

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Silas

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 13

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IN BRIEF

Saint Silas

Christian of the first community in Jerusalem, companion of Saint Paul on his second missionary journey.

Feast day	July 13, July 30 (Eastern Churches)
Era	1st century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Silas in Times of Trial

Novena to Saint Silas

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Silas

Saint Silas, also called Silvanus, was a Christian of the first community in Jerusalem and the companion of Saint Paul on his second missionary journey. The Acts of the Apostles presents him as a prophet and one of the leaders of the Church. With Paul he was beaten and imprisoned at Philippi, then proclaimed the Gospel in Macedonia and Greece. The letters of the New Testament also show him at the side of Paul and of Peter. The Catholic Church celebrates him on July 13.

Who was Saint Silas?

Everything we know about Silas comes from the New Testament. The name Silas appears only in the Acts of the Apostles. The letters of Paul and the First Letter of Peter speak of a "Silvanus," the Latin form of the same name, and most commentators see them as the same person. According to Acts, Silas, like Paul, was a Roman citizen.

Silas first appears in chapter 15 of Acts, at the gathering known as the Council of Jerusalem, around the year 49. The apostles and elders had decided not to impose all the prescriptions of the law of Moses on Christians who came from paganism. To carry this decision to the Church of Antioch, they chose two "leading men among the brothers," Judas called Barsabbas and Silas. Acts adds that both were prophets, and that they encouraged and strengthened the community with many words.

Key dates in the life of Saint Silas

- **c. 49**: Sent by the Council of Jerusalem to Antioch, with Judas Barsabbas.
- **c. 50**: After parting from Barnabas, Paul chooses him as companion for his second journey.

- **c. 50**: Imprisoned at Philippi with Paul.
- **c. 50-51**: Mission in Thessalonica and Berea, then a stay in Corinth.
- **c. 51**: Named with Paul and Timothy at the head of the letters to the Thessalonians.

The companion of Saint Paul

After a disagreement with Barnabas, Paul chose Silas to set out again on mission. They first went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Joined by Timothy, they crossed into Europe and arrived at Philippi, in Macedonia. This is where the most famous episode of his life takes place.

Paul had freed a young slave girl who had a spirit of divination. Her owners, deprived of their income, had Paul and Silas arrested. The two men were beaten with rods and thrown into prison, their feet fastened in the stocks.

Singing hymns at midnight

About midnight, Acts tells us, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly a violent earthquake shook the prison: the doors flew open and the chains fell off. The jailer, thinking the prisoners had escaped, was about to kill himself, but Paul stopped him. The jailer then asked, "What must I do to be saved?" He washed their wounds and was baptized with his whole household. The next morning, when the magistrates wanted to release them quietly, Paul and Silas declared that they were Roman citizens who had been beaten without trial, and the officials came to apologize.

This scene of two prisoners singing in the dark has inspired Christians of every age. It is one of the clearest images in the New Testament of praise that does not wait for circumstances to improve.

Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth

The mission continued in Thessalonica, where the preaching stirred up a riot, and then in Berea, where the listeners examined the Scriptures every day to check what they heard. When Paul had to leave for Athens, Silas and Timothy stayed behind for a time, then rejoined him in Corinth. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul recalls that Christ was proclaimed among them "by me and Silvanus and Timothy." The two letters to the Thessalonians open with the names of all three: "Paul, Silvanus and Timothy."



The ancient site of Philippi, in Greek Macedonia.

Silvanus at the side of Peter

The First Letter of Peter ends with these words: "Through Silvanus, a faithful brother as I consider him, I have written briefly to you." If this Silvanus is indeed Paul's companion, then Silas served both great apostles, perhaps as the bearer or the secretary of the letter.

What tradition says

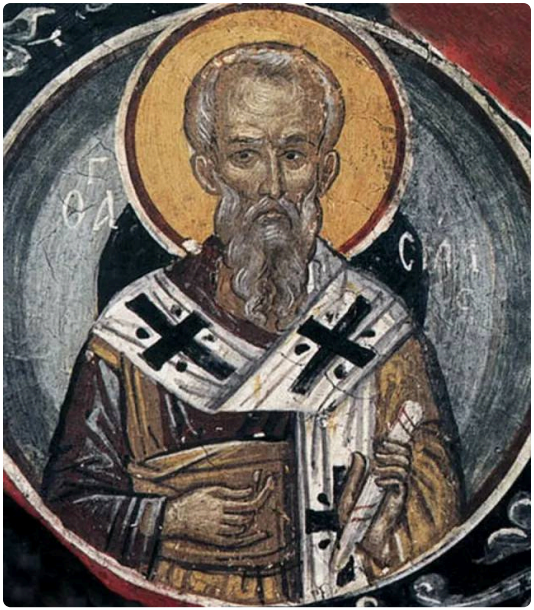
The New Testament says nothing about the end of his life. Later traditions count him among the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus and present him as bishop of Corinth, where he is said to have died after working many miracles. These accounts cannot be verified. He is celebrated on July 13 in the Catholic Church and on July 30 in the Eastern Churches.

What is Saint Silas the patron of?

Silas has no widely established official patronage. He is the saint of faithfulness in the background. He was not a founder but a companion: he carried the decisions of the Church, shared beatings and prison, and sang God's praise in the middle of the night. He can be prayed to for those who assist pastors, for missionaries, for prisoners and for anyone going through a time of trial.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Silas in art

- **Chains or the stocks**: he is most often shown with Paul in the prison at Philippi.
- **Light breaking into the prison**: a reminder of the earthquake that opened the doors.
- **A scroll**: in Eastern icons, where he is honored as an apostle among the seventy.



Saint Silas, icon.

Where to pray to Saint Silas

No major shrine holds relics of Saint Silas. Pilgrims following in the footsteps of Saint Paul in Greece visit the archaeological site of Philippi, where a spot is traditionally pointed out as the prison of Paul and Silas, as well as Thessalonica, Berea (Veria) and Corinth. Above all, Silas can be honored wherever the Acts of the Apostles is read and prayed.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Silas and the novena to Saint Silas.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Silas in Times of Trial

No ancient prayer to Saint Silas has come down to us, but the Acts of the Apostles has kept the image of him that Christians love most: a prisoner singing God's praise at midnight. Here is that passage, followed by an original prayer to Saint Silas.

A word from Scripture

> *"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."*

Source: Acts of the Apostles 16:25.

Prayer to Saint Silas

Saint Silas, faithful companion of Saint Paul, you left Jerusalem to carry the word of the Church and to strengthen your brothers and sisters in the faith. Help me to be a source of encouragement for those around me.

You were beaten and thrown into prison, and yet at midnight you prayed and sang to God. When night falls on my life, when I feel bound and without a way out, teach me to praise God still and to trust that he can open every door.

You served the apostles without seeking the first place. Pray for all who work in the background of the Church: assistants of pastors, catechists, volunteers and missionaries whose names no one knows.

I entrust to you prisoners and their families, those who are persecuted for their faith, and my own intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me a faithful heart, so that like you I may walk with others on the road of the Gospel to the end. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Silas is celebrated on July 13 in the Catholic Church and on July 30 in the Eastern Churches. You can pray to him:

- in a time of trial, when everything seems closed;
- for prisoners, prison chaplains and those who visit them;
- for missionaries and for all who serve the Church quietly;
- when you are asked to work as part of a team rather than in the spotlight.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Silas, and read the life of Saint Silas.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Silas

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what the New Testament tells us of Saint Silas. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on July 13, begin on July 4; it then ends on July 12. You can also pray it at any time of the year, especially in a time of trial or for someone in prison.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, the Bible passage it refers to. Then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life.

Day 1: A member of the first community

Silas belonged to the Church of Jerusalem, the community born at Pentecost. His faith was rooted in a living Church, among those who had known the apostles. No one becomes a Christian alone: we receive the faith from others (Acts 15:22).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the community that passed the faith on to me. Make me a living member of your Church.

Today: Pray for your parish and for those who brought you to the faith.

Day 2: Bearer of good news

The apostles sent Silas to Antioch to carry a decision that freed Christians from pagan backgrounds from burdens that were not theirs to bear. The letter brought joy to the community. Silas was the messenger of a word that sets free

(Acts 15:30-31).

Prayer: Lord, make me a bearer of good news, a word that lifts others up and does not weigh them down.

Today: Share a piece of good news with someone who needs it.

Day 3: The gift of encouragement

Acts says that Silas, who was a prophet, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. Encouragement is a real ministry. A kind and truthful word can give someone the strength to keep going (Acts 15:32).

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me words that build up and comfort, and teach me to notice who needs encouragement.

Today: Send a message of encouragement to someone who is struggling.

Day 4: Chosen as a companion

After his disagreement with Barnabas, Paul chose Silas to go with him. Silas said yes to a long, uncertain journey. Many vocations are not about leading but about walking faithfully with someone else (Acts 15:40).

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a faithful companion to those you have placed beside me, in my family, my work and my parish.

Today: Offer concrete help to a colleague or a family member.



The ancient site of Philippi, where Paul and Silas were imprisoned.

Day 5: Suffering for the Gospel

At Philippi, Silas was beaten with rods and thrown into prison with Paul, for having freed a young slave girl. He paid the price of a good deed. Following Christ sometimes brings misunderstanding and injustice (Acts 16:19-24).

Prayer: Lord, give strength to all who suffer for doing good, and to Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

Today: Pray for a Christian community that is persecuted today.

Day 6: Singing at midnight

Bound in the stocks, wounded and in the dark, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God, and the other prisoners listened. Their praise did not wait for deliverance. It was already a victory over fear (Acts 16:25).

Prayer: Lord, in my nights, teach me to praise you still, trusting that you are present even there.

Today: Sing or recite a psalm of praise, even if your heart is heavy.

Day 7: The jailer's household

When the earthquake opened the doors, Silas and Paul did not run away. They stayed to save the jailer, who was about to take his own life. That night he and his whole household were baptized. Freedom became, for Silas, an occasion to serve (Acts 16:26-34).

Prayer: Lord, I pray for those who are in despair. Send them someone who will say, "Do not harm yourself."

Today: Pray for prisoners, prison staff and chaplains, or support a prison ministry.

Day 8: Searching the Scriptures

In Berea, the listeners of Paul and Silas examined the Scriptures every day to see whether what they heard was true. Silas helped people to meet God in his Word (Acts 17:10-12).

Prayer: Lord, give me a love for your Word, and the desire to search it every day.

Today: Read a chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Day 9: A faithful brother

Peter, at the end of his first letter, calls Silvanus "a faithful brother." That is perhaps the most beautiful title one can receive. Silas did not seek glory: he simply stayed faithful, to Paul, to Peter and to Christ (1 Peter 5:12).

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Silas, make me faithful in small things and in great ones. Amen.

Today: Thank someone whose quiet faithfulness has supported you.

Closing prayer

Saint Silas, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for missionaries and for all who serve the Church in the background, for prisoners and for those who are going through a night of trial. Obtain for us a faithful heart and a voice that praises God in every circumstance. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be.

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

CREDITS

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