

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Silvia of Rome

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 3

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Silvia of Rome

Roman noblewoman of the sixth century, mother of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, patron saint of mothers of priests.

Feast day	November 3
Born	c. 520
Died	c. 592, Rome, Italy
Canonized	immemorial cult, entered in the Roman Martyrology in 1603
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	mothers of priests

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Silvia for Mothers and Vocations

Novena to Saint Silvia

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Silvia of Rome

Saint Silvia was a Roman noblewoman of the sixth century, wife of the senator Gordianus and mother of Pope Saint Gregory the Great. As a widow, she withdrew to a life of prayer on the Little Aventine while continuing to help the poor and the sick. Her son, who praised her, had her portrait painted in the family house on the Caelian Hill. Patron saint of mothers of priests, she is celebrated on November 3.

Who was Saint Silvia?

Few things about Silvia are certain, and almost everything we know comes from her son, Pope Gregory I, and from his biographers. She was born around 520, perhaps in Sicily, perhaps in Rome; some connect her to the great family of the *Octavii*. She had three sisters, two of whom, Tarsilla and Emiliana, are honored as saints for their life of prayer and charity. Gregory speaks in his writings of the holiness of these two aunts.

Around the age of eighteen, she married Gordianus, a Christian senator of the noble *gens Anicia*, a family that had already given the Church a pope, Felix III, an ancestor of Gregory. The couple lived in a family villa on the *clivus Scauri*, a street on the Caelian Hill in Rome.

Key dates

- **Around 520**: Born in Sicily or in Rome.
- **Around 538**: Marries the senator Gordianus.
- **Around 540**: Birth of her son Gregory, the future pope; a second son is born later.
- **Around 573**: Widowed, she withdraws to the Little Aventine for a life of prayer.

- **590**: Her son Gregory is elected pope.
- **Around 592**: Dies in Rome; Gregory has her buried in the family house on the Caelian.
- **1603**: Cardinal Baronius rebuilds her oratory and obtains the inclusion of her name in the Roman Martyrology.

A Christian family of Rome

Silvia and Gordianus had two sons: Gregory, born around 540, and another son whose name has not come down to us. According to Gregory's biographers, she was an attentive mother, eager to pass on the faith by teaching and by example. Both sons first followed their father's path in public administration: Gregory became prefect of Rome, the highest civil office in the city. Yet from his youth he was drawn to the contemplative life.

According to Roman tradition, Silvia and Gordianus devoted a large share of their wealth to the poor. Their home is linked to the *triclinium pauperum*, the hall where Gregory, once pope, had a meal served to the poor every day. It is today the Oratory of Saint Barbara, near the church of San Gregorio al Celio.

The widow of the Aventine

Around 573, Silvia lost her husband after more than thirty years of married life. She then withdrew to a family property on the Little Aventine, a little apart from the city, to live in prayer and meditation. This place, later called *Cella Nova*, would welcome Eastern monks at the end of the century, who founded there a monastery dedicated to Saint Sabbas. This is the origin of the church of San Saba.

At the same time, Gregory gave up his offices, turned the family house on the Caelian into a monastery dedicated to Saint Andrew, and became a monk there. Tradition says that his mother, worried about his fragile health, had

vegetables from her garden brought to him every day. According to an ancient account, she once sent him a dish of legumes in a silver bowl, and Gregory gave the bowl to a poor man.

Mother of a pope

Silvia saw her son become a deacon, then papal representative in Constantinople, and finally pope in 590. She died in Rome around 592. Gregory had her buried in the family house that had become a monastery, near the tomb of her sisters Tarsilla and Emiliana.

He had her portrait painted on a wall, holding a cross and a book inscribed with a verse from Psalm 118 (Psalm 119 in most modern Bibles): "My soul shall live and shall praise thee: and thy judgments shall help me." In this way the son left to later generations an image of his mother at prayer.

Rediscovered in Rome

In 1603, Cardinal Baronius, the great historian of the Church, rebuilt the Oratory of Saint Silvia on the Caelian and obtained from Pope Clement VIII that her name be entered in the Roman Martyrology, on November 3. In the twentieth century, at the request of Pope John XXIII, a parish of Saint Silvia was created in the Portuense district of Rome.

Why is Saint Silvia the patron saint of mothers of priests?

Silvia is a saint of spiritual motherhood. She founded no order and left no writings, but she raised a son who would become one of the greatest popes in history, supported him in his monastic vocation and saw him become bishop of Rome. That is why mothers of priests, and of men and women religious, have chosen her as their patron. She is also prayed to for widows and for all parents who pass on the faith to their children, much like Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Silvia in art

Saint Silvia is usually shown as a Roman noblewoman or a widow. Following the portrait her son had painted, she may hold a cross and a book, the open book of the Psalms. She is often represented beside her son Gregory, as in the statue of the Roman parish that bears her name.

Where to pray to Saint Silvia

- **Rome**: the Oratory of Saint Silvia, beside the church of San Gregorio al Celio.
- **Rome**: the church of San Saba, on the Little Aventine.
- **Rome**: the parish church of Saint Silvia, in the Portuense district.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Silvia and the novena to Saint Silvia.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Silvia for Mothers and Vocations

As far as we know, there is no traditional prayer to Saint Silvia whose text can be vouched for. Saintspedia offers an original prayer, inspired by what tradition remembers of her: the attentive mother of Saint Gregory the Great, the charitable wife, the widow who withdrew to a life of prayer.

A mother at prayer

Silvia passed on the faith to her son, supported him in his vocation as a monk and saw him become pope. After her husband's death, she lived in prayer on the Little Aventine, without ceasing to help the poor. Her son had her portrait painted with a book bearing this verse of the Psalms: "My soul shall live and shall praise thee: and thy judgments shall help me."

Prayer to Saint Silvia for Mothers and Vocations

Saint Silvia, mother of Saint Gregory,
you passed on the faith to your children by your words and by your example:
bless the mothers and fathers
who want to raise their children in the love of God.

You supported your son in his vocation:
I entrust to you the mothers of priests,
of religious brothers and sisters.
Give them peace, humble joy and trust in God.

You lived your widowhood in prayer and charity:
comfort widows and people who live alone,
and help them find a new way of giving themselves.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).
Through your intercession, may my soul live to praise the Lord. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- On November 3, the feast of Saint Silvia in the Roman Martyrology.
- On the day of a priestly ordination or a religious profession, especially by the new priest's or religious's mother.
- For a son or daughter who is discerning a vocation.
- In grief after the death of a husband or wife.
- For mothers who worry about the health or faith of their grown children.

A prayer for mothers of priests

> *Saint Silvia, you gave the Church a great shepherd. Watch over the mothers of priests: may they support their sons with prayer, and may their sons be holy and faithful servants of Christ. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Silvia or pray the novena to Saint Silvia, from October 26 to November 3.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Silvia

This novena to Saint Silvia is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the Roman noblewoman who was a wife, the mother of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, and a widow given to prayer and charity. To end on November 3, her feast day, begin it on October 26. You can also pray it at any time, especially before an ordination or a religious profession, for a child's vocation or in widowhood.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act suggested for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: A woman of faith

Silvia was born around 520, in Sicily or in Rome. Of her sisters, two, Tarsilla and Emiliana, are honored as saints. Faith was lived and shared in her family. Gregory himself would later write about the holiness of his aunts, a sign of how much this household marked him.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, thank God with me for the family in which I received the faith, and pray for those who did not have this gift. Amen.

Today: Pray for your brothers, sisters and cousins by name.

Day 2: A Christian marriage

Around the age of eighteen, Silvia married the senator Gordianus. Together they made their home a place of faith and generosity for more than thirty years.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, bless married couples. May they help each other grow in faith and love, through the joys and trials of life. Amen.

Today: Pray for a married couple you know, or for your own marriage.

Day 3: A mother who teaches

According to Gregory's biographers, Silvia was an attentive mother who passed on the faith by teaching and by example. The pope who would reform the Church first learned to pray at home.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, help parents to be the first teachers of the faith for their children, with patience and joy. Amen.

Today: Teach a child a prayer, or pray together as a family.

Day 4: Open hands for the poor

Silvia and Gordianus gave a large share of their wealth to the poor. Their son would later feed the poor every day in a hall near the family home. Generosity learned in childhood bore fruit in a whole pontificate.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, make our homes open and generous, and teach our children to share. Amen.

Today: Share a meal, or give to a soup kitchen or food pantry.

Day 5: Letting a son follow God

Gregory was prefect of Rome, the highest civil office in the city. He gave it all up to become a monk. Silvia did not hold him back; she supported him. Letting a child follow God's call, even when it upsets our plans, is an act of deep love and trust.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, pray for parents whose children choose the priesthood or religious life. Give them generous and trusting hearts. Amen.

Today: Pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life in your diocese.

Day 6: A mother's care

Worried about Gregory's fragile health, Silvia had vegetables from her garden brought to his monastery every day. Love shows itself in small, faithful gestures, repeated day after day without fuss.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, bless mothers who worry about their children's health. Give them peace and practical wisdom. Amen.

Today: Do a small, practical kindness for a family member.

Day 7: The widow at prayer

After her husband's death around 573, Silvia withdrew to the Little Aventine to live in prayer, without forgetting the poor and the sick.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, comfort widows and widowers. Help them carry their grief and discover a new way to give themselves. Amen.

Today: Call or visit a widow, a widower or a person who lives alone.

Day 8: Mother of a pope

Silvia saw her son become a deacon, a papal envoy in Constantinople and, in 590, pope. Gregory the Great would become one of the most important popes in the history of the Church.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, pray for the Pope and for all bishops and priests. Watch over their mothers and their families. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Pope and for your parish priest.

Day 9: My soul shall live

Silvia died in Rome around 592. Gregory had her portrait painted with a verse of the Psalms: "My soul shall live and shall praise thee." Her whole life, as wife, mother and widow, was a song of praise.

Prayer: Saint Silvia, present to God all the intentions of this novena. May my soul, like yours, live to praise the Lord forever. Amen.

Today: Pray Psalm 119 slowly, or a part of it, as a prayer of praise.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God,*
> *you gave Saint Silvia the grace to be a faithful wife,*
> *a mother who formed a great saint,*
> *and a widow devoted to prayer and charity.*
> *Through her intercession, bless families,*
> *support the mothers of priests and religious,*
> *comfort those who mourn,*
> *and raise up holy vocations in your Church.*
> *Grant us the graces we ask in this novena,*
> *through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Silvia or pray the prayer to Saint Silvia.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: Unknown author, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com