

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Thomas Garnet

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 25

IN BRIEF

Saint Thomas Garnet

English Jesuit priest, secret missionary, martyred at Tyburn in 1608.

Feast day	October 25, June 23
Born	c. 1575, Southwark, London (England)
Died	June 23, 1608, Tyburn, London (England)
Canonized	beatified on December 15, 1929 by Pius XI, canonized on October 25, 1970 by Paul VI
Era	17th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Thomas Garnet for Persecuted Christians

Novena to Saint Thomas Garnet

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Thomas Garnet

Saint Thomas Garnet was an English Jesuit priest, born around 1575 in Southwark, near London. Trained in exile at Saint-Omer and Valladolid, he returned to England to support persecuted Catholics in secret. Arrested, banished, then returned, he was hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn on June 23, 1608. Canonized in 1970 among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, he is celebrated on June 23 and October 25.

Who was Saint Thomas Garnet?

Thomas Garnet belongs to the generation of priests trained on the Continent who, at the risk of their lives, came back to England to celebrate Mass and give the sacraments. Since Henry VIII's break with Rome and then the laws of Elizabeth I, being a Catholic priest in England had been treated as treason. Thomas was also the nephew of Henry Garnet, superior of the English Jesuits, executed in 1606. He is sometimes called the first martyr of the college of Saint-Omer, where he had studied.

Key dates

- **c. 1575**: Born in Southwark, London, into a Catholic family; his father, Richard Garnet, had been dismissed from Oxford for his faith.
- **1590s**: Studies at the English college of Saint-Omer, in Artois, then at the English seminary of Valladolid, in Spain.
- **1599**: Ordained a priest, probably at Valladolid, then returns to England in July.
- **1599-1605**: Secret missionary, especially in Warwickshire.
- **September 29, 1604**: Admitted to the Society of Jesus by his uncle Henry Garnet.

- **January 1606**: After the Gunpowder Plot, he is arrested, imprisoned and questioned in the Tower of London.
- **June 1606**: Found to have had no part in the plot, he is banished from England on pain of death if he returns.
- **February 1, 1607**: Begins his Jesuit novitiate at Louvain, and takes his first vows a few months later.
- **1607**: Returns to England; betrayed by an apostate priest, he is arrested within a few weeks.
- **June 19, 1608**: Tried at the Old Bailey for high treason, he is condemned to death.
- **June 23, 1608**: Hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn, at about thirty-three.
- **December 15, 1929**: Beatified by Pius XI.
- **October 25, 1970**: Canonized by Paul VI, with thirty-nine other martyrs of England and Wales.

A youth in exile for the faith

Thomas grew up in a family that paid the price of its loyalty to Catholicism. After first schooling at Horsham, in Sussex, he left for Saint-Omer, where the Jesuits had just opened a college for young English Catholics, deprived of schools in their own country. He then continued his studies at the English college of Valladolid, in Spain, where his companion was Andrew White, the future missionary to Maryland. Ordained a priest, he knew that by going home he risked death.

A hidden priest in England

In 1599, Thomas came back to England. For six years he traveled through Warwickshire and neighboring regions, secretly sheltered by Catholic families, celebrating Mass, hearing confessions, baptizing and comforting. He would say

himself that he went from place to place to help souls return to the faith of the Catholic Church. In 1604, he was admitted to the Society of Jesus.

In November 1605, the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot, a conspiracy by a few Catholics against King James I, set off a wave of repression. The Jesuits were accused of being its inspirers. Thomas was arrested and harshly questioned in the Tower of London, notably by Robert Cecil, who sought to implicate him with his uncle. But nothing was found against him. In 1606, he was banished with other priests, while his uncle Henry was executed.

Return and martyrdom

On the Continent, Thomas stayed at the English college of Douai, then entered the Jesuit novitiate at Louvain. His superiors judged that his trials in prison had sufficiently shown his steadfastness, and allowed him to take his vows. In 1607, despite the ban, he set out again for England.

A few weeks later, he was betrayed and arrested. He was asked to take the oath of allegiance imposed by the king, which included a rejection of the pope's authority. He refused. Tried for high treason because he was a priest ordained abroad, he denied any treason but did not deny anything of his faith. On June 23, 1608, at Tyburn, he declared that he was a priest and a Jesuit, and that his only desire had been to bring straying sheep back to Christ's flock, with no intention of treason. He was hanged, drawn and quartered.

Veneration and iconography

Thomas Garnet was beatified by Pius XI in 1929, then canonized by Paul VI on October 25, 1970, with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. The Roman Martyrology mentions him on June 23, the day of his death, and he is also celebrated with his companions on October 25. He is shown as a Jesuit priest, with the palm of martyrdom.

What should we remember about Saint Thomas Garnet?

Thomas Garnet could have stayed safe on the Continent after his banishment. He came back, knowing what awaited him, because English Catholics were without priests. To the end, he refused to confuse faithfulness to the Church with betrayal of his country. He reminds us that the faith is a treasure handed on at the price of great sacrifices. We can pray to him for persecuted Christians, for priests who exercise their ministry in danger and for all who must choose between their conscience and their safety.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Thomas Garnet and the novena to Saint Thomas Garnet.

Where to pray to Saint Thomas Garnet

- **London**: Tyburn Convent, near Marble Arch, a shrine of the martyrs executed at Tyburn.
- **London**: Westminster Cathedral, where the martyrs of England and Wales are honored.
- **Stonyhurst** (Lancashire): the college that descends from the one at Saint-Omer, where he studied.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Thomas Garnet for Persecuted Christians

Saint Thomas Garnet, a priest trained in exile, returned to England to support persecuted Catholics in secret. Banished after a first imprisonment, he came back again, was betrayed and died at Tyburn on June 23, 1608, declaring that he had never wished to betray his country but only to serve Christ. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him persecuted Christians and all whose faithfulness is put to the test.

Prayer to Saint Thomas Garnet

Saint Thomas Garnet,
you left your country to prepare for the priesthood,
and you came back to it knowing what awaited you.
From house to house, in secret,
you brought to the Catholics of England
the Mass, forgiveness and hope.

Imprisoned, questioned, banished,
you did not give up.
You came back again, out of love for souls,
and gave your life at Tyburn
without hatred for those who condemned you.

Pray for persecuted Christians around the world,
for priests who exercise their ministry in danger,
for those who must choose between their conscience and their safety.
Grant that we may love our country without ever denying our faith,
and be faithful to Christ to the end.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Thomas Garnet

- On October 25, the feast of the martyrs of England and Wales, and on June 23, the day of his death.
- For Christians who live in countries where their faith is forbidden or threatened.
- For a priest or missionary sent to a dangerous region.
- When you are asked to give up your convictions to keep your place.

- For the unity of Christians and reconciliation between Catholics and Anglicans.

An invocation for faithfulness

You can pray, in the manner of Saint Thomas, this simple act of faithfulness:

> *Lord, I want to belong to you entirely.*
> *Keep me faithful, today and at the hour of my death.*
> *Saint Thomas Garnet, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Thomas Garnet from October 17 to October 25, and read the life of Saint Thomas Garnet.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Thomas Garnet

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Thomas Garnet, an English Jesuit priest martyred at Tyburn in 1608. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on October 25, the day he is celebrated with the martyrs of England and Wales, begin on October 17. You can also finish it on June 23, the day of his death, by beginning on June 15.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Finish with: "Saint Thomas Garnet, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena in a concrete way.

Day 1: A faithful family

Thomas's father had lost his place at Oxford because of his faith. Thomas grew up in a family that knew the price of faithfulness. Faith is often handed on by the example of parents.

Prayer: Lord, bless Christian families who hand on the faith in difficulty.

Today: Pray for your parents and grandparents, living or deceased.

Day 2: Studying far from home

With no Catholic schools in England, Thomas had to study at Saint-Omer and then in Spain. He accepted exile to be formed for the service of God.

Prayer: Lord, bless seminarians and all who are preparing to serve you.

Today: Pray for the seminarians of your diocese, or support vocations work.

Day 3: Coming back despite the danger

Ordained a priest, Thomas went home to England, where the priesthood was punishable by death. Love of souls was stronger than fear.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to do what is right, even when I am afraid.

Today: Take a step you have been putting off out of fear.

Day 4: The hidden priest

For six years Thomas celebrated Mass in secret, from house to house. The Catholics who welcomed him were also risking prison. The Eucharist was a treasure to them.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, let me never grow used to the gift of the Mass.

Today: Attend a weekday Mass, or spend some time in adoration.

Day 5: Wrongly accused

After the Gunpowder Plot, Thomas was imprisoned and questioned, suspected of a conspiracy in which he had taken no part. He knew injustice and fear.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you innocent prisoners and all who are wrongly accused.

Today: Pray for prisoners, or support an organization that accompanies them.

Day 6: Exile

Banished from England, Thomas could have settled on the Continent. He entered the Jesuit novitiate at Louvain and took his vows. He used exile to give himself more fully to God.

Prayer: Lord, make my trials a time to draw closer to you.

Today: Pray for the refugees and exiles of our time.

Day 7: Betrayed

Back in England, Thomas was betrayed by a priest who had abandoned his faith. Like Christ betrayed by Judas, he knew the wound of betrayal.

Prayer: Lord, heal in me the wounds of betrayal, and give me strength to forgive.

Today: Pray for someone who has disappointed or betrayed you.

Day 8: Neither traitor nor renegade

Thomas refused the oath that rejected the pope's authority. Yet he affirmed that he had never wished to betray his king. We can love our country and remain faithful to Christ and his Church.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a good citizen and a faithful disciple, without ever denying my faith.

Today: Pray for your country and for those who govern it.

Day 9: The witness of Tyburn

On June 23, 1608, Thomas died at Tyburn, declaring that his only desire had been to bring straying sheep back to Christ's flock. His death was the last act of his priestly ministry.

Prayer: Lord, may my whole life bear witness to your love. Through the intercession of Saint Thomas Garnet, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for Christians persecuted around the world today.

Living the novena with Saint Thomas Garnet

This novena can accompany a time when your faith is tested: mockery, pressure at work, hard choices of conscience. It is also suited to praying for persecuted Christians, for priests and seminarians, and for the unity of Christians. Saint Thomas Garnet died without hatred, affirming his love for his country and for Christ: ask him for this peace of heart in the midst of conflict.

Closing prayer

Saint Thomas Garnet,
Jesuit priest and martyr of Tyburn,
you gave your life so that your brothers and sisters might receive the sacraments.
Present to God the intention I have carried through these nine days.
Obtain for me the courage of faithfulness,
peace in the midst of trials
and a love without hatred for those who oppose me.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Thomas Garnet at any time, or read the life of Saint Thomas Garnet.

CREDITS

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