

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Philip the Deacon

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 11

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IN BRIEF

Saint Philip the Deacon

One of the seven deacons of Jerusalem, evangelist of Samaria, who baptized the Ethiopian eunuch.

Feast day	October 11
Canonized	Venerated since ancient times
Era	1st century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Philip the Deacon, Evangelist

Novena to Saint Philip the Deacon

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Philip the Deacon

Saint Philip the Deacon, also called Philip the Evangelist, was one of the seven men chosen by the Church of Jerusalem to serve at table, whom tradition regards as the first deacons. After the martyrdom of Stephen, he was the first to proclaim the Gospel outside Jerusalem, in Samaria, and then, on the road to Gaza, he baptized a high official of the queen of Ethiopia. He later settled in Caesarea, where he welcomed Saint Paul into his home. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on October 11.

Who was Saint Philip the Deacon?

Philip appears in the Acts of the Apostles, in chapters 6, 8 and 21. He should not be confused with Saint Philip the Apostle, one of the Twelve, who came from Bethsaida. Since ancient times the two have sometimes been mixed up, especially in Asia Minor, where the tombs of Philip and his daughters were venerated at Hierapolis. The Acts, however, clearly distinguish them.

Philip bears a Greek name. He belonged to the group of the "Hellenists," Greek-speaking Jews who had become disciples of Christ, often from the Jewish diaspora. Acts describes him and his companions as men "of good reputation, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Acts 6:3, Douay-Rheims).

Key dates

- **c. 33-35**: In Jerusalem, he is chosen among the Seven to serve the widows of the community; the apostles pray and lay hands on them.
- **Shortly after**: After the martyrdom of Stephen, persecution scatters the disciples; Philip proclaims Christ in Samaria.
- **Then**: On the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, he baptizes an Ethiopian eunuch, treasurer of Queen Candace.

- **Later**: He preaches in the towns of the coast, from Azotus to Caesarea, where he settles.
- **c. 57-58**: He welcomes Saint Paul and his companions into his home in Caesarea; he has four daughters who prophesy.

One of the Seven

In the first community of Jerusalem, tensions arose: the Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. The apostles gathered the disciples and proposed choosing seven men for this service, so that they themselves could devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. The community chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas. The apostles prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6). The Church has seen in this account the origin of the ministry of deacons.

Missionary to Samaria

After Stephen was stoned, a violent persecution struck the Church of Jerusalem, and the disciples scattered. Philip went down to Samaria, a region the Jews regarded as heretical and foreign. There he proclaimed Christ, and the crowds listened attentively. Acts reports healings and deliverances, and great joy in the city. Even Simon, a famous magician, was baptized. The apostles Peter and John then came to confirm this young Church. For the first time, the Gospel crossed the boundaries of the Jewish world of Jerusalem.

On the road to Gaza

The best-known episode of his life takes place on the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. An angel sends Philip to meet a chariot. An Ethiopian, a high official of Queen Candace in charge of her treasury, is returning home after coming to worship in Jerusalem. He is reading the

prophet Isaiah aloud. Philip asks him: "Thinkest thou that thou understandest what thou readest?" The man answers: "And how can I, unless some man shew me?" and invites Philip to sit beside him (Acts 8:30-31, Douay-Rheims).

The passage speaks of the Suffering Servant, led like a sheep to the slaughter. Beginning from this text, Philip proclaims Jesus to him. When they come to some water, the Ethiopian asks: "See, here is water: what doth hinder me from being baptized?" Philip baptizes him, then is taken away, and the man goes on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:26-39). The Churches of Ethiopia see in this episode one of their origins.

The evangelist of Caesarea

Philip then traveled through the towns of the coast, from Azotus to Caesarea, the Roman capital of the province, and settled there. Some twenty years later, Saint Paul, who had once persecuted the scattered disciples, stayed in his house with his companions during his last journey to Jerusalem. Luke then calls him "Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven," and adds that he had four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). Later traditions say he died at Tralles or at Hierapolis, in Asia Minor, without certainty.

Why is Saint Philip the Deacon a model for deacons and catechists?

Saint Philip is not the official patron saint of a particular group, but his life speaks directly to several vocations. He began by serving at table and became one of the first great evangelists. He proclaimed Christ to the despised Samaritans and to a stranger from the ends of the earth. He knew how to listen, how to ask the right question, and how to start from a page of Scripture to lead someone to Christ. Permanent deacons, catechists, missionaries, RCIA (OCIA) teams and all who walk with people seeking God can find in him a model and an intercessor.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Philip the Deacon in art

Philip the Deacon is almost always shown in the scene of the baptism of the Ethiopian: standing in the water or on the bank, he pours water on the official, who kneels beside his chariot. Painters such as Rembrandt chose this scene. Elsewhere he is shown seated in the chariot, explaining the scroll of Isaiah.

Where to pray to Saint Philip the Deacon

- **Caesarea Maritima** (Israel): the site of the city where he lived and welcomed Saint Paul.
- **Samaria**: the region of his first preaching, around today's Nablus and Sebastia.
- In any church, at the ordination of deacons, a ministry of which he is one of the first witnesses.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Philip the Deacon or the novena to Saint Philip the Deacon, from October 3 to October 11.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Philip the Deacon, Evangelist

The most beautiful page linked to Saint Philip the Deacon is the account of his meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch in the Acts of the Apostles. Below you will find the dialogue of that meeting, with its reference, followed by an original prayer to Saint Philip. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

A dialogue to ponder

> *"Thinkest thou that thou understandest what thou readest?" Who said: "And how can I, unless some man shew me?"*

Source: Acts of the Apostles 8:30-31, Douay-Rheims translation.

> *"See, here is water: what doth hinder me from being baptized?"*

Source: Acts of the Apostles 8:36, Douay-Rheims translation. This is the Ethiopian's request after Philip has proclaimed Jesus to him, starting from the prophet Isaiah.

Prayer to Saint Philip the Deacon, Evangelist

Saint Philip, you were chosen to serve the widows in Jerusalem:
teach me that every service given to the least
is already a proclamation of the Gospel.

You brought the Good News to the Samaritans, who were despised:
help me to cross the borders of my prejudices
and to go toward those who are kept on the margins.

You ran to meet the Ethiopian traveler
and asked him whether he understood what he was reading:
make me attentive to the questions of those who seek God,
and give me the right words to speak to them of Jesus.

Bless deacons and their families,
catechists and all who walk with catechumens toward baptism.
I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Like the Ethiopian, may I go on my way
rejoicing in the baptism I have received. Amen.

This original text by Saintspedia may be freely used for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

- On October 11, when the Roman Martyrology commemorates Saint Philip the Deacon; in the West he was formerly celebrated on June 6.
- At the ordination of a deacon, or for the permanent deacons of your diocese.
- During the Easter season, when the liturgy reads the Acts of the Apostles.
- For a person preparing for baptism, or for an RCIA (OCIA) group.

- Before a conversation about faith with someone who is searching.

To go further, read the life of Saint Philip the Deacon or pray the novena to Saint Philip the Deacon, from October 3 to October 11.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Philip the Deacon

This novena to Saint Philip the Deacon is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the Acts of the Apostles (chapters 6, 8 and 21). Over nine days, it follows Philip from the service of widows in Jerusalem to the road to Gaza and his home in Caesarea. To end on October 11, the day the Roman Martyrology commemorates him, begin it on October 3. It is also well suited to the Easter season, to the weeks before a diaconal ordination, or to the preparation of an adult for baptism.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act suggested for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: Chosen by the community

When the widows of the Greek-speaking Christians were neglected, the community of Jerusalem chose seven men "of good reputation, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." Philip was one of them. God calls through the voice of the Church. Philip did not choose himself: he received his mission from his brothers and sisters and from the prayer of the apostles.

Prayer: Saint Philip, pray for all who are called to serve in the Church, that they may answer with generosity. Amen.

Today: Pray for the deacons, priests and lay ministers of your parish by name.

Day 2: Serving at table

Philip's first mission was humble: to serve the daily needs of widows. No service is too small when it is done for Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.

Prayer: Lord, give me a heart that loves to serve, especially those who are forgotten. Amen.

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

Day 3: The laying on of hands

The apostles prayed and laid their hands on the Seven. The Church has seen in this gesture the origin of the ministry of deacons, a gift of the Spirit for service.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, strengthen deacons and their families, and raise up new vocations to service in the Church. Amen.

Today: Thank a deacon or a minister who has served you or your family.

Day 4: Scattered, yet sent

After Stephen's death, persecution scattered the disciples. Philip did not hide: he went to Samaria and proclaimed Christ. What seemed a defeat became a mission. The deacon who served at table became the first to carry the Gospel beyond Jerusalem.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see in the trials of my life a call to bear witness to you. Amen.

Today: Pray for Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

Day 5: Crossing borders

The Samaritans were regarded as foreigners and heretics. Philip went to them, and there was great joy in the city. The Gospel is for everyone, without exception.

Prayer: Saint Philip, help me to cross the barriers of my prejudices and to go toward those I tend to avoid. Amen.

Today: Greet or speak kindly to someone you usually keep at a distance.

Day 6: Listening to the Spirit

An angel sent Philip to a desert road, with no explanation. He rose and went. Docility to the Spirit often begins with a step whose meaning we do not yet see.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, make me attentive to your inspirations and quick to follow them. Amen.

Today: Follow a good inspiration without putting it off.

Day 7: The right question

Philip ran up to the chariot and asked: "Thinkest thou that thou understandest what thou readest?" He did not begin with a speech, but with a question and an invitation to talk. He then sat beside the traveler and started from the very page the man was reading.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to listen to those who seek you, and to ask the questions that open hearts. Amen.

Today: Truly listen to someone, without interrupting or judging.

Day 8: "What doth hinder me from being baptized?"

Starting from Isaiah's words about the Suffering Servant, Philip proclaimed Jesus. When they came to water, the Ethiopian asked for baptism and went on his way rejoicing. The Churches of Ethiopia see in this meeting one of their origins.

Prayer: Saint Philip, bless all who are preparing for baptism, and those who accompany them. Amen.

Today: Recall the date of your own baptism and give thanks for it.

Day 9: An open house in Caesarea

Philip settled in Caesarea, where he raised four daughters who prophesied. Years later, he welcomed into his home Paul, the former persecutor, together with his traveling companions, and they stayed with him for some days. A Christian home can become a place of welcome and of the Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, make my home a place of welcome, prayer and peace, as Philip's house was. Amen.

Today: Invite someone into your home, or call a person who is lonely.

Closing prayer

Saint Philip, deacon and evangelist, you served at table, crossed borders and opened the Scriptures to a traveler on the road. I entrust to you the intention of this novena (name it in silence). Pray for deacons and their families, for catechists, for missionaries and for all who are seeking God. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Philip the Deacon or read his life.

CREDITS

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