

INFANT OF PRAGUE



Novena & Prayers



Infant of Prague

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Written and Compiled by
Marianne Lorraine Trouvé, FSP



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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

15 14 13 12 11

Contents

<i>What Is a Novena?</i> -----	1
<i>Devotion to the Infant of Prague</i> -----	5
<i>Morning Prayer</i> -----	9
<i>Novena to the Infant of Prague</i> -----	15
<i>Various Prayers</i> -----	21
<i>Evening Prayer</i> -----	33



What Is a Novena?



The Catholic tradition of praying novenas has its roots in the earliest days of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that after the ascension of Jesus, the apostles returned to Jerusalem, to the upper room, where “They all devoted themselves single-mindedly to prayer, along with some women and Mary the Mother of Jesus and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). Jesus had instructed his disciples to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of the Lord came to them. This prayer of the first Christian community was the first “novena.” Based on this, Christians have always prayed for various needs, trusting that God both hears and answers prayer.

The word “novena” is derived from the Latin term *novem*, meaning nine. In biblical times numbers held deep symbolism for people. The number “three,” for example, symbolized perfection,

fullness, completeness. The number nine—three times three—symbolized perfection times perfection. Novenas developed because it was thought that—symbolically speaking—nine days represented the perfect amount of time to pray. The ancient Greeks and Romans had the custom of mourning for nine days after a death. The early Christian Church offered Mass for the deceased for nine consecutive days. During the Middle Ages novenas in preparation for solemn feasts became popular, as did novenas to particular saints.

Whether a novena is made solemnly—in a parish church in preparation for a feastday—or in the privacy of one’s home, as Christians we never really pray alone. Through the waters of Baptism we have become members of the Body of Christ and are thereby united to every other member of Christ’s Mystical Body. When we pray, we are spiritually united with all the other members.

Just as we pray for each other while here on earth, those who have gone before us and are united with God in heaven can pray for us and intercede for us as well. We Catholics use the term “communion of saints” to refer to this exchange of spiritual help among the members of the Church on earth, those who have died and are being purified, and the saints in heaven.

While nothing can replace the celebration of Mass and the sacraments as the Church's highest form of prayer, devotions have a special place in Catholic life. Devotions such as the Stations of the Cross can help us enter into the sufferings of Jesus and give us an understanding of his personal love for us. The mysteries of the Rosary can draw us into meditating on the lives of Jesus and Mary. Devotions to the saints can help us witness to our faith and encourage us in our commitment to lead lives of holiness and service as they did.



How to use this booklet

The Morning and Evening Prayers are modeled on the Liturgy of the Hours, following its pattern of psalms, Scripture readings, and intercessions.

We suggest that during the novena you make time in your schedule to pray the Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. If you are able, try to also set aside a time during the day when you can pray the novena and any other particular prayer(s) you have chosen. Or you can recite the devotional prayers at the conclusion of the Morning or Evening Prayer. What is important is to pray with expectant faith and confidence in a loving God who will answer

our prayers in the way that will most benefit us. The Lord “satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things” (Ps 107:9).