

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Tabitha

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 25

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Tabitha

First-century Christian of Joppa known for her charity, raised to life by the apostle Peter.

Feast day	October 25
Died	Joppa (Jaffa)
Era	1st century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Tabitha for Practical Charity

Novena to Saint Tabitha

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 Tabitha

Saint Tabitha, called Dorcas in Greek, was a Christian woman of Joppa, today's Jaffa, in the first century. The Acts of the Apostles describe her as a woman full of good works, who made clothing for the widows of the town. After she died of an illness, the apostle Peter raised her to life, and this sign led many people of the town to faith. The Catholic Church remembers her on October 25.

Who was Saint Tabitha?

Everything we know about her fits into a few verses of the Book of Acts (Acts 9:36-43), written according to tradition by Saint Luke. The text gives her two names: Tabitha in Aramaic and Dorcas in Greek. Both words mean "gazelle." This double name reflects a port city where languages met, at the border between the Jewish and Greek worlds.

Luke describes her with a rare word: she is a "disciple," in the feminine form. She is the only woman in the New Testament to whom this title is explicitly given. The account says nothing about her age, her family or her state of life. It keeps only what made her known: she was "full of good works and almsdeeds which she did."

Key dates

- **c. 40**: Approximate date of the event told in Acts, when Peter was visiting the communities of Judea.
- **Lydda, then Joppa**: Peter, who has just healed a paralyzed man at Lydda, is urgently called to Joppa, about ten miles away.
- **After the miracle**: Peter stays for many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon; there he will receive the call of the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10).

- **4th century**: First depictions of the scene on Christian sarcophagi.
- **October 25**: Commemoration in the Roman Martyrology.

The account in Acts

Tabitha fell sick and died. Those close to her washed her body and laid it in the upper room of the house. Hearing that Peter was at Lydda, the disciples sent two men to beg him to come without delay. When he arrived, the widows stood around him weeping and showed him the tunics and cloaks that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

Peter sent everyone out, knelt down and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said: "Tabitha, arise." She opened her eyes, saw Peter and sat up. He gave her his hand, helped her to her feet, called the saints and the widows and presented her to them alive.

The news spread throughout the town, and many believed in the Lord. The scene closely echoes the raising of the daughter of Jairus in the Gospel: the disciple repeats the gestures of his Master.

A saint of practical charity

What strikes us in this account is the way the community mourns Tabitha: not with great speeches, but by showing clothes. In the ancient world, widows were often among the poorest. Tabitha did not help them from a distance: she sewed for them, with her own hands. Her holiness is made of ordinary, repeated acts of service, whose value we only measure when they are gone.

This portrait has inspired many. In the nineteenth century, in England and North America, numerous parish groups of women who made clothing for the poor took the name "Dorcas societies." The story also asks every community a simple question: who, around us, quietly supports the most vulnerable?



Louis Testelin, Saint Peter Raising Tabitha (1652), Arras.

Why is Saint Tabitha a patron of charitable works?

Saint Tabitha has no official patronage, but Christians have long seen her as a model and protector of those who sew, mend and collect clothing for people in need, and more broadly of all practical works of charity. The "Dorcas societies" of the English-speaking world chose her name for exactly this reason. Her story also makes her a natural intercessor for widows, for the sick and for families in mourning.

Tabitha spoke no words that Scripture has recorded. She is known by what she did and by the love she inspired. She reminds us that the humblest charity, sewing a garment, visiting a widow, is a true way of being a disciple. The miracle that concerns her is not told for her sake alone: it opens a whole town to the Gospel.

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

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Tabitha in art

Tabitha is most often shown in the scene of her raising: she sits up on her bed as Saint Peter takes her hand, while widows weep nearby, sometimes holding up the clothes she made. On her own, as in stained glass windows, she appears as a woman holding a garment she has made.

The scene appears very early in Christian art, from the fourth century, on sarcophagi, usually within cycles devoted to Saint Peter. In the seventeenth century, Louis Testelin painted it for Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, in the series of "Mays" offered each year by the goldsmiths' guild; the painting is now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Arras. In Rome, Saint Peter's Basilica has an altar of Tabitha decorated with a mosaic copy of a painting by Placido Costanzi. Saint Peter's Cathedral in Lisieux keeps a *Raising of Tabitha* painted by Anicet Lemonnier in 1770.

Where to pray to Saint Tabitha

- **Jaffa, Israel**: the old city, ancient Joppa, with Saint Peter's Church recalling the apostle's stay. A local tradition places Tabitha's tomb in a garden of the Russian Orthodox Church, at the church of Saint Peter and Saint Tabitha.
- **Rome**: the altar of Tabitha in Saint Peter's Basilica.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Tabitha for Practical Charity

There is no widely used traditional prayer to Saint Tabitha. Her memory rests entirely on the account in the Acts of the Apostles. Below you will find the heart of that account, with its reference, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia asking for the grace of practical charity.

The word of Scripture

> *"And in Joppe there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did."*

Source: Acts of the Apostles 9:36 (Douay-Rheims translation).

> *"And they all being put forth, Peter kneeling down prayed, and turning to the body, he said: Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes; and seeing Peter, she sat up."*

Source: Acts of the Apostles 9:40 (Douay-Rheims translation).



Saint Peter praying at Tabitha's bedside.

Prayer to Saint Tabitha for practical charity

Saint Tabitha, disciple of Joppa, your hands sewed for widows and the poor: teach me the charity that is not content with words. Help me to see the needs of those around me and to serve them simply, without seeking to be noticed.

The community mourned you by showing the clothes you had made: help me to leave behind me traces of kindness rather than memories of glory.

The Lord raised you up through the prayer of Peter: pray for the sick, for those who grieve and for those who feel they have no strength left. May the word "Arise" be for them a promise of life.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Through your intercession, may the risen Christ strengthen our faith and make our communities attentive to the most vulnerable. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Tabitha is commemorated on October 25 in the Roman Martyrology. You can also pray to her:

- before a clothing drive, a sewing or knitting group for the poor, or a parish charity project;
- when visiting a widow, an elderly person or someone who lives alone;
- for a sick person, or for a family who has just lost a loved one;
- when you feel your small acts of service go unnoticed.

To get to know her better, read the life of Saint Tabitha, or pray the novena to Saint Tabitha.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Tabitha

This novena to Saint Tabitha is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the disciple of Joppa whose hands made clothing for the widows, and whom the apostle Peter raised to life, as told in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 9:36-43). To end on her commemoration, October 25, begin it on October 17. You can also pray it at any time, especially for the sick, for those in mourning or before a work of charity.

How to pray this novena

Each day, take a few minutes of quiet. Make the Sign of the Cross, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act proposed. It is a good idea to read Acts 9:36-43 on the first day. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Day 1: A disciple

Luke calls Tabitha a "disciple," using the feminine form of the word, the only time it appears in the New Testament. Before being a woman of good works, she was a follower of Jesus. Her charity flowed from her faith. Everything she did for the widows began with her love for the Lord she followed.

Prayer: Saint Tabitha, help me to be first of all a disciple of Jesus, so that everything I do may come from him. Amen.

Today: Read Acts 9:36-43 slowly.

Day 2: Full of good works

Scripture says Tabitha was "full of good works and almsdeeds." Her life was not made of one great deed, but of many small ones, repeated day after day.

Prayer: Saint Tabitha, teach me faithfulness in small acts of kindness. Amen.

Today: Do one good deed that no one asked of you.

Day 3: The work of her hands

Tabitha sewed tunics and cloaks for widows. She gave not only money, but her time, her skill and her hands. Charity is most real when it costs us something of ourselves. What we make for others with patience and care carries something of our love with it.

Prayer: Saint Tabitha, bless the work of my hands, and help me to use my talents for others. Amen.

Today: Use a skill you have to help someone: cooking, repairing, writing, sewing.

Day 4: Seeing the widows

In the ancient world, widows were often among the poorest. Tabitha saw them, and she clothed them. Today, too, many people live alone, forgotten and in need.

Prayer: Saint Tabitha, open my eyes to the lonely and the poor who live near me. Amen.

Today: Visit or call an elderly person or someone who lives alone.

Day 5: Sickness and death

Tabitha fell ill and died. Even those who do much good are not spared suffering. The Gospel does not promise that we will avoid trials, but that God will be with us in them.

Prayer: Saint Tabitha, pray for all who are sick today, and for those who care for them. Amen.

Today: Pray for a sick person by name, or send them a message.

Day 6: The tears of the widows

When Peter arrived, the widows wept and showed him the clothes Dorcas had made. They grieved because they had been loved. Grief is the other face of love, and Jesus himself wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus.

Prayer: Saint Tabitha, comfort those who mourn, and let them feel the presence of the Lord. Amen.

Today: Write a word of comfort to someone who has lost a loved one.

Day 7: Peter knelt and prayed

Before speaking to Tabitha, Peter sent everyone out, knelt down and prayed. The apostle knew that life comes from God alone. Everything begins with prayer. Before we rush to solve problems, we are invited to place them in the hands of the Father.

Prayer: Saint Tabitha, teach me to kneel before God and to trust him before I act. Amen.

Today: Spend five minutes in silent prayer, on your knees if you can.

Day 8: "Tabitha, arise"

Peter said: "Tabitha, arise," and she opened her eyes. The disciple repeated the words and gestures of his Master at the bedside of the daughter of Jairus. Christ still wants to raise up what is dead in us: our hope, our courage, our faith.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Saint Tabitha, raise up in me what has fallen asleep or died. Amen.

Today: Take up again a good habit you had abandoned.

Day 9: Many believed

The news spread through all of Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Tabitha's life, and her return to life, became a door to the Gospel for a whole town. Our charity, too, can lead others to God.

Prayer: Saint Tabitha, present to the Lord the intention I have carried through this novena, and make my life a witness to his love. Amen.

Today: Donate clothing in good condition to people in need.

Closing prayer

> *Lord our God, you made Saint Tabitha rich in good works and raised her to life through the prayer of the apostle Peter. Through her intercession, give us hands ready to serve, eyes open to the poor and hearts filled with hope in the resurrection. Comfort the sick and those who mourn, and make our communities places where no one is forgotten. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read more in the life of Saint Tabitha, or say the prayer to Saint Tabitha.

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: Alsto911, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Louis Testelin, Saint Peter Raising Tabitha (1652), Arras.: Image: VladoubidoOo, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Peter praying at Tabitha's bedside.: Image: Masolino da Panicale, CC BY-SA 4.0, 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