

Jerome died soon after Eustochium at the age of 73. He was buried beneath the north aisle of the Church of the Nativity, near the graves of Paula and Eustochium.

Saint Paula was well respected by the monks and nuns of the two monasteries she founded, by the poor whom she had helped over the years, who considered her a mother as well as a benefactor.

Both women were regarded as saints before the Catholic Church created a formal canonization process. St. Paula's feast day is January 26. She is the patron of widows as well as monks and nuns of the Order of St. Jerome. St. Eustochium's feast day is September 28.

Both women are considered early Desert Mothers; female Christian ascetics living in the Eastern desert lands in the fourth and fifth centuries. The Desert Mothers are honored as Christian leaders because of their spiritual teaching and direction. Most of the information known about St. Paula and St. Eustochium comes from St. Jerome's letters.

Even though St. Jerome is more widely known than his female collaborators, it's clear these three holy people were connected and had a significant impact on the Church.

Jerome, Paula, and Eustochium walked with each other as they walked with God, and are now counted among the saints.

St. Jerome said, "If all the members of my body were to be converted into tongues... I could still do no justice to the virtues of the holy and venerable Paula. Noble in family, she was nobler still in holiness; rich formerly in this world's goods, she is now more distinguished by the poverty that she has embraced for Christ."

Socials with the Saints

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Sources include Vatican News, "Blessed Among Us: St. Paula" by Robert Ellsberg and "Paula: A Portrait of 4th Century Piety" by Nancy Hardesty

St. Paula

Desert Mother & Pilgrim Saint

Born: 347 A.D.

Died: 404 A.D.

Patron Saint of Widows

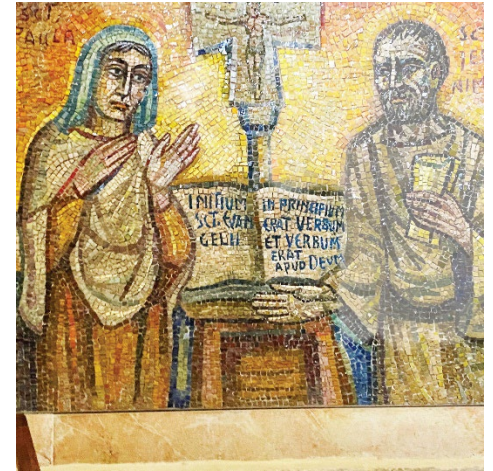
Saint Paula of Rome was recognized as a saint by the Latin Church a year after her death in 404. She was known for her devotion to God, which included fasting, studying the Scriptures, and living a simple life.

Paula was the daughter of Blesilla, a descendant of prominent families including one said to descend from the Greek king Agamemnon. Paula married a Senator, Toxotius, from whom she had five children: four girls and a boy. She lived in privilege and luxury, dressing in silk and being carried through the city by slaves.

After the death of her husband, Paula approached a group of widows led by Saint Marcella, women who had also been wealthy and prominent citizens. With them, Paula devoted herself to prayer and penance, and hosted their semi-monastic order in her great Roman house on the Aventine Hill. The women dedicated their resources to the works of mercy, providing blankets, sustenance, and proper burial for the poor.

In the year 382, when Paula was thirty-five years old, Marcella introduced Paula to Saint Jerome, who was in Rome after the Council of Constantinople, as well as the bishop Saint Ephiphanius. Paula was deeply struck by these figures, and she housed the pilgrims in her home. Jerome had a profound influence on Paula. This became the catalyst of her desire to embrace the monastic life in the East. To understand this, we need to briefly meet St. Jerome.

Jerome lived from the years 342 to 420. He was a priest, confessor, theologian, translator, and historian. He was known for his teachings



on the Christian moral life; he often focused on women's lives and identified how a woman devoted to Jesus should live.

Jerome himself journeyed to the Holy Land, and chose to live in a simple grotto near the birthplace of Jesus at Bethlehem. In this humble setting, Jerome translated most of the Old Testament from Hebrew and Greek, into Latin. This is considered his greatest achievement, and built the foundation for today's Scriptural translations. He continued to live in Bethlehem for thirty-six years.

Now let us continue with Paula's story:

In September of the year 385, after the death of her daughter Blesilla, Paula decided to follow Saint Jerome to the Holy Land, accompanied by her daughter, Eustochium, to follow monastic life. Jerome, who had left about a month ahead of them, rejoined them at Antioch, and together they made a pilgrimage through the Holy Land. Paula and Eustochium were among the first Christian women to make a Holy Land pilgrimage.

They followed to Egypt, in the footsteps of the hermits, and finally settled in Bethlehem.

Paula and Eustochium immediately began their work; founding several monasteries, a hospice, and a convent. One of the monasteries was reserved for men and placed under the direction of Jerome. The other was for women, under the direction of Paula and Eustochium.

Many virgins flocked to this mother and daughter from Rome. They formed monastic communities which gathered several times a day for prayer. Every day, the nuns sang the entire Psalter, which they had to know by heart. (The Psalter is a book that contains the 150 Psalms, commonly used in monasteries.)

Even though Paula and Eustochium came from nobility, they were humble, and performed whatever tasks were necessary. Both women enjoyed learning, and continued the studies they began in Rome. Most of their time in Bethlehem was spent studying Sacred Scripture under Jerome's guidance. Paula had studied Greek as a young lady. Both women mastered Hebrew; Eustochium also learned Latin and Greek.

The women's language skills proved to be helpful when Jerome was commissioned by the pope to translate the Scriptures into Latin. They assisted Jerome's tedious but blessed project. Eustochium helped a great deal with the Biblical commentaries. Their finished product is known as the *Vulgate*, the official Latin Bible used by the Roman Catholic Church.

Both Paula and her daughter took an active part in Jerome's preaching, becoming his most fervent collaborators and conforming more and more to his spiritual direction. Paula would often give to the poor from her own community's substance.

In the year 404, at age 59, Paula understood that death was near. She seemed to hear the voice of Jesus speaking to her in the words of the Song of Songs: "Get up, my friend, my beloved, and come soon! For, behold, the winter is past, the rain has ceased, it is gone; show me your face, let me hear your voice, because your voice is gentle, your face is lovely" (2:10-14).

This call she answered in the words of Psalm 27: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom I will be afraid? The Lord is defending my life, who will I fear? I am sure to contemplate the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living," and let herself go to death. She left Eustochium in charge of their work. Having shared all her wealth in her monastic work and with the poor, she died without a trace of monetary riches.

Upon her death on January 26, 404, her funeral was noted as having a significant portion of the Palestine population present in her honor. A year after her passing, Paula obtained the title of Saint recognized by the Latin Church. She was buried in Bethlehem, in the Church of the Nativity.

In 417, a group of thugs attacked and destroyed one of the monasteries. They also injured and killed several people. This was a painful event for Eustochium, and she died a few years later around the age of 51. Her niece, Paula the Younger, took over her duties after her death.