

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Anacletus (Cletus)

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 26

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IN BRIEF

Saint Anacletus (Cletus)

Third Bishop of Rome according to tradition, around 80-92, successor of Saint Linus.

Feast day	April 26
Died	Rome
Canonized	Pre-Congregation
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	Ruvo di Puglia, Belmonte del Sannio

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Anacletus for the Pope and the Church

Novena to Saint Anacletus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Anacletus (Cletus)

Saint Anacletus, also called Cletus or Anencletus, was according to tradition the second successor of the Apostle Peter as Bishop of Rome, and so the third pope, at the end of the 1st century. The successor of Saint Linus and the predecessor of Saint Clement, he is said to have guided the Church of Rome for about twelve years, around 80-92. Almost nothing is known of his life, and even his name has given rise to confusion. Catholics still hear his name at Mass in the Roman Canon, and his feast day is April 26.

Who was Saint Anacletus?

Anacletus belongs to the very first generation of leaders of the Church of Rome, a generation that could still have known direct witnesses of the Apostles Peter and Paul. What we know of him fits in a few lines, handed down by the lists of Bishops of Rome drawn up in the 2nd century.

Around 180, Saint Irenaeus of Lyon wrote in his treatise *Against Heresies* that after the apostles had founded the Church of Rome, they handed over its charge to Linus; "To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric." This is the oldest and most reliable testimony.

The title "pope" was not yet in use: it was applied to the Bishop of Rome only from the 4th century onward. Historians also point out that the Church of Rome may then have been led by a college of presbyters, among whom one held a leading place.



Pope Cletus, by Palma the Younger, Venice.

Key dates in the life of Saint Anacletus

- **Around 79-80**: Succeeds Saint Linus at the head of the Church of Rome.
- **Around 81-96**: Reign of Emperor Domitian, marked toward its end by persecutions against Christians.
- **Around 91-92**: Dies in Rome; Saint Clement succeeds him.

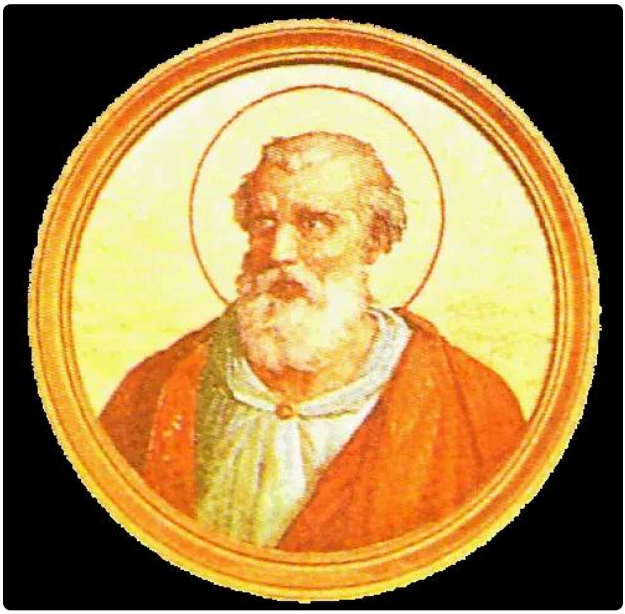
Anacletus or Cletus: one pope or two?

The name Anacletus, meaning "blameless" in Greek, was often shortened to Cletus. Irenaeus, Eusebius of Caesarea and Saint Augustine all speak of a single person. But two later documents, the so-called Liberian Catalogue (354) and the *Liber Pontificalis*, turned him into two separate popes, Cletus and Anacletus, placed at different ranks in the list.

Historians see this as a mistaken doubling. For centuries the *Annuario Pontificio*, the official yearbook of the Holy See, hesitated between the two versions, before settling for good on a single pope, Anacletus or Cletus, third Bishop of Rome.

Later legends

The *Liber Pontificalis* credits him with organizing a college of twenty-five priests in Rome, which historians consider an anachronism. In the 9th century, the author of the *False Decretals* even forged three letters under his name. These additions say more about later centuries than about the real Anacletus.



Saint Anacletus in the gallery of papal portraits at Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.

Was Saint Anacletus a martyr?

Tradition counts him among the martyr popes, who died during the persecution of Domitian. The *Liber Pontificalis* presents him that way, but historians believe the title was given to him without proof. The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches honor him as a saint, and the Roman Martyrology sets his memorial on April 26.

His feast left a mark on the French popular calendar: an old saying claims that "Saint Cletus closes the door on the last peas," a reminder of the sowing season in late April.

Saint Cletus in the Roman Canon

Every Catholic who attends Mass celebrated with the Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I, hears his name. Among the saints remembered before the consecration, the priest names the first successors of Peter in order: "Linus, Cletus, Clement." This ancient prayer is one of the strongest witnesses to the place Anacletus held in the memory of the Church of Rome.

What does his holiness teach us?

Saint Anacletus reminds us of the continuity of the Church since the apostles. His holiness is not made of well-known works, but of faithfulness: that of a shepherd who received the charge of the Church of Rome in a time of persecution and handed it on to his successor.

He shows that one can serve God greatly while leaving almost no trace in history. Many faithful Christians, parents, catechists and priests, do the same today: they receive the faith and pass it on, and that is enough.

Why is Saint Anacletus the patron saint of Ruvo di Puglia?

Saint Anacletus is the patron saint of two towns in Italy, Ruvo di Puglia, in Apulia, and Belmonte del Sannio, in Molise. These local patronages show how the memory of the first popes spread through the Church in Italy. More broadly, Catholics can turn to him to pray for the pope, for the unity of the Church and for all who hand on the faith.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Anacletus in art

All images of Saint Anacletus were made long after his time. He is shown as a pope, often wearing the papal tiara and a cope, as in the painting by Palma the Younger in Venice. In the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, in Rome, he appears in the long series of mosaic medallions that portray every pope since Saint Peter.

Where to pray to Saint Anacletus

Tradition places the tombs of the first popes near that of the Apostle Peter, on the Vatican Hill. Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome is therefore the natural place to remember him. The Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, with its gallery of papal portraits, and the towns of Ruvo di Puglia and Belmonte del Sannio, which honor him as their patron, also keep his memory.

Wherever you are, you can pray to him with the prayer to Saint Anacletus or the novena to Saint Anacletus.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Anacletus for the Pope and the Church

No prayer written by Saint Anacletus has come down to us, and almost nothing is known of his life. Yet his name has been spoken for centuries at the heart of the Mass, in the Roman Canon, between those of Linus and Clement. Here is an original prayer that entrusts to him the Church, the pope and all who hand on the faith.

Prayer to Saint Anacletus

Saint Anacletus, second successor of the Apostle Peter as shepherd of the Church of Rome, you received the faith from those who had known the apostles, and you handed it on faithfully in a time of persecution.

Pray for our Holy Father the pope, successor of Peter, and for all the bishops: may they guard the faith with courage and lead the people of God with gentleness.

You left no great works behind you, only the memory of your faithfulness: teach us that God values a humble and steady service more than the praise of the world.

Watch over parents, catechists, teachers and priests, who pass on the Gospel from one generation to the next. Keep the Church united, as she was in your time around the tomb of Peter.

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

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

Praying with the Roman Canon

In Eucharistic Prayer I, also called the Roman Canon, the Church recalls the apostles and then the first popes: "Linus, Cletus, Clement." When you hear these names at Mass, you can join your prayer to that of the whole Church of Rome, which has remembered Saint Anacletus since the first centuries. It is a simple way to remember that we receive our faith from a long chain of witnesses.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Anacletus is remembered on April 26 in the Roman Martyrology. This prayer is especially suited:

- on his feast day, April 26;
- when praying for the pope and for the unity of the Church;
- for parents, godparents and catechists preparing children for the sacraments;
- for Christians who are persecuted today, as the Church of Rome was in his time;
- for the people of Ruvo di Puglia and Belmonte del Sannio, which honor him as their patron.

A short prayer for the pope

> *Lord, through the intercession of Saint Anacletus and of all the holy popes, protect our Holy Father, give him strength and wisdom, and keep your Church faithful to the faith of the apostles. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Anacletus, or pray the novena to Saint Anacletus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Anacletus

This novena to Saint Anacletus, also called Saint Cletus, is an original composition by Saintspedia. Little is known of his life, so each day draws on what is certain: he was the second successor of Peter as Bishop of Rome, he received the faith from the first generation of Christians and handed it on in a time of persecution. To end on his feast day, April 26, begin it on April 18. It is especially suited to praying for the pope and for the unity of the Church.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act proposed. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Day 1: Built on the apostles

Anacletus led the Church of Rome founded, according to tradition, by the Apostles Peter and Paul. He did not start something new: he continued what he had received. The Church is built on the foundation of the apostles, with Christ as the cornerstone.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the faith of the apostles that has reached me. Make me faithful to it. Amen.

Today: Pray the Apostles' Creed slowly, word by word.

Day 2: Receiving the faith

Anacletus belonged to a generation that could still have known witnesses of the apostles. He received the Gospel from people who had heard it from the first disciples. We, too, received the faith from someone.

Prayer: Saint Anacletus, help me to give thanks for those who passed on the faith to me. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for the people who taught you the faith: parents, godparents, catechists, priests.

Day 3: Linus, Cletus, Clement

The names of the first popes are still spoken in the Roman Canon of the Mass. A single name, repeated over centuries, is a sign of communion across time. In the Church, no one is forgotten before God. Each Mass joins us to the saints who went before us.

Prayer: Lord, unite me to the whole Church, in heaven and on earth, each time I take part in the Eucharist. Amen.

Today: Go to Mass if you can, or read the Gospel of the day.

Day 4: Shepherd in times of persecution

Anacletus led the Church of Rome under Emperor Domitian, whose reign ended with persecutions against Christians. Leading the faithful then meant sharing their danger.

Prayer: Saint Anacletus, pray for Christians persecuted today, and for the pastors who stay with them. Amen.

Today: Learn about a country where Christians are persecuted, and pray for them.

Day 5: A hidden life

We know almost nothing about Anacletus. His holiness was not made of famous deeds but of quiet faithfulness. God sees what is done in secret. A life does not need to be remembered by historians to bear fruit for eternity.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the desire to be noticed, and teach me to serve you in hiddenness. Amen.

Today: Do a good deed without telling anyone.

Day 6: The blameless one

The Greek name Anacletus means "blameless." It is a call addressed to every Christian: not to be perfect by our own strength, but to let God purify our lives.

Prayer: Lord, cleanse my heart and make my life blameless in your sight. Amen.

Today: Make a careful examination of conscience, and plan to go to confession.

Day 7: Praying for the pope

Anacletus was one of the first successors of Peter. Today the pope carries the same charge of confirming his brothers in the faith. He needs the prayer of the whole Church. Praying for him is a simple and powerful way to love the Church.

Prayer: Lord, protect our Holy Father the pope, give him strength, wisdom and peace. Amen.

Today: Pray one Our Father, one Hail Mary and one Glory Be for the intentions of the pope.

Day 8: The unity of the Church

Later documents confused Anacletus and Cletus, turning one man into two popes. Confusion and division are part of history, but the Church always seeks the truth and unity. Christ prayed "that they may all be one."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, heal the divisions among Christians and make us one in you. Amen.

Today: Make a gesture of reconciliation in your family, parish or workplace.

Day 9: Handing on the faith

Anacletus received the Church from Linus and handed it on to Clement. Every Christian is a link in this long chain. What we have received, we are called to pass on. Faith is not a possession to keep for ourselves but a gift that grows when it is shared.

Prayer: Saint Anacletus, help me to hand on the faith to those who come after me, by my words and above all by my life. Amen.

Today: Share something of your faith with a child, a young person or a friend.

Closing prayer

> *Lord our God, you gave Saint Anacletus to your Church as a shepherd after the Apostle Peter, in a time of trial. Through his intercession, keep your Church faithful to the faith of the apostles, protect our Holy Father the pope, strengthen persecuted Christians and help us to hand on the Gospel to the next generation. I entrust to you my intention for this novena: (name it in silence). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read also the life of Saint Anacletus and the prayer to Saint Anacletus.

CREDITS

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