

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Polydore Plasden

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 10

IN BRIEF

Saint Polydore Plasden

English priest martyred at Tyburn in 1591, one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

Feast day	December 10, October 25
Born	1563, London
Died	December 10, 1591, Tyburn, London
Canonized	canonized on October 25, 1970 by Paul VI
Era	16th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Polydore Plasden for Faithfulness and Peace

Novena to Saint Polydore Plasden

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Polydore Plasden

Saint Polydore Plasden was an English Catholic priest, born in London in 1563 and martyred at Tyburn on December 10, 1591, during the reign of Elizabeth I. Trained at Reims and Rome, he returned in secret to his country to exercise his ministry, at a time when being a Catholic priest in England was punishable by death. Arrested at the end of a Mass, he was hanged and quartered. He is one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales canonized in 1970. His feast day is December 10.

Who was Saint Polydore Plasden?

Polydore Plasden was the son of a rope maker of London. He grew up in an England that had broken with Rome and where the Catholic Mass was forbidden. Like many young English Catholics of his time, he went abroad to study to become a priest, then secretly returned to serve the faithful who remained attached to the Catholic faith. His life is known from the registers of the English colleges and from the accounts of his trial and execution.

Key dates

- **1563**: Born in London, into a family of craftsmen.
- **1580s**: He studies theology at the English college at Reims, then at the English College in Rome.
- **December 7, 1586**: Ordained a priest in Rome.
- **April-September 1588**: Stays at Reims, then leaves on mission for England.
- **1588-1591**: Hidden ministry in Sussex and in London.
- **November 1591**: Arrested at the end of a Mass in the house of Swithun Wells, in London.

- **December 6, 1591**: Sentenced to death for entering England as a priest.
- **December 10, 1591**: Executed at Tyburn.
- **1929**: Beatified by Pius XI.
- **October 25, 1970**: Canonized by Paul VI, with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

A priest for a hidden Church

In the 1580s, English laws made Catholic ordination a crime: a priest trained abroad who returned to England was considered a traitor. Yet the English colleges at Reims (previously located at Douai) and at Rome trained dozens of young men who knew what awaited them. Polydore Plasden was one of them. Ordained in Rome in December 1586, he left for England in September 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada, when tensions between Catholics and the authorities were at their highest.

For three years he ministered in Sussex and in London. He celebrated Mass in friendly houses, heard confessions and encouraged families who paid heavy fines to remain faithful. He lived under false names and constantly changed hiding places.

A Mass to the end

In November 1591, Polydore attended a Mass celebrated by Father Edmund Gennings in the house of Swithun Wells, near present-day Gray's Inn Road, in London. The famous priest-hunter Richard Topcliffe arrived with officers to arrest them. The faithful kept the door shut until the end of the Mass. Then all surrendered without violence.

On December 6, Polydore Plasden was tried with the priests Edmund Gennings and Eustace White, and with several laymen, among them Swithun Wells. All were condemned to death.

Faithful to God and loyal to his queen

On December 10, 1591, at Tyburn, Polydore Plasden spoke before he died. He declared that he acknowledged Elizabeth as his lawful queen, that he was ready to defend her against her enemies and gladly prayed for her and for the kingdom. But he added that he would rather lose a thousand lives than deny his religion. He was then hanged and quartered, the punishment reserved for traitors. Sir Walter Raleigh, who was present, intervened so that the execution would be carried out quickly. His companions were put to death in London in the same period: they are called the London martyrs of 1591.

Devotion and iconography

Polydore Plasden was beatified in 1929 by Pius XI, then canonized on October 25, 1970 by Paul VI, with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales who died between 1535 and 1679. He is celebrated on December 10 with his companions, or on October 25 with the Forty Martyrs; in England, the martyrs of the Reformation are also celebrated together on May 4. He is shown as a priest, with the martyr's palm and sometimes the rope.

What can we learn from Saint Polydore Plasden?

Polydore Plasden was not a rebel. He loved his country and his queen, and he said so even on the scaffold. But he could not accept being asked to deny his faith. He shows that one can be a good citizen and a faithful Christian, and that conscience has rights no power can abolish. We can pray to him for priests, for persecuted Christians, and for those who must reconcile loyalty with faithfulness to their conscience.

Where to pray to Saint Polydore Plasden

- **London**: Tyburn Convent, near Marble Arch, the shrine of the martyrs executed at Tyburn.

- **London**: Westminster Cathedral, the city's Catholic cathedral.
- **Rome**: the English College, where he was trained and ordained a priest, and whose chapel honors its martyred students.

To pray with him at home, you can use the prayer to Saint Polydore Plasden or the novena to Saint Polydore Plasden.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Polydore Plasden for Faithfulness and Peace

Saint Polydore Plasden, the son of a London rope maker, became a priest in Rome and returned in secret to serve English Catholics. Arrested at the end of a Mass, he died at Tyburn on December 10, 1591, declaring his loyalty to his queen and his faithfulness to his faith. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him priests, persecuted Christians and those who must remain faithful to their conscience.

Prayer to Saint Polydore Plasden

Saint Polydore,
craftsman's son who became a priest of Christ,
you went back to your country
knowing that you were awaited there to be killed,
and you brought the sacraments
to those who hungered for them.

Arrested as you left the Mass,
you spoke your love for your homeland
and your refusal to deny your God,
and you gave your life without hatred.

Pray for our priests:
may they serve with courage and faithfulness.
Pray for persecuted Christians,
and for those who must choose between their conscience and their safety.

Teach us to love our country
without ever giving it what belongs to God.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Polydore Plasden

- On his feast day, December 10, or on October 25 with the Forty Martyrs.
- For a priest, a seminarian or an ordination.
- For Christians who live their faith in secret.
- When your conscience obliges you to say no.
- For reconciliation between the Churches in England.

An invocation for the Mass

The faithful who surrounded Polydore Plasden insisted on finishing the Mass before being arrested. Before taking part in the Eucharist, you can say:

> *Saint Polydore, teach me the value of the Mass.*
> *Let me live it with faith and gratitude,*
> *thinking of those who risked their lives for it. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Polydore Plasden from December 2 to 10, and discover the life of Saint Polydore Plasden.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Polydore Plasden

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Polydore Plasden, priest and martyr in London in 1591. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, December 10, begin on December 2, generally during Advent. It is suited to praying for priests, for persecuted Christians, or to ask for the strength to remain faithful to one's conscience. You can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Saint Polydore Plasden, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A craftsman's son

Polydore was the son of a London rope maker. God calls in every family and every walk of life. Work done with the hands often prepares a simple and solid heart.

Prayer: Lord, bless craftsmen and workers. Let vocations grow in our families.

Today: Thank a craftsman or a shopkeeper for their work.

Day 2: Leaving to be trained

To become a priest, Polydore had to leave England and study at Reims and then Rome. Formation takes time, sometimes exile, and much perseverance.

Prayer: Lord, bless seminarians and those who form them. Give them perseverance.

Today: Support a seminary or a vocations charity with prayer or a gift.

Day 3: A priest forever

Polydore was ordained a priest in Rome on December 7, 1586. He knew this priesthood might lead him to death. He received it as a gift to be given back.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the priests who have marked my life. Keep them faithful and joyful.

Today: Write a note of thanks to a priest.

Day 4: Going home

In 1588, Polydore returned to England, where the law made him a traitor. He could have stayed safe abroad. He chose to rejoin his people.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to serve where I am needed, even if it is hard.

Today: Do a favor you had been avoiding because it cost you.

Day 5: A hidden ministry

For three years, Polydore celebrated Mass in secret, in Sussex and in London. He constantly changed hiding places to bring the sacraments to the faithful.

Prayer: Lord, support priests who minister in hiding. Protect the communities that receive them.

Today: Pray for a country where Christians cannot practice their faith freely.

Day 6: Finishing the Mass

At the arrest, the faithful kept the door shut until the end of the Mass. For them, nothing was more important than the sacrifice of Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to live the Mass with faith, as the greatest treasure of my week.

Today: Attend a weekday Mass, or arrive early at Sunday Mass to prepare for it.

Day 7: Together before the judges

Polydore was tried with other priests and with laymen. Priests and faithful shared the same fate. The Church is one body, in joy as in trial.

Prayer: Lord, deepen the unity between priests and lay people in my parish.

Today: Offer your pastor your help with a concrete task.

Day 8: Loyal and faithful

On the scaffold, Polydore declared his loyalty to his queen, but refused to deny his faith. He rendered to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve my country honestly, without ever betraying my conscience.

Today: Pray for the leaders of your country.

Day 9: Dying in forgiveness

Polydore died at Tyburn on December 10, 1591, praying for his queen and his kingdom. The martyr does not curse: he offers his life and prays for those who take it.

Prayer: Lord, give me a forgiving heart. Through the intercession of Saint Polydore Plasden, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for a person who has wronged you.

Living the novena with Saint Polydore Plasden

This novena most often falls during Advent, the season of waiting and faithfulness. During these nine days, you can bring to your prayer the priests of your diocese, persecuted Christians, or a situation where your conscience asks you for courage. You can also pray for reconciliation between Catholics and Anglicans, which the martyrs of every confession long for.

Closing prayer

Saint Polydore Plasden,
priest of Christ and martyr of London,
you served your people at the risk of your life
and died faithful to God and loyal to your country.
Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.
Obtain for our priests courage and faithfulness,
for persecuted Christians strength and peace,
and for me an upright heart that does not deny its Lord.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Polydore Plasden at any time, and discover the life of Saint Polydore Plasden.

CREDITS

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