

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus

Emigrant from Trentino to Brazil, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and first saint of Brazil.

Feast day	July 9
Born	December 16, 1865, Vigolo Vattaro, Trentino, Italy
Died	July 9, 1942, São Paulo, Brazil
Canonized	May 19, 2002, by Pope John Paul II
Era	20th century

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus

Saint Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus, born Amabile Lucia Visintainer, was a religious sister of Italian origin who emigrated to Brazil as a child and founded the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. The daughter of poor farmers from Trentino, she began by caring for one sick woman in a small hut and ended her life blind and with an amputated arm, in prayer. Canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2002, she is the first saint of Brazil. Her feast day is July 9.

Who was Saint Paulina?

Amabile Lucia Visintainer was born on December 16, 1865, in Vigolo Vattaro, a village in Trentino, then a poor region belonging to the Austrian Empire. Her family lived modestly from the land. At that time, thousands of people from Trentino were leaving their valleys to seek a better life in South America.

In 1875, when Amabile was ten, she left for Brazil with her parents. They settled with other emigrants from the same region at Nova Trento, in the state of Santa Catarina in southern Brazil, in a place they named Vígolo in memory of their home village. The girl grew up there in a deeply believing rural community. As a child, she took an active part in the life of her parish and in serving at Mass.

Key dates

- **December 16, 1865**: Birth in Vigolo Vattaro, Trentino.
- **1875**: Emigration to Brazil with her family, to Nova Trento (Santa Catarina).

- **1890**: With a friend, she takes in a sick woman, the first act of her future congregation.
- **1895**: She makes her vows and takes the name Sister Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus.
- **1903**: Move to Ipiranga, a district of São Paulo, to serve orphans and former slaves.
- **1918**: She withdraws from all responsibilities and devotes herself to prayer.
- **1938**: Serious complications of diabetes begin.
- **July 9, 1942**: Death in São Paulo.
- **October 18, 1991**: Beatification by John Paul II in Florianópolis.
- **May 19, 2002**: Canonization by John Paul II in Rome.

A hut for a sick woman

Saint Paulina's congregation was born from a very simple act. In 1890, at Vígolo, Amabile and a friend, Virgínia Nicolodi, took in a woman suffering from cancer whom no one could care for. They settled her in a humble little house and looked after her day and night. Other young women joined them, and this small community serving the sick became the core of the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.

In 1895 the work received the bishop's approval, and Amabile made her vows. She chose a name that expresses her whole spirituality: Sister Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus. She wanted to be united with Christ in his agony in the Garden of Olives, where he accepted the Father's will despite his anguish. She became the first superior of the congregation.

São Paulo and the most abandoned

In 1903 Mother Paulina left Nova Trento for São Paulo. She settled in the Ipiranga district, where she devoted herself to orphans and to former slaves left without any means. Slavery was abolished in Brazil only in 1888, and many former slaves, elderly or sick, found themselves without shelter or support. The sisters took them in, together with the abandoned children of a fast-growing city.

The congregation grew and opened new houses. But Mother Paulina also knew the trial of being misunderstood: some years later she was removed from the leadership of the work she had founded. She accepted this humiliation in silence and continued to serve the sick and the elderly wherever she was sent.

Prayer and suffering

From 1918 Mother Paulina withdrew from public life and lived at the motherhouse in Ipiranga, devoted to prayer and contemplation. Her last years were marked by illness. From 1938 diabetes caused her serious complications, to the point that her right arm had to be amputated. She became blind in the last months of her life. She died in São Paulo on July 9, 1942, at the age of seventy-six.

To her sisters she left an exhortation often quoted as her spiritual testament: be humble, always trust in Providence and never be discouraged, even when contrary winds blow. This message takes on its full meaning when we remember that she knew poverty, exile, being pushed aside and physical suffering.

The first saint of Brazil

On October 18, 1991, during his journey to Brazil, John Paul II beatified her in Florianópolis, capital of the state of Santa Catarina where she had grown up. On May 19, 2002, he canonized her in Rome as Saint Paulina of the Agonizing

Heart of Jesus. She thus became the first canonized saint of Brazil, an immense joy for the country and for the descendants of Italian emigrants. She was later joined on the altars by Saint José de Anchieta, the Apostle of Brazil.

Why do the sick and migrants pray to Saint Paulina?

Saint Paulina has no official patronage, but her life makes her a natural friend for several groups. Migrants and refugees recognize in her a child who left her homeland for an unknown country. The sick, and especially people living with diabetes, turn to a woman who lost her arm and her sight to that disease. The elderly and those who feel useless find in her someone who, set aside from her own work, kept loving and praying. In Brazil, where her shrine is one of the great pilgrimage sites, she is invoked in every kind of need.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Paulina in art

- **A black veil and white wimple**: the habit of her congregation, as in the photographs taken during her life.
- **Joined hands or a rosary**: statues and holy cards often show her at prayer.
- **Old photographs**: as a twentieth-century saint, she is best known through authentic photographs rather than imagined portraits.

What can we learn from her holiness?

Saint Paulina is first of all a saint of practical charity. She did not start with a grand plan, but with a sick woman who needed care. She is also a saint of humility: pushed aside and ill, she never stopped loving or praying. Migrants, the sick, the elderly, people with diabetes and all who are going through trials can find a friend in her.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Paulina and the novena to Saint Paulina, prayed from June 30 to July 8.

Where to pray to Saint Paulina

- **Nova Trento** (Santa Catarina, Brazil): the Shrine of Saint Paulina at Vígolo, on the site where her congregation was born.
- **São Paulo**: the Ipiranga district, home to the motherhouse of the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, where she died.
- **Vigolo Vattaro** (Trentino, Italy): her native village.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Paulina for the Sick and Migrants

Saint Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus is greatly loved in Brazil, where her shrine in Nova Trento welcomes many pilgrims. She left no major written work, but her sisters kept an exhortation of hers that is often presented as her spiritual testament. You will find it summarized below, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia.

Mother Paulina's spiritual testament

To her daughters, the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Mother Paulina recommended that they be humble, always trust fully in divine Providence, and never let themselves be discouraged, even when contrary winds blow. She urged them to stand firm and to keep going forward, trusting in God and in Mary Immaculate.

Source: an exhortation attributed to Saint Paulina and handed down by her congregation, quoted in the biographies published at her canonization (2002). It is summarized here, not quoted word for word.

Prayer to Saint Paulina for the Sick and Migrants

Saint Paulina, you left your country as a child for an unknown land: watch over migrants, uprooted families and all who are starting their lives again far from home.

You opened your home to a sick woman no one would care for: make me attentive to the suffering people I meet, and give me hands ready to serve.

You welcomed orphans and abandoned former slaves: teach me to see the dignity of every person, especially those the world forgets.

You accepted being set aside, and you carried illness, blindness and amputation in union with the Agonizing Heart of Jesus: support the sick, people living with diabetes, the elderly and all who feel useless.

I entrust to you the intention I carry today: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me humility, trust in Providence and the courage never to lose heart, even in contrary winds. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Paulina is honored on July 9, the day of her death in São Paulo in 1942. You can pray to her:

- for a sick relative, especially someone suffering from diabetes or losing their sight;
- for migrants, refugees and families who have left their homeland;
- for caregivers, nurses and all who look after the elderly;
- when you feel pushed aside, misunderstood or discouraged.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Paulina from June 30 to July 8, and read the life of Saint Paulina.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus. It is not an official liturgical text. Begin it on June 30 to finish on July 8, the eve of her feast on July 9; if you prefer to end on the feast itself, begin on July 1. Each day follows a step of her journey, from emigration to illness, so that her life can shed light on our own.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then one Our Father and one Hail Mary. The small act proposed for the day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. If you are praying for a sick person, you can pray this novena at their bedside. A parish group, a family or a community of caregivers can also pray it together, each person reading one part aloud.

Day 1: Setting Out with Trust

At ten years old, Amabile left Trentino with her parents for Brazil. She left behind her mountains and her village. Her whole life began with a departure into the unknown.

Prayer: Lord, you walk with those who set out. Give me trust when I must leave what I know, and stay close to all who have left their homeland. Amen.

Today: Pray for a migrant or refugee family.

Day 2: A Faith Received at Home

In the small community of Vígolo, faith was lived every day, at home and in the chapel. That is where Amabile learned to pray and to serve, taking part in the life of her parish from childhood.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who passed the faith on to me. Bless families who pray together, and help parents to be the first teachers of their children. Amen.

Today: Thank someone who helped you to believe.

Day 3: Beginning with One Act

In 1890, Amabile and her friend Virgínia took in a sick woman whom no one would care for. A great work was born from this simple act of compassion. God often begins great things with something small.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to the person who needs me today, and give me the courage to act without waiting for perfect conditions. Amen.

Today: Visit or call someone who is sick.

Day 4: United to the Agonizing Heart

By taking the name Paulina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus, she chose to be united with Christ in his anguish in the Garden of Olives, when he said to the Father: "Not my will, but yours be done."

Prayer: Jesus, in my hours of anguish, keep me united to your Heart and to the will of the Father. Amen.

Today: Spend a moment of silence before a crucifix.

Day 5: Serving the Forgotten

In São Paulo, Mother Paulina welcomed orphans and abandoned former slaves, many of them old or sick after the abolition of slavery in 1888. She went toward those whom society left by the roadside.

Prayer: Lord, help me to recognize your face in the poorest, and to defend the dignity of every person. Amen.

Today: Support a work that cares for the elderly or for children on their own.

Day 6: Humility in Trial

Mother Paulina was removed from the leadership of the work she had founded. She accepted without bitterness and continued to serve wherever she was sent. Her greatness lay not in her title but in her love.

Prayer: Lord, heal my heart of the wounds of injustice, and teach me to serve without seeking first place. Amen.

Today: Forgive, in your heart, a past humiliation.

Day 7: A Time for Prayer

From 1918, Mother Paulina lived in retirement at the motherhouse in Ipiranga, devoted to prayer and contemplation. Her hidden life bore fruit for her whole congregation.

Prayer: Lord, teach me that prayer is never wasted time, and that a life offered in silence can carry many others. Amen.

Today: Offer fifteen minutes of silent prayer for someone who is suffering.

Day 8: Carrying Illness

Diabetes cost her right arm, then her sight. She went through these sufferings in peace, uniting them with those of Christ. She did not stop being a mother to her sisters.

Prayer: Lord, support the sick, those who are losing their independence, and those who care for them. Give them patience, comfort and hope. Amen.

Today: Do a concrete service for an elderly or disabled person.

Day 9: Never Losing Heart

Mother Paulina left her sisters this advice: always trust in Providence and never be discouraged, even when contrary winds blow. These words sum up a life that knew exile, poverty, rejection and pain, and remained full of trust.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Paulina, give me humility and trust. Amen.

Today: Encourage someone who is discouraged with a word or a message.

Closing prayer

Saint Paulina, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. You knew exile, poverty, being set aside and illness: pray for me and for all who suffer. Obtain for us the grace to serve with love and never to lose trust in God and in Mary Immaculate. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Paulina and the prayer to Saint Paulina.

PILGRIMAGE

Shrine of Saint Paulina in Nova Trento

The Shrine of Saint Paulina is in Vígolo, a rural district of the municipality of Nova Trento, in the state of Santa Catarina, in southern Brazil. It is where the young Amabile Visintainer, an emigrant from Trentino, grew up and where, in 1890, the congregation of the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception was born. Since the beatification and then canonization of Brazil's first saint, this place has become one of the country's great pilgrimage sites.

History of the place

At the end of the 19th century, Vígolo was a small community of emigrants from Trentino, who gave their new land the name of their home village. In this setting of hills and small farms, Amabile took part in the life of the chapel, then, with her friend Virgínia Nicolodi, took in a sick woman. Their humble little house became the cradle of a congregation that then spread throughout Brazil.

After Mother Paulina's beatification in Florianópolis in 1991 and her canonization in 2002, the influx of pilgrims led to the development of the site. A large church was built next to the older places of memory, linked to the saint's youth and the beginnings of her community.



The Shrine of Saint Paulina in Nova Trento.

Visiting the shrine

The shrine welcomes pilgrims throughout the year, and the July 9 feast draws particularly large crowds. A visit lets you pray in the large church and discover the places linked to the life of Saint Paulina at Vígolo, in a countryside setting conducive to recollection. Many visitors come to entrust sick people to her or to give thanks for a grace received.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Paulina. On site, entrust to her an intention for a sick person, an elderly person, or a migrant family, then say the prayer to Saint Paulina. If you come around her feast, you can follow the novena to Saint Paulina, from June 30 to July 8. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Paulina

- **São Paulo**: the Ipiranga district, where she served orphans and former slaves, and where she died on July 9, 1942.
- **Florianópolis**: the capital of Santa Catarina, where John Paul II beatified her on October 18, 1991.
- **Vigolo Vattaro** (Trentino, Italy): her native village, which she left at the age of ten.

Practical information

Nova Trento is in the interior of the state of Santa Catarina and can be reached by car from Florianópolis. Mass times, arrangements for welcoming groups, and the dates of the major celebrations vary through the year: consult the official website of the shrine or ask the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception before you leave.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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