Novena to San Gennaro

Litany in Honor of San Gennaro

Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, here us.
Christ, graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven,
Have mercy on us.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world,
Have mercy on us.

God the Holy Spirit,
Have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, One God,
Have mercy on us.

Holy Mary,
Pray for us.

Holy Mother of God,
Pray for us.

Holy Virgin of virgins,
("*Pray for us" after each petition)*

Queen of Martyrs,

Saint Gennaro,

Saint Gennaro, glory of the priesthood and episcopate,

Saint Gennaro, shining mirror of all virtues,

Saint Gennaro, zealous pastor of souls,

Saint Gennaro, kind shepherd respected and loved by Christians and pagans,

Saint Gennaro, shining light for the conversion of unbelievers,

Saint Gennaro, intercessor for the conversion of sinners,

Saint Gennaro, model of perfection for believing Catholics,

Saint Gennaro, unwearied laborer in the vineyard of Christ,

Saint Gennaro, teacher of truth and virtue,

Saint Gennaro, devoted to his flock with a father's love,

Saint Gennaro, moved to compassion by the needs of his suffering children,

Saint Gennaro, fearless follower of Christ in the face of dangers and threats,

Saint Gennaro, who refused to abandon those entrusted to his care,

Saint Gennaro, who gave his life in the act of comforting the imprisoned,

Saint Gennaro, who chose the sufferings of this world rather than offend God by the sin of apostasy,

Saint Gennaro, who forgave his tormentors,

Saint Gennaro, spared by the wild beasts,

Saint Gennaro, great martyr of the Catholic Faith,

Saint Gennaro, who desires even now to remain close to those who seek his assistance,

Saint Gennaro, worker of miracles for the people of Naples and the world,

Saint Gennaro, chosen patron of our parish,

Saint Gennaro, still the good shepherd who each year gathers together all the people of our parish,

Saint Gennaro, whose name our parish invokes for the blessings of unity and Christian peace,

Saint Gennaro, whose intercession we seek on our pilgrim journey to God,

Saint Gennaro, whom we honor each year with our parish feast,

Saint Gennaro, bless our efforts with good weather, harmony, and an increased love of our Church,

Priest: Pray for us Saint Gennaro,

People: Bless us with good weather and bring success to the work of our hands.

LET US PRAY:

Merciful God, through the labors and sacrifices of Saint Gennaro, You brought about the sanctification of believers and the conversion of pagans. From his place in heaven Saint Gennaro continues to watch over those who call upon him as a chosen intercessor. Each year You confirm his desire to remain with his people by the miracles which take place at his tomb.

We, as a parish, honor Your great martyr and call upon him for heavenly assistance and protection.

May he continue to be a channel of divine grace, may he obtain from You success for the endeavors of our yearly feast. May we be blessed with good weather and harmony. Lord, grant us a spirit of true joy doing Your work and an increased sense of dedication to Your body on earth, the Catholic Church.

May Saint Gennaro present our humble efforts to Your Divine Throne of Mercy and may our good works help to obtain the remission of our sins and blessings for our parish and our families. We ask all this through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, One God, for ages unto endless ages. Amen.

Who is Saint Gennaro?

In order to understand "who" Saint Gennaro was, we have to first have some understanding of "when" he was. Put aside all modern concepts of recorded information. We live by tax records, social security numbers, and credit cards. In the world of ancient Rome, records were only kept about the rich and famous. If you belonged to a persecuted minority like the Christians, then records of who you were and where you lived would be a definite disadvantage.

We know that Saint Gennaro died in 305 A.D. during the persecution of Christians in the reign of the Roman Emperor Diocletian. He lived and died in the region of southwest Italy known today as the province of Campania. Several cities claim to be his birth place and also claim him to have been "their" bishop. While he really could only have been born in one place, it is conceivable that as bishop of the region, he traveled from city to city baptizing, confirming, and preaching the Faith. So Naples, Benevento, Nola and Pozzuoli may all, in a sense, have a legitimate claim as the site of his priestly labors.

Saint Gennaro was known to have been a kindly and holy man. Zealous in preaching the Faith, he

converted many pagans and persuaded many who had fallen away from the practice of the faith (things never change, do they?) to return to the Sacramental life of the Church. Tradition says he was very young when he was consecrated a bishop and that is why in pictures he is shown as a young man without beard. Certainly, he was chosen to be a bishop because of his outstanding personal holiness and kindness and was even greatly respected by the pagans of the province. As a true pastor of the souls Our Lord had entrusted to him, he visited the sick, counseled the troubled, celebrated the grace-giving Sacraments, and taught the true faith of Christ. In every way he was a channel of grace who gathered together and nourished the Church in the area around Naples.

A persecution of Christians was commanded by the Roman Emperor Diocletian. Why? Buring incense before the statues of the guardian deities of Rome was considered a civic act of loyalty as well as an act of worship. Worshiping other gods was no problem for the Romans. For Christians and Jews, it was and is forbidden by the First Commandment. Just as we are not permitted to worship in any other faith, the early Christians were not allowed to worship in this pagan Roman religious/civic ritual and were therefore seen by the emperors, governors, and general populace as a disloyal “fifth column.”

Certain highly visible members of Saint Gennaro's congregation were arrested: a lector, a man in charge of distributing alms to the poor, and a catechist. The Christians urged Saint Gennaro to leave the city and hide in the country until things were safer. As their bishop Saint Gennaro felt he could not abandon his people when they needed him most. He visited and encouraged his flock to remain steadfast in their faith. He taught them as Christ teaches us, the troubles of this world are passing. Commit no sin which would endanger your souls for the eternal life to come.

Saint Gennaro also visited the above-mentioned Christians who had been arrested. They were alone and frightened in a damp miserable jail, and he went to strengthen then with the Sacraments and console them with his prayers. He was recognized, arrested, and humiliated by being chained to the governor's chariot and dragged to trial at Pozzuoli where the governor was to hold court.

Now, it was Saint Gennaro's turn to feel the dampness, filth, and fatigue of a Roman jail. Deprived of food, water, and sleep, constantly threatened and reminded by taunting guards of the horrible tortures awaiting him, our brave saint prayed for strength. He feared the pain they could

inflict on his flesh less than he feared the pain he would inflict on the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, by the sin of apostasy. He was condemned to be torn to pieces by wild beasts in the arena at Pozzuoli.

We find it unimaginable that human beings would crowd into an arena to watch and cheer as their fellow human beings were torn to pieces by lions and bears, but that was a world of darkness where the light of Christ's mercy did not shine. Miraculously, the beasts would not touch Saint Gennaro as he knelt trembling in prayer on the sandy floor of that arena. How did this miracle affect the cruel Roman crowd of spectators? Did they raise their thumbs up and ask the governor to spare the innocent man who even the wild beasts would not harm? We will never know. What we do know is that the Roman governor had to send soldiers to do what the wild animals would not do. Saint Gennaro was beheaded.

Christians of that place came and took his body so that it would be given a decent burial. They also filled a container with Saint Gennaro's blood that spilled on the dirt of the arena. (The color worn on the feast of a martyr, i.e., one who suffers death rather than renounce Christ, is red, the color of the blood they shed.)

Within a hundred years of his death Christians were free to worship openly, and so a chapel was built in his honor in the city of Naples. When they came to take his body from its tomb and carry it to the newly built chapel, the first miracle of Saint Gennaro was seen. A glass container with the saint's blood had been placed beside his body. When the tomb was opened, the blood was a dried stain on the inside of the container. As the body was being carried to Naples, the dried blood liquefied. Ever since then on his feast day, September 19, and certain other days associated with events of his life, the glass container with his dried blood is taken from his tomb and shown to the people of Naples. If you were to go there on one of those days, you would witness what was seen by the Christians of Campania a hundred years after his death, a true miracle. Chemists and scientists have examined the contents of the glass container. It is dried blood and it liquefies! The have no explanation of how.

Why it happens may be easier to understand. Saint Gennaro did not want to leave his people. He was martyred because he stayed and refused to abandon them during their time of troubles. We might well see the miracle of the liquefaction of his blood as a favor God grants to this saint who loved Him so much. A favor that allows Saint Gennaro to show

his presence to those who still look to him as a guide and shepherd on their journey through life. Saint Gennaro is saying to us "See, my love for you, my protection, my directing you to follow Christ, my urging that you be steadfast in the practice of your Catholic faith, these are not dried up dusty memories of the past. Even from heaven I continue to watch over you and bring your cares and needs to Our Lord's attention."

The miracle is an assurance that our chosen patron was granted his wish by God, to remain with his people. He did not and does not abandon us in our hour of greatest need. Our kind and gentle bishop saint continues to draw souls, teach, protect, and remains a guide for those who seek God with a sincere heart.

I am told by parishioners that twenty-six years ago when Father Harold Langley was looking for a saint to be the focal point of our parish endeavor, he went through the lives of dozens of popular Italian saints but "couldn't get Saint Gennaro out of his mind." I think I understand why.

Saint Gennaro, our chosen patron, continue to watch over us.

Amen.

(Novena and Life of Saint Gennaro composed in honor of the 25th Anniversary of the Sain Gennaro Feast, Sacred Heart Parish, Island Park, NY 11558. All rights reserved, 1995.)

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