

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Pope Saint Adrian III

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 8

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Pope Saint Adrian III

Pope from 884 to 885, who died on his way to the emperor and is venerated at the abbey of Nonantola.

Feast day	July 8
Born	Rome
Died	September 885, San Cesario sul Panaro, Emilia (Italy)
Canonized	1891, cult confirmed by Pope Leo XIII
Era	9th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Adrian III for Times of Crisis

Novena to Saint Adrian III

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Pope Saint Adrian III

Saint Adrian III was pope for little more than a year, from May 884 to September 885, in one of the most troubled periods in the history of the papacy. Born in Rome, he died in Emilia while traveling to Germany to meet Emperor Charles the Fat, and he was buried in the abbey of Nonantola, near Modena. The precise reasons for his veneration are not well known, but his ancient local cult was confirmed by Pope Leo XIII in 1891. His feast day is July 8.

Who was Saint Adrian III?

Adrian, *Hadrianus* in Latin, was a Roman whose date of birth is unknown. Some genealogical reconstructions connect him to the family that would later produce the counts of Tusculum, and make him a distant relative of Pope Adrian I and the elder brother of the future Pope Sergius III. These links are possible, but they remain hypotheses. He was elected on May 17, 884, to succeed Pope Marinus I.

Very few documents from his pontificate have survived. What we know comes from brief chronicles, from the memory kept at Nonantola, and from the later work of historians trying to sort fact from legend. Honesty requires saying so clearly: his life is mostly hidden from us.



Adrian III, imaginary portrait in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

Key dates in the life of Adrian III

- **Date unknown**: Born in Rome.
- **May 17, 884**: Elected pope.
- **Summer 885**: He sets out for an imperial diet called at Worms by Emperor Charles III the Fat.
- **September 885**: He falls ill on the way and dies near present-day San Cesario sul Panaro, in Emilia.
- **September 885**: Buried in the abbey of Nonantola.
- **1891**: His cult is confirmed by Pope Leo XIII.

A pope in a papacy in crisis

At the end of the 9th century, the Carolingian Empire was falling apart. The families of the Roman aristocracy fought over the see of Peter, pontificates were often short, and the Italian coasts suffered raids by the Saracens. Historians readily speak of a crisis of the papacy for this period. Adrian III belongs fully to this context: his pontificate lasted only about sixteen months, and the documents that mention it are rare.

Tradition remembers one act of charity: during a famine that struck Rome, he is said to have come to the aid of the people. It is one of the few personal traits we know of him, and it may partly explain the favorable memory he left behind.

The interrupted journey

In 885, Emperor Charles III the Fat, who had no legitimate heir, called a diet at Worms to settle his succession and organize defense against the Saracens. Adrian III left Rome to attend it. When he reached the area of Modena, near a forest the texts call *Silva Wilzacara*, he was struck by a sudden illness and died in September 885.

His body was not brought back to Rome. It was carried to the nearby Benedictine abbey of Nonantola, where he was buried. A pope who set out on a mission died on the road, far from his city, and was welcomed by monks.

A cult born at Nonantola

It was at Nonantola that veneration for Adrian III grew up, around his tomb. Over the centuries he was sometimes confused with his distant predecessor Adrian I, and local scholars of the 19th century worked to distinguish the two popes. In 1891, Leo XIII officially confirmed this ancient cult, which makes Adrian III a recognized saint of the Catholic Church. Churches in the region of Modena, such as at Spilamberto, are dedicated to him.

What does his holiness teach us?

We know little about Adrian III, and it must be said honestly. Yet his figure reminds us that holiness is not measured by the length of a pontificate or the abundance of archives. The memory kept by the faithful of Nonantola is that of a shepherd attentive to the hungry, who died on the road in the middle of his mission. He can be invoked for those who hold responsibility in times of crisis.

His story also speaks to anyone whose work seems unfinished. Adrian III did not reach Worms, did not see the outcome of the affairs he set out to settle, and left almost no written trace. But Christians believe that no act of love is lost: the bread given to the hungry of Rome counted before God, even if the chronicles barely recorded it.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Adrian III and the novena to Saint Adrian III, which ends on his feast day, July 8.

Is Saint Adrian III a patron saint?

No universal patronage is attached to Adrian III. He is honored above all locally, at Nonantola and in the parishes of the Modena area that bear his name. Given what tradition remembers of him, Catholics can naturally turn to him for people suffering from hunger, for travelers who fall ill far from home, and for leaders who must act in troubled times.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Adrian III in art

No ancient portrait of Adrian III has survived. He is shown as a pope, in liturgical vestments, as in the 19th-century mosaic medallion in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, part of the series of portraits of all the popes; this is an imaginary portrait. Because he was long confused with Adrian I, it is not always easy to tell which pope local images were meant to represent.

Where to pray to Saint Adrian III

- **Nonantola** (Emilia-Romagna, Italy): the abbey of San Silvestro, where he was buried and where his cult was born.
- **Spilamberto**, near Modena: the parish church that bears his name.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Adrian III for Times of Crisis

No traditional prayer to Saint Adrian III has come down to us. This pope of the 9th century reigned for only sixteen months, in a time of crisis for the Church. Tradition remembers that he came to the aid of the people of Rome during a famine, and that he died on the road, on his way to meet the emperor. His cult grew up around his tomb in the abbey of Nonantola. Here is an original prayer inspired by what we know of him.

Prayer to Saint Adrian III

Saint Adrian, shepherd of the Church in a troubled time, you accepted to serve when the see of Peter was surrounded by rivalries and dangers: give courage to all who hold responsibility in times of crisis.

Tradition says that you fed the people of Rome in a time of famine: pray for all who are hungry today, and open my hands to share my bread.

You set out on a long road for the good of the Church and died far from home: watch over travelers, pilgrims and all who fall ill far from their families.

Your life is mostly hidden from us, yet the faithful never forgot you: teach me that holiness does not depend on being known or remembered, but on being faithful to God.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, July 8, or during the novena to Saint Adrian III, from June 30 to July 8.
- For people suffering from hunger, and for those who work to feed them.
- Before a long journey, or for a loved one who is sick far from home.
- For the Pope and for leaders who must make decisions in times of crisis.
- When you feel that your work goes unnoticed.

A short prayer for travelers

> *Lord, you guided your people on the road and walked with your disciples to Emmaus. Through the intercession of Saint Adrian III, protect those who travel today, bring them safely to their destination, and comfort those who fall ill along the way. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia. To learn more, read the life of Saint Adrian III.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Adrian III

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what we know of Pope Saint Adrian III. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast, begin on June 30: the ninth day then falls on July 8. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially for those who suffer from hunger, for travelers, or for leaders in times of crisis.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps turn prayer into a concrete step.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: *Lord, you gave Saint Adrian III to your Church as a shepherd in a troubled time. Through his intercession, give me faithfulness and charity, and hear the prayer I bring you today. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. Perseverance matters more than perfection. You can pray this novena alone, with your family or with your parish community.

Day 1: A child of Rome

Adrian was born in Rome, but we do not know when. Most of his life before his election is hidden from us. Many lives are like that: unknown to history, but fully known to God.

Prayer: Lord, you know me better than anyone. Help me to live under your gaze, not for the gaze of others.

Today: Do a good deed that no one will see.

Day 2: Called in a time of crisis

Adrian was elected in May 884, when the papacy was torn by rivalries and the empire was falling apart. He accepted a heavy and dangerous task.

Prayer: Lord, give courage to those who must lead in troubled times.

Today: Pray for the Pope and for the leaders of your country.

Day 3: Feeding the hungry

Tradition remembers that he came to the aid of the people of Rome during a famine. Of all he did, this is what the faithful kept in their memory.

Prayer: Lord, give bread to the hungry, and hunger for you to those who have bread.

Today: Give to a food bank or share a meal with someone in need.

Day 4: Serving in a short time

His pontificate lasted only about sixteen months. Holiness is not measured by the length of our service, but by the love we put into it.

Prayer: Lord, help me to make good use of the time you give me, without putting off the good I can do.

Today: Do today a good deed you have been postponing.

Day 5: Setting out

In 885, Adrian left Rome for Worms, to take part in the affairs of the empire and the defense of Christian lands. He did not stay in comfort; he went where he thought he was needed.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to leave my comfort when you call me.

Today: Visit someone you have been meaning to see for a long time.

Day 6: Sickness on the road

Near Modena, Adrian was struck by a sudden illness. He died far from his city and his people. Illness often comes when we do not expect it.

Prayer: Lord, comfort the sick, especially those who are alone or far from their families.

Today: Call or visit a sick person.

Day 7: Welcomed by the monks

His body was not taken back to Rome but to the abbey of Nonantola, where the monks buried him. Burying the dead is one of the corporal works of mercy, and the monks of Nonantola gave a stranger a resting place among them.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who welcome strangers, and make me hospitable.

Today: Welcome someone warmly, at home, at work or in church.

Day 8: A memory kept by the faithful

The people of Nonantola remembered Adrian and prayed at his tomb for centuries. The Church confirmed this devotion in 1891. The faith of simple people often recognizes holiness before the official decisions.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the faith of the humble, which keeps the memory of your saints.

Today: Pray at the grave of a loved one, or for the dead of your family.

Day 9: Holiness hidden in God

We know little about Adrian III, and that is a lesson in itself. What matters is not to be remembered by history, but to be found faithful by God.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Adrian III, keep me faithful until the end of my road. Amen.

Today: Thank God for one hidden grace in your life.

Closing prayer

Saint Adrian III, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have brought before God. You served the Church in a troubled time, you came to the aid of the hungry, and you died on the road while serving. Pray for me, that I may be generous to the poor, courageous in difficult times, and faithful to the end of my journey. Amen.

You can end with the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be, then thank God for the graces received during these nine days.

To go further, read the life of Saint Adrian III and the prayer to Saint Adrian III.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: Unknown author, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Adrian III, imaginary portrait in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.: Image: Unknown author, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com