

St. Macrina the Younger: The Saint Who Made Family Her Mission

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St. Macrina the Younger was simply a big sister who never stopped showing up for her family. She cared for her widowed mother, raised her nine younger siblings (including two future saints), and turned her family estate into a monastery where service and community thrived. If you're longing for deeper connection with your loved ones, her story might just hold the blueprint.

Who was St. Macrina the Younger?

St. Macrina the Younger (c. 330–379) was the eldest in a remarkable family of ten children, several of whom became saints. But behind their greatness was Macrina. After losing her fiancé at a young age, she chose not to marry, devoting her life instead to caring for her widowed mother and raising her younger siblings.

She lived with her mother until her dying breath. Their bond was so strong that her mother would joke that she never stopped being pregnant with Macrina because Macrina was always with her. Macrina ran the household like a family business, managing everything from daily chores, finances, to spiritual formation. She was a mother and father figure to her youngest brother Peter, who was born when their father died, a guiding hand to Gregory of Nyssa, and a sharp voice of humility to Basil the Great when he returned home pompous from his studies in Athens.

After the sudden death of their brother Naucratus, Macrina helped her family turn their grief into purpose. Her words literally lifted her poor mother off the floor from despair. She told her it was better to rejoice in the blessings she enjoyed than to grieve over those that were missing. She and her mother turned their estate into a monastery and freed their workers, asking them to join their community as sisters in Christ. Macrina and Peter founded one of the first co-ed monasteries on their estate in Annisa. She led the

women's side, and he led the men's. Her calling was simple but profound: to serve her family with love. Through that calling, she helped shape the early Church.

After her death, her brother Gregory of Nyssa honored her by writing *The Life of Saint Macrina*, preserving the story of her extraordinary holiness, wisdom, and unwavering devotion.

Finding Family Unity in Today's World

St. Macrina's life was a testimony to family unity. She kept her family together by serving her mother and working on projects with her brother Peter, such as founding one of the first dual monasteries. Family unity is harder to achieve today than in the past. First, families used to live in close proximity, sometimes even in the same household. Families today are more likely to live in different cities, states, or even countries due to job opportunities, education, or lifestyle choices. Although technology has helped connect families across lots of distances, overreliance on technology has also caused superficial connections, i.e. sending a text instead of giving a phone call. Our busy lives have also caused long work hours and scheduling conflicts.

The rise of mobile devices has created a new norm of families reclining to their own spaces and devices for entertainment, whereas before families would watch a show together on one television set. Also, families were larger back then, with multiple generations often living together, creating natural opportunities for bonding and shared caregiving roles. Because of the decline of intergenerational living, nursing homes, senior living communities, and independent living are more common, reducing interaction between generations.

So How Can You Foster Family Unity Today?

Prioritize Quality Time

- Regular Family Meetings: Schedule time to check in on each other's lives, share concerns, and celebrate milestones.
- Mealtimes Together: Dedicate at least one meal a day to sit down together without distractions like phones or TV.
- Plan Activities: Organize family game nights, hikes, or movie nights to spend quality time together.

Embrace Technology Wisely

- Video Calls with Distant Family: Use video platforms to regularly connect with relatives who live far away.
- Shared Digital Spaces: Create a family group chat for daily updates, encouragement, or sharing photos and memories.
- Set Screen-Free Zones: Establish areas or times (like dinner) where everyone disconnects from devices to focus on one another.

Serve Each Other in Practical Ways

- Acts of Kindness: Surprise a family member with a simple act of kindness or charity, like making their favorite meal or helping with chores for example.
- Share Responsibilities: Take turns with household tasks or support a family member's workload when they're overwhelmed.

- Be a Listener: Sometimes, the greatest act of service is giving your full attention to a family member who needs to talk.

Engage in Community Service Together

- Volunteer as a Family: Participate in activities like serving at a soup kitchen, cleaning up parks, or helping at a local charity.
- Support a Cause: Choose a cause important to your family and work together to make a difference, such as organizing a donation drive.
- Random Acts of Kindness: Spread kindness in your community, like delivering baked goods to neighbors or writing thank-you notes.

Celebrate Traditions and Create New Ones

- Maintain Rituals: Celebrate holidays, birthdays, or milestones with special traditions that bring everyone together.
- Create New Memories: Start simple traditions, like a weekly gratitude practice or a family recipe night.
- Honor Cultural Practices: Teach and participate in rituals or traditions that connect with your family's heritage.

Cultivate Empathy and Understanding

- Express Gratitude: Regularly thank each other for the roles they play in the family.
- Resolve Conflicts Thoughtfully: Practice active listening and open communication to address disagreements respectfully.
- Encourage Vulnerability: Create a safe space for family members to share their feelings without fear of judgment.

Grow Spiritually Together

- Pray or Meditate Together: Build a spiritual connection by sharing prayer, meditation, or devotions.
- Study Together: Read religious texts or other meaningful literature and discuss how they apply to your family's life.
- Practice Gratitude: Reflect as a family on the things that you're grateful for, reinforcing positivity and togetherness.

Build a Shared Vision

- Set Family Goals: Work together to set goals for the household, whether financial, personal, or relational.
- Support Dreams: Encourage and assist each other in achieving individual goals, like career aspirations or personal growth.
- Collaborate on Projects: Tackle projects together, such as redecorating a room or planning a vacation, to help strengthen teamwork.

Teach and Learn Together

- Skill Sharing: Teach each other skills, like cooking, driving, or DIY crafts.
- Educational Activities: Visit museums, attend workshops, or read books as a family to expand knowledge and bond.
- Mentor Younger Generations: Encourage older family members to share their experiences and wisdom with younger ones.

St. Macrina's Patronage and Associations

St. Macrina the Younger is not traditionally associated with a specific patronage in the way that some saints are (e.g., St. Anthony for lost items or St. Francis for animals). However, her life and legacy might make her an inspirational figure for particular groups or causes such as:

Theologians and Scholars:

St. Macrina played a significant role as a theologian, deeply influencing her brothers, St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa, in their theological work. She is often recognized for her wisdom and contributions to early Christian thought.

Older Siblings:

St. Macrina was the eldest of ten siblings. She cared for them and instructed them in religious studies. She often reprimanded St. Basil when his ego was puffed up from his studies. She uplifted St. Gregory when Emperor Valens stripped him of his position as a Bishop of Nyssa. As an educator, especially for her brothers, St. Macrina might be seen as a model for teachers and mentors, particularly in faith and moral instruction.

Ascetics and Monastics:

Her commitment to a life of prayer, fasting, and asceticism makes her an inspirational figure for those who pursue a monastic or ascetic lifestyle.

Family Unity and Service:

St. Macrina never left her mother's side. She helped her with housework, finances, and child-rearing.

Charity:

St. Macrina's monastery was widely known for its generosity. They fed the country during a famine, picking up those laid out on the side of the road and children abandoned by their parents.

How St. Macrina Can Help Us Overcome Family Struggles

Family life can feel hard. We're pulled in a thousand directions—by work, screens, and packed schedules. But St. Macrina reminds us that holiness is often found in the quiet, unseen work of loving and serving those closest to us. At times, caring for family can feel like a burden—but that's exactly what made St. Macrina a saint. She chose to stay by her widowed mother's side and helped carry the weight of single motherhood. When family life feels overwhelming, we can look to St. Macrina for inspiration and pray for the grace to serve our loved ones with the same love and devotion as she did.

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Feast Day: July 19th