

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Théodore Guérin

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 14

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IN BRIEF

Saint Théodore Guérin

French religious, foundress of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in Indiana, educator and missionary.

Feast day	May 14, October 3 (United States)
Born	October 2, 1798, Étables-sur-Mer, France
Died	May 14, 1856, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, USA
Canonized	October 15, 2006, by Pope Benedict XVI
Era	19th century
Patron saint of	Archdiocese of Indianapolis

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Théodore Guérin for Teachers and Missionaries

Novena to Saint Théodore Guérin

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Théodore Guérin

Saint Théodore Guérin, born Anne-Thérèse Guérin in Brittany in 1798, was a French religious sister who left for Indiana in 1840 and founded the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. In the middle of the forest, in poverty and through heavy trials, she opened schools, orphanages and an academy for young women, laying the foundations of one of the great Catholic educational works of the American Midwest. She died in 1856, was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1998 and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006. Known to many Americans as Saint Mother Théodore, she is celebrated on May 14, and on October 3 in the United States.

Who was Saint Théodore Guérin?

Anne-Thérèse Guérin was born on October 2, 1798, in Étables-sur-Mer, on the north coast of Brittany, at the end of the French Revolution, in a region deeply marked by religious persecution. Her father, Laurent Guérin, was a naval officer under Napoleon; her mother, Isabelle Le Fèvre, taught her at home. Of the couple's four children, only two daughters, Anne-Thérèse and Marie-Jeanne, reached adulthood.

Allowed to make her First Communion at ten, earlier than was customary, she told the parish priest of her wish to become a sister. But at fifteen she lost her father, killed by bandits on his way home. Her mother fell into a deep depression, and Anne-Thérèse took charge of the house, the garden and her younger sister.

Key dates in the life of Saint Théodore Guérin

- **October 2, 1798**: Born in Étables-sur-Mer, Brittany.
- **Around 1813**: Her father is killed by bandits.

- **1823**: At twenty-five, she enters the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir and becomes Sister Saint Théodore.
- **September 8, 1825**: First vows.
- **September 5, 1831**: Perpetual vows.
- **1840**: She leaves for Indiana at the head of a small group of sisters and reaches Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in October.
- **1841**: The academy for young women at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods opens.
- **May 14, 1856**: Dies at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.
- **October 25, 1998**: Beatified by Pope John Paul II.
- **October 15, 2006**: Canonized by Pope Benedict XVI.

A Sister of Providence in France

Only at twenty-five, five years after first asking, did Anne-Thérèse obtain her mother's permission to enter religious life. She joined the young congregation of the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir, in the Sarthe, devoted to teaching and caring for the sick, and received the name Sister Saint Théodore.

First sent to Preuilly-sur-Claise, in Touraine, she caught a serious illness there, probably smallpox, which nearly killed her and left lasting effects: for the rest of her life she had to follow a very strict diet. She then taught at the parish school of Saint-Aubin in Rennes, and later at Soulaines, in the diocese of Angers, where she also visited the sick. Her teaching earned her a medal from the school inspectors.

The Indiana mission

In 1840, the bishop of Vincennes, Indiana, a Breton priest named Célestin de la Hailandière, asked the Ruillé congregation for sisters. The superior chose Sister Saint Théodore to lead the mission. She did not feel equal to the task,

but she accepted, relying on the rule of her congregation, which asked the sisters to be ready to go wherever obedience sent them.

With five companions she crossed the Atlantic and arrived in October 1840 at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, near Terre Haute, an isolated clearing in the forest. The community settled in a simple farmhouse. The following year Mother Théodore opened an academy for young women, which later became Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, and she went on to found schools in several towns of Indiana and Illinois.

In poverty and trial

The early years were very hard: freezing winters, extreme poverty, a fire that destroyed the community's harvest, prejudice against Catholics, and the foundress's fragile health. Mother Théodore had to return to France in 1843 to find resources and support.

Above all, she faced serious difficulties with the bishop of Vincennes, who wanted to run the community himself and repeatedly opposed her decisions. The crisis peaked in 1847, when the bishop went so far as to release her from her vows and order her to leave the diocese. Mother Théodore went through this trial in prayer and obedience, and the situation was resolved shortly afterward when the bishop resigned. His successor supported the community, which became an American congregation independent of the house in Ruillé.

In her letters and journals, Mother Théodore shows constant trust in Providence. Her congregation remembers in particular her words: "With Jesus, what have we to fear?"

Her death and legacy

Worn out by work and illness, Mother Théodore died on May 14, 1856, at the age of fifty-seven, at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. She left a firmly established congregation that had opened many schools and orphanages. Her remains rest in the Church of the Immaculate Conception at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, now a place of pilgrimage.

Beatified by John Paul II in 1998, she was canonized by Benedict XVI on October 15, 2006. The Roman Martyrology remembers her on May 14; in the United States her feast is kept on October 3.

Why is Saint Théodore Guérin a patron saint of Indianapolis?

Because her life's work took root in Indiana, she is the second patron of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. More broadly, she left everything to serve in a country whose language she did not speak, and built a lasting work in poverty, sickness and misunderstanding. Her strength came from complete trust in Providence and great gentleness in conflict. She is prayed to for teachers and educators, for missionaries and migrants, for those who start a new work or face conflict with authority, and for people living with chronic illness.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Théodore Guérin in art

- **The habit of the Sisters of Providence**, with a white coif and a black veil.
- **A book or a pen**, recalling her teaching and her many letters.
- **The church or the woods of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods**, the place of her foundation.

Where to pray to Saint Théodore Guérin

- **Saint Mary-of-the-Woods** (Indiana, USA): the Church of the Immaculate Conception, where her remains rest, and the shrine of her congregation.
- **Étables-sur-Mer** (Côtes-d'Armor, France): her native village.
- **Ruillé-sur-Loir** (Sarthe, France): the motherhouse of the Sisters of Providence, where she made her novitiate.
- **Indianapolis**: the archdiocese of which she is second patron.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Théodore Guérin for teachers and missionaries and the novena to Saint Théodore Guérin.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Théodore Guérin for Teachers and Missionaries

Saint Théodore Guérin, the Breton missionary who founded the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, is especially loved in the United States, and above all in Indiana. Below is an original prayer inspired by her trust in Providence and her devotion to education.

"With Jesus, what have we to fear?"

Leaving for Indiana in 1840 with five companions, Mother Théodore founded schools in the middle of the forest, through poverty, illness and misunderstanding. She came through it all by abandoning herself to Providence.

Prayer to Saint Théodore Guérin

Saint Théodore, you left your Brittany to bring Christ to a faraway land: pray for us.

Bless teachers, educators and all who pass on knowledge and faith. Give them your patience, your gentleness and your love for children.

Watch over missionaries, migrants and all who must start their lives again far from home. Support the sick who live with fragile health, as you did all your life.

When conflict, misunderstanding or injustice comes, teach us to keep peace in our hearts, to pray for those who hurt us, and to entrust ourselves to Providence.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Present it to Jesus, with whom we have nothing to fear. Amen.

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

A short prayer of trust

Saint Mother Théodore, in the forest of Indiana you had nothing but trust in God. When I am afraid of what lies ahead, help me to say with you: with Jesus, what have we to fear? Amen.

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia, built on her well-known words.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Théodore Guérin is celebrated on May 14, and on October 3 in the United States. You can pray to her:

- at the start of a school year, for students and teachers;
- before moving abroad or starting over in a new place;
- in a time of conflict with a superior or an institution;
- when living with a chronic illness or fragile health.

To know her better, read the life of Saint Théodore Guérin, or pray the novena to Saint Théodore Guérin.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Théodore Guérin

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Théodore Guérin, foundress of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, May 14, begin on May 6. In the United States, where her feast is kept on October 3, you can begin on September 25. It can also be prayed at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. You may end each day with her words: "With Jesus, what have we to fear?" The suggested act helps carry the prayer into daily life.

This novena is suited to teachers and students, to missionaries and migrants, to those facing conflict or misunderstanding, and to anyone living with fragile health. The nine days follow the path of her life, from the coast of Brittany to the woods of Indiana.

Mother Théodore's letters and journals show a woman who was often tired, sick and uncertain, yet who kept returning to God with simple trust. You do not need to feel strong to pray this novena. Bring your worries as they are, and let each day's meditation help you hand them over, one at a time, to the Providence she trusted so completely. If you pray as a family or a class, one person can read the meditation aloud and everyone can say the prayer together.

Day 1: A child of Brittany

Anne-Thérèse was born in 1798 in a region still wounded by the persecution of the Revolution. Her mother taught her at home, and she made her First Communion at ten. Faith is often first received in the family.

Prayer: Lord, bless parents who teach their children to know and love you.

Today: Thank God for the person who first taught you to pray.

Day 2: Carrying the family

When her father was killed, Anne-Thérèse took charge of the household and cared for her grieving mother and her sister. She put her own plans on hold out of love.

Prayer: Saint Théodore, support young people who care for a sick or grieving parent.

Today: Help a family member with a practical task.

Day 3: Patience in waiting

She waited five years before entering religious life. Her vocation matured in patience. God's timing is not always ours.

Prayer: Lord, give me patience when my plans are delayed, and trust in your timing.

Today: Offer to God a desire that has not yet been fulfilled.

Day 4: Strength in weakness

A serious illness in her first assignment left her with fragile health for life. Yet she taught, traveled and founded a congregation. God works through our limits.

Prayer: Saint Théodore, comfort those who live with chronic illness, and show them that their lives are fruitful.

Today: Pray for someone with a long-term illness.

Day 5: Saying yes to the unknown

Asked to lead a mission to Indiana, she felt unequal to the task, but she said yes. She crossed the ocean to a land whose language she did not speak.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to say yes when you call me beyond my comfort.

Today: Pray for missionaries, and for migrants who are starting a new life.

Day 6: A school in the woods

In a clearing near Terre Haute, Mother Théodore opened an academy for young women in 1841. Education was, for her, a work of love and of faith.

Prayer: Saint Théodore, bless teachers and students, and make our schools places of truth and kindness.

Today: Thank a teacher who made a difference in your life.

Day 7: Poverty and fire

Freezing winters, poverty and a fire that destroyed the harvest tested the young community. Mother Théodore did not give up. Providence did not remove every trial, but it carried her through them.

Prayer: Lord, sustain those who are struggling to make ends meet, and help me to share what I have.

Today: Give something to a family in need.

Day 8: Peace in conflict

The bishop of Vincennes opposed her, released her from her vows and ordered her to leave. She answered with prayer, obedience and gentleness, and peace came in time.

Prayer: Saint Théodore, help me to keep peace in my heart in conflicts, and to pray for those who make me suffer.

Today: Pray sincerely for someone with whom you are in conflict.

Day 9: With Jesus, what have we to fear?

Mother Théodore died in 1856, leaving a congregation that continues her work. Her life was built on one conviction: with Jesus, there is nothing to fear. That trust is offered to us too.

Prayer: Saint Théodore, give me your trust in Providence, and present my intention to Jesus.

Today: Name a fear you carry, and entrust it to Jesus in prayer.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Théodore Guérin, you left your homeland to serve God in the forests of Indiana, and through poverty, illness and opposition you never lost your trust in Providence. Bless teachers and students, missionaries and migrants, the sick and all who face conflict. Teach us to say with you: with Jesus, what have we to fear? Present to the Lord the intention we have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Théodore Guérin and her prayer for teachers and missionaries.

CREDITS

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