

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter Chanel

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 28

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IN BRIEF

Saint Peter Chanel

French Marist priest, missionary on Futuna, first martyr and patron saint of Oceania.

Feast day	April 28
Born	July 12, 1803, Cuet, Montrevel-en-Bresse, France
Died	April 28, 1841, Poi, Futuna
Canonized	June 12, 1954, by Pope Pius XII
Era	19th century
Patron saint of	Oceania

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Novena to Saint Peter Chanel

Basilica of Saint Peter Chanel in Poi, Futuna

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter Chanel

Saint Peter Chanel was a French priest of the Society of Mary (the Marists), born in the Bresse region of eastern France in 1803 and killed on the island of Futuna, in the South Pacific, on April 28, 1841. The son of farmers and a former shepherd boy, he dreamed of distant missions. He spent three and a half years on an island where he baptized only a handful of people before he was murdered. Shortly after his death, almost the whole island asked for baptism. Canonized in 1954, he is the first martyr and the patron saint of Oceania, and his feast day is April 28.

Who was Saint Peter Chanel?

Pierre Louis Marie Chanel was born on July 12, 1803, at the Potière farm in the hamlet of Cuet, in the town of Montrevel-en-Bresse (department of Ain, France). He was the fifth of the eight children of Claude-François Chanel and Marie-Anne Sibellas, who worked the land. From the age of seven to twelve he looked after the sheep.

The parish priest of Cras-sur-Reyssouze, Father Trompier, noticed this bright and devout child and took him in to teach him Latin. Peter made his First Communion in 1817. Reading letters sent home by missionaries, he discovered a desire to go far away and proclaim the Gospel.

He studied at the minor seminary of Meximieux, then at the major seminary of Brou, in Bourg-en-Bresse. He was ordained a priest on July 15, 1827, for the Diocese of Belley, the same diocese in which Saint John Vianney was serving as the parish priest of Ars.

Key dates in the life of Saint Peter Chanel

- **July 12, 1803**: Born at Cuet (Montrevel-en-Bresse, Ain, France).

- **July 15, 1827**: Ordained a priest; assistant priest at Ambérieu-en-Bugey.
- **1828-1831**: Parish priest of Crozet, in the Pays de Gex.
- **1831**: Joins the Society of Mary, founded by Jean-Claude Colin.
- **September 24, 1836**: Makes his religious profession as a Marist.
- **December 24, 1836**: Sails from Le Havre with the first Marist missionaries and Bishop Pompallier.
- **November 8, 1837**: Lands on Futuna with Brother Marie-Nizier Delorme.
- **April 28, 1841**: Killed at Poi, on Futuna.
- **November 17, 1889**: Beatified by Pope Leo XIII.
- **June 12, 1954**: Canonized by Pope Pius XII.
- **April 28, 1977**: His relics return to Futuna.

From country parish to the Society of Mary

As assistant priest at Ambérieu and then parish priest of Crozet, Peter Chanel found a parish where the church was almost empty on Sundays. He visited the sick, cared for the children and brought the community back to life. But the call of the missions never left him.

In 1831 he entered the Society of Mary, a young congregation founded by Father Jean-Claude Colin, and made its spirit his own: "To love Mary and to make her loved." His superiors first sent him to the minor seminary of Belley, where he served in turn as teacher, spiritual director, bursar and vice-rector. In 1833 he went with Colin to Rome to seek approval of the Society.

In 1836 Pope Gregory XVI entrusted the mission of Western Oceania to the Marists. Peter Chanel volunteered and was made superior of the first group of seven missionaries.



Statue of Saint Peter Chanel at Cuet, his native village in France.

Three and a half years on Futuna

The voyage lasted almost a year. His friend Father Claude Bret died at sea. After stops at Valparaíso, the Gambier Islands and Tahiti, Peter Chanel landed on Futuna on November 8, 1837, with Brother Marie-Nizier Delorme. Bishop Pompallier sailed on to New Zealand, promising to return in six months. He did not come back for four years.

The island was divided between two traditional kingdoms, often at war. King Niuliki at first welcomed the missionaries and gave them lodging. Father Chanel learned the Futunan language, cared for the sick and for those wounded in the war of 1839, visited homes and baptized mostly the dying. He celebrated his first Mass on the island on December 8, 1837, the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Conversions remained rare, then began to multiply in early 1841. The king saw this as a threat to his authority. He stopped feeding the missionaries, who had to grow their own food and went hungry. According to his biographers, when Father Chanel was threatened he said that religion had taken root on the island and would not be lost by his death, because it was not the work of men but came from God. When Meitala, the king's own son, asked to become a Christian, the royal circle decided to put an end to the mission.

The martyrdom of April 28, 1841

At dawn on April 28, 1841, a group led by Musumusu, the king's son-in-law, burst into the missionary's hut while he was alone. Peter Chanel was struck with clubs and a spear, then killed with a blow of an adze to the head. He died without resisting. His house was looted and his body hastily buried.

Less than two years later, nearly all the people of Futuna had been baptized. The missionaries saw in this the fruitfulness of the martyr's blood; historians also point to rivalries between chiefs and outside pressures. Musumusu himself converted and asked to be buried near the place where he had killed the priest. King Niuliki's daughter became the first religious sister of the island.



The Basilica of Saint Peter Chanel at Poi, on Futuna.

Why is Saint Peter Chanel the patron saint of Oceania?

Peter Chanel was the first martyr of Oceania, the first person in that vast region of islands to be declared a saint for having given his life for the faith. His remains were taken from Futuna in 1842 and traveled by way of New Zealand and Australia before reaching the Marist motherhouse in Lyon in 1850. Recognized as a martyr, he was beatified by Pope Leo XIII on November 17, 1889, and canonized by Pope Pius XII on June 12, 1954.

He is honored throughout the Pacific, in New Zealand, in Australia, on Wallis and in his native Bresse. Many Catholic schools and parishes in Australia and New Zealand bear his name, and the Marist Fathers and Brothers keep his memory alive wherever they work.

What his holiness teaches us

Peter Chanel did not see the fruits of his mission. He sowed with patience, gentleness and poverty, learning the language and caring for bodies before speaking of souls. His martyrdom reminds us that the Gospel is handed on by the gift of oneself more than by results.

Catholics pray to him for missionaries, for the peoples of Oceania, for those who work without seeing any fruit and for reconciliation after violence. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Peter Chanel and the novena to Saint Peter Chanel, prayed from April 20 to 28.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter Chanel in art

Saint Peter Chanel is usually shown as a young priest in a black cassock, sometimes with a blue cape or a white chasuble. He often holds a **palm**, the sign of martyrdom, and a **cross**, the sign of his missionary work. Stained-glass windows in churches of the Pacific, including in Tonga, show him with a halo and a cross in his hand.

Where to pray to Saint Peter Chanel

- **Futuna**: the Basilica of Saint Peter Chanel at Poi, built on the site of his martyrdom and dedicated in 1986, where his relics rest.
- **Cuet** (Montrevel-en-Bresse, France): the shrine in his native village and the Oceanian museum devoted to him.
- **Crozet** (Ain, France): the church of his first parish.
- **Wallis**: the chapels dedicated to him, notably at Halalo and Vaitupu.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter Chanel for Missions and Oceania

Saint Peter Chanel did not leave a traditional prayer of his own, but his biographers preserved words he spoke shortly before his death, and his whole life is summed up in the motto of the Society of Mary. You will find them below, followed by an original prayer to Saint Peter Chanel for missionaries, for Oceania and for all who work without seeing results.

Two sayings to meditate on

> *"Religion has taken root on this island; it will not be lost by my death, for it is not the work of men, but comes from God."*

Source: words attributed to Father Chanel when he was threatened with death on Futuna in 1841, as reported by his first Marist biographers.

> *"To love Mary and to make her loved."*

Source: the motto of Saint Peter Chanel, drawn from the spirit of the Society of Mary founded by Father Jean-Claude Colin.

Prayer to Saint Peter Chanel

Saint Peter Chanel, shepherd boy of the Bresse who became a missionary at the ends of the earth, teach me to answer God's call, even when it is slow to be fulfilled.

You learned the language of Futuna, cared for the sick and shared the hunger of those you served: help me to respect the people to whom I am sent, and to love them before I speak to them.

You sowed without seeing the harvest: support all who work in patience and discouragement, missionaries, catechists, parents and teachers. Remind us that the work is not ours, but God's.

You gave your life without defending yourself, and the man who killed you became a Christian: obtain reconciliation wherever violence has wounded hearts. Pray for the peoples of Oceania and for my intention (name it in silence).

With you, I want to love Mary and to make her loved. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Peter Chanel's feast day is April 28, the anniversary of his martyrdom on Futuna in 1841. You can pray to him at any time of the year:

- for missionaries, catechists and all who carry the Gospel far from home;
- for the Church in Oceania, in Australia, New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific;
- when you work hard and see no results, as a parent, teacher, priest or volunteer;

- for reconciliation after violence, and for those who find it hard to forgive.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Peter Chanel, from April 20 to 28, and read the life of Saint Peter Chanel.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter Chanel

This novena to Saint Peter Chanel is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by his life. It is not an official liturgical text. Over nine days, it follows the path of the shepherd boy from the Bresse who became the first martyr of Oceania. To end on his feast day, April 28, begin it on April 20. You can also pray it at any time of the year, for a missionary, for a difficult task or for reconciliation.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by a Hail Mary, in memory of his Marian motto: "To love Mary and to make her loved." The small act proposed for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.



Statue of Saint Peter Chanel.

Day 1: The shepherd boy

From the age of seven to twelve, Peter looked after the sheep in the countryside of the Bresse. It was a village priest who noticed the boy and helped him to study. Many vocations begin with someone who simply pays attention.

Prayer: Lord, bless the children of the countryside and those who awaken them to faith. Through the intercession of Saint Peter Chanel, help me to notice the gifts of the young people around me. Amen.

Today: Thank God for a priest, a teacher or a mentor who helped you to grow.

Day 2: A desire is born

Reading letters written by missionaries, the teenage Peter felt a desire to go far away and proclaim the Gospel. God also speaks through the witness of others, through stories that stir something deep within us.

Prayer: Lord, make the desires that come from you grow in me, and give me the courage to follow them. Amen.

Today: Read the story of a missionary, or of a Christian from another country.

Day 3: A country priest

At Crozet, Father Chanel found an almost empty church. He visited the sick and cared for the children. He did not wait to sail to the other side of the world to be a missionary: he began where he was.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be faithful where you have placed me today, in my family, my work and my parish. Amen.

Today: Offer a concrete service in your parish or your neighborhood.

Day 4: To love Mary and to make her loved

When he entered the Society of Mary, Peter Chanel made this motto his own. Mary led him to Christ and went with him to the ends of the earth. He celebrated his first Mass on Futuna on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, keep me close to your Son and teach me to serve him as you did. Amen.

Today: Pray a decade of the Rosary for missionaries.

Day 5: The patience of waiting

For five years his superiors kept him at the seminary of Belley, where he served as teacher, spiritual director, bursar and vice-rector. He served with all his heart, without knowing whether he would ever leave.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to wait for your hour without losing heart. Amen.

Today: Do carefully a task that seems thankless to you.

Day 6: The great departure

On December 24, 1836, he left France for good. On the way he lost his friend Father Claude Bret, who died at sea. Leaving one's homeland and losing a companion: he knew both the cost of the call and the grief it can bring.

Prayer: Lord, support those who leave their country and those who mourn a friend. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone living in exile or far from family, and reach out to them if you can.

Day 7: Learning the language of others

On Futuna he learned the island's language, cared for the sick and the wounded and shared the life of the people. He respected a people before announcing the Gospel to them.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, help me to understand those who are different from me, and to love them before I speak. Amen.

Today: Listen at length to someone without trying to convince them of anything.

Day 8: Sowing without seeing the harvest

In three and a half years he baptized only a few people, most of them dying. He knew hunger, loneliness and threats, but he stayed. He trusted that the work was God's, not his own.

Prayer: Lord, support those who work without seeing any fruit; may their faithfulness bear fruit in your time. Amen.

Today: Encourage someone who is discouraged in their work or their mission.

Day 9: The gift of his life

On April 28, 1841, he died without defending himself. Soon the whole island asked for baptism, and the man who killed him became a Christian. Forgiveness and grace went further than violence.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Peter Chanel, make my life a gift. Amen.

Today: Forgive someone who has hurt you, or pray for them.

Closing prayer

Saint Peter Chanel, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for missionaries, for the peoples of Oceania and for all who sow in patience. Obtain for us the grace to love Mary and to make her loved. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Peter Chanel and pray the prayer to Saint Peter Chanel.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Saint Peter Chanel in Poi, Futuna

The Basilica of Saint Peter Chanel stands in Poi, on the coast of the island of Futuna, in the French territory of Wallis and Futuna, in the heart of the South Pacific. It is built on the very spot where Father Peter Chanel was killed on April 28, 1841, and it has housed his relics since their return to the island in 1977. It is the chief place of pilgrimage in honor of the first martyr of Oceania.

From the site of the martyrdom to the basilica

As early as 1844, three years after the missionary's death, a first wooden building was put up at Poi, on the site of the murder. In the late 1880s, Bishop Armand Lamaze had an octagonal stone chapel built there, consecrated in 1918. After the canonization of 1954, the place drew more and more pilgrims from the neighboring islands.

In the 1970s, the Bishop of Wallis and Futuna, Bishop Lolesio Fuahea, himself a native of Wallis, asked that the saint's relics, kept in France, be returned to the island for which he had given his life. They arrived at Poi on April 28, 1977, the day of his feast; the skull, kept in Rome since 1954, joined them in 1987. The present basilica, built after several years of work, was inaugurated in 1986.



The Basilica of Saint Peter Chanel in Poi, on Futuna.

Visiting the shrine at Poi

One enters the shrine through a gate, near a large *fale*, the traditional Futunan house, used for gatherings. The basilica, bright and wide open to the light, houses the saint's reliquary. Above it, on the hill, a small chapel dedicated to Saint Peter Chanel overlooks the site. Very near the basilica is the tomb of Musumusu, the man who had killed him: converted, he asked to rest beside his victim. This tomb, topped with a white cross, is one of the strongest signs of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Each April 28, Futuna celebrates its saint with a great Mass, customary kava ceremonies and dances, in which the island's traditional authorities take part.



The interior of the Basilica of Saint Peter Chanel in Poi.

Praying on site

Before your pilgrimage, you can read the life of Saint Peter Chanel. Before his relics, the prayer to Saint Peter Chanel can accompany a time of silence. Musumusu's tomb invites you to entrust a difficult reconciliation. The novena to Saint Peter Chanel, from April 19 to 27, prepares for the feast. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places associated with Saint Peter Chanel

- **Cuet** (Montrevel-en-Bresse, Ain): his native village, with a shrine near the hamlet's church and the Oceanian and Saint Peter Chanel museum.
- **Crozet** (Ain): the church of his first parish, where a statue recalls his memory.

- **Wallis**: the Saint Peter Chanel chapels of Halalo, Kanahe (village of Ahoa) and Vaitupu.
- **Bourg-en-Bresse**: the church of Saint-Pierre-Chanel, inaugurated in 1967.

Practical information

Futuna is an isolated island, reached by plane from Wallis; flights are few and lodging is limited. Inquire well in advance with the territory's services and the Diocese of Wallis and Futuna. Proper dress is required in the shrine, and local customs must be respected. For the April 28 celebrations and Mass times, consult the Diocese of Wallis and Futuna.

Credits and sources

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