

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Spyridon of Trimythus

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: December 14

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IN BRIEF

Saint Spyridon of Trimythus

Shepherd who became bishop of Trimythus in Cyprus in the fourth century, wonderworker venerated in Corfu.

Feast day	December 14, December 12 (Eastern Churches)
Born	c. 270, Cyprus
Died	c. 348, Trimythus, Cyprus
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Corfu

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Spyridon of Trimythus

Saint Spyridon was a fourth-century bishop in Cyprus, a shepherd who became a pastor of souls, known for his simplicity, his charity and the many miracles tradition attributes to him. According to ancient historians he took part in the Council of Nicaea, and he is one of the most popular saints of the Orthodox world. Since the fifteenth century his relics have been venerated on the Greek island of Corfu, of which he is the protector. He is listed in the Roman Martyrology on December 14 and celebrated on December 12 in the Eastern Churches.

Who was Saint Spyridon?

Spyridon was born in Cyprus around 270, according to tradition in the village of Assia. He was a shepherd, married and the father of a daughter, Irene. After his wife's death, he led a life of prayer and charity, and the people chose him as bishop of Trimythus (Trimithous), a small town on the island.

Fifth-century Church historians, Rufinus, Socrates and Sozomen, write about him. They report that he remained a shepherd even after becoming a bishop, and tell several stories about his kindness and his spiritual gifts. His name also appears among the bishops who defended the faith of Nicaea at the Council of Serdica, around 343.

Around this historical core, the Greek Lives gathered many marvelous stories that should be read with caution. He is venerated by both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, which call him the "Wonderworker."

Key dates

- **c. 270**: Born in Cyprus, according to tradition.

- **Early fourth century**: A married shepherd, then a widower; elected bishop of Trimythus.
- **325**: Takes part in the Council of Nicaea, according to ancient historians.
- **c. 343**: His name appears among the bishops of the Council of Serdica.
- **c. 348**: Dies at Trimythus, according to tradition.
- **Seventh century**: His relics are moved to Constantinople.
- **1456**: Shortly after the fall of Constantinople, they reach Corfu.
- **1589**: They are placed in the Church of Saint Spyridon in Corfu.

The shepherd bishop

The ancient historians stress Spyridon's simplicity. Even as a bishop, he went on tending his sheep. Sozomen tells that one night thieves came to steal his animals. In the morning he found them held fast inside the fold, unable to move. He freed them, gave them a fatherly rebuke and handed them a ram, so that they would not have stayed up all night for nothing.

In icons he is often shown wearing a shepherd's hat of woven wicker.

Sozomen also reports that once, at a gathering of bishops in Cyprus, Spyridon corrected a preacher who, while quoting the Gospel, had replaced a simple word with a more elegant one. He asked him whether he thought himself better than the one who had spoken that word. The story shows his deep respect for the Word of God.

At the Council of Nicaea

In 325, according to the ancient historians, Spyridon took part in the first ecumenical council, held at Nicaea against the heresy of Arius, who denied the full divinity of Christ.

A famous tradition tells that a philosopher defending Arius was converted by the very simple profession of faith of an old bishop; the Greek Lives identified this bishop as Spyridon. Another, later tradition credits him with a more astonishing gesture: to explain the unity of God in three Persons, he is said to have squeezed a brick in his hand, which separated into fire, water and earth. These stories express the conviction that the faith of simple people meets the faith of the learned.

The father of Irene

The ancient historians record a moving episode. His daughter Irene, who had died while he was away, had been given a valuable deposit by a woman for safekeeping. No one knew where she had hidden it. Spyridon went to her tomb, called her by name, and learned from her where to find the deposit, which he returned to its owner. The historians tell the story as it was told in their time; it bears witness to the bishop's reputation for holiness.

From Cyprus to Corfu

Spyridon died at Trimythus around 348. In the seventh century, because of Arab raids on Cyprus, his relics were taken to Constantinople. Shortly before or after the fall of the city in 1453, they were taken to safety and reached Corfu in 1456. Since 1589 they have rested in the Church of Saint Spyridon in Corfu.

Why is Saint Spyridon the patron saint of Corfu?

The people of Corfu have kept his relics for more than five centuries, and they credit him with protecting the island from famine, epidemics and the Ottoman siege of 1716. In gratitude, they honor him with four great processions every year, carrying his relics through the streets of the old town. He has become the protector of the whole island.

What can we learn from Saint Spyridon?

Saint Spyridon is the saint of simplicity. A shepherd, he remained a shepherd when he became a bishop; without great learning, he defended the faith of the Church with the wisdom of the humble. His charity even toward thieves, his uprightness and his trust in God left a deep mark on those who knew him.

We can pray to him for shepherds and farmers, for those who lack bread or water, for the sick, and for the unity of Christians of East and West, who venerate him together. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Spyridon and the novena to Saint Spyridon.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Spyridon in art

- **The shepherd's hat**: his most distinctive sign, a rounded hat of woven wicker worn with bishop's vestments.
- **The omophorion**: the Eastern bishop's stole, marked with crosses, worn over his shoulders.
- **The brick**: in some icons he holds a brick from which flame and water spring, recalling the tradition of Nicaea.

Where to pray to Saint Spyridon

- **Corfu** (Greece): the Church of Saint Spyridon, which keeps his relics.
- **Cyprus**: the area of Trimythus (Tremetousia), where he was bishop.
- In any church on December 12 according to the Eastern calendar, or on December 14, the day of his entry in the Roman Martyrology.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Spyridon, Bishop and Wonderworker

Saint Spyridon, the shepherd who became bishop of Trimythus in Cyprus, has been invoked for centuries as the protector of Corfu and as a saint close to humble people. The Eastern Churches have many hymns in his honor; here is a prayer inspired by what the ancient historians tell us about his simplicity and his charity.

Prayer to Saint Spyridon

Saint Spyridon, shepherd and pastor, you kept watch over your sheep even as a bishop. Teach me to remain simple and close to those entrusted to me.

You forgave the thieves and gave them something to live on. Give me a generous heart that answers evil with good.

With simple words you confessed faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Strengthen my faith, and keep it from the pride of the clever and from lukewarmness.

The faithful call on you in drought, in famine and in sickness. Pray for those who lack bread, water or health, and for all who work the land.

Saint honored in East and West, pray for the unity of Christians. I also entrust to you this intention: (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Spyridon is celebrated on December 12 in the Eastern Churches, and the Roman Martyrology commemorates him on December 14. In Corfu, his relics are carried in procession on Palm Sunday, Holy Saturday, August 11 and the first Sunday of November. You can pray to him:

- in times of drought, famine or epidemic;
- for shepherds, farmers and all who work the land;
- for the sick and for those who lack what they need to live;
- for the unity of Catholic and Orthodox Christians, who venerate him together.

A short invocation

During the day, you can repeat this simple prayer: *"Saint Spyridon, humble shepherd and faithful bishop, pray to Christ our God for us."*

To pray with him at greater length, follow the novena to Saint Spyridon. You can also read the life of Saint Spyridon.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Spyridon

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Spyridon as told by the ancient Church historians. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on December 12, his feast in the Eastern Churches, begin it on December 4; to finish it on December 14, the day of his entry in the Roman Martyrology, begin it on December 6. It can also be prayed at any time, especially in times of drought, illness or need.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short 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 you live in the spirit of Saint Spyridon: simplicity, charity and trust in God. You can pray it alone, with your family or with a parish group. Catholics and Orthodox Christians both honor Saint Spyridon, so this novena can also be a quiet prayer for Christian unity.

Day 1: A shepherd of Cyprus

Spyridon was a shepherd before he was a bishop. He knew the fields, the weather and the needs of his flock. God chose a man of simple work to shepherd his people. No life is too ordinary to become a path to holiness.

Prayer: Lord, help me to find you in my daily work, however simple it may be.

Today: Offer your work today to God, and do it with care.

Day 2: Husband and father

Spyridon was married and the father of a daughter, Irene. He knew the joys and responsibilities of family life, and also the grief of losing his wife. Holiness grows within family life, not apart from it.

Prayer: Lord, bless our families, comfort widows and widowers, and keep parents and children united in your love.

Today: Pray for each member of your family by name.

Day 3: Chosen by the people

After his wife's death, Spyridon lived in prayer and charity, and the people chose him as their bishop. They recognized in him a man of God. Our lives also speak, often more loudly than our words.

Prayer: Lord, let my life bear witness to you, so that others may come to know your goodness.

Today: Pray for your bishop and for the priests of your parish.

Day 4: The bishop who stayed a shepherd

Even as a bishop, Spyridon went on tending his sheep. Honors did not change him. He remained the same humble man, close to ordinary people.

Prayer: Lord, keep me humble and simple, whatever responsibilities I am given.

Today: Do a humble task that you would usually leave to someone else.

Day 5: Mercy for the thieves

When thieves tried to steal his sheep and were found held fast in the fold, Spyridon freed them, corrected them like a father and gave them a ram. He answered wrongdoing with mercy and generosity.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to answer evil with good, and to forgive those who wrong me.

Today: Do something kind for someone who has hurt or annoyed you.

Day 6: Respect for the Word of God

Spyridon corrected a preacher who had replaced a simple word of the Gospel with a more elegant one. For him, the words of Christ were not to be improved upon, but received with reverence.

Prayer: Lord, give me a deep love and respect for your Word.

Today: Read a passage of the Gospel slowly, and keep one word in your heart.

Day 7: The faith of Nicaea

According to the ancient historians, Spyridon took part in the Council of Nicaea, which proclaimed that Jesus Christ is true God, one in being with the Father. Tradition remembers a simple bishop whose faith converted a learned philosopher.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, true God and true man, strengthen my faith in you.

Today: Pray the Nicene Creed slowly and attentively.

Day 8: A father's love

The story of Irene and the hidden deposit shows a father who loved his daughter and a bishop who cared for justice, returning to a woman what belonged to her. Love and justice go together.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you my loved ones who have died. Grant them eternal rest.

Today: Return or repay something you owe, or pray for a loved one who has died.

Day 9: Protector of the people

For more than five centuries, the people of Corfu have kept his relics and called on him in famine, epidemic and danger. The saints remain close to those who pray to them, and their love continues in God.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayers of Saint Spyridon, protect our homes, our cities and all who are in danger.

Today: Help someone in need with food, a visit or a gift.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Spyridon, humble shepherd and faithful bishop, you kept the faith of the Church with simple words and showed mercy even to thieves. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Obtain for me a simple heart, a strong faith and a generous charity. Pray for the sick, for those who lack bread and water, for all who work the land, and for the unity of Christians of East and West. Amen.*

This novena is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer. You can also pray the prayer to Saint Spyridon.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint Spyridon in Corfu, Relics of the Saint

In the heart of the old town of Corfu, in Greece, the Church of Saint Spyridon has kept since 1589 the relics of Saint Spyridon, bishop of Trimythus in Cyprus in the 4th century. The saint is the protector of the island, and his church, recognizable by its tall bell tower, is the heart of the religious life of the Corfiots.

Relics from Constantinople

After Saint Spyridon's death, around 348, his body was venerated at Trimythus. In the 7th century, Arab raids against Cyprus led to its transfer to Constantinople. Shortly before or after the city's capture by the Ottomans in 1453, the relics were put in safekeeping; they arrived in Corfu in 1456. According to a local tradition, a priest carried them hidden in sacks of straw. Kept at first in other churches on the island, they were installed in 1589 in the church built for them, where they remain today.

The protector of Corfu

The people of Corfu credit Saint Spyridon with delivering their island on several occasions: during a famine, during plague epidemics in the 17th century, and during the Ottoman siege of 1716. Each year, four solemn processions, called litanies, carry his relics through the city: on Palm Sunday, on Holy Saturday, on August 11, and on the first Sunday of November. His feast is celebrated on December 12. Many Corfiots bear his name, Spyros or Spyridoula.

What you will see

The church, with a simple plan, is richly decorated: a painted ceiling, a marble iconostasis, and many silver lamps offered by the faithful. In a chapel to the right of the sanctuary rests the saint's body, in a silver reliquary. Pilgrims come in great numbers, often for a brief time of prayer, to light a candle or kiss the reliquary. The bell tower, visible from afar, is one of the landmarks of the city.

Praying at the Church of Saint Spyridon

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Spyridon. Before the reliquary, a time of silence lets you pray for the sick, for those lacking necessities, and for the unity of Christians of East and West. The prayer to Saint Spyridon suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

The church is in the old town of Corfu, a few steps from the Esplanade (Spianada) and the Liston. It belongs to the Orthodox Church and is open to visitors outside services; modest dress is requested, and visitors should be discreet during the prayer of the faithful. On procession days, the city is very lively. Ask on site for the times of services and of the exposition of the relics.

Credits and sources

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