

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Vincent de Paul

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 27

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IN BRIEF

Saint Vincent de Paul

French priest, apostle of charity, founder of the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity.

Feast day	September 27
Born	April 24, 1581, Pouy, near Dax (today Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, Landes, France)
Died	September 27, 1660, Paris, France
Canonized	June 16, 1737, by Pope Clement XII
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	charitable works, prisoners, abandoned children

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Vincent de Paul to Serve the Poor

Novena to Saint Vincent de Paul

Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul, Rue de Sèvres in Paris

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Vincent de Paul

Saint Vincent de Paul was a seventeenth-century French priest who devoted his life to the poor. The son of peasant farmers from the Landes region, he founded the Congregation of the Mission, whose priests are known as Vincentians or Lazarists, and then, with Saint Louise de Marillac, the Daughters of Charity. He organized relief for the sick, for galley slaves, for abandoned children and for regions devastated by war. He died in Paris on September 27, 1660, and his feast day is celebrated on that date. He is the patron saint of all charitable works.

Who was Saint Vincent de Paul?

Vincent was born on April 24, 1581, in Pouy, near Dax, in southwestern France, into a family of small farmers. As a boy he tended the flocks. His father, who saw that he was gifted, sent him to study with the Franciscans in Dax and then at the University of Toulouse. Ordained a priest very young, in 1600, Vincent at first thought mainly of his career and of obtaining a benefice that would allow him to help his family.

In letters written at that time, he tells of being captured by pirates and sold as a slave in Tunis between 1605 and 1607; historians still debate whether this episode really happened.



The birthplace of Saint Vincent de Paul, at the Berceau, near Dax.

Key dates

- **April 24, 1581**: Born in Pouy, near Dax.
- **September 23, 1600**: Ordained a priest.
- **1605-1607**: Captivity in Tunis, according to his own letters.
- **1612**: Parish priest of Clichy, near Paris.
- **1613**: Tutor in the Gondi household.
- **January 25, 1617**: Sermon at Folleville, in Picardy, seen as the starting point of the missions.
- **1617**: Parish priest of Châtillon-les-Dombes, where he founds the first Confraternity of Charity.
- **1619**: Chaplain general of the galleys.
- **April 17, 1625**: Founds the Congregation of the Mission.
- **1632**: Settles at the priory of Saint-Lazare in Paris.

- **November 29, 1633**: The Daughters of Charity are born, with Louise de Marillac.
- **1638**: Begins his work for foundlings.
- **1643**: Member of the Council of Conscience of the regent Anne of Austria.
- **September 27, 1660**: Dies at Saint-Lazare, Paris.
- **June 16, 1737**: Canonized by Pope Clement XII.

Folleville and Châtillon: two conversions

In Paris, Vincent met Pierre de Bérulle, who became his spiritual adviser. He was for a time parish priest of Clichy, then entered the service of the powerful Gondi family as tutor to their children. In January 1617, called to the bedside of a dying peasant at Gannes, in Picardy, he discovered how little the people of the countryside knew of their faith. On January 25, he preached at Folleville on general confession; so many came that other priests had to be called in. He saw this as the beginning of his mission to the rural poor.

A few months later, as parish priest of Châtillon-les-Dombes, he learned that an entire family was sick and without help. His parishioners rushed to them, but all at once. Vincent understood that charity had to be organized if it was to last: he gathered women of good will into a Confraternity of Charity, with a rule of life. This model was taken up in hundreds of parishes.

The Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity

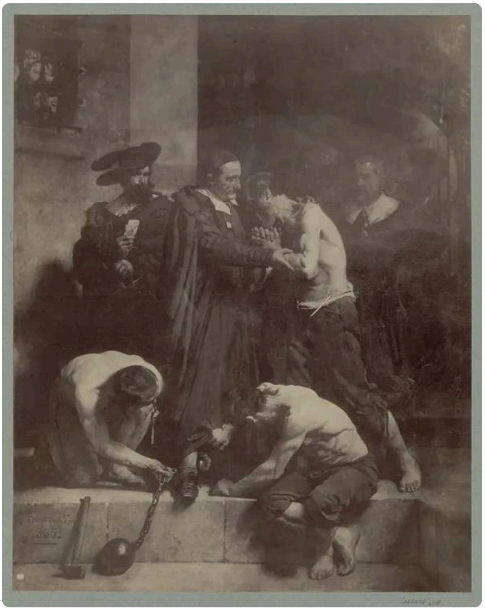
In 1625, with the support of the Gondi family, Vincent founded the Congregation of the Mission, a community of priests devoted to preaching in the countryside and to forming the clergy. In 1632 they settled at the priory of Saint-Lazare in Paris, which is why they came to be called Lazarists. Vincent organized retreats for future priests and conferences for the clergy, contributing to the renewal of the priesthood in France.

With Louise de Marillac, he founded the Daughters of Charity in 1633. This was something new: consecrated women who did not live in an enclosed convent but went out into the streets, homes and hospitals. Vincent told them that their monastery would be the houses of the sick and their cloister the streets of the city. The Ladies of Charity, drawn from the nobility and the middle class, funded and supported these works.

Galley slaves, foundlings and victims of war

Appointed chaplain general of the galleys in 1619, Vincent visited the chained convicts and tried to ease their lot. From 1638 he took charge of the abandoned children of Paris, who were left on the streets by the hundreds each year and most of whom died. During the Thirty Years' War and the Fronde, he organized collections and sent relief to the devastated regions of Lorraine, Picardy and Champagne. As a member of the Council of Conscience of the regent, Anne of Austria, he worked to have good bishops appointed. He also sent missionaries to North Africa, Madagascar, Ireland and Poland.

Despite these immense responsibilities, he remained simple, very gentle and truly humble. He died at Saint-Lazare on September 27, 1660, at the age of seventy-nine, a few months after Louise de Marillac.



Saint Vincent de Paul taking the place of a galley slave, by Léon Bonnat (1865): a scene from a popular tradition, not attested by history.

Why is Saint Vincent de Paul the patron saint of charities?

Vincent showed that charity is not just a feeling of the heart, but a concrete, lasting and well-organized commitment. He saw Christ in the poor and asked his followers to serve the poor as their "masters." In 1885, Pope Leo XIII proclaimed him patron of all works of charity. Because of his ministry to galley slaves and abandoned children, he is also invoked for prisoners and for orphans.

He inspired generations of Christians, among them Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, who founded the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1833. Today the Society's volunteers serve the poor in parishes across the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, India and many other countries, and the Vincentian Family continues his work in schools, hospitals and missions around the world.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Vincent de Paul in art

- **A priest in a black cassock**, often elderly and smiling, wearing a skullcap.
- **Infants in his arms** or children at his side: his care for foundlings.
- **A galley slave or chains**: his ministry to convicts.
- **A Daughter of Charity** beside him, recognizable in older images by her large white cornette.

Where to pray to Saint Vincent de Paul

- **Paris**: the Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul, 95 rue de Sèvres, which holds his relics.
- **Paris**: the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, rue du Bac, motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, where Saint Louise de Marillac rests.
- **Saint-Vincent-de-Paul** (Landes, France): the Berceau, his birthplace, and the oak tree associated with him.
- **Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne** (formerly Châtillon-les-Dombes): where he founded the first Confraternity of Charity.
- **Folleville** (Somme): the church of the 1617 sermon.



The reliquary of Saint Vincent de Paul in the Vincentian chapel, rue de Sèvres, Paris.

To pray with him, you can say the prayer to Saint Vincent de Paul to serve the poor, or follow the novena to Saint Vincent de Paul from September 19 to 27.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Vincent de Paul to Serve the Poor

Saint Vincent de Paul did not leave a short prayer meant to be recited under his name. His words have come down to us through his thousands of letters and through notes taken during his conferences with the priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. This page presents one of his best-known sayings, followed by an original prayer to Saint Vincent de Paul to serve the poor.

"Let us love God, but with the sweat of our brow"

In a conference to the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, Vincent warned his confreres against a piety that stays in the feelings without turning into action. Translated from the French by Saintspedia:

> *"Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be at the expense of our arms, let it be with the sweat of our brow."*

Source: conference to the missionaries, in *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, edited by Pierre Coste, volume XI. These seventeenth-century words are in the public domain.

For Vincent, love of God and service of the poor are one and the same. He did not look down on prayer, which he practiced at length every day; he wanted it to bear fruit in concrete charity.

Prayer to Saint Vincent de Paul to serve the poor

Saint Vincent de Paul, you recognized Christ in the sick, in galley slaves and in abandoned children: open my eyes to the poor around me.

Teach me to love not only in words but in deeds: to give my time, my strength and my goods, humbly and without seeking to be seen.

You knew how to gather and organize so much good will: help the charities, the parishes and all who serve those most in need. Give them perseverance, gentleness and joy.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). I also entrust to you those who are hungry, lonely, sick or homeless. Obtain for us the grace to serve them as you served them, with respect and with love. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Vincent de Paul's feast day is September 27, the anniversary of his death in Paris. You can pray to him before volunteering, before a visit to someone sick or isolated, at a meeting of a Saint Vincent de Paul Society conference, or for all works of charity. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Vincent de Paul, and read about the life of Saint Vincent de Paul.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Vincent de Paul

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the stages of the life of Saint Vincent de Paul, from the Landes countryside to Saint-Lazare in Paris. It is not an official liturgical text, nor was it written by the saint. To finish it on his feast day, begin on September 19; it ends on September 27, the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul. It is also well suited to a parish group or a conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, and say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day is an act of charity: with Saint Vincent, prayer always continues in service. Choose acts that fit your situation; what matters is to love in deeds.



Saint Vincent de Paul, church stained glass or statue.

Day 1: The young shepherd of the Landes

Vincent grew up in a family of modest farmers. He knew the land, hard work and poverty. God prepared the apostle of the poor by having him born among them. He never forgot the dignity of people who live from the work of their hands.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for my roots and for those who raised me. Keep me from looking down on the humble.

Today: Thank someone who passed on to you the faith or a love of work.

Day 2: An ambitious young priest

Vincent became a priest hoping for a comfortable position. Yet God made use of this imperfect man. Our motives need to be purified, and God knows how to do this patiently.

Prayer: Lord, purify my intentions. Help me to seek you for your own sake, and not for mine.

Today: Examine your conscience about your real motives.

Day 3: Folleville, the poverty of souls

At the bedside of a dying peasant, Vincent discovered that many people lived without knowing the Gospel. Poverty is not only material: there is also a hunger for God. Vincent never separated feeding the body from nourishing the soul.

Prayer: Lord, send laborers into your harvest, and make me a witness to your love where I live.

Today: Pray for priests and missionaries.

Day 4: Châtillon, organizing charity

The parishioners of Châtillon rushed all together to help a sick family, and then no one came at all. Vincent understood that charity has to last. He organized it, with faithfulness and good judgment.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me a faithful charity that does not burn out after the first enthusiasm.

Today: Commit to a regular service, however small, to a person or a charity.

Day 5: The galley slaves

Vincent went down into the holds of the galleys to visit the convicts. He did not judge: he comforted, he cared for them, he tried to make their lives more humane. No one, for him, was beyond the reach of God's mercy.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you prisoners and their families. Help me to see each person beyond their faults.

Today: Pray for someone in prison, or support a prison ministry.

Day 6: Louise de Marillac

With Louise de Marillac, Vincent founded the Daughters of Charity. Their partnership, built on trust and respect, bore immense fruit. God works through friendships and shared work.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for those with whom I serve. Make understanding and trust grow among us.

Today: Encourage someone who is committed to serving others.



Praying with Saint Vincent de Paul.

Day 7: The foundlings

Every year, hundreds of children were abandoned on the streets of Paris. Vincent could not accept it. He called on the Ladies of Charity to take them in and feed them, even when money ran short and the task seemed impossible.

Prayer: Lord, protect children who are abandoned, mistreated or alone. Give them adults who love them.

Today: Support a charity that welcomes or cares for children.

Day 8: The poor, our masters

Vincent asked his followers to serve the poor with respect, as their masters, because Christ is present in them. To serve is not to give alms from above, but to honor.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to recognize you in the poor and to serve them with respect.

Today: Take time to talk, as an equal, with a homeless or lonely person.

Day 9: Loving to the end

At the end of his life, though ill, Vincent kept following his works and writing letters. He died at Saint-Lazare after giving all he had. His charity has become a spring that still flows today.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Vincent de Paul, help me to love you with the sweat of my brow, by serving my brothers and sisters. Amen.

Today: Make a donation or offer a few hours to a charitable organization.

Closing prayer

Saint Vincent de Paul, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for me, for the poor and for all who serve them. Obtain for us a humble, gentle and generous heart that knows how to love in deed and in truth. Amen.

To go further, read about the life of Saint Vincent de Paul and pray the prayer to Saint Vincent de Paul to serve the poor.

PILGRIMAGE

Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul, Rue de Sèvres in Paris

The Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul, at 95 Rue de Sèvres, in Paris's 6th arrondissement, is the chapel of the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission, the Vincentians. Since 1830 it has housed the shrine containing the relics of Saint Vincent de Paul. It is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to the saint.

Relics saved from the Revolution

Saint Vincent de Paul died in 1660 at the Priory of Saint-Lazare, where he was buried. At the Revolution, the Vincentians were driven out of Saint-Lazare, but his remains were put in a safe place. After the congregation was reestablished, a new motherhouse was set up on Rue de Sèvres, and a chapel was built there in the 1820s. On April 25, 1830, the relics were solemnly carried there in a great procession through Paris led by the archbishop, Monsignor de Quélen.

A young novice of the Daughters of Charity, Catherine Labouré, took part in the celebrations of this translation. In the days that followed, she reported seeing the heart of Saint Vincent appear to her in the chapel on Rue du Bac, a few months before the apparitions of the Virgin that gave rise to the Miraculous Medal.



Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul, Rue de Sèvres in Paris.

The shrine of Saint Vincent

The shrine, of silver and glass, is placed high above the main altar. Pilgrims can go up by a staircase to pray as close as possible to the relics. The saint's body rests there dressed in his priestly vestments; the visible face and hands are wax reproductions covering the bones. The chapel, in the Neoclassical style, is decorated with paintings and stained glass evoking the saint's life and works.

Praying beside Saint Vincent de Paul

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Vincent de Paul. On site, after a time of silence before the shrine, it is natural to entrust the poor people you know, those you serve or would like to serve. The prayer to Saint Vincent de Paul can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia for a personal visit.

Other places of Saint Vincent de Paul

- **Paris**: the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, 140 Rue du Bac, motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, where Saint Louise de Marillac and Saint Catherine Labouré rest.
- **Saint-Vincent-de-Paul** (Landes), near Dax: the Berceau, with the family's birthplace house, a chapel, and the old oak associated with his childhood.
- **Dax**: the town where he did his early studies.
- **Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne** (Ain): the former Châtillon-les-Dombes, where he founded the first Confraternity of Charity in 1617.
- **Folleville** (Somme): the church where he preached the sermon of January 25, 1617.

Practical information

The chapel is on Rue de Sèvres, near the Vaneau subway station, and a few minutes' walk from Rue du Bac, which makes it possible to visit both places on the same day. On September 27, the feast day of Saint Vincent de Paul, special celebrations are held. Check opening hours and Mass times with the Congregation of the Mission before you come.

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