BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Paul the Simple

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 7

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IN BRIEF

Saint Paul the Simple

Egyptian hermit of the 4th century, disciple of Saint Anthony the Great.

Feast day	March 7
Born	late 3rd century, Egypt
Died	c. 339, Egyptian desert
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Paul the Simple for a Simple Heart and for Wounded Hearts

Novena to Saint Paul the Simple

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Paul the Simple

Saint Paul the Simple was an Egyptian hermit of the 4th century, a disciple of Saint Anthony the Great. A simple farmer who became a monk at about sixty, he remained in the memory of the Desert Fathers as the model of obedience and of "holy simplicity". He is said to have died around 339. His feast day is March 7.

Who was Saint Paul the Simple?

Paul the Simple belongs to the first generation of the monks of Egypt, a contemporary of Saint Paul of Thebes, whom tradition regards as the first hermit. His life is known to us through two ancient collections on the desert monks: the *Lausiac History* of Palladius, written at the end of the 4th century, and the *History of the Monks of Egypt*, known in Latin through the translation of Rufinus of Aquileia. These texts mostly report a few striking scenes, meant to instruct monks. We know neither his date of birth, nor the exact place of his hermitage, nor with certainty the date of his death. Saint John Climacus, in the 7th century, still cites him as an example: Paul the Simple was, he writes, the type and the rule of holy simplicity.

Key dates in the life of Paul the Simple

- **Late 3rd century**: Born in Egypt, on an unknown date; he lives for a long time as a farmer.
- **At about sixty**: Having discovered his wife's unfaithfulness, he leaves his home to devote himself to prayer.
- **Shortly after**: He goes to Saint Anthony, who first judges him too old for the life of a hermit.

- **The following days**: He stays several days at Anthony's door, until Anthony takes him in for fear he will die.
- **Time of formation**: Anthony tests him with work, fasting, vigils and prayer, then admits him as a hermit in a separate cell.
- **c. 339**: He dies in the desert, according to the date most often given.
- **Late 4th century**: Palladius and the *History of the Monks of Egypt* record his story.

A farmer at Anthony's door

According to the ancient accounts, Paul was a farmer. At about sixty he discovered that his wife was unfaithful to him. Rather than take revenge, he left everything and went to seek God in the desert. He went to Anthony, already famous, and asked to become a hermit. Anthony discouraged him: at his age, the solitary life seemed too harsh. He advised him to remain a devout and grateful farmer, or, if he truly wanted to become a monk, to join a community.

Paul would not be sent away. Anthony shut his door and left him outside; Paul stayed there, day after day, without leaving. After several days Anthony finally let him in, for fear he would die of hunger. The accounts add a delightful scene: at the meal, Anthony took a piece of bread and invited Paul to have more. "If you eat more, I will eat; if not, I will not," Paul answered. Anthony said he had eaten enough for a hermit. "Then it is enough for me too, for I want to become a hermit," the disciple replied.

The school of obedience

Anthony then put Paul through a long trial: hard work, severe fasts, nights of prayer, the singing of psalms and repeated prostrations. Paul obeyed in everything, without arguing, with a child's trust. Struck by his constancy and

humility, Anthony at last admitted him as a hermit and gave him a separate cell. The Desert Fathers remembered his obedience without calculation, which was not naivety but total surrender to God through his spiritual father.

Power over demons

Tradition reports that Paul received a special gift against demons. It is told that one day a young man possessed by a very powerful spirit was brought to Anthony. Anthony declared that he could do nothing for him, but that Paul the Simple had received this power, and he sent him to his disciple. The story aims to show that humility and simplicity of heart have more strength before God than learning or seniority in monastic life.

Cult and iconography

Paul the Simple has been venerated since antiquity, in East and West alike. He was never canonized by the modern procedure: his cult is immemorial. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on March 7; the Orthodox Churches also celebrate him on October 4. He is depicted as an old hermit, simply dressed, often beside Saint Anthony.

What can we learn from Saint Paul the Simple?

Saint Paul the Simple shows that it is never too late to give oneself to God, even after a deep wound. He teaches us perseverance, trusting obedience and simplicity of heart. His life reminds us that holiness is not reserved for the learned: it is offered to those who let themselves be led.

Where to pray to Saint Paul the Simple

- No known tomb or shrine keeps his memory; he can be prayed to anywhere, especially on March 7.
- In monasteries that live from the tradition of the Desert Fathers.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Paul the Simple for a Simple Heart and for Wounded Hearts

Saint Paul the Simple, an Egyptian farmer wounded by his wife's unfaithfulness, became at about sixty the disciple of Saint Anthony the Great. The Desert Fathers made him the model of obedience and simplicity of heart. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him those who have been betrayed, those who begin a new life late, and those who seek a simple heart.

Prayer to Saint Paul the Simple

Saint Paul the Simple,
you were wounded in your love
and chose to seek God rather than revenge:
help those who have been betrayed
to find peace and forgiveness.

You waited for days at Anthony's door:
give me perseverance
when God seems slow to open to me.

You obeyed with a child's heart:
teach me holy simplicity,
not to complicate what God asks,
and to do with trust what he shows me.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Paul the Simple

- On his feast day, March 7.
- After a betrayal or a painful break in a marriage.
- When you want to begin a new life at an advanced age.
- To grow in obedience and humility.
- For monks, hermits and spiritual guides.

An invocation for a simple heart

> *Lord, give me a simple heart that trusts you.*
> *Saint Paul the Simple, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Paul the Simple from February 27 to March 7, and discover the life of Saint Paul the Simple.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Paul the Simple

This novena follows Saint Paul the Simple, an Egyptian farmer who became at sixty the disciple of Saint Anthony the Great. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To end it on his feast day, March 7, begin it on February 27 (February 28 in leap years). 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 Paul the Simple, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The scenes recalled come from the ancient accounts of the Desert Fathers.

Day 1: A life of labor

Paul was for a long time a simple farmer. God knows the value of ordinary lives and patient work.

Prayer: Lord, bless my daily work.

Act of the day: Do an ordinary task carefully, offering it to God.

Day 2: The wound

At about sixty, Paul discovered that his wife was unfaithful to him. The wound was deep, but it became the starting point of a search for God.

Prayer: Lord, heal hearts wounded by betrayal.

Act of the day: Pray for a couple in difficulty.

Day 3: Choosing God rather than revenge

Paul did not take revenge: he left. He placed his suffering in God's hands and sought a new life.

Prayer: Lord, free me from resentment and teach me to forgive.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who has hurt you.

Day 4: Never too late

Anthony judged him too old for the life of a hermit. Paul did not lose heart. It is never too late to give oneself to God.

Prayer: Lord, renew my life, whatever my age.

Act of the day: Begin a small habit of daily prayer.

Day 5: At the door

Anthony shut his door; Paul stayed outside for several days. His perseverance finally opened the way.

Prayer: Lord, help me persevere in prayer, even when you seem silent.

Act of the day: Take up again a prayer or a project abandoned out of discouragement.

Day 6: The shared bread

At the meal, Paul refused to eat more than his master: "I want to become a hermit." He imitated his guide even in small things.

Prayer: Lord, teach me sobriety and self-control.

Act of the day: Fast from one food or drink today.

Day 7: Trusting obedience

Hard labor, fasts, vigils: Paul obeyed in everything without arguing. His obedience was not weakness but trust.

Prayer: Lord, make me docile to your will and to good advice.

Act of the day: Accept willingly a request that costs you.

Day 8: The strength of the humble

Anthony acknowledged that Paul had received a power against demons that he himself did not have. God gives his strength to the humble.

Prayer: Lord, deliver us from evil and keep us in your peace.

Act of the day: Pray the Our Father slowly, meditating on "deliver us from evil".

Day 9: Holy simplicity

Saint John Climacus made Paul the model of holy simplicity. A simple heart sees God.

Prayer: Saint Paul the Simple, obtain for us the grace we entrust to you, and a pure and simple heart.

Act of the day: Read Matthew 18:1-4, about the child among the disciples.

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