

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Philomena

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 11

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Philomena

Unknown young martyr of the Roman catacombs whose devotion spread in the 19th century through the Curé of Ars.

Feast day	August 11
Died	early centuries (according to tradition), Rome (according to tradition)
Canonized	Public veneration authorized by Pope Gregory XVI in 1837; feast removed from the calendar in 1961
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	young people, the sick, difficult causes

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Philomena, with the Curé of Ars

Novena to Saint Philomena

Shrine of Saint Philomena at Mugnano del Cardinale

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Philomena

Saint Philomena is a case apart among the saints. We know neither her date of birth, nor the date of her death, nor anything of her life: only a name, read on three tiles that sealed a tomb in the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome, discovered in 1802. From that discovery an immense devotion grew in the 19th century, carried by healings attributed to her intercession and by the fervor of Saint John Vianney, the Curé of Ars. In 1961, for lack of reliable historical data, her feast was removed from the liturgical calendar. It was celebrated on August 11, a date her shrine at Mugnano del Cardinale still keeps.

Who was Saint Philomena?

It has to be said plainly: historically, we know almost nothing about her. On May 25, 1802, excavators exploring the Catacomb of Priscilla, on the Via Salaria, uncovered a burial niche (a *loculus*) closed by three terracotta tiles. On them were painted letters, "LUMENA / PAX TE / CUM FI", together with symbols: an anchor, arrows, a palm and perhaps a lily. By moving the first tile to the end, one reads "Pax tecum, Filumena": "Peace be with you, Philomena."

In the tomb lay the bones of a young girl and a small vial, which was then interpreted as containing blood, a sign that at the time was believed to mark the graves of martyrs.

Everything else, including the story of her life that still circulates today, comes from much later sources, which must be distinguished from history.

Key dates in the story of Saint Philomena

- **Unknown date**: Death and burial of a young girl in the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome.

- **May 25, 1802**: Discovery of the tomb and of the three tiles bearing her name.
- **1805**: The relics are entrusted to a priest from Campania, Francesco De Lucia, and arrive on August 10 at Mugnano del Cardinale, near Nola.
- **1833**: A Neapolitan nun, Sister Maria Luisa of Jesus, reports private revelations about the life of the saint.
- **1835**: Pauline Jaricot, founder of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, says she was healed at Mugnano and spreads the devotion in France.
- **1837**: Pope Gregory XVI authorizes the public veneration of Saint Philomena.
- **1830s-1859**: The Curé of Ars, Saint John Vianney, dedicates a chapel to her and attributes many graces to her.
- **Early 20th century**: The archaeologist Orazio Marucchi questions the interpretation of the tiles.
- **1961**: The Sacred Congregation of Rites removes her feast from all liturgical calendars.

History and legend: what can be said

The most widespread account makes Philomena a thirteen-year-old Greek princess, consecrated to God, who refused to marry Emperor Diocletian and endured many tortures before being beheaded. This story rests on no ancient document. It comes from the revelations reported in 1833 by Sister Maria Luisa of Jesus, a nun in Naples. The Church never vouched for the content of these private revelations, and historians do not see them as a source about antiquity.

Even the reading of the tiles has been disputed. In the early 20th century, the archaeologist Orazio Marucchi, a specialist in the catacombs, argued that the tiles had been reused: the unusual order of the letters would be explained if

they came from another, older tomb, and the girl buried there might not have been named Philomena at all.

Likewise, archaeologists today no longer regard the vials found in the catacombs as proof of martyrdom. These questions remain debated, and no definitive answer can be given.

Mugnano, Ars and the spread of the devotion

In 1805, the relics were granted to Don Francesco De Lucia, a priest from Mugnano del Cardinale in Campania. Their arrival in the village on August 10 was followed by healings reported by the faithful. Mugnano became a place of pilgrimage, and the fame of the "little saint" spread quickly through Italy and then France.

Two French figures played a decisive role. Pauline Jaricot of Lyon, founder of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and of the Living Rosary, was gravely ill when she traveled to Mugnano in 1835, and she came back healed. She gave a relic of the saint to the Curé of Ars, Saint John Vianney. He dedicated a chapel to her in his church and, out of humility, credited her with the healings that pilgrims attributed to him. He liked to call her "my little saint." The popularity of Ars gave the devotion to Philomena an enormous reach.

In 1837, Pope Gregory XVI authorized her public veneration. This was not a canonization in the sense of a process examining the life and virtues of a known person: it was the recognition, then considered sufficient, of a martyr of the catacombs. Churches, confraternities and charitable works took her name throughout the world, including in India, where the large neo-Gothic Saint Philomena's Cathedral was built in Mysore.

The 1961 decision

In the 20th century, the Church undertook a revision of the liturgical calendar, setting aside the feasts of saints whose existence or history could not be established. In February 1961, under Pope John XXIII, the Sacred Congregation of Rites decided that the feast of Saint Philomena would no longer appear in any liturgical calendar.

The decision passed no judgment on the faith of believers or on the graces they had received: it simply noted that, apart from her name and the discovery of 1802, nothing historically certain is known about her. The devotion did not disappear. The shrine at Mugnano continued to welcome pilgrims and still celebrates her feast around August 11. Still, it is honest to remember, when we pray to her, that most of what is told about her belongs to pious tradition rather than to history.

Why is Saint Philomena invoked for difficult causes?

Saint Philomena has no official patronage, but her devotion grew up around requests that seemed hopeless and around healings reported at Mugnano and Ars. For that reason she is often prayed to in difficult situations, for the sick and for young people, since the faithful have always seen her as a young girl. Her devotion, as the Curé of Ars lived it, is above all a school of trust and humility: one asks, and then leaves everything to God.

The message of the tile, "Peace be with you," is what we can hold on to with certainty. To pray with her, say the prayer to Saint Philomena or follow the novena to Saint Philomena from August 2 to 10, ending on the eve of August 11.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Philomena in art

Images of Saint Philomena, mostly from the 19th century, show her as a young girl and draw on the symbols painted on her tiles: an anchor, arrows, a palm and a lily. The anchor is an ancient Christian sign of hope, the palm a sign of martyrdom and the lily a sign of purity. Devotional images often add a crown and arrows, inspired by the later legend of her tortures.

Where to pray to Saint Philomena

- **Mugnano del Cardinale** (Campania, Italy): the Shrine of Saint Philomena, east of Naples, which has kept her relics since 1805. The main celebrations take place in August.
- **Ars-sur-Formans** (France): the Chapel of Saint Philomena in the church of the holy Curé of Ars.
- **Rome**: the Catacomb of Priscilla on the Via Salaria, where the tomb was discovered in 1802.
- **Lyon** (France): the house of Lorette on Fourvière hill, where Pauline Jaricot lived.
- **Mysore** (India): Saint Philomena's Cathedral, a large neo-Gothic church of the 20th century.



The urn of Saint Philomena at the shrine of Mugnano del Cardinale.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Philomena, with the Curé of Ars

There is no ancient prayer of Saint Philomena and no text written by her: all we know of her is her name, read in 1802 on a tomb in the Catacomb of Priscilla. The many prayers in circulation were composed in the 19th century or later. This page offers an original prayer, in the spirit of trust of the holy Curé of Ars, who was her greatest devotee.

The only certain words: the inscription on the tomb

The three tiles that closed the niche bore, once put back in order, this Latin greeting:

> *"Pax tecum, Filumena." ("Peace be with you, Philomena.")*

Source: inscription painted on three tiles discovered on May 25, 1802, in the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome. Archaeologists have debated the reading and the order of the tiles; this greeting nevertheless remains the starting point of her whole devotion.

Prayer to Saint Philomena for trust and peace

Saint Philomena, we know almost nothing of you, except that you were buried among the first Christians of Rome with this simple wish: "Peace be with you." Obtain that peace for me.

The holy Curé of Ars placed his trust in you and humbly passed on to you the graces that people attributed to his prayer: teach me to keep nothing for myself and to give everything back to God.

I entrust to you the sick, young people looking for their way, and all who are facing a situation with no way out. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

May I know how to remain faithful in the shadows, as you did, without noise and without glory, and may my whole life proclaim faith in Jesus Christ, who died and rose again. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Philomena's feast was celebrated on August 11. It was removed from the liturgical calendar in 1961 for lack of reliable historical data, but the shrine of Mugnano del Cardinale continues to honor her on that date, and personal devotion to her remains possible.

Many people turn to her in a difficult situation, for a sick person or for a young person who is searching. Pray this prayer slowly, as the Curé of Ars would have wished: not as a formula that guarantees a result, but as an act of trust that leaves the answer to God.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Philomena, and read what we know about Saint Philomena.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Philomena

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the devotion of the holy Curé of Ars to Saint Philomena. It is not an official liturgical text. Remember too that almost nothing is known about the life of the saint, and that her feast was removed from the calendar in 1961. To finish on the eve of August 11, her traditional feast day, begin on August 2; the novena then ends on August 10, the anniversary of the arrival of her relics at Mugnano in 1805.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.

The meditations do not retell a legend. They start from what is certain, the greeting of peace on her tomb, and from the lived devotion of Saint John Vianney and of the pilgrims of Mugnano and Ars. You can pray it at any time of the year, especially in a difficult situation or for someone who is ill.

Day 1: Peace be with you

The only certain words from her tomb are a wish for peace. Beginning this novena means first asking God for peace of heart, before any other grace. Peace is not the absence of difficulties: it is the presence of Christ in the middle of them, the gift he offered his disciples on the evening of Easter.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Philomena, give me your peace, the peace the world cannot give.

Today: Be reconciled with someone, or take the first step toward it.

Day 2: The forgotten Christians

The catacombs of Rome hold thousands of Christians about whom we know nothing. Their faith is not lost to God: he knows each one by name. Praying with Philomena unites us to this immense crowd of hidden witnesses, who prayed, loved and hoped in the same faith as ours.

Prayer: Faithful God, I thank you for all who believed before us and whom no one remembers.

Today: Pray by name for the deceased members of your family.

Day 3: Remaining faithful

Tradition sees Philomena as a young martyr. Whether or not we know her story, martyrdom reminds us that faith can be costly, and that faithfulness is lived out in small things.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to you in the choices of each day, even when it costs me.

Today: Keep a resolution you keep putting off.

Day 4: The humility of the Curé of Ars

When people credited him with a healing, John Vianney answered that it was the work of his "little saint." He turned people's eyes away from himself and toward God. He spent long hours in the confessional and gave the credit for every grace to God and to the saint he loved.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to do good without seeking to be seen, and to give you all the glory.

Today: Do someone a quiet favor, without mentioning it.

Day 5: The sick

Pauline Jaricot, gravely ill, made the long journey to Mugnano. Many pilgrims have come there to entrust their sufferings to God. Not all were healed, but many found there the strength to carry their illness with peace.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the sick people I know. Give them strength, relief and, if it is your will, healing.

Today: Call or visit someone who is ill.

Day 6: Young people

The faithful have always seen Philomena as a young girl. Children and young people, their studies, their choices and their future are often entrusted to her.

Prayer: Lord, watch over the young people in my family and around me. Keep them in truth and joy.

Today: Encourage a young person in something they are undertaking.



The church of Ars, where John Vianney built a chapel to Saint Philomena.

Day 7: Difficult causes

Devotion to Philomena grew around requests that seemed hopeless. Trust is not the certainty of getting what we want, but surrender to God, whatever happens.

Prayer: Lord, you know the situation that is beyond me. I place it in your hands, with trust.

Today: Write your intention on a piece of paper and place it before a holy image or a cross.

Day 8: The truth

The Church removed Philomena's feast from the calendar out of concern for historical truth. Faith is not afraid of the truth: it knows how to tell what is certain from what is pious.

Prayer: Spirit of truth, make my faith humble and clear-sighted, and bind me first of all to Christ.

Today: Slowly read a passage of the Gospel, for example John 14:27.

Day 9: Handing over your intention

At the end of these nine days, we place our intention before God with trust, like the pilgrims of Mugnano and Ars, demanding nothing and letting ourselves be led. God hears every prayer, even when his answer is different from the one we expected.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I entrust my intention to you through the intercession of Saint Philomena and the holy Curé of Ars. Your will be done. Amen.

Today: Go to Mass or spend some time in adoration.

Closing prayer

Saint Philomena, your tomb wishes us peace. I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. With the holy Curé of Ars, pray for me, for the sick and for young people. Obtain for us a humble faith, unreserved trust and the peace of Christ. Amen.

To go further: what we know about Saint Philomena and the prayer to Saint Philomena.

PILGRIMAGE

Shrine of Saint Philomena at Mugnano del Cardinale

The shrine of Saint Philomena, in Mugnano del Cardinale, in Campania, has kept since 1805 the relics discovered in 1802 in the Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome. It is the main place of pilgrimage dedicated to the saint, in a small town in the province of Avellino, east of Naples, not far from Nola.

The arrival of the relics at Mugnano

After the discovery of the tomb on May 25, 1802, the bones and the tiles bearing Philomena's name were kept in Rome. In 1805, they were entrusted to Don Francesco De Lucia, a priest of Mugnano, who brought them back to his town. They arrived there on August 10, 1805, and were installed in a church of the town. The healings reported by the faithful quickly made Mugnano a place of pilgrimage, and the church became the shrine of Saint Philomena.



The shrine of Saint Philomena in Mugnano del Cardinale.

Pauline Jaricot and the shrine's influence

In 1835, Pauline Jaricot of Lyon, gravely ill, made the journey to Mugnano. She said she was healed before the relics and became one of the great promoters of devotion to Philomena in France. It was she who passed on a relic to the Curé of Ars, Saint John Vianney, whose devotion would make Philomena known across Europe. In 1837, Pope Gregory XVI authorized her public veneration.

It should be kept in mind that Philomena's story remains almost entirely unknown, and that her feast was removed from the liturgical calendar in 1961. The shrine has nevertheless continued to welcome pilgrims and to celebrate the saint, especially around August 10 and 11.

Praying at the shrine

Before your visit, you can read what is known about Saint Philomena, distinguishing history from tradition. On site, a time of silence before the urn lets you entrust an intention, especially for someone who is ill or a young person. The prayer to Saint Philomena can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The urn of Saint Philomena, inside the Mugnano shrine.

Other places of Saint Philomena

- **Rome**: the Catacombs of Priscilla, on the Via Salaria, where the tomb was discovered in 1802.
- **Ars-sur-Formans** (Ain): the Chapel of Saint Philomena, in the church where the holy Curé of Ars preached.
- **Lyon**: the Maison de Lorette, on the hill of Fourvière, where Pauline Jaricot lived.

- **Mysore** (India): Saint Philomena's Cathedral, one of the largest Neo-Gothic churches in Asia.

Practical information

Mugnano del Cardinale is in Campania, about twenty-five miles east of Naples. It is easier to reach by car, from Naples or Avellino. The most important celebrations take place in August, around the anniversary of the relics' arrival. Check Mass and opening times with the shrine before you come.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: SanFilippoApostolo1, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source
- The urn of Saint Philomena at the shrine of Mugnano del Cardinale.: Image: Giuseppe Guida, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The church of Ars, where John Vianney built a chapel to Saint Philomena.: Image: Paul C. Maurice, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The shrine of Saint Philomena in Mugnano del Cardinale.: Image: Giuseppe Guida, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The urn of Saint Philomena, inside the Mugnano shrine.: Image: Giuseppe Guida, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com