

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Vincent Ferrer

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 5

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IN BRIEF

Saint Vincent Ferrer

Dominican priest from Valencia, great itinerant preacher of the late Middle Ages, who died in Vannes.

Feast day	April 5
Born	1350, Valencia, Spain
Died	April 5, 1419, Vannes, France
Canonized	June 29, 1455, by Pope Callixtus III
Era	15th century
Patron saint of	Vannes, Valencia, builders, roofers, plumbers

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Novena to Saint Vincent Ferrer

Vannes Cathedral and the Tomb of Saint Vincent Ferrer

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Vincent Ferrer

Saint Vincent Ferrer was a Dominican priest born in Valencia, Spain, in 1350, who died in Vannes, Brittany, on April 5, 1419. For twenty years he crossed Europe on foot, preaching penance to huge crowds in the middle of the Great Western Schism. A major figure of his time, he is also at the center of a historical debate about his preaching to the Jews of Spain. Canonized in 1455, patron of Vannes and of the region of Valencia, he is celebrated on April 5.

Who was Saint Vincent Ferrer?

Vincent was the fourth child of Guillem Ferrer, a notary, and Constança Miquel. He was baptized in Valencia and received the name of Saint Vincent of Saragossa, patron of his city. His brother Boniface became a Carthusian, then prior of the Grande Chartreuse and general of his order.

At nineteen, Vincent entered the Order of Preachers founded by Saint Dominic. At first he was tempted to leave the habit, but he persevered, encouraged by his parents.

Highly gifted, he taught logic from the age of twenty and wrote on dialectics. Ordained a priest in Barcelona in 1379, he taught theology in Barcelona and then at the University of Lleida, where he received his doctorate. He was already noticed for his talent as a speaker.



Saint Vincent Ferrer, central panel of Giovanni Bellini's polyptych in Venice.

Key dates in the life of Saint Vincent Ferrer

- **1350**: Born in Valencia, in the Crown of Aragon.
- **Around 1367**: Enters the Dominicans.
- **1379**: Ordained a priest in Barcelona.
- **1378-1417**: Great Western Schism; he first supports the Avignon papacy and becomes confessor to Pedro de Luna, the antipope Benedict XIII.
- **1399**: Beginning of his twenty years of itinerant preaching.
- **1410**: Founds an orphanage in Valencia, the first in the country.
- **1412**: Plays a decisive role in the Compromise of Caspe, which settles the succession to the throne of Aragon.
- **1416**: Breaks with Benedict XIII and has Aragon withdraw its obedience from him, to help end the schism.
- **1418**: Called to Brittany by Duke John V.

- **April 5, 1419**: Dies in Vannes.
- **June 29, 1455**: Canonized by Pope Callixtus III.
- **April 5, 1456**: Solemn translation of his relics in Vannes.

A man of the Great Schism

When Vincent was a young priest, the Western Church was torn apart: from 1378, two and then three popes disputed their legitimacy. Close to the Aragonese cardinal Pedro de Luna, Vincent first took the side of Avignon and defended this position in a treatise. When Pedro de Luna became the Avignon pope Benedict XIII, Vincent was his confessor.

But, disappointed by the stubbornness of Benedict, who refused every solution, he eventually supported the efforts of the Council of Constance. In 1416 he had Aragon proclaim its withdrawal of obedience from Benedict XIII, an important step toward the end of the schism.

The preacher of Europe

From 1399 until his death, Vincent traveled through Spain, southern France, Italy and Switzerland, and according to some sources as far as England and Scotland. His day followed a set pattern. He celebrated Mass, with the consent of the local Church authorities, then preached for hours in the open air, since no church could hold the crowds. Processions of penance and catechism lessons followed. Hundreds of disciples followed him from town to town.

He often preached on the Last Judgment, which is why he came to be shown with wings, as the "angel of the Apocalypse." Witnesses nevertheless describe a gentle and joyful man, a man of prayer and study rather than a threatening prophet. Tradition credits him with the gift of tongues, because very different audiences understood him, and with many healings.



Saint Vincent Ferrer preaching, after Alonso Cano.

A disputed memory: Vincent Ferrer and the Jews

A significant part of Vincent's preaching aimed at the conversion of the Jews and Muslims of Spain. He knew Hebrew and the Talmud, and many Jews, including rabbis, were baptized after hearing him. But this took place in a climate of violence: since the massacres of 1391, many conversions were made out of fear. Vincent also advocated the strict separation of Jews and Christians, and synagogues were turned into churches in the wake of his preaching.

Historians remain divided. For some, he belongs to the history of Spanish anti-Judaism. For others, he condemned violence, recalling in a sermon that "the apostles who conquered the world carried neither lances nor knives," and that Jesus and the Virgin Mary were Jews. Acknowledging this shadow is part of an honest memory: the holiness recognized by the Church does not erase the limits of an age.

The last months in Brittany

In 1417 Vincent preached in Burgundy, and then Duke John V of Brittany invited him to his duchy. He passed through Nantes and reached Vannes, seat of the ducal court, in 1418. He traveled across Brittany as far as Caen, in Normandy, where he met King Henry V of England and urged him to end the Hundred Years' War. He returned to Vannes exhausted and ill, and died there on April 5, 1419. The Bretons, who had seen him preach, at once surrounded him with great devotion.

Why is Saint Vincent Ferrer the patron saint of builders?

Vincent Ferrer is the patron of the building trades: builders, roofers and plumbers take him as their protector. He is also patron of the city of Vannes, where he died, and of the region of Valencia, where he was born. He is invoked against epilepsy and headaches, and he is prayed to for preachers, for the unity of Christians and for the conversion of the heart. He is also much loved in Latin America and in the Philippines, where many parishes bear his name.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Vincent Ferrer in art

- **The Dominican habit**, white tunic and black cloak.
- **A raised index finger** pointing to heaven, the gesture of the preacher announcing the Judgment.
- **Wings**, as the "angel of the Apocalypse."
- **An open book**, sometimes with the words "Fear God and give him glory" (Revelation 14:7).
- **A trumpet or a flame**, in some images, signs of his preaching.



The chapel of the tomb of Saint Vincent Ferrer in Vannes cathedral.

What his holiness teaches us

Saint Vincent Ferrer put his whole life at the service of the word of God and the unity of the Church. He called his contemporaries, tested by plague, war and schism, to change their lives.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Vincent Ferrer and follow the novena to Saint Vincent Ferrer, from March 28 to April 5.

Where to pray to Saint Vincent Ferrer

- **Vannes** (Brittany, France): Saint Peter's Cathedral, which keeps his tomb and part of his relics.
- **Valencia** (Spain): his birthplace, now a church, and the basilica that bears his name.

- **Collioure** (southern France): the feast of Saint Vincent on August 16 recalls the arrival of relics in 1700.
- **Brittany**: many chapels and stained glass windows show him, as at Plounéour-Trez.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Vincent Ferrer for Conversion and Unity

Saint Vincent Ferrer has been invoked for six centuries in Brittany, Spain and Italy, and also in Latin America and the Philippines. No single prayer to him has become universal, but his whole preaching was a call to conversion and hope. Below is an original prayer to Saint Vincent Ferrer for conversion and unity.

Prayer to Saint Vincent Ferrer

Saint Vincent Ferrer, tireless preacher of the Gospel, you walked the roads of Europe for twenty years to call people back to God: pray for us.

You suffered from the division of the Church and worked for its unity: obtain for Christians the grace to be reconciled in truth and charity.

You spoke to the crowds about the judgment of God without losing your gentleness and your joy: help me to take my life seriously and to turn back to God each day.

Watch over preachers and catechists, over the sick, especially those who suffer from epilepsy or headaches, and over those who build our homes. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Finally, teach me to respect every person and to bear witness to Christ by word and example, never by force. Amen.

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



Saint Vincent Ferrer in a stained glass window at Plounéour-Trez, Brittany.

A short invocation for the sick

> *Saint Vincent Ferrer, you brought comfort to so many sick people on your journeys: look upon (name), who is suffering, and ask the Lord to grant healing, strength and peace. Amen.*

This invocation is also an original text by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Vincent Ferrer is celebrated on April 5, the day of his death in Vannes in 1419, according to the Roman Martyrology. The Dominican Order celebrates him on May 5. You can pray to him for someone who is sick, before preaching or teaching the faith, at the start of a building project, or when you long for reconciliation in your family or in the Church.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Vincent Ferrer, from March 28 to April 5, and discover the life of Saint Vincent Ferrer.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Vincent Ferrer

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Vincent Ferrer, Dominican preacher of the late Middle Ages. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, April 5, begin on March 28.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.

This novena usually falls at the end of Lent or during Easter time. It is well suited to those who pray for a sick person, to preachers and catechists, to builders, and to anyone who wants to make a fresh start in the Christian life.

Day 1: Persevering in one's vocation

As a young Dominican, Vincent was tempted to leave the habit. Encouraged by his parents, he persevered. Every vocation, whether to marriage, priesthood or religious life, goes through hours of doubt. Faithfulness is often built in those hours, with the help of those who love us and believe in us.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen me on the path to which you have called me.

Today: Encourage someone who is going through a time of discouragement.

Day 2: Study in the service of truth

Before preaching to the crowds, Vincent was a teacher of logic and theology. A word that touches hearts is nourished by study and prayer. We cannot hand on what we have not first received. Vincent spent years in the classroom before he spent years on the road.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me a desire to know my faith better.

Today: Read and meditate slowly on the Gospel of the day.

Day 3: Suffering from division

Vincent lived through the Great Schism, when the Church had several popes at once. He sometimes chose the wrong side, but he always sought unity. Division wounds the Church, and it also wounds families and friendships.

Prayer: Lord, heal the divisions of your Church and those of my family.

Today: Take a first step toward someone with whom you have fallen out.

Day 4: Acknowledging one's mistakes

For a long time faithful to Benedict XIII, Vincent finally broke with him to serve the peace of the Church. Changing one's mind takes humility, especially when one has publicly defended the opposite position. Vincent preferred the good of the Church to his own consistency.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to admit when I have been wrong.

Today: Ask forgiveness for a mistake, even an old one.



Statue of Saint Vincent Ferrer in Valencia, his hometown.

Day 5: On the roads

For twenty years, Vincent walked from town to town, until he was exhausted. He kept nothing for himself, and he founded an orphanage in Valencia for children who had no one. The Gospel is not meant to stay at home: it goes out to meet people where they are.

Prayer: Lord, make me ready to go wherever you send me.

Today: Visit or call someone you have been neglecting.

Day 6: Turning back to God

Each of Vincent's sermons ended with a procession of penance. The crowds who heard him did not just listen; they changed their lives. Conversion is not a feeling but a change of life. It begins with a simple step: to recognize what needs to change and to ask God for help.

Prayer: Lord, show me what I must change, and give me the strength to do it.

Today: Prepare to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Day 7: Thinking of the last things

Vincent often spoke about the Judgment, without losing his joy. Thinking about the end of our lives helps us to live better today, to forgive sooner and to love more freely. The Judgment he preached was that of a God who wants all to be saved.

Prayer: Lord, may I live each day as if I were to meet you this evening.

Today: Pray for the deceased members of your family.

Day 8: Respecting every person

Vincent's preaching to the Jews of Spain remains a subject of debate. Yet he reminded his hearers that Jesus and Mary were Jews. Proclaiming Christ can never justify contempt or coercion. Faith is offered, never imposed, and it is received only in freedom.

Prayer: Lord, purify my heart of all prejudice and contempt. Bless the Jewish people, your first people.

Today: Refrain from any contemptuous word about a group or a person.



The reliquary of Saint Vincent Ferrer in Vannes.

Day 9: Dying in Brittany

Exhausted, Vincent returned to Vannes to die there, far from his native Valencia. The Bretons immediately adopted him as one of their own. He had given his life to the end, and he gave it away from home. Wherever we are, we can make that place the ground of our holiness.

Prayer: Lord, I place the intention of this novena in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Vincent Ferrer, grant me a life given to others and a peaceful death. Amen.

Today: Pray for your town and for those who live there.

Closing prayer

Saint Vincent Ferrer, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have brought to you. You preached conversion to all of Europe: obtain for me a new heart. Pray for the unity of the Church, for preachers, for the sick and for all who seek God. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Vincent Ferrer and the prayer to Saint Vincent Ferrer.

PILGRIMAGE

Vannes Cathedral and the Tomb of Saint Vincent Ferrer

The Cathedral of Saint-Pierre in Vannes, in the Morbihan, keeps the tomb of Saint Vincent Ferrer, who died in the city on April 5, 1419, and part of his relics. It is the saint's main place of pilgrimage in France. Vincent Ferrer is also the patron of the city of Vannes, which has adopted him as one of its own.

The tomb of a preacher from Spain

Called to Brittany by Duke John V, Vincent Ferrer arrived in Vannes, seat of the ducal court, in 1418. He died there a few months later and was buried in the cathedral. Many miracles were soon reported at his grave, and the duke requested his canonization. Proclaimed a saint by Callixtus III in 1455, Vincent had his relics solemnly raised at Vannes on April 5, 1456. The cathedral was largely rebuilt between the 15th and 19th centuries; a chapel is devoted to the saint's tomb.



The Cathedral of Saint-Pierre in Vannes.

Visiting the cathedral

In the tomb chapel, pilgrims find the saint's burial place and the reliquary chest that preserves part of his remains. The Chapel of Saint Vincent Ferrer also houses a bust of the saint. Works of art in the cathedral evoke his preaching and the miracles that tradition attributes to him. The visit can continue in the old town of Vannes, where the saint preached.



The Chapel of Saint Vincent Ferrer in Vannes Cathedral.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Vincent Ferrer. Before his tomb, you can entrust to God those who proclaim the Gospel, the unity of the Church, or an intention for personal conversion, with the prayer to Saint Vincent Ferrer. The novena, from March 27 to April 4, can prepare a pilgrimage for his feast. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Vincent Ferrer

- **Valencia** (Spain): his birthplace, turned into a small church in 1950, the Basilica of Saint Vincent Ferrer, and chapels at the cathedral and the Saint Dominic convent.
- **Collioure** (Pyrénées-Orientales): the Saint-Vincent festivities on August 16, in memory of relics that arrived in 1700.

- **Ploudalmézeau** (Finistère): a relic was transferred there with great celebration in 1925.
- **Venice**: the polyptych of Saint Vincent Ferrer painted by Giovanni Bellini, in the Basilica of Santi Giovanni e Paolo.

Practical information

The cathedral is in the heart of the old town of Vannes, within walking distance of the train station. It remains a place of worship: visits are suspended during services. Celebrations around April 5 draw many of the faithful. Consult the website of the Diocese of Vannes or the cathedral parish for times.

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