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim?

Nicholas had no learning, no office and no human plan. He had only one prayer, that of the tax collector in the Gospel: "Lord, have mercy." By repeating it all his life, he became a sign of humility and of total trust in God's mercy. He also reminds us that the Church has learned to recognize holiness in those

whom the world despises or finds strange. You can pray to him for pilgrims, for people who are mocked or rejected, for those who suffer from mental illness, and to learn the prayer of the heart.

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

Where to pray to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim

- **Trani** (Apulia, Italy): the cathedral, whose crypt houses his body.
- **Trani**: the church of Saint Nicholas, the former house of Archbishop Byzantius and the traditional place of his death.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim for Pilgrims and the Rejected

Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim, a young Greek shepherd, wandered through Apulia with a cross in his hand, repeating "Kyrie eleison." Mocked and rejected, he died in Trani on June 2, 1094, at the age of nineteen. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It takes up his prayer, "Lord, have mercy," and entrusts to him pilgrims and all who are rejected.

Prayer to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim

Saint Nicholas,
poor shepherd of Greece,
you had only one prayer in your heart and on your lips:
"Lord, have mercy."
Teach me to pray simply,
trusting in the mercy of God.

You were mocked, driven away, beaten,
taken for a madman,
and you kept on your way carrying the cross.
Support those who are rejected and misunderstood,
and give me eyes that respect everyone.

Pilgrim of the roads of Apulia,
watch over all who are on the road,
pilgrims, travelers and the homeless.
At the end of my journey,
lead me to the house of the Father.
Kyrie eleison. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim

- On his feast day, June 2, or at the patronal feast of Trani, at the end of July.
- Before setting out on a pilgrimage or a journey.
- For people who are mocked, isolated or rejected.
- For those who suffer from mental illness and for their families.
- To learn to pray without ceasing, with simple words.

The prayer of Nicholas

You can take up slowly, in rhythm with your breathing, the prayer Nicholas repeated day and night:

> *Kyrie eleison.*
> *Lord, have mercy on me.*
> *Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim from May 25 to June 2, and read the life of Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim

This novena offers nine days of prayer with Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim, a young Greek who died in Trani in 1094. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, June 2, begin on May 25. You can also pray it before the patronal feast of Trani, at the end of July, or before a pilgrimage.

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 by repeating several times, like Nicholas: "Kyrie eleison," then "Saint Nicholas, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A poor child

Nicholas was born into a family of poor peasants at Stiri, in Greece. He received almost no education. God often chooses what is small in the eyes of the world.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to recognize your presence in the poor and the little ones.

Act of the day: Do a discreet service for someone who is poor or alone.

Day 2: The shepherd's prayer

A shepherd from childhood, Nicholas began to repeat ceaselessly: "Kyrie eleison." A very simple prayer became his whole life.

Prayer: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Teach me to pray without ceasing.

Act of the day: Repeat "Lord, have mercy" in every free moment of the day.

Day 3: Mocked and driven away

His continual prayer made people think he was mad. At twelve, his own mother drove him away. He knew rejection very early.

Prayer: Lord, console those rejected by their families, and keep me from despising anyone.

Act of the day: Greet and listen to someone whom others avoid.

Day 4: The cave on Mount Helicon

Taking refuge in a cave, Nicholas met a monk who taught him monastic life. In his distress, God sent him a guide.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those you place on my path to help me grow.

Act of the day: Thank someone who helped you at a difficult time.

Day 5: Setting out on pilgrimage

Nicholas felt prompted to leave for Rome. He crossed the sea and arrived in Italy, a poor man among the poor.

Prayer: Lord, make my life a pilgrimage toward you, and bless all who are on the road.

Act of the day: Pray for migrants and travelers, or take a walk while praying.

Day 6: The cross in his hand

In Apulia, Nicholas went from town to town carrying a cross. He proclaimed Christ without speeches, by his presence alone.

Prayer: Lord, grant that I may carry my cross with you, and be a humble witness to your love.

Act of the day: Spend a moment before a crucifix to entrust your troubles to him.

Day 7: Beaten and despised

In Lecce and Taranto, Nicholas was badly received and beaten. He did not respond with violence.

Prayer: Lord, give me gentleness in the face of injustice, and teach me to forgive.

Act of the day: Forgive in your heart a humiliation you have suffered.

Day 8: Welcomed in Trani

In Trani, Archbishop Byzantius wanted to meet Nicholas himself. Moved by his simplicity, he welcomed him into his house. A single kind look changed everything.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to look at others with kindness and to open my door.

Act of the day: Welcome someone into your home, or offer them a meal.

Day 9: Dying at nineteen

Nicholas fell ill and died on June 2, 1094, surrounded by children and adults who loved him. The rejected one had become a saint for a whole city.

Prayer: Lord, welcome me one day into your mercy. Through the intercession of Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim, 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 young people who are sick.

Living the novena with Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim

Saint Nicholas offers us the simplest prayer of all: "Lord, have mercy." During these nine days, you can repeat it often, and carry in your prayer pilgrims, rejected people, those who suffer from mental illness and young people. If you can, go one day to Trani, to his tomb.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim,*
> *poor man of God and fool for Christ,*
> *you prayed ceaselessly for the Lord's mercy.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Keep me humble and trusting,*
> *and lead me on the path of life.*
> *Kyrie eleison. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Trani Cathedral

Trani Cathedral stands on the shore of the Adriatic Sea, in Apulia, in southern Italy. Dedicated to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim, it was built from 1099 onward, five years after the death of the young Greek pilgrim, and its crypt houses his body. With its tall silhouette of pale stone facing the waves, it is one of the great Romanesque monuments of the region.

A cathedral born of holiness

Nicholas, a Greek shepherd who wandered through Apulia repeating "Kyrie eleison," died in Trani on June 2, 1094, at the age of nineteen. The miracles reported at his tomb and the fervor of the people led Archbishop Byzantius to ask Pope Urban II to recognize him, and the pope confirmed his holiness in 1098. The very next year, work began on a new cathedral to honor him. The building took a long time, but it kept the memory of this poor saint who was the reason for its construction.

Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim is one of the patrons of the archdiocese of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie. Every year, his liturgical feast is celebrated on June 2, and the city celebrates its patron on the last weekend of July.

What you can see

The exterior, with its facade and slender bell tower, is striking for its sobriety and its position facing the sea. Inside, the upper church rises above crypts. This is where the body of Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim rests, and where the faithful come to pray to him. Not far from the cathedral, the church of Saint Nicholas, the former house of Archbishop Byzantius, keeps the memory of the place where the young man was welcomed and died.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim. In the crypt, slowly repeat his prayer, "Kyrie eleison," and entrust to him pilgrims, rejected people and those who suffer in their minds. Then say the prayer to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Trani is on the Adriatic coast of Apulia, north of Bari, and is easy to reach by train or by car. The cathedral is a place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested, especially during Mass. Opening hours, access to the crypts and any visiting conditions may vary: check with the cathedral or the tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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