

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Stanislaus Kostka

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 13

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IN BRIEF

Saint Stanislaus Kostka

Young Polish nobleman who became a Jesuit novice and died in Rome at seventeen, patron saint of young people and novices.

Feast day	November 13, August 15
Born	October 28, 1550, Rostkowo, Poland
Died	August 15, 1568, Rome, Italy
Canonized	December 31, 1726, by Pope Benedict XIII
Era	16th century
Patron saint of	young people, students, novices, Poland

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Stanislaus Kostka

Saint Stanislaus Kostka was a young Polish nobleman of the 16th century who, at seventeen, ran away from Vienna on foot so that he could join the Jesuits against his family's wishes. After walking hundreds of miles to Rome, he died there only ten months into his novitiate, on August 15, 1568, at the age of seventeen. Canonized in 1726, he is a patron saint of young people, students and novices. The Society of Jesus celebrates his feast on November 13.

Who was Saint Stanislaus Kostka?

Stanislaus was born on October 28, 1550, at the castle of Rostkowo in Masovia, into a family of the high Polish nobility, several of whose members held important offices in the service of the kingdom. His father, Jan Kostka, dreamed of brilliant careers for his sons. In 1564, at fourteen, Stanislaus was sent with his older brother Paul and a tutor to the Jesuit college in Vienna.

The college was a place of excellence. Stanislaus learned German, Latin and the basics of Greek, and proved a very good student. But what struck people most was his life of prayer. He received Communion often, which was rare at the time, went to confession regularly and joined a Marian sodality that combined prayer with help for prisoners and destitute travelers. When the boarding school closed in 1565, the two brothers lodged in the house of a Lutheran senator. Stanislaus's long night prayers irritated his brother and their companions, who mocked him and eventually mistreated him.

Key dates in the life of Saint Stanislaus Kostka

- **October 28, 1550**: Born at Rostkowo, Poland.
- **July 1564**: Arrives at the Jesuit college in Vienna.

- **December 1566**: Falls gravely ill and recovers, which he attributes to Saint Barbara; he resolves to enter the Society of Jesus.
- **August 10, 1567**: Escapes from Vienna disguised as a beggar.
- **September 1567**: Welcomed by Peter Canisius at Dillingen, in Bavaria.
- **October 25, 1567**: Reaches Rome after crossing the Alps on foot.
- **Late October 1567**: Enters the novitiate, admitted by Francis Borgia.
- **August 15, 1568**: Dies in Rome, at the novitiate of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale.
- **August 14, 1605**: Beatified by Pope Paul V.
- **December 31, 1726**: Canonized by Pope Benedict XIII, together with Aloysius Gonzaga.

A vocation opposed

In December 1566, Stanislaus fell seriously ill. The Lutheran owner of the house refused to let a Catholic priest bring him Communion. According to the account handed down by his first biographers, the young man prayed to Saint Barbara, patron of his sodality, and saw her come with two angels to bring him the Eucharist. He recovered shortly afterward, to the surprise of those around him. His decision was made: he would enter the Society of Jesus.

The obstacles were many. He was very young, and his father was a powerful lord whose anger people feared. The Jesuit provincial of Austria refused to admit him. To those who advised him to wait for his parents' consent, Stanislaus replied that he knew them too well to hope for their permission, and that he had to keep the promise he had made to Christ.

The flight to Rome

At dawn on August 10, 1567, Stanislaus left Vienna dressed as a beggar. His brother Paul set off in pursuit, without success. In about two weeks he reached Augsburg, then Dillingen, where Saint Peter Canisius, provincial of the Jesuits in Germany, lived. Canisius recognized that his vocation was genuine, tested him for a time at the college, then sent him to Rome with a letter for the superior general, Saint Francis Borgia. With two other young candidates, Stanislaus made the journey from Dillingen to Rome on foot, arriving on October 25, 1567.

A few days later he began his novitiate, first at the house of the Gesù, then at the new novitiate of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, opened in early 1568. Among his companions were Claudio Acquaviva, future superior general of the Society, and Rodolfo Acquaviva, who would die a martyr in India. All of them were struck by his joy, his gentleness and his spirit of service. From Poland, however, came a letter from his father, extraordinarily violent, threatening to throw him into a dungeon if he ever came home. Stanislaus answered gently that he hoped one day to regain his father's affection.

Dying on the feast of the Assumption

In early August 1568, Stanislaus wrote a letter to the Virgin Mary asking her to take him to heaven on the day of her Assumption, and he kept it on him. On August 10 a fever broke out; malaria was common in Rome at the time. On the 13th he was carried to the infirmary. He died on the morning of August 15, 1568. His brother Paul, sent by their father to bring him back to Poland by force, arrived too late.

What does his holiness teach us?

Stanislaus Kostka founded nothing, wrote nothing, and died a novice. His holiness is that of a young man who took God seriously, who knew how to say no to the pressure of his surroundings and who risked everything to follow an inner call, without ever answering violence with violence. His joy and purity of heart left a deep mark on those who knew him.

The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on August 15, the day of his death, which is also the solemnity of the Assumption. The Society of Jesus celebrates him on November 13, and the Church in Poland on September 18.

Why is Saint Stanislaus Kostka the patron saint of young people and students?

He died at seventeen, after years spent as a student in Vienna, and his whole story is that of a teenager making a life choice. That is why he is invoked as a patron of young people, students and novices, and of all who are discerning a vocation. He is also one of the patron saints of Poland. Polish immigrants carried his name abroad: in the United States, several parishes bear it, among them the Basilica of Saint Stanislaus Kostka in Winona, Minnesota, and the historic Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church in Chicago.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Stanislaus Kostka and the novena to Saint Stanislaus Kostka, from November 4 to 12.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Stanislaus Kostka in art

He is shown as a beardless young man in the black cassock of a Jesuit novice. He is often depicted kneeling before the Virgin Mary, sometimes receiving the Child Jesus in his arms, or receiving Communion from an angel or from Saint

Barbara, in memory of his illness in Vienna. The most famous image of him is the marble statue by the French sculptor Pierre Le Gros the Younger, which shows him on his deathbed in a posture of peaceful surrender.



The church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale in Rome, where Saint Stanislaus rests.

Where to pray to Saint Stanislaus Kostka

- **Rome**: the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, Bernini's masterpiece, where his relics rest, and the adjoining rooms of the former novitiate, which hold the marble statue of him on his deathbed.
- **Rome**: the church of the Gesù, where he began his novitiate.
- **Rostkowo** (Masovia, Poland): his birthplace.
- **Vienna** (Austria): the city of his studies at the Jesuit college.
- **Dillingen** (Bavaria): the town where Peter Canisius welcomed him.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Stanislaus Kostka for Young People and Vocations

Saint Stanislaus Kostka left no spiritual writings: he died at seventeen, still a novice. Tradition and his biographers attribute two sayings to him. You will find them below with their context, followed by an original prayer to Saint Stanislaus Kostka for young people and vocations.

Two sayings of Saint Stanislaus

> *"I was born for greater things." (Ad maiora natus sum.)*

Source: a motto that Jesuit tradition attributes to Saint Stanislaus Kostka, expressing his desire not to settle for the worldly ambitions his family had in mind for him. The attribution is traditional; the phrase does not appear in anything written in his own hand.

> *"I hope that in time you will give me back your former affection."*

Source: Stanislaus's reply to his father's threatening letter, as reported by his biographers, Rome, 1568.

Prayer to Saint Stanislaus Kostka for young people and vocations

Saint Stanislaus, you had the courage to follow God's call in spite of mockery, threats and distance. Pray for the young people who are looking for their way. Help them hear the voice of the Lord and not be afraid to answer it.

You walked all the way to Rome to keep your promise: make me faithful to my commitments, even when the road is long.

You answered your father's anger with gentleness: teach me to keep peace in family conflicts and to hope for reconciliation.

You loved the Virgin Mary as a mother: lead me to her. I entrust to you students, novices and all who are preparing a life choice, and also my own intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me a pure and joyful heart that always seeks greater things: the things of God. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Stanislaus Kostka is celebrated on November 13 by the Society of Jesus and in many communities. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on August 15, the day of his death, and Poland keeps his feast on September 18. Many people turn to him at exam time, during a period of discernment, or before an important life decision. Parents and grandparents can also pray it for a teenager who is drifting or searching.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Stanislaus Kostka, and read the life of Saint Stanislaus Kostka. His relics rest in Rome, in the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Stanislaus Kostka

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Stanislaus Kostka. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast day, November 13, begin it on November 4. It can also be prayed at any time of the year, especially before exams, during a time of discernment or for a young person you love.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then a Hail Mary, in memory of Stanislaus's love for the Virgin Mary. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day. This novena is especially suited to young people, students and anyone discerning a vocation.

You can pray it alone, as a family, or with a youth group, a class or a parish confirmation group. If you are praying for someone else, for example a son, a daughter or a student preparing for an exam, you may name that person at the start of each day.

Day 1: A childhood in the faith

In his noble family in Masovia, Stanislaus received a living faith. Long before his great decisions, prayer was already part of his life. Faith is often a gift we receive from others before it becomes our own choice.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for those who handed on the faith to me. Bless them and reward them.

Today: Thank, with a message or a prayer, someone who helped you come to know God.

Day 2: Studying seriously

At the college in Vienna, Stanislaus was an excellent student. He learned languages and worked hard. For him, work done well was also a way of serving God.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind and give me perseverance in my work and studies.

Today: Carefully finish a task you have been putting off.

Day 3: Standing firm under mockery

His brother and companions laughed at his prayers and mistreated him. Stanislaus did not give up his prayer, and he did not take revenge. Fidelity sometimes means accepting not to be understood.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to stay faithful without despising those who hurt me.

Today: Pray for someone who has wronged you.

Day 4: The Eucharist

Stanislaus received Communion often, which was rare in his time. When he was ill, he longed for the Eucharist, and the story of his recovery is tied to that desire. Christ in the Eucharist was the center of his young life.

Prayer: Jesus, present in the Eucharist, make my hunger for your presence grow.

Today: Go to a weekday Mass or spend some time in adoration.

Day 5: Daring to set out

On August 10, 1567, he left Vienna dressed as a beggar to answer God's call. It sometimes takes courage to go where the Lord is waiting for us, even when those around us do not understand.

Prayer: Lord, give me the boldness to do your will, even when it upsets my habits.

Today: Take one concrete step toward a decision you keep postponing.



Saint Stanislaus Kostka, stained glass window.

Day 6: The long walk

From Dillingen to Rome, he crossed the Alps on foot. Every day of walking was a prayer. The Christian life is a road too, made of small faithful steps rather than great leaps.

Prayer: Lord, walk with me on the road, especially when I am tired.

Today: Take a prayerful walk, or pray a Rosary on the way somewhere.

Day 7: Letting yourself be guided

Peter Canisius, then Francis Borgia, welcomed him and tested his vocation. Stanislaus accepted being accompanied and formed. No one discerns well alone.

Prayer: Lord, place trustworthy guides on my path and give me a teachable heart.

Today: Ask a person you trust for advice on an important question.

Day 8: Gentleness in the face of violence

His father wrote him a letter full of threats. Stanislaus answered with the hope of reconciliation. Gentleness is not weakness: it is the strength of those who refuse to let anger have the last word.

Prayer: God of peace, heal the wounds in our families and teach us to forgive.

Today: Make a gesture of reconciliation toward someone close to you.

Day 9: With Mary in heaven

He had asked the Virgin Mary to take him with her on the day of the Assumption. He died on August 15, 1568, at seventeen. His life was short, but it was full.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Stanislaus Kostka and of the Virgin Mary, grant me what is good for me. Amen.

Today: Entrust a young person you know to Mary.

Closing prayer

Saint Stanislaus Kostka, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for young people, for those who are seeking their vocation and for divided families. Obtain for me the grace always to seek the things of God with a joyful heart. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Stanislaus Kostka and the prayer to Saint Stanislaus Kostka. His relics rest in Rome, in the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, Tomb of Saint Stanislaus Kostka in Rome

Saint Stanislaus Kostka rests in Rome, in the Church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, on the Quirinal Hill. It was there, in the Jesuit novitiate opened in early 1568, that he lived his last months and died on August 15, 1568. The present church, a masterpiece by Bernini, preserves his relics, and the neighboring rooms house a marble effigy showing him on his deathbed.

From the novitiate to Bernini's church

In 1567-1568, the Jesuits opened a house at Sant'Andrea on the Quirinal for the formation of their novices. Stanislaus Kostka was part of the very first group, along with Claudio Acquaviva, the future superior general, and Rodolfo Acquaviva, the future martyr in India. He died there a few months after his arrival, at seventeen, and his reputation for holiness spread quickly.

In the following century, the small original church was replaced by a new building, begun in 1658 to designs by Bernini, for the Jesuit novitiate. Despite its modest size, Sant'Andrea al Quirinale is considered one of the summits of Roman Baroque architecture: an oval plan set across its width, colored marbles, and a coffered gilded dome, from which the eye is drawn to the high altar and the figure of Saint Andrew rising to heaven.



The Church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, in Rome.

The tomb and rooms of Saint Stanislaus

The relics of Saint Stanislaus Kostka are kept in a side chapel of the church dedicated to him, beneath the altar. In the adjoining former novitiate, you can see the rooms where, according to tradition, he lived and died. They house the famous effigy made by the French sculptor Pierre Le Gros the Younger in the early 18th century: the young novice lies on his couch, with face and hands of white marble and a cassock of black marble, in an attitude of peaceful surrender. This work, which made the saint known throughout Europe, is one of the most moving images of Baroque Rome.

Visiting the church

The church is on Via del Quirinale, a few steps from the Quirinal Palace. It is small, and an attentive visit takes little time: you can sit for a few moments to contemplate the dome, then pray before the chapel of Saint Stanislaus. Access to the saint's rooms is from the church, depending on opening availability.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you may read the life of Saint Stanislaus Kostka. Before his relics, entrust to him a young person in your life, a vocation in discernment, or a life choice. You can conclude with the prayer to Saint Stanislaus Kostka and a Hail Mary, in memory of his love for the Virgin. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Stanislaus Kostka

- **Rostkowo** (Masovia, Poland): his native village.
- **Vienna** (Austria): the city of the Jesuit college where he studied.
- **Dillingen** (Bavaria): the city where Peter Canisius welcomed him; a stained glass window there shows him kneeling before the Virgin.
- **Rome**: the Church of the Gesù, where he began his novitiate.

Practical information

The Church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale can be visited freely outside of services. The opening hours of the church and of the saint's rooms vary by day and season: check them on the official website of the church or with the Jesuits of Rome before you come. Modest dress is requested, as in all the churches of Rome.

CREDITS

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