

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Pope Saint Agapetus I

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 22

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Pope Saint Agapetus I

Pope from 535 to 536, who died in Constantinople after standing up to Emperor Justinian.

Feast day	April 22
Born	Rome
Died	April 22, 536, Constantinople
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Agapetus I for Peace and Courage

Novena to Saint Agapetus I

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 Agapetus I

Saint Agapetus I was pope for less than a year, from May 535 to April 536. A cultured Roman and the son of a priest, he set out in the depths of winter for Constantinople to plead for peace before Emperor Justinian. He failed politically, but he obtained the removal of a patriarch suspected of heresy and personally consecrated his successor. He died in Constantinople, was brought back to Rome, and is listed in the Roman Martyrology on April 22.

Who was Saint Agapetus I?

Agapetus was born in Rome, on a date that is unknown. His father, Gordianus, was a Roman priest killed in the riots that set the supporters of Pope Symmachus against those of the antipope Laurentius in the early 6th century. He may have been related to two popes: Felix III before him and, later, Gregory the Great.

Ordained a deacon at a young age, he became archdeacon of the Church of Rome and was elected pope on May 13, 535, succeeding John II. His name comes from the Greek *agapetos*, meaning "beloved."

A man of books

Agapetus loved learning. In his family home on the Caelian Hill, he gathered a library of sacred books, whose remains have been identified near the church of Saint Andrew on the *clivus Scauri*. He also supported the statesman and scholar Cassiodorus, whose plan for a Christian school would later take shape at the monastery of Vivarium in southern Italy.

Key dates in the life of Agapetus I

- **May 13, 535**: Elected pope after John II.

- **Winter 535-536**: Leaves for Constantinople at the request of the Ostrogothic king Theodahad.
- **February 536**: Arrives in Constantinople and meets Emperor Justinian.
- **Spring 536**: Removal of Patriarch Anthimus and consecration of Menas.
- **April 22, 536**: Dies in Constantinople.
- **September 20, 536**: His remains are laid to rest in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

A journey for peace

In 535, Italy was ruled by the Ostrogoths. The Byzantine general Belisarius had just reconquered Africa and Sicily, and Emperor Justinian was preparing to invade the Italian peninsula. King Theodahad, under threat, asked the pope to go to Constantinople and plead his cause.

The Church of Rome was then so poor that Agapetus had to pawn the sacred vessels to pay for the journey. He set out in the middle of winter, a hard and dangerous voyage at the time.

He was received with honor in February 536, but he could not persuade Justinian to give up the war: preparations were already too far advanced. He then turned to the religious questions that were closer to his heart.

Standing firm before the emperor

The see of Constantinople was then held by Anthimus, a protégé of Empress Theodora, who was suspected of Monophysite sympathies. Monophysitism tended to play down the full humanity of Christ as defined by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Agapetus asked Anthimus for a written profession of faith. When he refused, the pope broke communion with him. For Agapetus, unity between the Churches had to rest on one shared faith, not on political convenience or the favor of the court.

Justinian, irritated, threatened the pope with exile. According to the account handed down by tradition, Agapetus replied that he had come to see a most Christian emperor and had found a Diocletian instead, and that he was not afraid of his threats.

The emperor finally gave way. Anthimus was removed, and for the first time in the history of the Church of Constantinople, a pope personally consecrated the new patriarch, Menas.



Constantinople, where Agapetus I carried out his mission and died in 536.

A death far from Rome

Shortly after these events, Agapetus fell ill. He died in Constantinople on April 22, 536, after only ten months as pope. His body was carried back to Rome in a lead coffin and placed in Saint Peter's Basilica on September 20.

He is venerated as a saint by both Catholics and Orthodox. The Roman Martyrology mentions him on April 22, the day of his death, while the older calendar celebrated him on September 20, the day of his burial in Rome.

What can we learn from Saint Agapetus I?

Agapetus is not the patron saint of a particular cause, but his short pontificate leaves the image of a poor and free shepherd. He did not hesitate to pledge the goods of his Church to try to spare Italy a war. Then he stood up to the most powerful ruler of his time to defend the common faith.

He reminds us that it is possible to serve peace without giving up the truth. He can be a companion for:

- those who work for peace and negotiate between opposing sides;
- those who must speak the truth to people in power;
- those who love books, study and the transmission of Christian culture.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Agapetus I and the novena to Saint Agapetus I.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Agapetus I in art

Agapetus has no personal attribute established by tradition. He appears mainly among the portraits of the popes in medallions at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, in **papal vestments** and identified by his name. Later images give him the usual signs of a pope, such as the **tiara** or the **keys** of Saint Peter.

Where to pray to Saint Agapetus I

- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Basilica, where his remains were laid to rest on September 20, 536.

- **Rome**: the *clivus Scauri* on the Caelian Hill, near the church of Saint Andrew, where the remains of his library were found.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Agapetus I for Peace and Courage

No ancient prayer to Saint Agapetus I has come down to us. This pope, who crossed the sea in winter to plead for peace and then stood firm before Emperor Justinian to defend the faith, can be invoked by all who seek peace without sacrificing the truth. Here is an original prayer inspired by his life.

Prayer to Saint Agapetus I

Saint Agapetus, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you set out in the cold of winter to plead for peace and to spare your people the horrors of war: make me a patient and courageous builder of peace.

You gave up the treasures of your Church to serve the good of all: free my heart from attachment to possessions, so that I may give generously.

You did not fear the anger of the most powerful man of your time, because you were defending the faith of the Church: give me the courage to speak the truth with gentleness and firmness, even when it costs me.

You loved books and the wisdom they hand on: bless students, teachers, librarians and all who serve the truth through study.

Pray for the Pope, for the unity of Christians of East and West, and for peace among nations. 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

- For peace, when war threatens a country or when conflict divides a family or community.
- Before a difficult conversation, when you must say something true to a person with authority.
- For unity between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, since Agapetus is honored by both.
- For students and all who study or teach the faith.

A short prayer for peace

You may complete this prayer with the ancient words of the Mass, prayed after the Our Father:

> *Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and in your goodness give peace in our days, so that, helped by your mercy, we may always be free from sin and safe from every trouble, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.*

Source: the prayer *Libera nos* said after the Our Father at Mass, Roman Missal, free translation from the Latin by Saintspedia.

Saint Agapetus I is commemorated on April 22, the anniversary of his death in Constantinople in 536. You can also pray the novena to Saint Agapetus I or read the life of Saint Agapetus I.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Agapetus I

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Pope Saint Agapetus I. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast, begin on April 14: the ninth day then falls on April 22. You can pray it at any time of year, especially for peace, for Christian unity or when you need courage to defend the truth.

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 Agapetus I the courage to seek peace and to defend the faith before the powerful. Through his intercession, strengthen my heart 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.

Day 1: The son of a priest killed in violence

Agapetus's father, the priest Gordianus, was killed in riots that divided the Christians of Rome. The future pope grew up with the memory of a Church torn apart. Wounds of the past can become a call to work for unity.

Prayer: Lord, heal the wounds that division has left in my family and in your Church.

Today: Pray for someone with whom you are in conflict, asking God to bless them.

Day 2: A lover of books

Agapetus gathered a library of sacred books in his family home on the Caelian Hill and supported Cassiodorus in his plans for Christian learning. Faith seeks understanding, and study can be a form of prayer.

Prayer: Lord, give me a desire to know you better through your Word and the teaching of the Church.

Today: Read a page of Scripture or of a spiritual book attentively.

Day 3: Called to serve

Ordained a deacon young, then archdeacon, Agapetus was elected pope in May 535. He accepted a heavy charge in a time of danger. God's call often comes at moments we would not have chosen.

Prayer: Lord, help me to say yes to what you ask of me today, even when the time seems difficult.

Today: Accept a service you are asked to give, without complaining.

Day 4: Poor for the sake of peace

To pay for his journey to Constantinople, Agapetus had to pawn the sacred vessels of the Church. He was ready to give up even precious things to try to spare Italy a war.

Prayer: Lord, free me from attachment to my possessions, and teach me to use them for the good of others.

Today: Give something you value to someone who needs it, or make a gift to a work of peace.

Day 5: A winter journey

The pope set out in the middle of winter, on a long and dangerous voyage. He did not wait for an easier season. Some acts of love cannot wait.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage not to put off the good I can do today.

Today: Do one good thing you have been postponing.

Day 6: Accepting failure

Agapetus could not persuade Justinian to give up the war. His diplomatic mission failed. Yet he did not give up; he turned to what he could still do for the Church. God can bring fruit even from our failures.

Prayer: Lord, when my efforts fail, keep me from discouragement and show me what I can still do.

Today: Offer to God a recent disappointment, and take one small step forward.

Day 7: Truth before the powerful

When the emperor threatened him with exile, Agapetus did not yield. According to tradition, he answered that the threats of a ruler did not frighten him. He spoke freely because he feared God more than men.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak the truth with charity, even to those who have power over me.

Today: Pray for Christians who are threatened because they will not deny their faith.

Day 8: One faith, East and West

In Constantinople, Agapetus consecrated the new patriarch, Menas, a sign of communion between Rome and the East. He is still venerated today by both Catholics and Orthodox.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you prayed that all may be one. Heal the divisions between Christians of East and West.

Today: Pray for an Orthodox community, or learn something about the Eastern Churches.

Day 9: Dying far from home

Agapetus died in Constantinople on April 22, 536, far from Rome. His body was brought back months later to rest in Saint Peter's Basilica. Wherever we die, we are on our way to the Father's house.

Prayer: Lord, prepare me for the hour of my death, and welcome into your peace all who die far from their loved ones.

Today: Pray for the dead, especially those who died alone or far from home.

Closing prayer

Saint Agapetus I, poor and free shepherd, you crossed the sea in winter to plead for peace and stood firm before the emperor to defend the faith. Pray for peace among nations, for the unity of Christians and for all who must speak the truth to the powerful. Obtain for me a generous heart, a courageous word and a love for the truth. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You may also pray the prayer to Saint Agapetus I or read the life of Saint Agapetus I.

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
- Constantinople, where Agapetus I carried out his mission and died in 536.: Image: Arild Vågen, CC BY-SA 3.0, 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