

Saint John Berchmans

Patron Saint of Altar Servers

John Berchmans was born on March 13, 1599 at Driest, Brabant, Belgium. He was the son of a shoemaker, and one of five children, three of whom entered religious life. He had a great devotion to his position as an altar boy and is known today as the patron saint of altar servers. He spent much of his time caring for his mother, who was in poor health. Deciding to become a Jesuit after reading the life of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, John entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1616. He was a student at the Jesuit College at Malines and was sent to Rome to study philosophy in 1619. John had a dream of helping and teaching multi-lingual migrants, and he studied all the chief languages of Europe. He wanted to work in China after ordination. On August 12, 1621, he died in Rome of unknown causes following his participation in a public debate defending the faith. He died clutching his rosary, crucifix, and rules of his order. He did not live to be ordained.



John Berchmans was not noted for extraordinary feats of holiness or austerity, nor did he found orders or churches or work flashy miracles. His short religious life was distinguished by a faithful observance of the Rule of the Order. He made kindness, courtesy, and constant fidelity an important part of his holiness. The path to holiness *can* lie in the ordinary rather than the extraordinary.

John Berchmans relics are at Saint Ignatius Church, Rome. He was beatified in 1865 by Pope Pius IX and canonized in 1888 by Pope Leo XIII. His memorial is on November 26. His emblems are the Rule of Saint Ignatius, a cross, and a rosary. He is the Patron of youth. Altar Server societies are named after him.