

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Roque González de Santa Cruz

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 15

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IN BRIEF

Saint Roque González de Santa Cruz

Jesuit priest born in Asunción, founder of Guaraní reductions, martyr at Caaró, the first saint of Paraguay.

Feast day	November 15
Born	1576, Asunción, Paraguay
Died	November 15, 1628, Caaró, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
Canonized	May 16, 1988, by Pope John Paul II
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	Paraguay, Encarnación, Posadas, the missions of the reductions

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Roque González, Friend of the Peoples

Novena to Saint Roque González

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Roque González de Santa Cruz

Saint Roque González de Santa Cruz was a Jesuit priest born in Asunción, Paraguay, in 1576, and killed in hatred of the faith on November 15, 1628, at Caaró, in present-day Brazil. He founded several "reductions," Christian villages where the Guaraní people were protected from the colonists, and he defended their dignity and freedom. The first saint born in Paraguay, he was canonized by Pope John Paul II in Asunción in 1988. He is celebrated on November 15 with his fellow martyrs, Alonso Rodríguez and Juan del Castillo.

Who was Saint Roque González?

Roque González was a criollo, that is, a son of Spanish settlers born in the Americas. He belonged to one of the founding families of Asunción and spoke Guaraní from childhood. This double belonging made him an exceptional bridge between two worlds. First a diocesan priest and then a Jesuit, he gave his life to the Guaraní peoples: he explored unknown territories, founded villages, taught, cared for the sick, and defended the Indigenous people against those who wanted to exploit them.

He died under the blows of men stirred up by a local religious leader hostile to the missionaries. For Paraguay, he is both a saint and a national hero: his portrait has appeared on a banknote, and the bridge linking Encarnación (Paraguay) and Posadas (Argentina), two cities born of his foundations, bears his name.

The 1986 film *The Mission* made the Jesuit reductions famous in the English-speaking world; Roque González lived more than a century before the events it portrays, at the very beginning of that great missionary adventure.

Key dates

- **1576**: Born in Asunción into a Spanish family settled in Paraguay.
- **December 1598**: Ordained a priest in Asunción by the Bishop of Tucumán.
- **1609**: Archpriest of Asunción Cathedral, he turns down the office of vicar general and enters the Society of Jesus on May 9.
- **1611**: He organizes the reduction of San Ignacio Guazú, one of the most important in Paraguay.
- **1614-1618**: He founds the reductions of Itapúa (the future Encarnación and Posadas), Santa Ana and Yaguaporá.
- **1619-1626**: New foundations along the Uruguay River, including Concepción and Yapeyú.
- **February 1627**: Superior of the Jesuit missions of the Uruguay.
- **1628**: He founds the reductions of Ijuí and Caaró with two young Jesuits.
- **November 15, 1628**: Martyred at Caaró with Father Alonso Rodríguez; Juan del Castillo is killed two days later at Ijuí.
- **January 28, 1934**: Beatification of the three martyrs.
- **May 16, 1988**: Canonized by Pope John Paul II during a Mass in Asunción.

A priest of the land

Roque received his first schooling at a school founded by the first Bishop of Asunción, then prepared for the priesthood with a small group of young men, under the guidance of the bishop and of one of the first Jesuits to arrive in the region. Ordained in 1598, he was sent as a parish priest among the Indigenous people, whose language he spoke. In 1609, when there were plans to make him vicar general of the diocese, he chose instead to enter the Society of Jesus, to give himself entirely to the mission.

The builder of the reductions

While still a novice, he was sent to explore the territory of the Guaycurú, across the Paraguay River, a people reputed to be fierce. He then joined the missions of the Paraná. In 1611, with a fellow Jesuit, he organized the reduction of San Ignacio Guazú. He himself described its spirit: each family had its house and a church was built, but the real work was to build up "the spiritual temples, which are the souls" of the Indigenous people.

Roque developed a way of evangelizing attentive to Guaraní culture: music, singing, processions and feasts held a large place. He had the Guaraní language taught, introduced farming and crafts, and laid the foundations of the organization of the reductions, which would allow thousands of Guaraní to live in safety. In less than twenty years he founded or organized some ten villages, on both sides of the Paraná and then along the Uruguay River.

Defender of the Guaraní

Roque González fought on two fronts. On one side, he opposed the practices of the shamans who kept communities in fear. On the other, he stood firmly against the *encomenderos*, Spanish settlers who subjected the Indigenous people to forced labor. In a letter of 1614 to his brother, a senior official in Asunción, he denounced their greed and declared that they owed an enormous debt to the Indigenous people. His courage during epidemics, when he nursed the sick without fear of contagion, won him the trust of the people.



San Ignacio Guazú, the first great reduction organized by Roque González.

The martyrdom of Caaró

In 1628, Roque founded new reductions east of the Uruguay River, in what is now the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, with two young Spanish Jesuits, Alonso Rodríguez and Juan del Castillo. The missionaries' prestige troubled an influential shaman, Ñezú, who decided to get rid of them. On November 15, 1628, at Caaró, as Roque bent down to fix the bell of the little chapel, one of Ñezú's men struck him on the head with a stone axe. Alonso Rodríguez was killed next. Two days later, Juan del Castillo was murdered at Ijuí.

According to tradition, the bodies were thrown into the fire, but Roque's heart did not burn. This heart and the murder weapon are kept today in Asunción, in the Chapel of the Martyrs.

Why is Saint Roque González the patron saint of Paraguay?

As the first saint born in Paraguay and a founder of towns that still exist, Roque González is honored as a patron of Paraguay and of the cities of Encarnación and Posadas, born of his reduction of Itapúa, as well as of the missions of the reductions. He loved the Guaraní enough to share their life, speak their language and defend their rights against his own countrymen. He reminds us that proclaiming the Gospel goes hand in hand with justice and respect for cultures. He is a model for missionaries, educators, defenders of Indigenous peoples and all who serve the most vulnerable.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Roque González or follow the novena to Saint Roque González, from November 7 to 15.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Roque González in art

He is shown as a Jesuit in a black cassock, usually holding a cross. Some images show the stone axe of his martyrdom, the chapel bell he was fixing when he was struck, or his heart, which according to tradition did not burn. He is often depicted with his two companions, Alonso Rodríguez and Juan del Castillo.



The shrine of Caaró, Brazil, site of the martyrdom.

Where to pray to Saint Roque González

- **Asunción** (Paraguay): the Chapel of the Martyrs, which keeps his heart.
- **Caaró** (Caibaté, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil): the shrine built on the site of his martyrdom.
- **San Ignacio Guazú** (Paraguay): the former reduction he organized in 1611.
- **Encarnación** (Paraguay) and **Posadas** (Argentina): the two cities born of his foundations, of which he is patron.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Roque González, Friend of the Peoples

Saint Roque González de Santa Cruz, Jesuit priest and martyr, is much loved in Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil. Saintspedia offers here an original prayer inspired by his life as a missionary, defender of the Guaraní and builder of communities, together with a short invocation to him and his companions.

Prayer to Saint Roque González, friend of the peoples

Saint Roque González, you learned the language of the Guaraní as a child and put it at the service of the Gospel: teach me to speak to each person with respect, in the language of his or her heart.

You left the honors of Asunción to follow the poor Christ into the forest: give me the freedom to let go of whatever keeps me from serving.

You built villages where families lived in peace: protect our families, our parishes and our communities. Make us builders of peace and justice.

You defended the Indigenous people against those who exploited them: support Indigenous peoples, despised workers and all whose dignity is trampled. Give us the courage to denounce injustice and the generosity to repair it.

You died while fixing the bell of your chapel: keep alive in us the joy of calling people to prayer. Bless Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil and all the lands where you sowed the faith.

I entrust to you this intention (name it in silence). With Saint Alonso Rodríguez and Saint Juan del Castillo, intercede for us before the Father. Amen.

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

Invocation to the martyrs of the reductions

Saints Roque González, Alonso Rodríguez and Juan del Castillo, martyrs of Christ, pray for missionaries and for the peoples who welcome the Gospel. Amen.

This invocation is an original text by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Roque González is celebrated on November 15, the day of his martyrdom at Caaró in 1628. You can pray to him for the missions, for teachers and catechists, for Indigenous peoples and for Paraguay. It is also a fitting prayer for Jesuit schools and parishes, and for anyone working for justice among the poor. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Roque González, and discover the life of Saint Roque González.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Roque González

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the life of Saint Roque González de Santa Cruz, from his childhood in Asunción to his martyrdom at Caaró. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on November 7; it ends on November 15, the anniversary of his death in 1628. It can be prayed alone, in a family, or in a Jesuit school or parish.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps turn prayer into service, as Roque did all his life.

Roque González lived among the Guaraní as a brother, learning from them as much as he taught them. As you pray these nine days, you might keep in mind a particular community that is far from you, in culture or in circumstances, and carry it in your prayer: a mission, an Indigenous people, a parish in need, or a family of migrants near you.

Day 1: A child of two worlds

Born in Asunción to a Spanish family, Roque spoke Guaraní from childhood. He belonged to two worlds and became a bridge between them. God can use our whole story, with its mixtures and contrasts, to build communion.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for my roots and my story. Make me a bridge between people who do not understand each other. Amen.

Today: Learn a word or a greeting in the language of a neighbor or coworker from another culture.

Day 2: Choosing the last place

In 1609, when he was about to become vicar general of the diocese, Roque chose instead to enter the Society of Jesus and give himself to the mission. He preferred service to honors.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came to serve and not to be served. Free me from the search for recognition. Amen.

Today: Do a humble service at home or at work without drawing attention to it.

Day 3: Setting out into the unknown

While still a novice, Roque was sent to explore the territory of the Guaycurú, a people reputed to be fierce. He set out trusting in God, without knowing what awaited him.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to go where you send me, even when I am afraid. Amen.

Today: Take a step toward someone you have been avoiding.

Day 4: Building living temples

At San Ignacio Guazú, Roque built houses and a church, but he said the real work was to build up "the spiritual temples, which are the souls." Every work of the Church exists to bring people to God.

Prayer: Lord, build me up as a living temple of your Spirit, and help me to build up others in faith. Amen.

Today: Share a word of encouragement or of faith with someone.

Day 5: The joy of song and feast

In the reductions, music, singing, processions and feasts held a large place. Roque respected the culture of the Guaraní and let the Gospel take root in it with joy.

Prayer: Lord, fill our communities with joy. Let our liturgies and our feasts give you glory. Amen.

Today: Sing or listen to a hymn, and offer it to God.



The ruins of a Jesuit reduction in Paraguay.

Day 6: Justice for the poor

Roque stood firmly against the settlers who imposed forced labor on the Indigenous people. In a letter to his own brother, he denounced their greed. Love for the poor sometimes requires the courage to speak out.

Prayer: Lord, give me a heart that cannot stay indifferent to injustice, and the courage to defend the weak. Amen.

Today: Learn about a situation of injustice affecting Indigenous peoples or exploited workers, and pray for them.

Day 7: Caring without fear

During epidemics, Roque nursed the sick without fear of contagion. His love made him close to those whom others avoided.

Prayer: Lord, bless the sick and all who care for them. Make me close to those who suffer. Amen.

Today: Visit or call a sick person.

Day 8: Working together

Roque founded his last reductions with two young Jesuits, Alonso Rodríguez and Juan del Castillo. The mission is never the work of one person alone, and the three shared the same martyrdom.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who work at my side. Make us one in serving you. Amen.

Today: Thank a colleague, a fellow volunteer or a member of your parish for their help.

Day 9: The bell of Caaró

On November 15, 1628, Roque was struck down while fixing the bell of his little chapel at Caaró. He died calling people to prayer. According to tradition, his heart did not burn, and it is kept today in Asunción.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Roque and his companions, give me a heart burning with love that nothing can destroy. Bless missionaries and persecuted Christians. Amen.

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

Closing prayer

Saint Roque González, with Saint Alonso Rodríguez and Saint Juan del Castillo, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for Paraguay and for all the peoples of the Americas. Obtain for us a missionary heart, a love for justice and the courage to give our lives for Christ. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Roque González and pray the prayer to Saint Roque González.

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