

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Raphael the Archangel

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 29

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IN BRIEF

Saint Raphael the Archangel

Archangel whose name means "God heals," companion of Tobias, patron of travelers and the sick.

Feast day	September 29
Canonized	Venerated since ancient times (an angel, never canonized)
Patron saint of	travelers, the sick, physicians, nurses, pharmacists, the blind, engaged couples, Córdoba

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Raphael the Archangel for Healing and Guidance

Novena to Saint Raphael the Archangel

Córdoba, the City of Saint Raphael the Archangel

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Raphael the Archangel

Saint Raphael is one of the three archangels named in the Bible, together with Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel. His Hebrew name means "God heals." He is the quiet hero of the Book of Tobit: disguised as a traveling companion, he guides young Tobias on his journey, protects him, helps him marry Sarah and restores the sight of his blind father. Patron of travelers, the sick, physicians and young people looking for a spouse, he is honored on September 29 with the other two archangels.

Who is Saint Raphael the Archangel?

Saint Raphael is not a human being who became a saint after death, but an angel: according to Christian faith, a purely spiritual creature at the service of God. He therefore has no date of birth, no earthly biography and no canonization. His veneration is immemorial. He introduces himself as "one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord" (Tobit 12:15), which is why tradition calls him an archangel.

His name sums up his mission. Where Michael defends and Gabriel announces, Raphael accompanies and heals. He does more than cure an old man's eyes: he frees a young woman from the misfortune that haunts her, brings joy back to two families and leads a young man into a new life.

Key dates

- **Book of Tobit (written around the 3rd or 2nd century BC)**: Raphael accompanies Tobias and heals Tobit and Sarah.
- **1578**: According to the tradition of Córdoba, the archangel appears to the priest Andrés de las Roelas and declares himself guardian of the city.

- **1921**: Benedict XV extends his feast to the universal Church on October 24.
- **1969**: The Roman calendar unites Michael, Gabriel and Raphael in one feast on September 29.

The story of Tobit and Tobias

The Book of Tobit, which the Catholic and Orthodox Churches count among the books of the Old Testament, is an edifying story set during the exile of the Israelites in Nineveh. Protestant Bibles do not include it, or place it among the Apocrypha. Its purpose is less to record history than to show how God cares for those who remain faithful to him.

A just man put to the test

Tobit, an exiled Israelite, is a just man: he gives alms and buries the dead of his people at the risk of his life. One day, bird droppings fall into his eyes and leave him blind (Tobit 2:10). Ruined and discouraged, he asks God to let him die. At the same moment, far away in Ecbatana, a young woman named Sarah is also praying in tears: she has been given in marriage to seven husbands, and the demon Asmodeus killed each of them before the wedding night. The book says that both prayers were heard, and that Raphael was sent to heal them both (Tobit 3:16-17).

A companion on the road

Tobit sends his son Tobias to recover money left in trust with a relative in Media. Tobias needs a guide. Raphael presents himself as a young man who says his name is Azariah. Tobias sets out with him, followed by his dog. On the bank of the Tigris River a large fish leaps up as if to swallow the young man's foot; the angel tells him to catch it and keep its heart, liver and gall, which will serve as remedies.



Tobias and the Angel, workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio (c. 1470-1475), National Gallery, London.

The marriage of Tobias and Sarah

When they reach Ecbatana and the house of Raguel, Sarah's father, Raphael encourages Tobias to ask for her hand. On the wedding night, following the angel's instructions, Tobias burns the heart and liver of the fish, and the demon flees. The couple then rise to pray together: "Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors... I am taking this kinswoman of mine not because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that she and I may find mercy and grow old together" (Tobit 8:5-7). This prayer is often read at Catholic weddings.

The healing and the revelation

Back in Nineveh, Tobias applies the fish's gall to his father's eyes, and Tobit sees again. Tobit wants to reward his son's companion generously. Then Raphael reveals who he is: "I am Raphael, one of the seven angels." He tells the family to bless God rather than thank him: "As for me, when I was with you, I was not

acting on my own will, but by the will of God" (Tobit 12:18). Then he disappears, leaving them a lesson for every age: "Prayer with fasting is good, and almsgiving with righteousness" (Tobit 12:8).

The pool of Bethesda

The Gospel of John mentions a pool in Jerusalem whose waters an angel stirred from time to time; the first sick person to go in was healed (John 5:1-4). The angel is not named, but the liturgy long associated this passage with Raphael, the angel who heals: it was the Gospel read on his feast before 1969.

A feast shared with Michael and Gabriel

Since 1969 the Latin Church celebrates on September 29 the three archangels named in Scripture: Saint Michael, who protects, Saint Gabriel, who announces, and Saint Raphael, who heals and accompanies. Before that, Raphael had his own feast on October 24, extended to the whole Church by Pope Benedict XV in 1921. That date is still kept by those who follow the Roman calendar of 1962, and by the city of Córdoba in Spain, of which he is the guardian.

Why is Saint Raphael the patron saint of travelers, the sick and those seeking a spouse?

Because he walked with Tobias on the road, there and back, Raphael is invoked by travelers, pilgrims and anyone setting out far from home. Because he healed Tobit and freed Sarah, he is the patron of the sick and the blind, and of physicians, nurses and pharmacists. Many Catholic hospitals and health care ministries bear his name. Finally, because he led Tobias to Sarah, he is prayed to by single people who hope to marry and by young couples. A popular prayer to Saint Raphael "for a good spouse" circulates widely in the English-speaking world.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Raphael in art

Raphael is shown as a young winged traveler, holding a pilgrim's staff, sometimes with a water gourd at his belt. Beside him there is often young Tobias carrying a fish, and a small dog. The theme of "Tobias and the Angel" was much loved by Renaissance painters, especially in Florence, where families commissioned such pictures to protect a son who had set out on a journey. He also appears with Michael and Gabriel, as in Francesco Botticini's painting of the three archangels in the Uffizi.

How to pray to Saint Raphael

Catholics pray to Saint Raphael before a journey, for someone who is sick, for the healing of wounds of body or heart, and to find the person with whom to build a family. You can pray the prayer to Saint Raphael the Archangel or follow the novena to Saint Raphael, from September 20 to 28.

Where to pray to Saint Raphael

The city of Córdoba, in Andalusia, Spain, is the great city of Saint Raphael. Tall columns topped with his statue, called "triumphs," stand in its squares, and the Church of the Oath of Saint Raphael (Iglesia del Juramento de San Rafael) recalls the local tradition of his apparitions. On October 24 the whole city celebrates its guardian. In Venice, the Church of the Angelo Raffaele in the Dorsoduro district is also dedicated to him. Any hospital chapel is a fitting place to pray to the angel who heals.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Raphael the Archangel for Healing and Guidance

Saint Raphael's own story gives us one of the most beautiful prayers of the Bible: the prayer Tobias and Sarah said together on their wedding night, after the angel had freed them from misfortune. Below you will find an original prayer to the archangel, inspired by the Book of Tobit, followed by that biblical prayer.

Prayer to Saint Raphael the Archangel

Saint Raphael, angel of healing, whose name means "God heals," you who walked beside Tobias on his long journey, walk with me on the roads of my life.

Protect me when I travel and when I set out into the unknown. Watch over those I love when they are far away, and bring us safely home.

You who restored Tobit's sight, I entrust to you the sick, especially (name the person). Obtain healing for them, if it is God's will, and always peace and courage.

You who led Tobias to Sarah, guide those who are looking for the person with whom to build a family, and watch over couples beginning their life together.

Heal, too, the hidden wounds of my heart, and teach me, as you taught Tobit's family, to give glory to God for all the good he does.

Saint Raphael the Archangel, pray for us. Amen.

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

The prayer of Tobias and Sarah (Tobit 8:5-8)

> *"Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors, and blessed is your name in all generations forever. Let the heavens and all your creation bless you forever. You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support, and from the two of them the human race has come. You said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; let us make him a helper like himself.' I now take this kinswoman of mine, not because of lust, but in truth. Grant that she and I may find mercy and that we may grow old together." And they both said, "Amen, Amen."*

Source: Book of Tobit, chapter 8, verses 5-8 (Saintspedia translation). This passage is one of the readings offered in the Catholic rite of marriage, and many couples pray it together.

When to pray this prayer

Pray to Saint Raphael on September 29, the feast of the archangels, or on October 24, his traditional feast day. Turn to him before a trip or a move, at the bedside of someone who is sick, before surgery, and when you hope to meet a future spouse. Doctors, nurses, caregivers and pharmacists can entrust their daily work with the sick to him. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Raphael the Archangel and read the life of Saint Raphael.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Raphael the Archangel

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia that follows, step by step, the Book of Tobit, where the archangel Raphael appears. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of the feast of the archangels, begin on September 20; it ends on September 28, the day before the feast of September 29. You can also pray it from October 15 to 23, before his traditional feast of October 24, or at any time of the year for someone who is sick, for a journey or for a hoped-for meeting.

Why pray a novena to Saint Raphael?

Saint Raphael is the archangel of the journey. In the Book of Tobit he walks for weeks beside a young man who does not know who he is, guiding him, protecting him and leading him to healing and to marriage. A novena follows the same rhythm: nine days of walking with God, often without seeing where the road leads. People turn to Saint Raphael before a long trip or a move, for someone who is sick or awaiting surgery, for the healing of painful memories, and when they hope to meet the person with whom they will build a family. Each day of this novena follows one step of the story of Tobit, so that you can read your own life in the light of that journey.

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, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day,

simply pick up where you left off. A novena is not a formula that obliges God to answer; it is nine days of walking with him, as Tobias walked with his unknown companion.

Day 1: A just man in trial

Tobit gives alms and buries the dead, and yet he goes blind. The Book of Tobit does not hide the fact that good people suffer. It simply affirms that God does not forget them.

Prayer: Lord, when trials come and I do not understand them, keep me in trust. I place my intention in your hands for these nine days.

Today: Give something, even small, to a person in need.

Day 2: Two prayers heard

On the same day, Tobit in Nineveh and Sarah in Ecbatana pray in tears. They do not know each other, but God hears both prayers and prepares one answer for them both.

Prayer: Lord, hear my prayer, and the prayer of everyone who is weeping tonight without anyone knowing.

Today: Pray for someone who is suffering in silence.

Day 3: A companion on the road

Raphael presents himself to Tobias as a simple guide. God often sends his help in the ordinary features of a friend, a caregiver or a stranger.

Prayer: Saint Raphael, walk with me on my way, and open my eyes to recognize those God places on my path.

Today: Thank someone who has helped you recently.

Day 4: The fish of the Tigris

What tried to bite Tobias becomes a source of healing. With God, even what once threatened us can become a path to life.

Prayer: Lord, turn what has wounded me into an occasion for growth.

Today: Look back at a past trial and name one good thing that came out of it.

Day 5: The house of Raguel

Tobias and the angel are welcomed generously into Raguel's home. Hospitality is a place where God acts: when we open our door, we also open our heart.

Prayer: Lord, make me welcoming toward those who knock at my door.

Today: Invite someone to share a meal, or check in on a person who lives alone.

Day 6: The prayer of the newlyweds

On their wedding night, Tobias and Sarah begin their life together with prayer. Their love is rooted in trust in God, and fear gives way to peace.

Prayer: Saint Raphael, guide those who are looking for a spouse, and protect married couples, especially those going through a crisis.

Today: Pray for a couple you know.

Day 7: Parents who wait

While their son is away, Tobias's mother watches the road every day, full of worry. The waiting of those who love is part of the journey too.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the people I love who are far away. Keep them safe, and give me peace while I wait.

Today: Call or write to a family member or friend who lives far away.

Day 8: Eyes opened

Tobias applies the remedy to his father's eyes, and Tobit sees again. His first words are a blessing. The deepest healing is the one that makes us able to praise.

Prayer: Saint Raphael, I entrust to you the sick (name the person). Obtain healing and peace for them.

Today: Visit someone who is sick, or send them a message.

Day 9: "Bless God"

Raphael reveals his name and refuses to be thanked: it is God who must be blessed. Then he disappears, leaving behind a family filled with joy.

Prayer: Saint Raphael, teach me to give thanks to God for every good thing I have received. Amen.

Today: Write down three reasons to give thanks and, if you can, attend Mass on the feast of the archangels.

Closing prayer

Saint Raphael the Archangel, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you once more my intention. Walk with me on the road, heal what is wounded in me and in those I love, and lead me to the people God wants me to meet. Teach me to recognize his care in every step of my life, and to bless him always. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Raphael the Archangel and the prayer to Saint Raphael.

PILGRIMAGE

Córdoba, the City of Saint Raphael the Archangel

Córdoba, in Andalusia, is the city of Saint Raphael. The archangel is its "custodio," that is, its guardian, and his traveler's figure presides over squares, bridges, and streets in the form of tall columns topped with his statue. Every October 24, the city celebrates its protector, and pilgrims come to pray in the church that recalls the tradition of his apparitions.



The Triumph of Saint Raphael, near the Roman bridge of Córdoba.

The archangel's oath

According to local tradition, the Archangel Raphael appeared in 1578 to a Córdoba priest, Father Andrés de las Roelas. He is said to have introduced himself by swearing, by Jesus Christ crucified, that he was Raphael, the angel

whom God had placed as guardian of the city. This "oath" gave its name to the Church of the Oath of Saint Raphael (Iglesia del Juramento de San Rafael), built on the spot associated with these apparitions. The devotion of the people of Córdoba to the archangel is very much alive there.

The "triumphs" of Saint Raphael

Córdoba has many monuments called "triunfos": columns or pedestals bearing the archangel's statue, dressed as a pilgrim, often with Tobias's fish. The most famous, made in the 18th century, stands near the great Mosque-Cathedral and the Roman bridge. A statue of the archangel also adorns the Roman bridge itself, where passersby light candles and leave flowers.

What to see in Córdoba

- **The Church of the Oath of Saint Raphael**, the center of devotion to the archangel.
- **The Triumph of Saint Raphael**, near the Mosque-Cathedral.
- **The statue of the archangel on the Roman bridge**, above the Guadalquivir.
- **The Mosque-Cathedral**, the former great mosque that became a cathedral after the Christian reconquest of 1236.

Pilgrimage tips

October 24, the feast of Saint Raphael, is a holiday in Córdoba: solemn Masses and popular festivities follow one another. The rest of the year, you can follow a walking route among the various triumphs of the old town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Church hours vary by season: it is wise to check them on site.

Praying to Saint Raphael elsewhere

In Venice, the church of the Angelo Raffaele, in the Dorsoduro district, is dedicated to the archangel and keeps paintings telling the story of Tobit. Everywhere, hospital chapels are natural places to pray to the angel who heals. On September 29, the Church celebrates him together with Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel.

Credits and sources

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