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An Introduction to This Pocket Guide

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells his disciples a parable about the necessity to pray always without becoming weary (see Luke 18:1). A beautiful way to “pray always” is to pray novenas.

Praying a novena is an ancient tradition of praying for nine days in a row, usually for a specific intention. Novenas can be an enriching devotion to add to your prayer life, especially as most take just a few minutes to pray each day.

The history of novenas goes all the way back to the time of the apostles, when Jesus asked the apostles to pray in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Early Christians noticed that they prayed for the nine days leading up to Pentecost, and thus novenas follow this example.

In the history of the Church, novenas have often been prayed in preparation for feast days such as Christmas or Divine Mercy Sunday. They have been used to pray for the souls of the departed, especially for a pope who has passed away. At times, praying novenas has also been used as a condition to receive an indulgence. Actually,



Novenas: Our Story

Annie: I first learned of novenas at the University of Illinois, while I was living at the Newman Center. At the time, I was beginning to grow more in my faith, in large part due to my Newman friends and the activities at the Center that focused on prayer, worship, and Bible study.

One of my closest friends invited me to join her in praying a daily holy hour in the Newman chapel. Every morning, she and I would have a holy hour before class.

As my faith deepened, I began to discern my vocation. I felt called to marriage but had not dated many good, Catholic men. One night, a good friend of mine told me about a few other women who lived at the Newman Center who had met their boyfriends and fiancés after praying a novena to St. Anne. At that point, I didn't even know what a novena was!

When I got home that night, I found a “Novena to St. Anne” on the Internet, and I prayed it every morning in the chapel for the next nine days for the intention of meeting a good Catholic man to date—someone who could be my future husband. As I left the chapel each morning, I noticed a man sitting in the back, praying. I thought, *Now, I would like to meet someone like him, a man who also starts his day in prayer.*



An Introduction to Novenas

THE HISTORY OF NOVENAS

Novenas are a type of prayer that traditionally lasts for nine days. Many novenas are prayed for a specific intention through the intercession of a particular saint, while others are prayed directly to Jesus. They are a great way to become more persistent in your prayers and to “pray without ceasing.”

The word “novena” comes from the Latin word *novem*, meaning “nine.” There is a Scriptural reason why the number nine is significant. Acts 1:12–14 tells us that after Jesus’ ascension into heaven forty days after Easter, the apostles prayed for the next nine days. These nine days led up to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, which occurred fifty days after Easter. (*Pentecost* comes from the Greek word meaning “fiftieth.”)

This apostolic pattern of nine days of prayer is the basis for the novenas we pray today. It is also why many novenas are prayed during the nine days leading up to a feast or solemnity in the Church or before an important event such as a wedding, an ordination, a medical procedure, or an interview for a job. But they can be prayed at any time.

Praying a novena is a particularly great way to be intentional in prayer for a specific need. As with any habit we want

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NOVENA TO ST. JOSEPH



St. Joseph is the foster father of Jesus and the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He is known as a powerful intercessor for many different intentions, likely because he is so close to Jesus.

Everything we know about St. Joseph comes from Scripture, but even that doesn't give us very much detail about him and his life. This is what we do know: He was a humble, faithful, and compassionate man, caring for the Blessed Virgin Mary and for Jesus. He was the guardian and protector of the Holy Family.

Pope Francis writes, "Saint Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation ... During the hidden years in Nazareth, Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father."¹⁰

St. Joseph is invoked as a patron saint by many groups, and his intercession is sought for many causes, including these:

- families
- fathers
- workers
- people looking for a house
- people in doubt
- travelers

- cabinetmakers, carpenters, and craftsmen
- confectioners
- the dying
- a holy and happy death
- engineers

You can bring any prayer intention to St. Joseph and trust that he will bring it to our Father in heaven, seeking the Lord's will for you and your intention as he sought it for himself and his family.

The Solemnity of St. Joseph is March 19, and it is one of the few solemnities celebrated during the Lenten season. This tells us the importance of his role in his family and in the Church.

Just as the Blessed Virgin Mary has many different titles (such as Mother of God, Virgin of Virgins, and Queen of Peace), St. Joseph also has a litany of different names and patronages by which he is called upon for intercessory prayers, some of which are included in his novena.

You can pray this novena leading up to the feast day of St. Joseph or leading up to any other event that you feel could use his intercessory prayers.



PRAYING THE NOVENA

Day 1

Intention: Today we pray to grow in humility, faithfulness, and compassion.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Father in heaven, thank you for the gift and role model of St. Joseph. I desire to seek your will in my life and to follow you with great trust and confidence as St. Joseph did.

St. Joseph, you are the faithful protector and intercessor of all who love and venerate you. I have confidence in you, and after Jesus and Mary, I come to you as an example of holiness, for you are especially close to God.

St. Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer, pray for me.

Pray that I may grow closer to Christ.

Pray that I may know and follow his will.

Pray for me in every difficulty I am enduring and for every decision I need to make.

Pray that I will be guided every step along the way.

Please especially pray for ... [*mention your intentions here*].

St. Joseph, you are humble, faithful, and compassionate.

Pray that I will be the same.

NOVENA TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS



The Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is a movable feast that is usually celebrated nineteen days after Pentecost, on a Friday after Corpus Christi. (Solemnities are the celebrations of greatest importance on the Church's liturgical calendar. Every holy day of obligation is a solemnity.)

The Sacred Heart of Jesus devotion focuses on the love that Jesus has for each of us—for every person. This feast was first celebrated in France in the seventeenth century, and it was added to the calendar of the universal Church by Pope Pius IX in the mid-nineteenth century.

Speaking about the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI said,

In biblical language, “heart” indicates the centre of the person where his sentiments and intentions dwell. In the Heart of the Redeemer we adore God’s love for humanity, his will for universal salvation, his infinite mercy.

Practicing devotion to the Sacred Heart of Christ therefore means adoring that Heart which, after having loved us to the end, was pierced by a spear and from high on the Cross poured out blood and water, an inexhaustible source of new life.¹¹

There are several saints who had a special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, such as St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus, but most people today know about this devotion due to the witness of a French nun, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.