

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter Fourier

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: December 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint Peter Fourier

Priest from Lorraine, parish priest of Mattaincourt, reformer of the Canons Regular and founder of the Congregation of Notre Dame for the education of girls.

Feast day	December 9
Born	November 30, 1565, Mirecourt, France
Died	December 9, 1640, Gray, France
Canonized	May 27, 1897, by Pope Leo XIII
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	Lorraine, teachers, Congregation of Notre Dame

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Peter Fourier for Priests, Schools and the Poor

Novena to Saint Peter Fourier

Basilica of Saint Peter Fourier in Mattaincourt

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter Fourier

Saint Peter Fourier (Pierre Fourier) was a priest from Lorraine, a Canon Regular of Saint Augustine and parish priest of Mattaincourt, in the Vosges, for more than forty years. A tireless pastor, he founded with Alix Le Clerc the Congregation of Notre Dame for the free education of girls, reformed his order and created practical forms of solidarity for his parishioners. He died in exile at Gray in 1640, was canonized by Pope Leo XIII in 1897, and is celebrated on December 9.

Who was Saint Peter Fourier?

Peter Fourier was born on November 30, 1565, in Mirecourt, in the Duchy of Lorraine, then independent of France. His father, Demenge Fourier, was a cloth merchant; his mother, Anne Nacquard, came from Mattaincourt, the neighboring village where he would spend almost his entire life as a priest. He grew up just after the Council of Trent, in a Lorraine that applied the Catholic Reformation with zeal.

His life spanned two very different periods: the prosperous Lorraine of Dukes Charles III and Henry II, and then, under Charles IV, the horrors of the Thirty Years' War, plague and famine. Historians see him as one of the great witnesses of the Catholic Reformation, a pioneer of girls' education and a beloved figure of Lorraine patriotism. His motto, borrowed from Saint Ambrose, sums up his life: *Obesse nemini, omnibus prodesse*, "harm no one, be useful to all."

Key dates

- **November 30, 1565**: Birth in Mirecourt (Vosges).
- **1578**: Enters the Jesuit college of Pont-à-Mousson.

- **1585**: Joins the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine at the abbey of Chaumousey.
- **February 25, 1589**: Ordained a priest in Trier.
- **1597**: Becomes parish priest of Mattaincourt, a post he keeps until his death.
- **1598**: With Alix Le Clerc, opens a first school for girls at Poussay.
- **1623**: Charged with reforming the Canons Regular of Lorraine; birth of the Congregation of Our Savior.
- **1628**: Approval of the Congregation of Notre Dame.
- **1631-1632**: Fights the great plague in his parish.
- **1636**: Exile to Gray, in Spanish Franche-Comté.
- **December 9, 1640**: Death at Gray, at 75.
- **May 27, 1897**: Canonized by Pope Leo XIII.

Student and canon

At 14, Peter entered the Jesuit college of Pont-à-Mousson, a university founded in 1572. At 20, he chose religious life with the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine at the abbey of Chaumousey, near Épinal. Ordained in 1589, he returned to Pont-à-Mousson for several years to study the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas and law. This double training made him a pastor both spiritual and very practical.

The good priest of Mattaincourt

In 1597, he was given the parish of Mattaincourt, a town of cloth makers that the authorities considered de-Christianized and where many Protestants lived. Preacher, catechist and confessor, he was also, by local custom, head of the village court, which allowed him to act directly for his people.

He organized small teams of laypeople who collected and distributed food to the poor, set up a soup kitchen and founded a mutual aid fund, the Saint-Epvre fund, which lent to craftsmen without collateral or interest to free them from moneylenders. During the food shortage of 1626, he had the grain shared according to each family's needs, not its wealth. During the plague of 1631-1632, he imposed rules of hygiene and refused to leave his parish. To nuns who urged him to take shelter, he answered that a parish priest is for his people "father, mother, captain, guard, guide, sentinel, physician," and "all things to all."

Schools for girls and the Congregation of Notre Dame

The Council of Trent had stressed the importance of Christian instruction, and Peter Fourier saw how little of it girls received. With a young woman from Remiremont, Alix Le Clerc, and a few companions, he founded an association devoted to the free education of girls. The first school opened in 1598 at Poussay, near Mattaincourt. The work became the Congregation of Notre Dame, approved in 1628, whose sisters add to the usual three vows a fourth: the vow of teaching.

He wrote detailed constitutions for them, published after his death, organizing the school into classes and ability groups: all the pupils of one group learned at the same time, from the same book. This "simultaneous" method marks a milestone in the history of teaching. He also asked that Protestant girls be welcomed without anything troubling their conscience. "To win a single soul in your schools is more than creating a world," he wrote to the sisters of Mirecourt in 1619.

Reformer of his order

In 1623, he was entrusted with reforming the Canons Regular of Lorraine, who had grown lax. He visited the abbeys, restored common life and prayer, and gave birth to the Congregation of Our Savior, of which he became superior in 1632. He wanted educated religious, close to the parishes and committed to the education of boys.

Exile and death at Gray

In 1633, French troops occupied Lorraine. Peter Fourier remained loyal to his sovereign, Duke Charles IV, and refused to side with the occupiers. Threatened by Cardinal Richelieu, he had to go into exile in 1636, at 71, to Gray, in Franche-Comté, then a Spanish possession. He lived there poorly in a small room, kept guiding his communities by letter and cared for the sick of the town. He died on December 9, 1640. His body was brought back to Mattaincourt, while his heart remained at Gray. Beatified in 1730 by Benedict XIII, he was canonized on May 27, 1897, by Leo XIII.

Why is Saint Peter Fourier the patron of teachers and of Lorraine?

With Alix Le Clerc, he opened free schools for girls at a time when they had almost no access to education, and his method of teaching by classes marks a milestone in the history of education. This is why teachers and the Congregation of Notre Dame honor him as their patron. Lorraine claims him as one of its own: a son of the duchy who shared its sufferings during the Thirty Years' War and stayed loyal to its duke to the point of exile.

Close in spirit to Saint Charles Borromeo and Saint Francis de Sales, he also foreshadows great educators like Saint John Baptist de La Salle. He shows that one can become a saint in a country parish by taking all of people's needs seriously: faith, school, bread, health and money.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter Fourier in art

- **The white surplice of a canon**: he is shown in the choir dress of the Canons Regular.
- **A crucifix and a book**: statues often show him holding both, signs of the preacher and the teacher.
- **Children around him**: stained glass windows in Lorraine show him surrounded by children, recalling his schools.

Where to pray to Saint Peter Fourier

- **Mattaincourt** (Vosges, France): the basilica of Saint Peter Fourier, which keeps his relics.
- **Mirecourt**: his birthplace.
- **Gray** (Haute-Saône): the basilica of Notre-Dame, where a chapel keeps the reliquary of his heart, and the Saint Peter Fourier tower, the place of his exile.
- **Pont-à-Mousson**: a chapel dedicated to him in the church of Saint-Martin.
- **Rome**: his statue by Louis Noël in Saint Peter's Basilica.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Peter Fourier or follow the novena to Saint Peter Fourier, from December 1 to December 9.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter Fourier for Priests, Schools and the Poor

Saint Peter Fourier left an extensive correspondence, published in five volumes, and constitutions for his sisters. This page first offers his motto and one of his best-known sayings, then an original prayer inspired by his life as parish priest of Mattaincourt and founder of schools. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

A motto and a saying to meditate on

His motto, taken from Saint Ambrose, appears on many of his portraits:

> *"Harm no one, be useful to all." (Obesse nemini, omnibus prodesse.)*

And in a letter of 1619 to the sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Mirecourt, he wrote about their schools:

> *"To win a single soul in your schools is more than creating a world."*

Source: correspondence of Saint Peter Fourier, quoted by the historian René Taveneaux (1992), translated from the French.

Prayer to Saint Peter Fourier for Priests, Schools and the Poor

Saint Peter Fourier, good priest of Mattaincourt,
you were for your people father, guide and sentinel:
pray for priests and for all parishes.

You opened free schools for poor girls:
bless teachers, educators, students
and all who thirst to learn.

You lent without interest to craftsmen in debt
and shared bread in time of famine:
teach me to see the real needs of my neighbor
and to meet them with intelligence and generosity.

You did not leave your parish during the plague
and lived in exile without bitterness:
support the sick, caregivers, refugees
and all who have had to leave their homeland.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).
Help me to harm no one and to be useful to all.
Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Peter Fourier is celebrated on December 9, the day of his death at Gray. You can pray to him:

- at the start of the school year or before an exam;

- for a priest, a parish or a Catholic school;
- in financial difficulty or debt;
- for the sick, caregivers and refugees.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Peter Fourier, and read the life of Saint Peter Fourier.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter Fourier

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Peter Fourier, parish priest of Mattaincourt. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on December 9, his feast day, begin it on December 1, the day after the anniversary of his birth (November 30, 1565). Its eighth day falls on December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. You can also pray it at any time, for example at the start of a school year or in a time of financial hardship.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The small act suggested for the day carries the prayer into concrete life, as the holy priest of Mattaincourt did. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Day 1: A childhood in Mirecourt

Peter was born into a family of cloth merchants, in the heart of a Christian Lorraine. The faith he received at home prepared his whole life.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for those who passed the faith on to me. Bless families and parents. Saint Peter Fourier, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Thank, with a word or a prayer, someone who helped you know God.

Day 2: Studying in order to serve

At Pont-à-Mousson, he studied theology and law. He wanted to understand so as to serve better, and his learning made him a practical as well as a spiritual pastor.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me a love of learning, and let my knowledge serve the good of others. Amen.

Today: Read a few pages of a book that nourishes your faith.

Day 3: A priest who was all things to all

For more than forty years, he was parish priest of Mattaincourt, attentive to each of his parishioners. He described the parish priest as "father, mother, captain, guard, guide, sentinel, physician" for his people.

Prayer: Lord, bless my pastor and the priests of my diocese. Give them strength and joy in serving. Amen.

Today: Offer your help for a ministry or service in your parish.

Day 4: School for everyone

With Alix Le Clerc, he opened free schools for girls at a time when they had almost no access to education. "To win a single soul in your schools is more than creating a world," he wrote.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the children around the world who cannot go to school, and all who teach. Amen.

Today: Support an educational work, or help a child with homework.

Day 5: Lending without interest

He founded a fund that lent to craftsmen without collateral or interest, to free them from moneylenders. During the shortage of 1626, he had grain shared according to need.

Prayer: Lord, free those who are crushed by debt, and make me just in the use of money. Amen.

Today: Give to an organization that helps families in debt or in poverty.

Day 6: Staying during the plague

During the epidemic of 1631-1632, he refused to leave his people and organized hygiene and care.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the sick, caregivers and all who watch over the health of others. Amen.

Today: Visit or call someone who is ill.

Day 7: Reforming with patience

Charged with reforming his order, he visited, encouraged and corrected, without losing heart in the face of resistance.

Prayer: Lord, renew your Church, and begin with my own heart. Amen.

Today: Choose one small habit to correct, and keep to it today.

Day 8: Exile

At 71, he had to leave Lorraine and live poorly at Gray. There he continued to serve, guiding his communities by letter and caring for the sick. On this feast of the Immaculate Conception, we entrust our own trials to Mary.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you refugees, exiles and all who have lost their homes. Mary Immaculate, pray for them. Amen.

Today: Welcome kindly a foreigner or a newcomer in your community.

Day 9: Harm no one, be useful to all

His motto sums up a life given entirely. It can become a rule of life for each of us. He died at Gray on December 9, 1640.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Peter Fourier, teach me to harm no one and to be useful to all. Amen.

Today: Do a discreet service for someone without expecting anything in return.

A rule of life from Mattaincourt

Saint Peter Fourier did not separate prayer from practical charity. During these nine days, you may keep a simple notebook: each evening, write down one need you noticed around you (a lonely neighbor, a family under financial strain, a child struggling at school) and one small thing you did or could do about it. At the end of the novena, choose one of these needs to keep serving in the weeks ahead, in the spirit of his motto: harm no one, be useful to all.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Peter Fourier, good priest of Mattaincourt,*
> *friend of the poor and of children,*
> *I entrust to you the intention of these nine days.*
> *Pray for priests, for schools, for the sick and for exiles.*
> *Obtain for us a practical and generous heart,*
> *attentive to all the needs of our brothers and sisters.*
> *Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Saint Peter Fourier in Mattaincourt

The Basilica of Saint Peter Fourier in Mattaincourt, in the Vosges, stands in the heart of the village where the saint was pastor from 1597 until his death in 1640. It preserves his relics and remains the main pilgrimage site in his honor, in Lorraine and beyond.

The Village of the "Good Father"

Mattaincourt is a small town near Mirecourt, Peter Fourier's birthplace, which was also his mother's hometown. In 1597 the young canon became its pastor. For more than forty years he preached there, taught catechism, and organized aid to the poor, an interest-free loan fund and the fight against the plague. The villagers called him the "good father of Mattaincourt." He died in exile in Gray on December 9, 1640, and was brought back to his parish, where his tomb at once became a place of prayer.



The Basilica of Saint Peter Fourier in Mattaincourt.

A 19th-Century Basilica

The present church, in the neo-Gothic style, was built in the 19th century, when devotion to Blessed Peter Fourier was experiencing a great revival, before his canonization in 1897. It has been given the title of basilica. Inside, the saint's relics are kept in a shrine, and numerous stained-glass windows and statues evoke his life: the pastor among his parishioners, the founder of girls' schools, the shepherd during the plague.

Praying Beside Saint Peter Fourier

Before your visit, you might read the life of Saint Peter Fourier. Before his relics, entrust to him priests, teachers, students, the sick or a material difficulty, then recite the prayer to Saint Peter Fourier. Around December 9, the novena can accompany a pilgrimage. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other Places Associated with Saint Peter Fourier

- **Mirecourt**: his birthplace, a few miles away.
- **Poussay**: the site of the first girls' school, opened in 1598.
- **Chaumousey**, near Épinal: the former abbey where he became a canon regular.
- **Gray** (Haute-Saône): the Basilica of Notre-Dame, where a chapel keeps the reliquary of his heart, and the Saint-Pierre-Fourier tower, where he lived out his exile.
- **Pont-à-Mousson**: the chapel of Saint Peter Fourier in the Church of Saint-Martin.

Practical Information

Mattaincourt is in the western part of the Vosges department, very close to Mirecourt, between Nancy and Épinal; it is most easily reached by car. The basilica is a working parish church: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening, Mass and pilgrimage times may vary, so check with the parish or the Diocese of Saint-Dié before you come, especially around December 9.

CREDITS

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