

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Noël Chabanel

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 19

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IN BRIEF

Saint Noël Chabanel

French Jesuit priest, missionary among the Hurons, one of the eight North American Martyrs.

Feast day	October 19
Born	February 2, 1613, Saugues (Haute-Loire, France)
Died	December 8, 1649, Huron country, New France (present-day Ontario)
Canonized	canonized June 29, 1930, by Pius XI
Era	17th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Noël Chabanel

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Noël Chabanel

Saint Noël Chabanel was a French Jesuit priest, born in Saugues, in the Gévaudan, in 1613, and killed in New France on December 8, 1649. A missionary among the Huron-Wendat, in present-day Ontario, he is one of the eight North American Martyrs, canonized by Pius XI in 1930. He is celebrated with his companions on October 19, and on September 26 in Canada.

Who was Saint Noël Chabanel?

Noël Chabanel is the most discreet of the North American Martyrs, and perhaps the closest to us. A brilliant teacher in France, he never managed to settle into life in the Huron mission. The language resisted him, the food, the smoke of the longhouses and the lack of privacy repelled him, and he found almost no consolation in prayer. Yet he stayed. Rather than ask to return to France, he bound himself by a vow never to leave the mission. We know him mainly from the *Jesuit Relations* and from the testimony of his superior, Father Paul Ragueneau.

Key dates

- **February 2, 1613**: Born in Saugues, in the Gévaudan, in today's department of Haute-Loire.
- **c. 1630**: At seventeen, he enters the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Toulouse.
- **1630s**: He teaches rhetoric at several Jesuit colleges in the province of Toulouse.
- **August 15, 1643**: He arrives in Quebec, where he spends a year studying the Native American languages.
- **1644**: He joins the mission of Sainte-Marie, in Huron country.

- **June 20, 1647**: He makes a vow to remain all his life in the Huron mission, unless his superiors order otherwise.
- **Autumn 1649**: He is sent to the Petun to assist Father Charles Garnier at Etharita.
- **December 8, 1649**: Recalled by his superiors, he is killed on the way by a Huron, Louis Honarreennha, who throws his body into a river.
- **June 21, 1925**: Beatified by Pius XI with the other Canadian martyrs.
- **June 29, 1930**: Canonized by Pius XI.

A gifted teacher

Noël Chabanel was born in Saugues, a small town of the Margeride, on the day of the Presentation of the Lord. At seventeen, he entered the Jesuits in Toulouse. After his training, he taught rhetoric at several colleges of the Society. His superiors valued him for his virtue, his wisdom and his talents. A fine teaching career lay open before him.

But Noël had read the accounts coming from New France and wanted to go. He was sent to Canada and landed in Quebec on August 15, 1643. He spent a year there learning the languages of the country, then in 1644 joined the mission of Sainte-Marie, on Georgian Bay, the center of the Jesuit mission among the Hurons.

A mission without consolation

Father Chabanel soon discovered that what he had loved in France was of no use to him. He, the man of words, could not learn the Huron language properly despite years of effort. He felt a deep repugnance for the way of life in the villages: the smoky longhouses, the food, the lack of any privacy, the vermin. He also suffered from great interior dryness: prayer, which had carried him until then, seemed empty.

He could have asked to go home. His superiors would no doubt have understood. Fearing that this temptation would spoil his work, he chose instead to bind himself more firmly. On June 20, 1647, he made a vow to remain in the Huron mission until his death, unless his superiors decided otherwise. Father Ragueneau would write that he never wanted to detach himself from the cross on which God had placed him.

The death of a missionary

At the end of the 1640s, Iroquois attacks ravaged Huronia. In 1649, Jean de Brébeuf and Gabriel Lalemant were killed, and the Jesuits abandoned Sainte-Marie to fall back on Christian Island. In the autumn, Noël Chabanel was sent to the Petun, at Etharita, to help Father Charles Garnier. Faced with the threat of an attack, he was recalled and left the village in early December.

On December 7, Etharita was destroyed and Charles Garnier killed. The next day, December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Noël Chabanel was murdered on the road by a Huron named Louis Honarreennha, a former Christian who blamed the French for the misfortunes of his people. His body was thrown into a river and was never found. The murderer later confessed his crime. Noël Chabanel was thirty-six years old.

Devotion and iconography

Noël Chabanel was beatified by Pius XI on June 21, 1925, and canonized on June 29, 1930, with Jean de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, Antoine Daniel, Gabriel Lalemant, Charles Garnier, René Goupil and Jean de La Lande. The universal Church celebrates them together on October 19; in Canada, they are celebrated on September 26. The Roman Martyrology also remembers Noël Chabanel on December 8. Relics attributed to him are kept in the Basilica-Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Québec. He is shown in the black cassock of a

Jesuit, often among his companions, with the martyr's palm. Parishes in Quebec bear his name, notably in Laval, in the diocese of Rimouski and in Thetford Mines.

What to remember about Saint Noël Chabanel

Noël Chabanel was not a brilliant missionary. He did not convert whole villages, he did not master the language, he hardly knew any felt joy. His holiness comes down to one word: faithfulness. He stayed where God had put him, without taste and without visible success, out of love. He speaks to all who live a commitment that has become dry: a marriage, a vocation, a job, a mission. We can pray to him to hold on when prayer seems empty.

Where to pray to Saint Noël Chabanel

- **Midland** (Ontario, Canada): the Martyrs' Shrine, the great place of pilgrimage of the North American Martyrs, near Sainte-Marie among the Hurons.
- **Quebec**: the Basilica-Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Québec, where relics of the martyrs are kept.
- **Saugues** (Haute-Loire): his birthplace, on the pilgrim routes of Saint James.
- **Laval, Rimouski, Thetford Mines** (Quebec): the parishes dedicated to Saint Noël Chabanel.

To pray with him at home, you can use the prayer to Saint Noël Chabanel or the novena to Saint Noël Chabanel.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Noël Chabanel for Faithfulness in Dryness

Saint Noël Chabanel, a Jesuit born in Saugues, left a fine career as a teacher for the Huron mission, where he found neither ease nor consolation. Yet he stayed, bound by a vow, until his violent death on December 8, 1649. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life; it is not an official liturgical text. It asks the grace of perseverance for all whose commitment has become heavy or dry.

Prayer to Saint Noël Chabanel

Saint Noël Chabanel,
you left your students and your country
to bring the Gospel to the peoples of New France.
There, everything cost you:
the language that would not come,
the life in the longhouses that repelled you,
the prayer that seemed unanswered.

You could have gone back,
but you chose to stay,
and you promised God never to leave the cross
on which he had placed you.

Pray for those who live a faithfulness without taste,
for weary spouses,
for priests and religious in dryness,
for those who labor without seeing fruit.
Obtain for us the grace to persevere out of love,
even when we feel nothing.

With your companion martyrs,
pray for today's missionaries
and for the peoples they serve.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Noël Chabanel

- On his feast day with the North American Martyrs, October 19, or on December 8, the day of his death.
- When your prayer seems dry and empty.

- When you are tempted to give up a commitment made before God.
- For a missionary, a priest or a religious sister going through a trial.
- When you struggle to learn a language or to adapt to a foreign culture.

An invocation for dry days

Father Chabanel did not ask God to be consoled, but to remain faithful. You can pray to him with these simple words:

> *Lord, I feel nothing, but I stay.*
> *Keep me where you have placed me.*
> *Saint Noël Chabanel, pray for me. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Noël Chabanel from October 11 to October 19, and read about the life of Saint Noël Chabanel.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Noël Chabanel

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Noël Chabanel, a French Jesuit, missionary among the Hurons and martyr in 1649. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day with the North American Martyrs, October 19, begin on October 11. It is suited to times of weariness, spiritual dryness or doubt about a commitment, and you can pray it at any 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 Noël Chabanel, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live concretely what you have prayed.

Day 1: A child of Saugues

Noël was born on February 2, 1613, in Saugues, in the highlands of the Gévaudan, on the day the Church celebrates the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. His whole life would be an offering. God calls us where we were born, with our history and our roots.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for my family, my land and all I have received. Make my life an offering, like Noël's.

Today: Pray for your parents and for those who handed on the faith to you.

Day 2: The call of the Society

At seventeen, Noël entered the Jesuit novitiate in Toulouse. There he learned prayer, obedience and discernment. A vocation often begins with a simple yes, whose reach we do not yet measure.

Prayer: Lord, help me recognize your call today, and answer you without understanding everything in advance.

Today: Pray for vocations, especially for a young person searching for his or her path.

Day 3: Leaving one's talents

Noël was a respected teacher of rhetoric. In leaving for Canada, he left behind what he did best. God sometimes asks us to give up our strengths so that his strength may be shown in our weakness.

Prayer: Lord, I hand over to you my talents and my reputation. Make of me what you will, even what I would not have chosen.

Today: Do a favor in which you will be neither skilled nor noticed.

Day 4: The language that resists

For years, Noël struggled to learn the Huron language. The man of words found himself almost mute. He bore this daily humiliation without losing heart.

Prayer: Lord, when I feel incapable and slow, keep me from shame and anger. Teach me humility.

Today: Be patient with someone who speaks your language poorly or learns slowly.

Day 5: Repugnance overcome

Life in the smoky longhouses, the food and the lack of privacy repelled him deeply. Noël did not deny these feelings, but he did not let them decide for him. Love does not always depend on what we feel.

Prayer: Lord, when a task or a person puts me off, give me to love by an act of will, until the heart follows.

Today: Carefully do a task you dislike, without complaining.

Day 6: Prayer without consolation

Noël went through a long spiritual dryness. God seemed absent. He kept praying, faithfully, like someone keeping watch in the night. Faith is not a feeling, it is a trust.

Prayer: Lord, even when I feel nothing, I believe you are here. Keep me faithful to prayer.

Today: Take a time of prayer at a fixed hour, even if it seems empty.

Day 7: The vow to stay

On June 20, 1647, Noël promised God never to leave the Huron mission, unless his superiors decided otherwise. Instead of fleeing the difficulty, he clung to it more firmly. A promise kept is a treasure in a world that is always changing.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen my commitments: my faith, my marriage or my vocation, my given word. Keep me faithful to the end.

Today: Silently renew a commitment you have made, and keep a forgotten promise.

Day 8: Obedience to the end

In the autumn of 1649, Noël was sent to the Petun to join Charles Garnier, then recalled when the danger grew. He left without argument. It was on this road of obedience that he would find his death.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to welcome unexpected changes without rebellion, and to seek you on every road.

Today: Willingly accept a setback or a decision that does not suit you.

Day 9: Giving one's life

On December 8, 1649, Noël was killed by a Huron and his body was thrown into a river. He has no tomb. But his life, offered day after day, was already entirely given to God. The Church counts him among the martyrs.

Prayer: Lord, may my life be given without return, like Noël's. Through the intercession of Saint Noël Chabanel, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for persecuted Christians and for those who do them harm.

Living the novena with Saint Noël Chabanel

You may be praying this novena because you are tired. A commitment has become heavy, prayer no longer says anything to you, you wonder whether you are in the right place. Noël Chabanel knew all this. He does not promise that the taste will come back soon. He only shows you that one can stay, and that this silent faithfulness is precious in God's eyes. During these nine days, do not try to feel. Simply come, each day, at the appointed hour. You can also carry in your prayer today's missionaries and the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Closing prayer

Saint Noël Chabanel,
faithful in dryness,
patient in failure,
obedient unto death,
present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.
Obtain for me the grace to remain where he places me,
to love him even without consolation,
and to offer him my life each day.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Noël Chabanel at any time, and read about the life of Saint Noël Chabanel.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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