

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Veronica

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 4

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IN BRIEF

Saint Veronica

Woman of Jerusalem who, according to tradition, wiped the face of Christ on the way to Calvary.

Feast day	February 4
Born	1st century, Palestine (according to tradition)
Died	1st century
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	photographers

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Novena to Saint Veronica

The Pier of Saint Veronica in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Veronica

Saint Veronica is, according to a very ancient tradition, the woman of Jerusalem who stepped forward as Jesus carried his cross and wiped his face with a cloth. The features of Christ are said to have remained imprinted on it: this is "Veronica's veil," also called the Holy Face. The Gospels do not name her, but her act of compassion became the sixth Station of the Cross, prayed every Good Friday throughout the world. She is not in the General Roman Calendar; the French tradition celebrates her on February 4.

Who was Saint Veronica?

We must first distinguish between history and tradition. None of the four Gospels mentions a woman wiping the face of Jesus. Luke mentions only the "daughters of Jerusalem" who lament as he passes (Luke 23:27-31). The name Veronica appears in apocryphal writings of the early centuries, especially the *Acts of Pilate*, which give the name Berenice, in Latin Veronica, to the woman healed of a flow of blood after touching Jesus' cloak (Matthew 9:20-22).

In the Middle Ages these stories came together: the healed woman became the one who, out of gratitude, dared to approach the condemned man on the road to Calvary. Her name has often been linked to the Latin and Greek expression *vera icon*, "true image," though this etymology is not certain. In the end it matters little: the figure of Veronica is above all a gesture, which the Church offers to everyone for meditation.



Saint Veronica, by Hans Memling (c. 1470-1475, National Gallery of Art, Washington).

Key dates in the tradition of Saint Veronica

- **c. 30**: According to tradition, Veronica wipes the face of Jesus on the way to Calvary, in Jerusalem.
- **4th-5th centuries**: The *Acts of Pilate* give the name Berenice (Veronica) to the woman healed of a flow of blood.
- **Early Middle Ages**: Latin stories tell how she brought to Rome an image of Christ that healed Emperor Tiberius.
- **12th century**: A veil called "the Veronica" is venerated in the old Saint Peter's Basilica.
- **Early 13th century**: Pope Innocent III has the relic carried in procession to the Hospital of the Holy Spirit.
- **1300**: The first Jubilee; pilgrims flock to Rome to see the Veronica, which Dante mentions in the *Divine Comedy*.

- **15th-16th centuries**: The Way of the Cross gradually settles into fourteen stations; the meeting with Veronica becomes the sixth.
- **c. 1640**: Francesco Mochi's statue of Saint Veronica is installed in one of the four piers of the dome of Saint Peter's.
- **1844-1847**: In Tours, the Carmelite Sister Marie of Saint Peter revives devotion to the Holy Face.

The gesture of the sixth station

The Way of the Cross, born of the devotion of pilgrims in Jerusalem and spread across Europe by the Franciscans, commemorates the stages of the Passion. Some stations are based on the Gospels; others, such as the falls of Jesus or the meeting with Veronica, on tradition. Their power lies in the way they show human attitudes in the face of suffering.

Veronica's gesture is simple and daring. In the middle of a hostile or indifferent crowd, surrounded by soldiers, a woman steps forward without being able to change the course of events. She does not save Jesus from the cross; she does him a tiny service, wiping the sweat and blood from his face. Tradition sees the reward of this gesture in the image Christ leaves her. Spiritual writers have drawn a constant lesson from it: whoever comforts a suffering face meets Christ himself, as he said: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

In Jerusalem, on the Via Dolorosa, a small chapel traditionally marks the place of this meeting. Since the twentieth century it has been entrusted to the Little Sisters of Jesus.

Veronica's veil in Rome

From at least the twelfth century, Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome has kept a cloth venerated as Veronica's veil. It became one of the great relics of Christendom. At the Jubilee of 1300, pilgrims came in crowds to see it; Dante,

in the *Paradiso* (Canto XXXI), compares his wonder to that of a pilgrim from Croatia who at last sees "our Veronica." Thousands of pilgrim badges, small metal plaques showing the Holy Face, were carried home all over Europe.

When the basilica was rebuilt, the relic was placed in one of the four huge piers that support Michelangelo's dome, above a monumental statue of the saint carved by Francesco Mochi. It is still kept there and is rarely seen: it is traditionally shown to the faithful, from a distance, from the balcony of the pier on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Other ancient images claim the same name, such as the Volto Santo of Manoppello, in the Abruzzo region of Italy; their origin is debated, and the Church has not settled the question.



Saint Veronica, statue by Francesco Mochi in Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome (c. 1640).

Devotion to the Holy Face

Meditation on the suffering face of Christ runs through the whole of Christian history, from the medieval hymn *Salve, sancta facies* to the Flemish painters who multiplied images of Veronica. In the nineteenth century it gained new momentum in Tours, France, with Sister Marie of Saint Peter, a Carmelite who asked that the Holy Face be honored in reparation for blasphemy, and then with Leo Dupont, "the holy man of Tours," who kept a lamp burning before a reproduction of the Roman veil and opened an oratory in his home. It was in this current that Thérèse of Lisieux took the name "Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face."

In France, a medieval tradition without historical foundation also makes Veronica the wife of Zacchaeus and credits her with a mission in Aquitaine, around Soulac, in the Médoc. Above all, these stories show how attached Western Christians were to this figure.

Why is Saint Veronica the patron saint of photographers?

Saint Veronica is traditionally invoked as the patron saint of photographers because of the image of Christ's face said to have been imprinted on her veil, a kind of "true image" captured on cloth. More deeply, she is the patron of anyone who wants to learn to recognize the face of Christ in those who suffer.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Veronica in art

Veronica is almost always shown holding a white cloth, unfolded in front of her, on which the face of Christ appears, often crowned with thorns. Flemish and German painters of the fifteenth century, such as Hans Memling and the Master of Saint Veronica in Cologne, made her a favorite subject. In Rome, Francesco Mochi's statue shows her rushing forward, the veil billowing in her hands. In the Stations of the Cross, she kneels or leans toward Jesus, offering her veil.

What her holiness teaches us

Saint Veronica left neither writings nor a biography: for us she exists only through a gesture. That is precisely what makes her close to us. She reminds us that holiness can be found in one act of tenderness done at the right moment, without calculation and without fear of what others think. We pray to her to learn to recognize the face of Christ in those who suffer, and to find the courage to draw near to them.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Veronica and the Holy Face, or follow the novena to Saint Veronica from January 26 to February 3, ending on the eve of her feast. It can also be prayed during Lent, together with the Stations of the Cross.

Where to pray to Saint Veronica

- **Rome**: the pier of Saint Veronica in Saint Peter's Basilica, where the veil is kept.
- **Jerusalem**: the chapel of the sixth station, on the Via Dolorosa.
- **Tours** (France): the Oratory of the Holy Face, linked to Leo Dupont and Sister Marie of Saint Peter.
- **Manoppello** (Abruzzo, Italy): the Shrine of the Volto Santo, served by the Capuchins.
- **Soulac-sur-Mer** (France): the Basilica of Notre-Dame-de-la-fin-des-Terres, linked to the Aquitaine legend of Veronica.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Veronica and the Holy Face

There is no prayer written by Saint Veronica: she is known only through tradition, which recounts her gesture on the way to Calvary. To pray with her, the Church offers two treasures: the Word of God, which invites us to seek the face of the Lord, and meditation on the sixth Station of the Cross. Below you will find a psalm, followed by an original prayer to Saint Veronica.

"Your face, Lord, do I seek" (Psalm 27)

This verse of the Psalter has always been associated with devotion to the Holy Face. Translation by Saintspedia; the biblical text is in the public domain.

> *My heart has repeated your word to me: "Seek my face."*
>
> *Your face, Lord, do I seek: do not hide your face from me.*
>
> *Do not turn your servant away in anger: you remain my help.*

Source: Book of Psalms, Psalm 27 (26 in the Greek and Latin numbering), verses 8-9.



Saint Veronica with the Sudarium, by the Master of Saint Veronica (Cologne, c. 1420).

Meditating on the sixth Station of the Cross

In the traditional Way of the Cross, the sixth station is entitled: "Veronica wipes the face of Jesus." You can pray it this way: contemplate the scene in silence, imagine the crowd, the noise, the weight of the cross, then the gesture of this woman who steps forward. Then ask yourself which suffering face is waiting today for a similar gesture. End with an Our Father.

Prayer to Saint Veronica

Saint Veronica, you dared to approach Jesus in the middle of the crowd, when everyone else looked away: pray for me.

Give me your quiet courage, the courage that does not seek to be seen but does not let fear or indifference win. Teach me to make the small gesture that is possible, even when I cannot change everything.

You received the image of the Holy Face as your reward: help me to recognize the face of Christ in those who suffer, the sick, prisoners, people who are alone, all who are forgotten. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Lord Jesus, may your face remain engraved on my heart, as it was on Veronica's veil, and may I one day see you face to face. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Veronica is not in the General Roman Calendar; the French tradition celebrates her on February 4. She is also naturally prayed to during Lent, at the Stations of the Cross, and especially on Good Friday. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Veronica, and discover the tradition of Saint Veronica.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Veronica

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the tradition of Saint Veronica and by the sixth Station of the Cross. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast on February 4, begin on January 26; it then ends on February 3. It can also be prayed during Lent, especially in the days leading up to Good Friday.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry the prayer into your life, as Veronica did on the road to Calvary.

Day 1: Seeing

Before she acted, Veronica looked. In the crowd, many watched Jesus pass by without really seeing him. Compassion begins with a gaze that refuses to turn away. Our days are full of faces we pass without noticing; the first grace to ask for is simply to see them.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to those who suffer near me and whom I no longer notice.

Today: Truly greet someone you pass every day without looking at them.

Day 2: Stepping out of the crowd

It is more comfortable to stay among the onlookers. Veronica took a step forward, although nothing obliged her to. Faith sometimes asks us to stand out, quietly. Veronica did not make a speech; she simply moved toward the one

who was suffering, accepting the risk of being noticed.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to take a step toward you, even when no one around me does.

Today: Defend someone who is being criticized behind their back.

Day 3: The small gesture that is possible

Veronica could not stop the Passion. She did what was within her reach: she wiped a face. God does not ask the impossible of us, but the possible done with love.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from discouragement before all that I cannot change, and show me the gesture I can make today.

Today: Do a concrete favor, however small, for someone in difficulty.

Day 4: Touching suffering

To wipe the face of a condemned man is to touch sweat, dust and blood. Charity is not afraid to get its hands dirty. It draws near. Many of us prefer to help from a distance, by sending something or giving advice. Veronica reminds us of the value of presence, of being physically close to those who suffer.

Prayer: Jesus, you touched lepers; teach me not to run away from the suffering of others.

Today: Visit or call someone who is sick or elderly.

Day 5: The woman who was healed

According to an ancient tradition, Veronica was the woman healed after touching the cloak of Jesus. Her gesture at Calvary would then be an act of gratitude: she gave back a little of what she had received.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for all the healings, visible or hidden, that you have granted me.

Today: Write down three graces you have received this year and give thanks for them.

Day 6: The imprinted face

Tradition says that Christ left his face on the cloth. Whoever bends over the suffering of others is transformed by it and carries within something of Christ. Every act of mercy leaves a mark, not only on the one who receives it, but on the one who gives it.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, imprint your face on my heart, so that my words and actions may resemble you.

Today: Spend a few minutes contemplating an image of the Holy Face or a crucifix.

Day 7: Christ in the least of these

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me." Today the suffering face of Christ is hidden in the faces of the poor, refugees and prisoners. Veronica's veil invites us to look for that face not only in churches and images, but in the streets, hospitals and shelters of our own towns.

Prayer: Lord, may I recognize you in the least of my brothers and sisters, and serve them as I would serve you.

Today: Make a donation or give some of your time to a charitable organization.

Day 8: Making reparation

In Tours, in the nineteenth century, devotion to the Holy Face grew as a prayer of reparation for offenses against God. To console Christ is also to repair with love what hatred has damaged.

Prayer: Lord, forgive the offenses that disfigure your face in the world and in me. Make me a builder of reparation.

Today: Ask forgiveness from someone you have hurt, or go to confession.

Day 9: Seeing God face to face

Veronica's veil is only an image. God's promise goes further: "We shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). The whole Christian life is a search for that face.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Veronica, may I seek your face all my life, and one day see you face to face. Amen.

Today: Pray the Stations of the Cross, pausing for a long time at the sixth station.

Closing prayer

Saint Veronica, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I carry. You comforted Jesus on the way of the cross: obtain for me the grace to comfort those who suffer in my turn, and to keep the image of his face in my heart. Amen.

To go further: the tradition of Saint Veronica and the prayer to Saint Veronica and the Holy Face.

PILGRIMAGE

The Pier of Saint Veronica in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome

In Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, one of the four giant piers that support Michelangelo's dome is dedicated to Saint Veronica. Since the 17th century it has housed the cloth venerated as her veil, and a monumental statue of the saint. It is the main place associated with her memory, in the heart of the greatest shrine of Christendom.

A relic at the heart of the Roman pilgrimages

From at least the 12th century, the old Constantinian basilica kept a veil called "the Veronica." In the early 13th century, Pope Innocent III had it carried in procession, and the relic became, along with the tombs of the apostles, one of the goals of the pilgrimage to Rome. During the Jubilee of 1300, pilgrims crowded to catch a glimpse of it; Dante and Petrarch left their memory of it in their poems.



Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, which keeps Veronica's veil.

The pier and Francesco Mochi's statue

During the rebuilding of the basilica, Pope Urban VIII had niches and chapels built into the four piers of the crossing for the great relics of the Passion and of the apostles: the lance of Longinus, a fragment of the True Cross associated with Saint Helena, Veronica's veil and, at the time, the head of Saint Andrew. The statue of Veronica, sculpted by Francesco Mochi and completed around 1640, shows her in full motion, the veil spread between her hands. Above, a loggia decorated with a relief points to the relic kept inside the pier.

The exposition of the veil

The veil is not on permanent display. By an ancient custom, it is shown to the faithful from the loggia of the pier, from a distance, during a service on the fifth Sunday of Lent. The faithful can make out only a precious frame: what matters is the shared prayer before the memory of the Passion. Other images, such as the Volto Santo of Manoppello, also claim to be Veronica's veil; the Church has not ruled on these questions of authenticity.

Praying at the pier of Saint Veronica

Before your visit, you can reread the tradition of Saint Veronica and the account of the Passion in Saint Luke. Once there, stop beneath the dome, before the statue, for a time of silence; the prayer to Saint Veronica and the Holy Face can accompany this moment. You can then entrust a suffering person whose face is dear to you. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The statue of Saint Veronica by Francesco Mochi, beneath the dome of Saint Peter's.

Other places connected with Saint Veronica and the Holy Face

- **Jerusalem**: the chapel of the Sixth Station on the Via Dolorosa, entrusted to the Little Sisters of Jesus.
- **Manoppello** (Abruzzo): the Shrine of the Volto Santo, run by the Capuchins, which Benedict XVI visited in 2006.
- **Tours**: the Oratory of the Holy Face, in the former house of Léon Dupont.
- **Soulac-sur-Mer** (Gironde): the Basilica of Notre-Dame-de-la-fin-des-Terres, linked to a medieval legend about Veronica's coming to Aquitaine.

Practical information

Admission to Saint Peter's Basilica is free, after a security check often preceded by a long line; modest dress is required. The pier of Veronica is at the crossing, beneath the dome, near the Altar of the Confession. Opening hours and celebration times vary with the season and papal events: check the basilica's official website, basilicasanpietro.va, before you come.

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