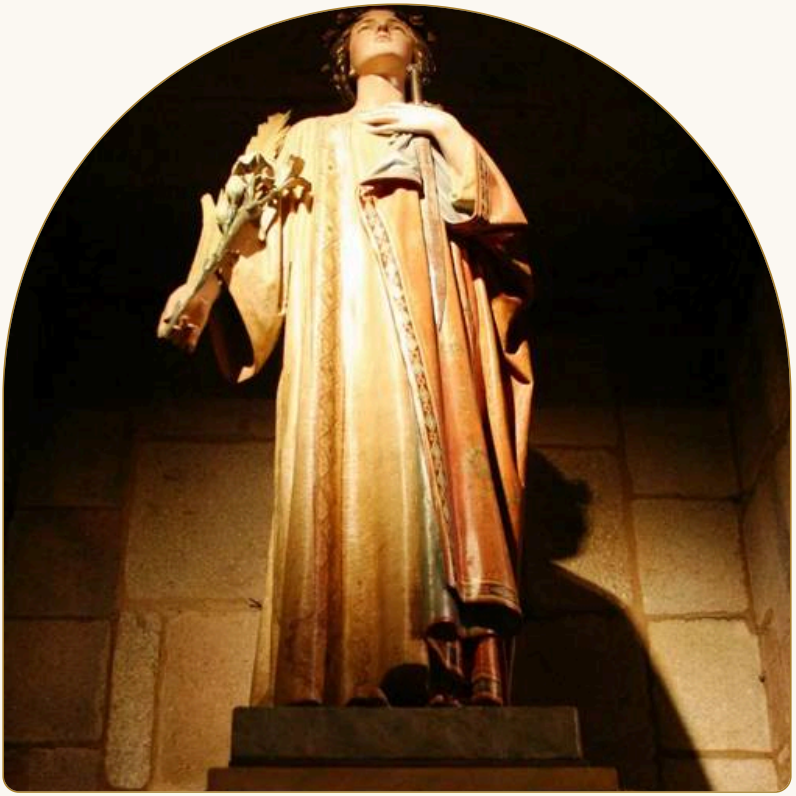


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Susanna

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: August 11

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Susanna

Roman virgin and martyr of the late third century, honored near the Baths of Diocletian.

Feast day	August 11
Born	Rome
Died	295, according to tradition, Rome
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	3rd century
Patron saint of	engaged couples

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Susanna for Engaged Couples

Novena to Saint Susanna

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 Susanna

Saint Susanna was a Roman virgin and martyr of the late third century, whose memory is tied to the Church of Santa Susanna, near the Baths of Diocletian, one of the oldest places of worship in Rome. Her Passion, written in the sixth century, presents her as the niece of Pope Caius and the daughter of a priest named Gabinus, put to death for refusing an imperial marriage and wishing to remain consecrated to Christ. Her feast day is August 11.

Who was Saint Susanna?

The cult of Saint Susanna is ancient and well attested. The Hieronymian Martyrology, one of the oldest calendars of saints, lists her on August 11, and a Roman church has borne her name since antiquity. Her life, on the other hand, is known only through a late Passion whose details belong more to edifying storytelling than to history. It is therefore important to distinguish the reality of her cult from the legendary part of the narrative.

The name Susanna comes from Hebrew and evokes the lily. In the Bible it is borne by the chaste Susanna of the Book of Daniel, falsely accused and then saved by God, which probably contributed to the popularity of the Roman martyr. The two should not be confused: the biblical Susanna lived in Babylon in the time of the prophet Daniel, while the martyr belongs to the last great persecution of the Roman Empire, under Diocletian.

Key dates

- **Second half of the third century**: Born in Rome, according to her Passion, into a Christian family from Dalmatia.
- **295**: Date of her martyrdom, according to tradition.
- **Sixth century**: Her Passion is written.

- **595**: The Church of Santa Susanna is dedicated as a basilica.
- **c. 800**: The church is rebuilt by Pope Leo III.
- **1475**: It is rebuilt again under Pope Sixtus IV.

The story of her Passion

According to her Passion, Susanna was the daughter of Gabinus, a widowed priest of Rome, and the niece of Pope Saint Caius. A studious young woman, she loved to meditate on the Scriptures with her father and her uncle. At fifteen she chose to consecrate her virginity to Christ. The Emperor Diocletian wanted to marry her to his adopted son. The envoys sent to persuade her, her cousin Claudius and then his brother Maximus, were moved by her witness and converted.

The emperor then ordered an official to make her worship a small statue of Jupiter. Susanna refused and confessed her faith. Condemned, she was beheaded in her father's house. According to the story, the empress, secretly a Christian, recovered her body and buried it. Pope Caius celebrated Mass in the house where she died, which became a place of worship. Gabinus died soon afterward in prison, and Claudius and Maximus were also martyred.

Many elements of this account, such as the family ties with the pope and the plan of an imperial marriage, are found in other Roman Passions of the same period and cannot be verified. What remains certain is that a young woman named Susanna was honored as a martyr in Rome very early, and that the Christians of the city built a church in her memory.

The Church of Santa Susanna

The church dedicated to her stands on the ancient *titulus* known as "at the two houses," which tradition identifies as the houses of Gabinus and Caius, near the Baths of Diocletian. It was one of the station churches of the Roman Lenten liturgy. Dedicated in 595 and rebuilt by Leo III and then by Sixtus IV,

it received its baroque facade by Carlo Maderno at the beginning of the seventeenth century. From 1587, Pope Sixtus V entrusted it to Cistercian nuns. It is also a cardinal's titular church.

For English-speaking Catholics the church has a special place: for much of the twentieth century it served as the church of the American community in Rome, cared for by the Paulist Fathers.

A widespread devotion

Devotion to Saint Susanna spread far beyond Rome. In Italy, the town of Torre Santa Susanna, in Apulia, bears her name; an obelisk topped by her statue was raised there in 1837 in thanksgiving after a cholera epidemic. In France, several towns have her as their patron, such as Sainte-Suzanne in Mayenne and Sainte-Suzanne-sur-Vire in Normandy.

Why is Saint Susanna the patron saint of engaged couples?

Saint Susanna is often invoked by engaged couples. Her story is centered on a marriage proposal: she refused a brilliant match with the emperor's family because she had already given her heart to Christ. Engaged couples ask her help to discern their vocation freely, to prepare for marriage in purity and truth, and to build their future on God rather than on ambition or social pressure.

Her name, linked to the lily, and the memory of the biblical Susanna also make her a figure of chastity and of trust in God in the face of false accusation.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Susanna in art

- **The palm**: the sign of martyrdom, as for all the martyrs of Rome.
- **The sword**: recalling her beheading, as in Norblin's painting in Paris.
- **The young Roman woman**: she is depicted as a young girl, in keeping with her Passion, which says she consecrated herself to Christ at fifteen.

What can we learn from Saint Susanna?

Saint Susanna recalls the courage of the young Christian women of Rome who preferred Christ to honors and security. Her story gathers a whole family around her, father, uncle and cousins, in the same witness of faith. Even when the details of her Passion are uncertain, the ancient church that bears her name shows how deeply the Christians of Rome honored her.

Where to pray to Saint Susanna

In Rome, the Church of Santa Susanna, near the Baths of Diocletian, has kept her memory since antiquity. It stands on the Via XX Settembre, a short walk from Termini station, so pilgrims arriving in Rome can easily stop there to pray. In Italy, Torre Santa Susanna in Apulia celebrates her as its patron, and in France she can be honored in the churches of the towns that bear her name.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Susanna for Engaged Couples

Saint Susanna, virgin and martyr of Rome, is honored in one of the oldest churches of the city, near the Baths of Diocletian. According to her Passion, she refused a marriage into the imperial family in order to remain consecrated to Christ. She is often invoked by engaged couples. Here is an original prayer inspired by her story.

The girl who said no to the emperor

Her Passion, written in the sixth century, tells that Susanna, niece of Pope Caius and daughter of the priest Gabinus, had consecrated her life to Christ at fifteen. When the Emperor Diocletian wanted her to marry his adopted son, she refused, and the very envoys sent to persuade her were converted. Refusing to worship an idol of Jupiter, she was beheaded around 295 in her father's house.

Prayer to Saint Susanna

Saint Susanna, you gave your heart to Christ and would not take it back, even for the honors of an emperor: teach me to choose God above every security and every ambition.

You loved the Word of God and meditated on it with your family: give me a love for Scripture, and make my home a place where faith is shared.

Watch over engaged couples as they prepare for marriage. Help them to discern freely, to love each other in truth and purity, and to build their life together on Christ.

Pray for young people who are pressured to give up their faith or their convictions, and for all who are falsely accused. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me a faithful and courageous heart, so that I may confess Jesus without fear in every circumstance of my life. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Susanna is commemorated on August 11. You can pray to her during an engagement or marriage preparation, before an important life decision, for a young person under pressure to compromise their faith, or when you feel alone in standing up for what is right.

A short prayer for engaged couples

> *Lord, through the intercession of Saint Susanna, bless (names) as they prepare for marriage. Keep their love sincere, patient and pure, help them to listen to each other and to you, and let their home become a place of faith and welcome. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Susanna

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the story of Saint Susanna, virgin and martyr of Rome. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on her feast day, begin on August 3; the ninth day falls on August 11. Engaged couples may also pray it together at any time of year, for example in the weeks before their wedding. The meditations follow her Passion, written in the sixth century, which belongs more to edifying storytelling than to strict history, but which has nourished the faith of Christians for centuries.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you are praying as a couple, take a moment to share what the day's meditation says to you.

Day 1: A name like a lily

The name Susanna evokes the lily, a flower of purity. It recalls the Susanna of the Book of Daniel, falsely accused and saved by God. The Roman martyr bore that name well. Like her biblical namesake, she trusted God when everything seemed to be against her.

Prayer: Lord, give me a pure heart, and protect all who are falsely accused.

Today: Read the story of Susanna in Daniel 13.

Day 2: A family of faith

According to her Passion, Susanna was raised by her father Gabinus, a priest, and was close to her uncle, Pope Caius. Faith was lived and shared at home. The family is the first school of prayer, where children learn to know and love God.

Prayer: Lord, bless our families, and make our homes places where your Word is loved and shared.

Today: Pray together with a family member, even briefly.

Day 3: Loving the Scriptures

Susanna loved to meditate on the Scriptures with her father and her uncle. The Word of God shaped her choices and gave her strength in the trial to come.

Prayer: Lord, let your Word dwell richly in me, so that I may know your will.

Today: Spend ten minutes with a passage of the Gospel.

Day 4: A heart given to Christ

At fifteen, Susanna chose to consecrate her life to Christ. Every vocation, to marriage, priesthood or consecrated life, begins with this gift of the heart. Engaged couples, too, are called to give their love first to God, so that he may be the foundation of their life together.

Prayer: Lord, help young people to discover their vocation and to answer you generously.

Today: Pray for a young person discerning their path in life.

Day 5: Saying no to a brilliant future

The emperor offered her a marriage into his own family. Susanna refused, because her heart already belonged to Christ. Freedom sometimes means saying no to what the world admires.

Prayer: Lord, give me the freedom to choose you above success, money and the opinion of others.

Today: Give up one thing you do mainly to impress others.

Day 6: A witness that converts

Her cousins Claudius and Maximus, sent to persuade her, were themselves won over by her faith and converted. A calm and sincere witness can touch even those sent to oppose us.

Prayer: Lord, make my life a gentle witness to you, especially before those who do not share my faith.

Today: Speak kindly of your faith to someone, if the occasion arises.

Day 7: Refusing the idol

Ordered to worship a statue of Jupiter, Susanna refused. Today's idols are often less visible: money, image, power, comfort. But the choice remains the same: to whom do I give the first place in my heart?

Prayer: Lord, show me the idols in my life, and give me the courage to put you first.

Today: Name one thing that takes God's place in your life, and offer it to him.

Day 8: Faithful unto death

Susanna was beheaded in her father's house. Gabinus died in prison, and Claudius and Maximus were also martyred. A whole family bore witness to Christ together. Their courage did not come from themselves, but from the Lord they loved.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen the Christians persecuted today, and give courage to their families.

Today: Learn about a community of persecuted Christians and pray for them.

Day 9: A house that became a church

According to the story, Pope Caius celebrated Mass in the house where she died, and it became a place of worship. For more than fifteen centuries, the Church of Santa Susanna has kept her memory near the Baths of Diocletian.

Prayer: Lord, make my home a place where you are welcomed and praised.

Today: Bless your home with a short prayer, or ask a priest to bless it.

Closing prayer

Saint Susanna, virgin and martyr, you preferred Christ to the honors of the world. We entrust to you the intentions of this novena. Pray for engaged couples and for families, for young people seeking their vocation, for those falsely accused and for persecuted Christians. Obtain for us faithful and courageous hearts, so that we may confess Jesus in every circumstance of our lives. Amen.

On August 11, if you can, attend Mass or spend a moment before the Blessed Sacrament to give thanks for the graces received during these nine days.

Go further

Read the life of Saint Susanna and the prayer to Saint Susanna.

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: José Luiz, CC BY-SA 3.0, 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