

Saints of Lithuania

Several Lithuanians have proven their unconditional faith and devotion to Christianity, showing extraordinary examples of self-sacrifice. Their martyrdom is recognized, remembered and celebrated up to this day.

St. John, St. Anthony and St. Eustace

Saints John, Anthony and Eustathius are the first officially recognized Christian martyrs from Lithuania. In the middle of the XIV century, they lived in Vilnius, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and served in the court of the Grand Duke Algirdas, – father of Jogaila, the future king of Poland. Although Algirdas married a Russian Orthodox noble woman, he remained a pagan as did his court. John, Anthony and their cousin Eustace, who were noblemen and members of the Duke's court, converted to Christianity under the influence of a Russian Orthodox priest. They were forced to denounce their faith in order to retake pagan practices. Refusing to denounce their faith, they were imprisoned, tortured, and killed. After their death, the devotion to martyrs began and this attracted the attention of the Patriarch of Constantinople. St. John, St. Anthony and St. Eustace were officially declared Eastern Orthodox saints in 1547. In 1969, Pope Paul VI declared them saints of the Roman Catholic Church. Their remains are resting in the Russian Orthodox Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius.

Saint Casimir (1458-1484)

Saint Casimir (Kazimieras) was the third of thirteen children, born to the King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Casimir IV and his wife Elizabeth of Austria. As a child, he was educated by the best teachers of that time. According to surviving historical accounts, the Prince was an extremely gifted student. St. Casimir is described as a person of refined taste, an intellectual, eloquent and of generosity. St. Casimir was a constant travel companion and provided assistance to his father. He was expected to succeed his father to the throne. The young prince had a distaste for the luxury of courtly life and chose the way of asceticism and devotion. Casimir showed his love for God through exercises of devotion, and also through his material charity to the poor. St. John Paul II stated, “he was a shining example of poverty and of sacrificial love for the poor and needy.”

Prince Casimir died from tuberculosis. His parents laid him to rest in a chapel in Vilnius Cathedral. Later, a new magnificent baroque style chapel was built for his remains. St. Casimir was declared patron of Lithuania and Poland. He is also the patron saint of youth and an example for young people because of his prudence, justice, sensitivity and chastity.

The city of Naples and the Knights of Malta, who had fought against Muslim Turks in the Mediterranean area, also consider St. Casimir as their patron saint. The devotion to St. Casimir is very well known in Florence, southern Italy and in Sicily. In Venezuela, there is a small town named in the Saint's honour, as well as St. Casimir Church and Monastery.

Saint Josaphat Kuntsevych, OSBM (1580-1623)

Josaphat Kuntsevych dedicated his entire monastic life to the unity of the Eastern and Western Christian Church. For that reason, he is considered a pioneer of ecumenism and a patron of those involved in ecumenical work. For his contributions towards the unification of the Christian Church, the remains of the Saint were buried at the altar of St. Basil the Great, in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

He was born Ioann (Ivan) Kuntsevych in 1580, into a merchant's family, in the Volhynia region in what is now the Ukraine. He arrived in Vilnius in 1596 to learn the merchant's trade, in the academy founded by the Jesuits. In 1604, he entered the Basilian Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Vilnius and received the name of Josaphat.

He was tenacious as a pastor and had a great ability to connect with people. The Orthodox called him the “thief of souls” because he led many of the Orthodox Christians to the Catholic Church. Josaphat Kuntsevych reorganized the Basilian Order and founded the Order of St. Basil the Great – a Congregation of the Holy Trinity with its headquarters in Vilnius. He became the Archbishop of Polotsk in 1618. Kuntsevych strongly supported the union of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, (the Union of Brest, signed in 1596 and united the Roman Catholic Church with the part of the Orthodox Church that was within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), which was opposed by some Russian Orthodox. He was killed by the citizens of Vitebsk, who opposed the union of the Churches. Twenty years after his death, in 1867, Josaphat was beatified, and then proclaimed a saint by Pope Pius IX.



Saint Andrew Bobola, SJ (1591-1657)

The future Saint Andrew Bobola was born in 1591, in the town of Sandomierz, Poland. In 1611, he entered the Society of Jesus in Vilnius where he studied philosophy and theology at Vilnius University, and worked at various locations in Lithuania's Jesuit Province. For twelve years he worked at St. Casimir Church in Vilnius. He was known for his preaching and for developing sodalities whose members ministered to prisoners and taught catechism to children. He and the sodalists acted heroically during trying times when the plague struck Vilnius.

During the Polish-Lithuanian war with Moscow in 1655, raging Cossacks demonstrated a particular hatred for Catholicism in Lithuania. Renowned for his missionary work, Father Bobola was captured by the Cossacks in 1657, and brutally tortured to death, after refusing to renounce the Catholic faith.

Andrew Bobola was beatified in St. Peter's Basilica in 1853, and was declared a saint in 1938. His remains were transported from Italy to the St. Andrew Bobola Shrine in Warsaw. Andrew Bobola's image is displayed at St Casimir's Church in Vilnius at the side the altar and his relics are kept in the crypt.

Saint Raphael of Joseph Kalinowski, O.C.D (1835-1907)

St. Raphael Kalinowski is one on the best known Saints of the Carmelites together with St. John of the Cross. He considered a patron of Siberian exiles, soldiers, officers and a guardian of people who find themselves in a hopeless situations.

Joseph Kalinowski was born and raised in a family of nobles in the city of Vilnius. In 1863, he was involved in the uprising and subsequently deported to Siberia. After his sentence, he entered the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Austria. After taking his solemn perpetual vows and being ordained a priest, he became the prior of the monastery at Czerna near Krakow. He successfully reformed and revitalized the monastery. After more than 10 years, he was appointed prior of Wadowice monastery, where he led the construction of the monastery and St. Joseph's Church. Later, he became the provincial's vicar for the affairs of the Discalced Carmelite nuns and cared for their religious life. Additionally, he founded many Catholic organizations throughout Poland and Ukraine, and established several new Carmelite convents in Przemysl and Lvov. He spent much of his time listening to confessions, and was referred to as the "Martyr of the Sacrament of Reconciliation". In the Ukraine, he cared for Catholics, and lovingly served the local Orthodox faithful, and sought the unification of the Eastern Orthodox Church with Rome. He wrote a four-volume historical account of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Poland, Lithuania and Russia and authored a number of pastoral publications, and translated from French.

He was buried in the monastery cemetery in Czerna, and renowned for miracles.

Father Raphael Kalinowski was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1983. In 1991 Blessed Raphael of Joseph Kalinowski was declared a saint.

Bl. Archbishop Teofilus Matulionis (1873-1962)

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Blessed Teofilus Matulionis, a martyr, was beatified in the Vilnius Cathedral square in 2017. He spent all his life fighting communist repression while spreading the Christian message and helping others. Bishop Matulionis suffered persecution, spending 16 years in prisons, forced labour camps and exile, yet remained faithful. While residing in St. Petersburg he witnessed the horrors of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 but continued to live in the city then renamed Leningrad. In 1923 he was arrested and sentenced to three years of imprisonment for refusing to cooperate with the communist authorities. Later, in 1929, Teofilus Matulionis was secretly consecrated as bishop and for that he was sentenced to 10 years in a concentration camp in the Solovetsky Islands, Russia. Nothing could hold him back from missionary work in Russia – neither the Bolsheviks' threats of brutal treatment, nor the offer of a safe and much more peaceful life in America. It is suspected that Matulionis was murdered. He died at the age of 90, after a search in his apartment and an injection of unidentified drugs on KGB's orders. He was buried in the crypt of the Kaišiadorys Cathedral. After his beatification, the sarcophagus with his remains was transferred to a special chapel. During the visit of Pope Francis the sarcophagus will be brought to Kaunas for the Mass. Bl. Teofilus Matulionis is commemorated on 14th of June. It is the day when massive deportation to Siberia started in 1941. Therefore, he stands as a symbol of all exiles honoring them and giving a meaning to their tortures and death.



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Bl. Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis, MIC (1871-1927)

Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis, MIC was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II on June 29, 1987, on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the baptism of Lithuania. Bl. Jurgis Matulaitis was the Archbishop of Vilnius from 1918 to 1925. From 1925, he served as the Apostolic Visitor to Lithuania. Perhaps because of his close friendship with Archbishop Achille Ratti, who later became Pope Pius XI and wrote the encyclical about social justice, Jurgis Matulaitis did much to engage the Catholic Church in social teaching and social work. He also was one of the founders of the Catholic youth movement Ateitininkai which remains one of the biggest Catholic youth organisations in Lithuania today. He also founded the Sisters of Immaculate Conception (a congregation in the United States and Lithuania). Bl. Jurgis Matulaitis worked in secret to revive the Marian Fathers after the Russian authorities suppressed all religious orders, and he even relinquished his teaching position to better dedicate himself to that secret revival. Bl. Jurgis Matulaitis was an excellent teacher and spiritual director, who set up other branches of the order in Switzerland and the United States.

The sarcophagus with the remains of Bl. Jurgis Matulaitis is at the chapel of St. Michael the Archangel pro-cathedral in Marijampolė.

St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, ZMBM (1905-1938)

St. Faustina is one of the most renowned mystics of the Catholic Church. She is referred to as the “Apostle of Divine Mercy”, who was entrusted by Jesus to spread the message of Divine Mercy to the entire world.

St. Faustina was born in Poland in 1905, and was baptized with the name Helena. At the age of twenty she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Warsaw and took the religious name of Sister Maria Faustina. St. Faustina's life of tending to a monastery garden and kitchen, or working as a doorwoman, seemed quite ordinary. However, God blessed her with vast graces: a deep knowledge of the mystery of Divine Mercy, invisible stigmata, the gifts of prophecy and the understanding of the human soul.

Having difficulty interpreting the mystical experiences she was having, Faustina sought guidance from her confessors and superiors and even prayed through the intercession of someone else, to help understand those experiences. Faustina arrived at the convent in Vilnius in 1929, and lived there from 1933 to 1936. She met Blessed Michael Sopocko in Vilnius and he became her spiritual father, confessor and executor of the requests she had received in her visions. During Faustina's time in Vilnius, the Divine Mercy Chaplet was dictated, and the image of Divine Mercy was painted according to her directions. Because of the meeting of these two saints, Vilnius is at the forefront of the message of Divine Mercy that is spreading to the world.

St. Faustina passed away on October 5, 1938 from tuberculosis and was laid to rest in the convent's cemetery, located in Krakow's Lagiewniki district. Faustina. She was beatified in 1993 and was declared a saint of the Church in 2000.

Bl. Michael Sopocko (1888-1975)

Blessed Michael Sopocko is known as the Apostle of Mercy. In Vilnius he met St. Faustina and became her spiritual guide and confessor. He dedicated his entire life to the propagation of the message of Divine Mercy, and Vilnius became the city from which this message spread to the world. Sister Faustina, who was encouraged by Michael Sopocko, began recording her mystical experiences in a diary, which has become a well-known book throughout the world. Blessed Michael Sopocko was the one who inspired St. Faustina to share her visions and seek that the image of Divine Mercy be painted. Additionally, he established a new religious congregation, currently known as the Congregation of Sisters of Divine Mercy, and initiated the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday.

Michael Sopocko was born in Juszewszczyzna, in the county of Asmena (present-day Belarus). Vilnius is Blessed Michael Sopocko's town. According to his memoirs, he often visited churches in Vilnius with his parents, and he received the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Vilnius Cathedral. Later he was ordained a priest there. In Warsaw, he studied theology and education. In 1924, Fr. Sopocko received an invitation from the Archbishop of Vilnius, Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis, to return to Vilnius. He taught at the university and was actively involved in pastoral care of the academic community, seminary and the army. He also served as the confessor and spiritual director of the nuns. In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI beatified Fr. Sopocko.

