

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Scholastica

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 10

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IN BRIEF

Saint Scholastica

Sister of Saint Benedict, 6th-century nun near Monte Cassino, mother of Benedictine nuns.

Feast day	February 10
Born	c. 480, Nursia (Norcia), Umbria, Italy
Died	c. 547, near Monte Cassino, Italy
Canonized	Pre-Congregation
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Benedictine nuns, schools, education, students, Le Mans, against storms, children with convulsions

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Scholastica to Love and Pray with Trust

Novena to Saint Scholastica

Monte Cassino Abbey, Tomb of Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Scholastica

Saint Scholastica, also called Scholastica of Nursia, was the sister of Saint Benedict, the father of Western monasticism. Consecrated to God from her youth, she lived in the 6th century near Monte Cassino, in Italy, at the head of a community of women following her brother's rule. We know her almost entirely from a few pages by Pope Saint Gregory the Great, which tell of her last meeting with Benedict during a famous stormy night. She is venerated as the mother of Benedictine nuns, and her feast day is February 10.

Who was Saint Scholastica?

Scholastica was born around 480 in Nursia, today Norcia, in Umbria, into a well-to-do family. Saint Gregory the Great, writing some fifty years after her death, presents her simply as Benedict's sister; a later tradition makes her his twin. According to tradition, their mother died shortly after their birth, and Scholastica was consecrated to God at a very early age.

Everything we know about her is found in the second book of Gregory's *Dialogues*, devoted to the life of Saint Benedict. These accounts, written around 593-594, are not a biography in the modern sense: they seek to edify the reader and to show the power of prayer. They are, however, based on testimonies gathered from disciples of Benedict, and Scholastica's existence is not in doubt.



Saint Scholastica, by Andrea Mantegna.

Key dates in the life of Saint Scholastica

- **Around 480**: Born in Nursia (Norcia), in Umbria.
- **Early 6th century**: According to tradition, she settles in the region of Subiaco, where her brother lives as a hermit.
- **Around 529**: Benedict founds the monastery of Monte Cassino; Scholastica settles below it, at Piumarola.
- **Around 547**: Last meeting with Benedict; she dies three days later, on a February 10 according to tradition.
- **Around 593-594**: Saint Gregory the Great tells her story in his *Dialogues*.
- **Late 7th century**: Relics attributed to the saint are taken to Gaul, to Fleury and Le Mans.
- **1950-1955**: Bones of Benedict and Scholastica are found under the high altar of Monte Cassino.

A nun in the shadow of Monte Cassino

According to tradition, Scholastica, sole heiress to a large fortune, gave it up to follow the religious life. She is said to have first settled near Subiaco with a few consecrated virgins, not far from the cave where Benedict lived as a hermit. When her brother founded the monastery of Monte Cassino, in southern Lazio, around 529, she settled about seven kilometers (four miles) below it, at Piumarola, today a hamlet in the municipality of Villa Santa Lucia.

There, with her sisters, she followed the rule written by Benedict. That is why she is regarded as the foundress of the women's branch of the Benedictine family. Gregory notes that brother and sister met once a year, in a house not far from Benedict's monastery, to spend the day praising God and talking about the spiritual life.

The night of the storm

The most famous story takes place at their last meeting, around 547. The day had passed in holy conversation, and night was falling. Scholastica begged her brother to stay until morning so they could keep talking about the joys of heaven. Benedict refused: his rule did not allow him to spend the night outside his monastery. His sister then laid her head on her joined hands and prayed in silence. The sky had been clear; at once a storm broke out, so violent that Benedict and his companions could not step outside.

"May God forgive you, sister, what have you done?" Benedict said, according to Gregory. She answered that she had asked him and he had not wanted to listen, but that God had heard her. So they spent the night awake, talking about God. Gregory concludes with a sentence that became the key to Scholastica's spirituality: she "could do more, because she loved more." The great lawgiver of monastic life lets himself be surpassed here by his sister's love.



The last meeting of Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica.

The dove and the shared tomb

Three days later, Gregory reports, Benedict, praying in his cell, saw his sister's soul rise to heaven in the form of a dove. He announced her death to his brothers and had her body carried to Monte Cassino and laid in the tomb he had prepared for himself. He joined her there soon after. Gregory comments that those whose souls had always been one in God were not separated in burial.

The journey of the relics

Monte Cassino was destroyed by the Lombards at the end of the 6th century and long remained abandoned. According to a French tradition, monks from Fleury, on the Loire, collected the bones of Benedict and Scholastica there around 660; part of the saint's relics were then entrusted to Le Mans at the end

of the 7th century. Around 875, Queen Richilde, wife of Charles the Bald, obtained a large share for the women's abbey she founded at Juvigny-sur-Loison, in the Meuse, where an annual pilgrimage still honors them. Monte Cassino always claimed to keep the bodies of both saints, and the dispute lasted for centuries.

After the abbey was destroyed by the bombing of 1944, the reconstruction led to the discovery under the high altar of an urn containing bones attributed to the two saints. They were solemnly replaced in 1955. The devotions of France and Italy can thus coexist, each keeping part of the heritage.

Why is Saint Scholastica the patron saint of nuns and schools?

As the sister of Saint Benedict and the head of the first community of women living by his rule, Scholastica is venerated as the mother of Benedictine nuns. Her name, which evokes the school (*schola*), has also made her a patron of schools, education, students and exams. She is the patron saint of the city of Le Mans, in France, and in memory of the storm she is invoked against bad weather, as well as for children suffering from convulsions.

In the United States, Benedictine sisters have carried her name to schools and colleges, such as the College of Saint Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. Her holiness fits in a single scene: a woman who prays with trust and whom God hears because she loves. She reminds us that the rule serves charity, and that the simplest prayer can change the course of things.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Scholastica and follow the novena to Saint Scholastica from February 1 to 9.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Scholastica in art

Scholastica is shown in the black habit of a Benedictine nun. Her usual attribute is the dove, recalling the vision of Benedict at her death. She often holds the book of the Rule and an abbess's crozier, and is sometimes depicted praying with her head on her joined hands, or at table with her brother as the storm rages outside.

Where to pray to Saint Scholastica

- **Monte Cassino** (Lazio, Italy): the tomb of Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica, under the high altar of the abbey basilica.
- **Subiaco** (Lazio): the Monastery of Saint Scholastica, placed under her protection.
- **Juvigny-sur-Loison** (Meuse, France): the church that keeps the largest share of her relics in France.
- **Le Mans** (France): the Church of Saint Benedict, which keeps a relic of the city's patron saint.
- **Dourgne** (Tarn, France): the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Scholastica.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Scholastica to Love and Pray with Trust

There is no prayer to Saint Scholastica that comes from her own hand: she left no writings. But the account of Saint Gregory the Great contains a sentence that sums up her whole life and that the Benedictine tradition loves to meditate on. You will find it below with its source, followed by an original prayer to Saint Scholastica.

Words to meditate on

> *"She could do more, because she loved more."*

Source: Saint Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, book II, chapter 33 (around 593-594), about the last meeting of Scholastica and her brother Benedict. In Latin: *Plus potuit, quae amplius amavit*.

Gregory writes these words after telling of the storm obtained by Scholastica's prayer. He adds that, since God is love, it was right that the one who loved more should be the more powerful.

Prayer to Saint Scholastica to love and pray with trust

Saint Scholastica, sister of Saint Benedict, you left everything to seek God in silence and in common prayer: teach me to give him first place in my life.

You laid your head on your joined hands and obtained from God what your brother refused you: teach me trusting prayer, the kind that does not calculate and dares to ask.

You could do more because you loved more: make love grow in me, stronger than rules and habits, stronger than fear.

I entrust to you monks and nuns, pupils and students, those preparing for an exam, and those going through a storm. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me conversations with those I love that bring us closer to God, and keep me in the hope of heaven, where you were reunited with your brother. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Scholastica's feast day is February 10, the traditional day of her death. You can pray to her before an exam or at the start of a school year, for a teacher or a student, for a monastery you love, or in the middle of an inner or outer storm. Her story also makes her a good companion for brothers and sisters, and for anyone who wants their friendships to lead them toward God.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Scholastica from February 1 to 9, and discover the life of Saint Scholastica.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Scholastica

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Scholastica as told by Saint Gregory the Great. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast on February 10, begin on February 1; it ends on February 9.

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. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.

The nine days follow the little we know of Scholastica: her search for God, her life with her sisters, her bond with her brother Benedict, the night of the storm and the dove of her death. The novena suits students, families, monastic communities and anyone who wants to learn a more trusting prayer.

Day 1: Seeking God

Scholastica was consecrated to God very young. Her whole life was a search for God, which is what the Rule of Saint Benedict asks of the monk before anything else. Seeking God is not reserved for monasteries: it is the vocation of every baptized person.

Prayer: Lord, grant that I may seek you every day, with a simple and undivided heart.

Today: Take ten minutes of silence to stand before God.

Day 2: Letting go to be free

According to tradition, she left a rich inheritance to follow Christ. Renunciation is not contempt for possessions, but freedom to love. What we hold too tightly ends up holding us; what we give away makes room for God and for others.

Prayer: Lord, free my heart from what clutters it, so that it may be wholly yours.

Today: Give away an object or a sum of money you can do without.

Day 3: Life in community

At Piumarola, Scholastica lived with her sisters under Benedict's rule. Holiness is also built in the patience of common life, with its daily frictions and small forgivenesses.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to live with others in gentleness and forgiveness.

Today: Do a quiet service for a member of your family or community.

Day 4: The bond between brother and sister

Once a year, Scholastica and Benedict met to talk about God. Their family affection became a path to holiness. They did not let the distance or their different missions weaken their bond: they made their rare meetings a time of shared prayer.

Prayer: Lord, bless my brothers and sisters, my family and my friends. Make our bonds a way to you.

Today: Call a brother, a sister or a friend you see too rarely.

Day 5: Talking about the things of God

Their last day was spent in "holy conversation." Daring to speak about our faith with those we love is a treasure. It need not be learned or eloquent: it is enough to say simply what God is doing in our lives.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the right words to share what you are doing in my life.

Today: Share with someone close a Gospel passage that has touched you.



Saint Scholastica in a stained glass window.

Day 6: Trusting prayer

Benedict refused to stay; Scholastica did not argue, she prayed. God answered with the storm. Hers was the prayer of a child who knows she is loved. She did not force her brother; she turned to God and left the answer to him. Trust is not stubbornness: it is placing our request in hands stronger than ours.

Prayer: Father, I present my intention to you with trust, as Saint Scholastica did.

Today: Write your intention on a piece of paper and place it before an image of Christ.

Day 7: Love stronger than the rule

"She could do more, because she loved more." The rule is good, but it serves charity. Benedict, the great master of the rule, accepted being taught by his sister's love.

Prayer: Lord, may love inspire all my actions, and may my principles never keep me from loving.

Today: Put a person ahead of your plans for the day, even if it means changing your schedule.

Day 8: The dove and heaven

Three days after their last meeting, Benedict saw his sister's soul rise to heaven like a dove. The death of the saints is an entrance into the peace of God. The dove, sign of the Holy Spirit and of peace, tells us that her life of prayer had prepared her for this last step.

Prayer: Lord, welcome our departed into your peace, and keep us in the hope of heaven.

Today: Pray for a deceased member of your family.

Day 9: United forever

Benedict and Scholastica rest in the same tomb. What the love of God has united, death does not separate. The communion of saints means that those we love who have died in Christ are not lost to us: they remain close in God.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Scholastica, make me grow in love. Amen.

Today: Thank God for someone who helped you to know him.

Closing prayer

Saint Scholastica, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for monks and nuns, for students, for families and for those going through a storm. Obtain for us the grace to love more, so that we may pray better. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Monte Cassino Abbey, Tomb of Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica

Monte Cassino Abbey overlooks the town of Cassino, in southern Lazio, halfway between Rome and Naples. Founded by Saint Benedict around 529, it keeps beneath the high altar of its basilica the tomb where, according to the monastery's tradition, Saint Benedict and his sister Saint Scholastica rest. It is the main pilgrimage site connected with the saint.

A monastery rebuilt many times

Benedict settled at the top of the mountain around 529, on the site of an old pagan place of worship, and built an oratory there dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. According to Saint Gregory the Great, it was there that he had his sister's body laid, in the tomb he had prepared for himself, before being buried there himself. A Latin inscription of the 17th century, still visible, recalls that the brother and sister, who came into the world together, departed together for heaven.

The abbey was destroyed several times: by the Lombards at the end of the 6th century, by the Saracens in the 9th century, by an earthquake in 1349, and then by the Allied bombing of February 15, 1944, during the Battle of Monte Cassino. It was rebuilt exactly as it had been after the war. During the work, an urn containing bones attributed to the two saints was found beneath the high altar; they were replaced there in 1955. Saint Paul VI consecrated the new basilica on October 24, 1964, and on that occasion proclaimed Saint Benedict patron of Europe.



Monte Cassino Abbey, above Cassino.

Visiting the abbey

The abbey is reached by a winding road from Cassino. The visit passes through several cloisters before reaching the basilica, richly decorated with marble. The tomb of the two saints lies beneath the high altar. In the crypt, a central chapel is dedicated to them, with two statues and mosaics illustrating their lives. The abbey also houses a museum and a famous library; the monastery remains home to a Benedictine community, and silence is asked.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Scholastica and the account of her last meeting with Benedict. At the tomb, you can entrust an intention to the saint, then say the prayer to Saint Scholastica. Taking part in the monks'

office, when possible, lets you pray as she prayed. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Scholastica

- **Piumarola** (Villa Santa Lucia, Lazio): the site of her monastery, a few miles below Monte Cassino.
- **Norcia** (Umbria): her native town and Saint Benedict's.
- **Subiaco** (Lazio): the Monastery of Saint Scholastica, near the places where Benedict lived as a hermit.
- **Juvigny-sur-Loison** (Meuse): the church that keeps a large share of her relics, honored in an annual pilgrimage.
- **Le Mans**: the city of which she is patron and where a relic is venerated at the Church of Saint-Benoît.

Practical information

The abbey is an active monastery: modest dress is required and some parts may be closed during services. Opening hours, Masses and visiting conditions vary with the season: check the official website of Monte Cassino Abbey before you come. Not far away, the Polish military cemetery and the other cemeteries of the 1944 battle recall the tragic history of the place.

Credits and sources

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