

BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Paul the Apostle

*Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage*

Feast day: June 29

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IN BRIEF

## Saint Paul the Apostle

*Apostle to the Gentiles, converted on the road to Damascus, author of New Testament letters.*

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| **Feast day** | June 29, January 25 |
| **Born** | c. AD 5-10, Tarsus, Cilicia (present-day Turkey) |
| **Died** | c. AD 64-67, Rome |
| **Canonized** | pre-congregation (venerated since the early Church) |
| **Era** | 1st century |
| **Patron saint of** | missionaries, Malta, evangelists |

## In this booklet


Life

Prayer to Saint Paul and the Hymn to Love

Novena to Saint Paul

Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Tomb of the Apostle in Rome

Credits and sources



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LIFE

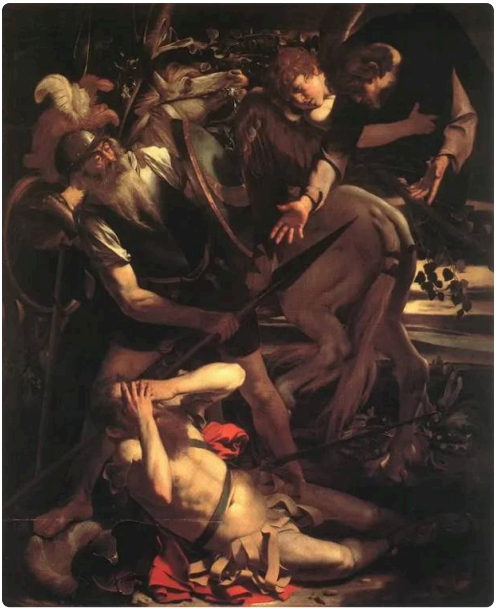
# Saint Paul the Apostle

Saint Paul, first known as Saul, was a Jewish Pharisee from Tarsus who persecuted the first Christians until an encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus turned his life around. Known as "the Apostle to the Gentiles," he traveled across Asia Minor and Greece to bring the Gospel to non-Jews, founded communities, and wrote them letters that make up a large part of the New Testament. Put to death in Rome under Nero, he is celebrated on June 29 together with Saint Peter, and his conversion is celebrated on January 25.

## Who was Saint Paul?

Paul was born at the beginning of the Christian era in Tarsus, a major city of Cilicia, into a Jewish family of the tribe of Benjamin that held Roman citizenship. He bore the Hebrew name Saul and the Latin name Paul. He learned the trade of tentmaking, which he practiced all his life so as not to be a burden to the communities he served (Acts 18:3).

Trained in Jerusalem under the famous teacher Gamaliel, he became a Pharisee full of zeal for the Law (Philippians 3:5-6). He spoke Greek, knew the Scriptures in depth, and belonged to two worlds at once: the world of Judaism and the world of the Greek cities of the Roman Empire.



*The Conversion of Saint Paul by Caravaggio, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome (1601).*

## Key dates in the life of Saint Paul

- **c. 5-10**: Born in Tarsus, in Cilicia.
- **c. 33-36**: Witnesses the stoning of Stephen, then persecutes the disciples of Jesus.
- **c. 34-36**: Meets the risen Christ on the road to Damascus; baptized by Ananias.
- **Three years later**: Goes to Jerusalem to meet Peter (Galatians 1:18).
- **c. 45**: Barnabas brings him to Antioch, where the disciples are first called Christians.
- **c. 46-48**: First missionary journey, to Cyprus and Galatia, with Barnabas.
- **c. 49**: Council of Jerusalem, which frees Christians of pagan origin from circumcision.

- **c. 50-52**: Second journey, from Philippi to Athens and Corinth; First Letter to the Thessalonians.
- **c. 53-57**: Third journey, long stay in Ephesus; letters to the Corinthians, the Galatians and the Romans.
- **c. 57-58**: Arrested in Jerusalem, then held for two years in Caesarea.
- **c. 60**: Sails to Rome as a prisoner and is shipwrecked on Malta.
- **c. 60-62**: Two years under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30).
- **c. 64-67**: Martyred in Rome under the emperor Nero.

## The road to Damascus

Paul himself tells us that he persecuted "the Church of God beyond measure" (Galatians 1:13). The Acts of the Apostles show him guarding the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen, then setting out for Damascus with orders to arrest the disciples there. On the way, a light from heaven flashed around him; he fell to the ground and heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" When he asked who was speaking, the voice answered: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4-5).

Blinded, he was led by the hand into Damascus, where a disciple named Ananias laid hands on him. He recovered his sight and was baptized.

Paul does not describe this as a "conversion" in the sense of changing religion. He understood himself as a Jew to whom God had revealed his Son, and who was called to proclaim him among the nations (Galatians 1:15-16). The encounter overturned his life: the one he had fought against became the center of everything. "For to me, to live is Christ," he would write to the Philippians (Philippians 1:21).

## The Apostle to the Gentiles

For some fifteen years, Paul covered thousands of miles on foot and by sea. With Barnabas, then Silas, Timothy, Luke and others, he preached first in the synagogues and then to the pagans, founding communities in Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus. He knew prison, flogging, shipwreck and hunger, which he lists in his Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

At the Council of Jerusalem, he argued forcefully that non-Jews could become Christians without adopting every practice of the Law of Moses. It was a decisive step toward the universal openness of the Church.

## The letters of Saint Paul

To stay in touch with the communities he had founded, Paul wrote to them. Thirteen letters in the New Testament bear his name. Scholars agree in attributing at least seven of them directly to him, including the First Letter to the Thessalonians, written around 50, which is probably the oldest Christian writing that has come down to us.

These letters contain some of the best-known pages of the Bible: the hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13), often read at weddings; the account of the Last Supper (1 Corinthians 11); the oldest testimony to the appearances of the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15); and the great reflection on faith and grace in the Letter to the Romans. They shaped the thought of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas and all of Christian theology.

## Martyrdom in Rome

Arrested in Jerusalem around 57-58, Paul appealed to the emperor as a Roman citizen. He was taken to Rome by sea, was shipwrecked on Malta, and then lived two years in the capital under guard, welcoming those who came to see him. The Acts of the Apostles do not tell what happened next.

According to a very ancient tradition, already echoed by Saint Clement of Rome at the end of the first century, he died a martyr under Nero. As a Roman citizen, he is said to have been beheaded, at the place called Aquae Salviae, today the Abbey of Tre Fontane. His tomb on the road to Ostia has been venerated since antiquity, and the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls stands above it.



*The nave of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, built over the apostle's tomb.*

## Why is Saint Paul the patron saint of missionaries and Malta?

Paul is the missionary par excellence: no one in the early Church traveled so far or founded so many communities to bring the Gospel to those who had never heard it. Missionaries, evangelists and all who share their faith naturally turn to him.

Malta honors him as its father in the faith. According to the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 27-28), the ship carrying him to Rome ran aground on the island after a storm of fourteen days, and he stayed there three months before continuing his journey. The Maltese have kept the memory of his shipwreck ever since.

## What his holiness teaches us

Saint Paul shows that no one is too far away to be reached by God: the former persecutor became the most ardent of missionaries. His life was marked by a passion for Christ, tireless energy and deep tenderness toward the communities he called his children. He did not hide his weaknesses; in them he discovered that the grace of God is enough (2 Corinthians 12:9). Catholics pray to him for missionaries, for Christian unity, and for all who try to proclaim the Gospel today.

## Symbols and how to recognize Saint Paul in art

- **The sword**: the instrument of his martyrdom by beheading, his most common attribute.
- **The book or scroll**: his letters, which form a large part of the New Testament.
- **The fall from a horse**: the classic way painters show the road to Damascus, although the Bible never mentions a horse.
- **A bald forehead and a dark beard**: the traditional features given to him in Christian art, often beside Saint Peter.

## Where to pray to Saint Paul

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, over his tomb, and the Abbey of Tre Fontane, the traditional place of his martyrdom.

- **Damascus** (Syria): the Chapel of Saint Ananias and the "Street called Straight" mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.
- **Malta**: Saint Paul's Bay and Saint Paul's Grotto in Rabat, linked to the apostle's shipwreck.
- **Tarsus** (Turkey): the Church of Saint Paul, now a museum, in his hometown.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Paul and the Hymn to Love

The most beautiful prayers of Saint Paul are found in his own letters, where he often moves from teaching to praise. The best known is the hymn to love in chapter 13 of the First Letter to the Corinthians, written in Ephesus around 54-55. Below you will find this text, a verse from the Letter to the Galatians to meditate on, and an original prayer to Saint Paul.

## The hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13)

Paul was writing to a divided community, proud of its spiritual gifts. He reminds it that nothing has value without love. Translated from the Greek by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*

*If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if I have faith enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

*If I give away all I have, and if I hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it does not boast, it is not puffed up. It is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not keep a record of wrongs. It does not rejoice over injustice but rejoices with the truth.*

*It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*

*So faith, hope and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Source: First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 1-8 and 13.

## A word to meditate on

*"I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."*

Source: Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians, chapter 2, verse 20. In one sentence, Paul sums up what the encounter on the road to Damascus did in him.

## Prayer to Saint Paul for conversion and courage

Saint Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, you whom Christ took hold of on the road to Damascus, pray for me.

You who were a persecutor and became a witness, obtain for me the grace of conversion: may I let Christ overturn whatever in me still resists him.

You who crossed roads and seas to proclaim the Gospel, give me your boldness and your love for the Church. You who knew weakness, prison and abandonment, teach me that the grace of God is enough for me.

I entrust to you the Church, missionaries and the unity of Christians. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). May I one day be able to say with you: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

## When to pray this prayer

Saint Paul is celebrated on June 29 with Saint Peter, the solemnity of the two pillars of the Church of Rome. The feast of his conversion, on January 25, closes the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity each year.

The hymn to love is also a good prayer before a wedding, during a conflict in a family or a community, or whenever you find it hard to love someone. The prayer to Saint Paul suits anyone who is going through a conversion, starting a mission, or feeling weak before a task that seems too great. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Paul.

NOVENA

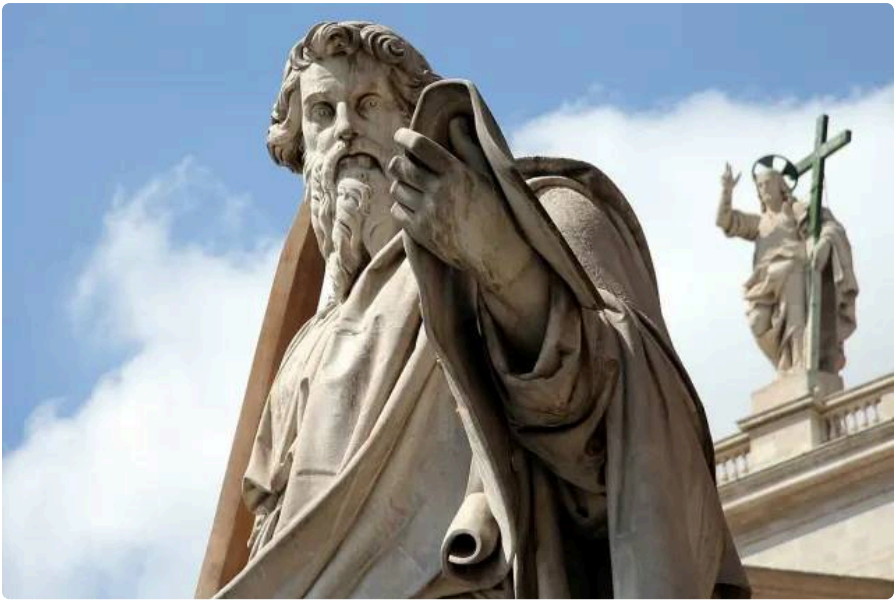
# Novena to Saint Paul

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the journey of Saint Paul from Damascus to Rome, drawing on the Acts of the Apostles and his letters. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, start on June 20; it ends on June 28. You can also pray it from January 16 to 24, before the feast of his conversion on January 25.

## How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and the Bible passage it mentions, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps you live it in the spirit of the apostle. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group. Keep a Bible close at hand: each day points to a passage from the Acts of the Apostles or from one of Paul's letters, and reading it slowly is the best way to meet the apostle in his own words. Many people choose one intention for the whole novena, such as a conversion, a mission, or reconciliation between Christians.



*Saint Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, in a church statue or window.*

## Day 1: Misguided zeal

Saul is sincere, educated and ardent, and it is with this very ardor that he persecutes the disciples. It is possible to be wrong with great conviction. God does not reject this zeal: he turns it around.

**Prayer:** Lord, purify my convictions. Show me where my zeal does harm without my seeing it.

**Today:** Listen all the way through to someone whose ideas you do not share.

## Day 2: Falling to the ground

On the road to Damascus, Saul is thrown to the ground by a light and hears: "Why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). Jesus identifies himself with those who are made to suffer.

**Prayer:** Jesus, when I fall, let me hear your voice. Teach me to recognize you in those who suffer.

**Today:** Read Acts 9:1-19 slowly.

## Day 3: Letting yourself be led

Blinded, Paul has to be led by the hand into Damascus, then wait for Ananias, a disciple he had come to arrest. Conversion passes through the humility of receiving from others.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me accept the help of those you place on my path, even when it costs me.

**Today:** Ask for help with something you have been carrying alone.

## Day 4: Being welcomed

In Jerusalem, the disciples are wary of the former persecutor. Barnabas takes him in and vouches for him (Acts 9:27). Without Barnabas, there might never have been an Apostle Paul.

**Prayer:** Lord, make me a Barnabas for those who are kept on the sidelines.

**Today:** Reach out to someone who is isolated in your parish, workplace or neighborhood.

## Day 5: Setting out on the road

Paul leaves Antioch for Cyprus, Galatia, Macedonia and Greece. He takes risks so that others may hear the Gospel. The Church is missionary by its very nature.

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, give me the desire to share my faith, and the gentleness to do it with respect.

**Today:** Pray for a missionary or support a missionary work.

## Day 6: Love above all

In Corinth, Christians quarrel over their gifts. Paul writes to them that without love, nothing has value. This is the hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13).

**Prayer:** Lord, make me patient and kind. May love come before my talents and my arguments.

**Today:** Reread 1 Corinthians 13, putting your own name in place of the word "love," and choose one point to work on.



*Praying with Saint Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles.*

## Day 7: Strength in weakness

Paul speaks of a "thorn in the flesh" that he begged three times to be freed from. He received this answer: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

**Prayer:** Lord, I present my weaknesses to you. May your grace reach me there and show its strength.

**Today:** Accept peacefully a limitation in yourself that you do not like.

## Day 8: In the storm

A prisoner on his way to Rome, Paul goes through a storm that lasts fourteen days. It is he, the man in chains, who encourages the crew and breaks bread before the shipwreck on Malta (Acts 27).

**Prayer:** Lord, in the storms of my life, keep me trusting, and make me a support for others.

**Today:** Encourage someone who is going through a hard time.

## Day 9: Finishing the race

At the end of his life, Paul can write: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). He gave his life in Rome for the one who had taken hold of him on the road to Damascus.

**Prayer:** Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Paul, grant me to keep the faith to the end. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for the unity of Christians, which Paul desired so much.

## Closing prayer

Saint Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for the Church, for those who proclaim the Gospel, and for those who are seeking God without knowing it. Obtain for us the grace to say with you: for me, to live is Christ. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Paul and pray the hymn to love with him.

PILGRIMAGE

# Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Tomb of the Apostle in Rome

The Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome stands on the Ostian Way, above the tomb that has been venerated as that of the Apostle Paul since antiquity. It is one of the four major basilicas of Rome, along with Saint Peter's, Saint John Lateran, and Saint Mary Major, and an essential pilgrimage site for anyone wishing to pray to the Apostle to the Gentiles.

## A basilica over the apostle's tomb

According to tradition, Paul was buried after his martyrdom in a necropolis lining the Ostian Way, outside the city walls, hence the basilica's name. Around the year 200, a Roman priest named Gaius already spoke of the "trophies," that is, the tombs, of the apostles Peter on the Vatican and Paul on the Ostian Way. In the 4th century, Emperor Constantine had a first church built over this tomb; from 386, the emperors Theodosius, Valentinian II, and Arcadius replaced it with an immense basilica, which for centuries was one of the largest in Christendom.



*Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, tomb of the apostle in Rome.*

## The fire of 1823 and the rebuilding

On the night of July 15-16, 1823, a fire destroyed the ancient basilica almost entirely. It was rebuilt to the same dimensions, thanks to gifts from around the world, and consecrated by Pope Pius IX in 1854. Medieval elements that escaped the flames can still be found there: Arnolfo di Cambio's Gothic ciborium (1285) over the altar, the great carved Paschal candlestick of the 12th century, the apse mosaic, and the Vassalletto cloister, a masterpiece of Cosmatesque art. Along the nave runs the series of medallion portraits of all the popes.

## The sarcophagus of Saint Paul

Beneath the papal altar, excavations carried out in the early 2000s uncovered a marble sarcophagus placed under a slab bearing the Latin inscription "PAULO APOSTOLO MART," "to Paul, apostle and martyr." An opening now lets

pilgrims see it from the confession. On June 28, 2009, at the close of the Pauline Year, Pope Benedict XVI announced that a probe inserted into the sarcophagus had made it possible to take small bone fragments, dated to the 1st or 2nd century, which is consistent with tradition. Near the tomb are displayed chains venerated as those of the apostle.

## Praying at the tomb of Saint Paul

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Paul or a chapter from one of his letters. On site, a time of prayer before the confession is a chance to entrust an intention, especially for the Church's mission or for Christian unity. The prayer with Saint Paul, the hymn to charity, suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



*Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, tomb of the apostle in Rome, the interior.*

## Other places of Saint Paul

- **Abbey of Tre Fontane** (Rome): according to tradition, the place of his beheading, at Aquae Salviae; a church there recalls his martyrdom.

- **Saint Peter's Basilica** (Rome): the tomb of the Apostle Peter, celebrated with him on June 29.
- **Church of Santa Maria in Via Lata** (Rome): linked by tradition to Paul's two years under house arrest in Rome.
- **Damascus** (Syria): the Chapel of Saint Ananias, a place of remembrance of his baptism.
- **Malta**: Saint Paul's Grotto in Rabat and Saint Paul's Bay, linked to the shipwreck of around the year 60.

## Practical information

The basilica is in the south of Rome, on Via Ostiense, and is easy to reach by subway (Line B, Basilica San Paolo station). A community of Benedictine monks, settled in the neighboring abbey, leads its prayer. On January 25, the pope traditionally presides here at the closing Vespers of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Check opening hours and Mass times before you come, especially during major feasts and Jubilee years.

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