

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Possidius

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 16

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IN BRIEF

Saint Possidius

Bishop of Calama in Numidia, disciple, friend and biographer of Saint Augustine.

Feast day	May 16
Born	c. 360
Died	c. 437, in exile, according to tradition in Mirandola, Italy
Era	5th century
Patron saint of	Mirandola

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Possidius

Saint Possidius was bishop of Calama, in Roman Numidia (today Guelma, in Algeria), at the turn of the fifth century. A disciple and friend of Saint Augustine for nearly forty years, he stood beside him in the great struggles of the African Church, was with him when he died in 430 and wrote his biography, the *Life of Saint Augustine*. Exiled by the Vandals, he died far from his diocese. His feast day is May 16.

Who was Saint Possidius?

Possidius, sometimes called Possidonius, was probably born around 360, perhaps in Thagaste, Augustine's hometown. He appears in many ancient documents: the acts of the African councils, the records of the Conference of Carthage, the letters and treatises of Augustine, and the chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine. Yet most of them mention only his name or the missions entrusted to him.

In the book he devoted to his teacher, he says very little about himself. His whole attention is turned toward Augustine. That discretion is perhaps the best portrait we have of him.

He belonged to the small group of disciples who, around Augustine, lived a common life of prayer, study and poverty in Hippo. Several of them became bishops in Africa, such as Alypius of Thagaste.

Key dates

- **c. 360**: Born, perhaps in Thagaste.
- **390s**: Member of Augustine's monastic community in Hippo.
- **c. 397**: Elected bishop of Calama (Guelma).

- **411**: One of the Catholic spokesmen at the Conference of Carthage against the Donatists.
- **416 and 419**: Takes part in the councils of Milevis and Carthage against Pelagianism.
- **429-430**: Takes refuge in Hippo, besieged by the Vandals, and assists the dying Augustine on August 28, 430.
- **437**: Exiled by the Vandal king Genseric.
- **c. 437**: Dies in exile, in Mirandola according to Italian tradition.

A bishop facing division

Possidius was elected bishop of Calama around 397. He found a city where the Donatists, Christians who had separated from the Catholic Church at the beginning of the fourth century, were numerous and sometimes violent. He experienced this himself: Augustine reports that Donatist partisans attacked him and that he narrowly escaped death. Calama also saw pagan riots, during which the church was set on fire.

At the Conference of Carthage

In 411, Possidius was chosen, together with Augustine and Alypius, as one of the seven spokesmen of the Catholic bishops at the great Conference of Carthage. This meeting brought Catholics and Donatists face to face, under the arbitration of a representative of the emperor.

Against Pelagianism

He then took part in the African councils that condemned Pelagianism, the teaching that claimed a person could do good without the help of God's grace. He was also sent on a mission to Italy, to the imperial court.

Witness to Augustine's death

In 429, the Vandals crossed from Spain and invaded Roman Africa. Driven out of Calama, Possidius took refuge in Hippo, where Augustine, then 75 years old, was encouraging the faithful during the siege. It was there that Augustine fell ill and died, on August 28, 430. Possidius was at his bedside.

He tells us that Augustine had the penitential psalms copied and posted on the wall so that he could read them from his bed. He died in peace, surrounded by his friends, and made no will, because he owned nothing.

The Life of Saint Augustine

After his teacher's death, Possidius wrote the *Vita Augustini*, the first biography of Augustine. It completes the *Confessions* by telling what Augustine does not say there: his life as a bishop, his battles, the way he lived in community, his simplicity at table, where an inscription forbade speaking ill of anyone absent.

Possidius added an *Indiculus*, a list of Augustine's works, which remains precious for historians. In substance, he writes that those who read Augustine's writings could profit from them, but even more those who could see how he lived among people.

Exile and death

In 437, the Arian Vandal king Genseric exiled several Catholic bishops who refused to submit to him, Possidius among them. He died soon afterward, in exile. An Italian tradition says he died in Mirandola, in Emilia, where he is venerated as patron saint. The Canons Regular of Saint Augustine count him among their spiritual fathers.

Why is Saint Possidius the patron saint of Mirandola?

According to a local Italian tradition, Possidius ended his days in exile in Mirandola, in the region of Emilia-Romagna. The town adopted him as its patron, and he is still honored there today.

Beyond Mirandola, Possidius is above all the saint of faithful friendship. He chose to stay in the shadow of his teacher and to pass on Augustine's memory rather than his own. Catholics can pray to him for biographers and historians, for disciples and students, and for those who accompany a friend at the end of life.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Possidius in art

Images of Saint Possidius on his own are rare. Paintings of the death of Saint Augustine show the great bishop surrounded by his disciples at prayer, a scene we know largely thanks to the account of Possidius, who was one of them. When he is represented, it is as a bishop, the office he held at Calama.

His true monument is a book. The *Life of Saint Augustine* is short and simple, but it is the only account of Augustine written by someone who lived with him day after day. Anyone who has read the *Confessions* and wants to know how their author lived, governed and died will find the answer in the pages of Possidius.

Where to pray to Saint Possidius

- **Mirandola** (Italy): the town that honors him as its patron, according to local tradition.
- **Annaba** (Algeria): the Basilica of Saint Augustine, on the site of ancient Hippo, where Possidius assisted his teacher.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Possidius or the novena to Saint Possidius.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Possidius for Faithful Friendship

As far as we know, there is no widespread traditional prayer in English to Saint Possidius. Here is an original prayer, inspired by his life as bishop of Calama, faithful friend of Saint Augustine and witness of his last days.

The saint of faithful friendship

For nearly forty years, Possidius walked beside Augustine: in community life at Hippo, in the debates with the Donatists and the Pelagians, and finally at his deathbed. He then wrote his teacher's life, keeping himself in the background. Exiled by the Vandals, he died far from his Church.

Prayer to Saint Possidius

Saint Possidius, faithful friend of Saint Augustine, you walked with him for many years and stayed at his side until his last breath: teach me to be a loyal friend, present in good times and in hard ones.

You were attacked for your faith and saw your church burned: give me courage when following Christ costs me something.

You wrote the life of your teacher without seeking your own glory: help me to pass on what I have received with humility and truth.

You died in exile, far from your people: comfort all who are driven from their homes, and Christians who suffer for their faith.

I entrust to you a friend who is ill or nearing the end of life, and my own intention: (name it in silence). Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Possidius is celebrated on May 16. You can also pray to him:

- when you are accompanying a sick or dying friend;
- for a friendship that needs healing or renewed faithfulness;
- before writing, teaching or doing research, especially about the history of the Church;
- for refugees and exiles, and for the Church in North Africa;
- for the people of Mirandola, who honor him as their patron.

A prayer from the table of Saint Augustine

Possidius tells us that at Augustine's table an inscription forbade speaking ill of the absent. You can make this simple resolution your own:

> *Lord, guard my tongue. May I never speak ill of those who are not here, and may my words build up rather than wound. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius and Saint Augustine. Amen.*

You may end with an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. To go further, pray the novena to Saint Possidius or read the life of Saint Possidius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Possidius

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Possidius, bishop of Calama, friend and biographer of Saint Augustine. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast day, begin on May 8: the ninth day then falls on May 16. You may also pray it at any time of the year, for a friendship, a sick loved one, a writing project or Christians in exile.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God in a moment of silence. Read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps turn prayer into a concrete step.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: *Lord, you gave Saint Possidius the grace of a long and faithful friendship with Saint Augustine. Through his intercession, make me faithful to you and to those you have placed on my path, and hear the prayer I bring you today. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. Faithfulness matters more than perfection.

Day 1: A disciple at Hippo

As a young man, Possidius joined the community Augustine had gathered at Hippo, a life of prayer, study and poverty shared among friends. He let himself be formed by a teacher and a community.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who have taught me the faith. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, make me a humble disciple, ready to learn. Amen.

Today: Thank, by message or in person, someone who helped you grow in faith.

Day 2: A friendship centered on God

The bond between Possidius and Augustine lasted nearly forty years. It was more than shared work: it was a friendship in which each helped the other toward God.

Prayer: Lord, bless my friendships. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, make them true, faithful and turned toward you. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for each of your close friends.

Day 3: Bishop of Calama

Around 397, Possidius became bishop of Calama, a city divided between Catholics, Donatists and pagans. He did not choose an easy place, but he accepted the place he was given.

Prayer: Lord, help me serve where you have placed me. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, give me patience in difficult situations. Amen.

Today: Do your work today with care, especially the task you like least.

Day 4: Courage under attack

Donatist partisans attacked Possidius and he narrowly escaped death. Pagan rioters set his church on fire. He did not give up his flock.

Prayer: Lord, give strength to Christians who are threatened for their faith. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, keep me steadfast when faith costs me something. Amen.

Today: Learn about a community of persecuted Christians and pray for them.

Day 5: Seeking unity

In 411, Possidius was one of the Catholic spokesmen at the Conference of Carthage, where Catholics and Donatists met face to face. Division in the Church was a wound he wanted to heal.

Prayer: Lord, heal the divisions among Christians. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, make me a builder of unity in my family and my parish. Amen.

Today: Take a first step toward someone with whom you are at odds.

Day 6: Everything is grace

Possidius took part in the councils that rejected Pelagianism, which claimed we could do good without God's grace. With Augustine, he knew that every good thing we do is first a gift.

Prayer: Lord, without you I can do nothing. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, teach me to rely on your grace rather than on my own strength. Amen.

Today: Before each task, say silently: "Lord, help me."

Day 7: At the bedside of a friend

In 430, in besieged Hippo, Possidius stayed at Augustine's bedside. Augustine read the penitential psalms posted on the wall and died in peace, surrounded by his friends.

Prayer: Lord, comfort the sick and the dying. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, give me the grace to be present to those who suffer. Amen.

Today: Visit or call someone who is ill or alone, or pray Psalm 51.

Day 8: Handing on a memory

Possidius wrote the life of Augustine and listed his works. He reminds us that what we have received from holy people must be passed on.

Prayer: Lord, help me hand on the faith I have received. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, make my words and my life a witness to you. Amen.

Today: Tell someone about a person whose faith has inspired you.

Day 9: Faithful in exile

In 437, the Vandal king Genseric sent Possidius into exile. He died far from his Church, but not far from God, who accompanies those who lose everything.

Prayer: Lord, be close to refugees and exiles. Through the intercession of Saint Possidius, keep me faithful to the end, wherever life leads me. Amen.

Today: Support a group that welcomes refugees, by a gift or by your time.

Closing prayer

Saint Possidius, faithful friend of Saint Augustine, courageous bishop and humble witness, obtain for me the grace I have asked during these nine days, if it is God's will. Teach me to love my friends in truth, to stay close to those who suffer and to pass on the faith with fidelity. Pray for the Church in North Africa, for Mirandola and for all who live far from home. Amen.

To continue, you can pray the prayer to Saint Possidius or read his life.

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