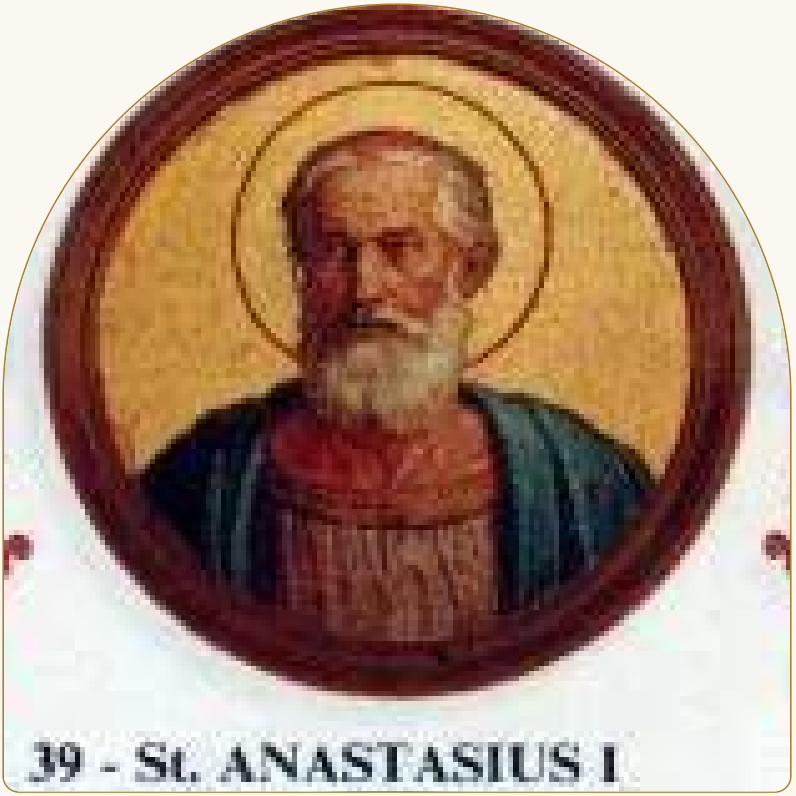


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Anastasius I

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 19

IN BRIEF

Saint Anastasius I

Pope from 399 to 401, peacemaker in the Origenist controversy and friend of Saint Jerome.

Feast day	December 19
Born	c. 340, Rome
Died	December 19, 401, Rome
Era	5th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Anastasius I for Peace in the Church

Novena to Saint Anastasius I

Credits and sources

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LIFE

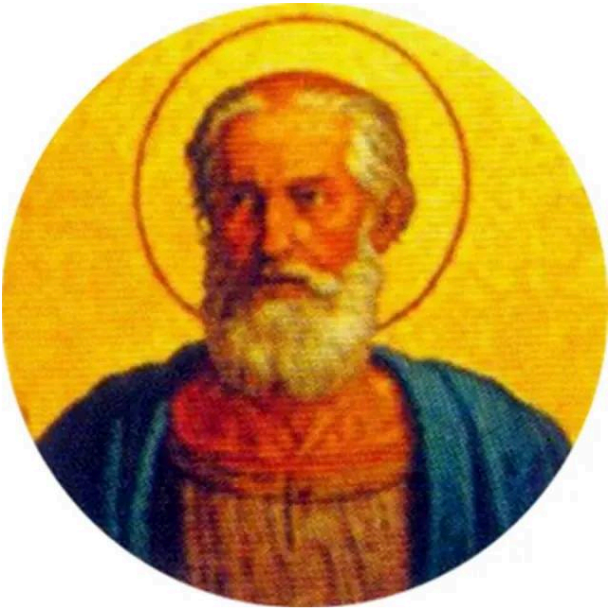
Saint Anastasius I

Saint Anastasius I was pope for just over two years, from 399 to 401. His short pontificate came at a time when the great figures of the Christian West, Jerome, Augustine and Paulinus of Nola, were all at the height of their activity, and all three held him in high esteem. A peacemaker in the controversy over Origen and an opponent of Donatism in Africa, he is celebrated by the Catholic Church on December 19.

Who was Saint Anastasius I?

The *Liber Pontificalis*, the main ancient chronicle of the popes, says he was a Roman; one tradition links him to the Massimi family. He was born around 340 and succeeded Pope Siricius on November 27, 399. We know almost nothing of his life before his election. What we know of him comes mostly from the letters of his contemporaries, who describe him as a man of peace and great virtue.

The setting is that of a Church that had emerged from persecution less than a century earlier. Christianity was now the official religion of the Roman Empire, but it was shaken by lively doctrinal debates, and the Bishop of Rome was increasingly called upon to act as an arbiter between Churches and theologians.



Imaginary portrait of Anastasius I, Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

Key dates in the life of Saint Anastasius I

- **c. 340**: Born in Rome.
- **November 27, 399**: Becomes Bishop of Rome.
- **c. 400**: A Roman synod condemns the theses attributed to Origen.
- **400**: Paulinus of Nola visits Rome and is received "kindly" by the pope.
- **c. 401**: Letter to the Council of Carthage concerning the Donatists.
- **December 19, 401**: Dies in Rome.

The Origenist controversy

Origen, a great theologian of Alexandria who lived in the 3rd century, was one of the most brilliant minds of the early Church. He commented on almost the whole Bible and left a vast body of work. But some of his speculations, for

example on the origin of souls or the final restoration of all things, troubled later generations.

At the turn of the 5th century, his writings divided Christians. Rufinus of Aquileia had translated his treatise *On First Principles* into Latin to make it better known. Saint Jerome, from Bethlehem, saw it instead as a danger. Jerome's friends in Rome and Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria pressed the pope to settle the matter. Anastasius had a synod condemn the Origenist theses, while trying to calm the people involved: he acted as a mediator rather than an accuser, and did not break with the persons concerned.

A shepherd esteemed by his contemporaries

Anastasius also supported the bishops of Africa against Donatism. This movement, born in North Africa after the persecutions, refused to recognize the validity of sacraments given by clergy it judged unworthy, and had divided the African Church for generations. The pope's letter was read at the Council of Carthage, encouraging the bishops in their efforts.

The *Liber Pontificalis* credits him with a liturgical rule: priests were to listen to the Gospel, proclaimed by the deacons, standing and with heads bowed. He is also credited with building in Rome the basilica known as the Crescenziana, identified today with San Sisto Vecchio.

Jerome spoke of him as a man of great holiness, "rich in his poverty." Augustine and Paulinus of Nola, who had been more reserved toward his predecessor, counted among his close friends.

Death and relics

Anastasius I died on December 19, 401, and was buried outside the city, above the Catacomb of Pontian. Later, his relics and those of his successor Innocent I were given to the abbey of Gandersheim in Saxony, founded in the 9th century.

What does his holiness teach us?

The Church remembers him as a conciliatory pope, firm in the faith without becoming the instrument of grudges, and poor in the middle of a Rome that was still wealthy. His holiness is a quiet one, known through the admiring eyes of his friends more than through his own writings.

In a time of fierce theological quarrels, he showed that one can defend the truth without hatred, and settle a dispute without humiliating anyone. He also reminds us that a short ministry can still bear fruit: in barely two years, he left the memory of a just and gentle shepherd.

Why pray to Saint Anastasius I?

No traditional patronage is attached to Saint Anastasius I. His life makes him a fitting intercessor for peace within the Church, for those who must settle conflicts, for theologians and teachers, and for a spirit of poverty and simplicity. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Anastasius I and the novena to Saint Anastasius I.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Anastasius I in art

Like most early popes, Anastasius I has no portrait from his own time. He appears in the series of mosaic medallions of the popes in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, an imaginary portrait made long after his death. Later images show him, like the other early popes, simply in papal vestments. In Huelva, in Spain, a ceramic altarpiece on the facade of a church depicts him.

Where to pray to Saint Anastasius I

- **Rome**: the Basilica of San Sisto Vecchio, identified with the basilica built in his time.

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, where his portrait appears among the medallions of the popes.
- **Gandersheim** (Lower Saxony, Germany): the former abbey that received his relics.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Anastasius I for Peace in the Church

Saint Anastasius I, Bishop of Rome from 399 to 401, left no prayer of his own, and no ancient prayer to him is in common use. His contemporaries remembered him as a man of peace, "rich in his poverty," who defended the faith without fueling resentment. The prayer below is inspired by his short pontificate. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Anastasius I for peace in the Church

Saint Anastasius, shepherd of the Church of Rome,
you were called to lead the Church in a time of quarrels,
when even the greatest minds were divided.
You held fast to the faith,
yet you sought to calm hearts rather than condemn persons.
Teach me to love the truth without loving victory over others.

Jerome called you rich in your poverty.
Free me from the desire to possess and to appear,
and give me a simple heart that finds its wealth in God.

You welcomed Paulinus of Nola with kindness
and encouraged the bishops of Africa in their struggles.
Make me a friend to those who serve the Gospel,
and a support to those who work for unity.

Pray for the Pope and the bishops,
for theologians and teachers,
for parishes and families divided by conflict,
and for all who must settle a dispute with justice and gentleness.
I 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

Saint Anastasius I is celebrated on December 19, in the last days of Advent, the anniversary of his death in 401. You can pray to him whenever a conflict divides a family, a parish or a community, before a difficult conversation, or

when you have to make a decision that will disappoint someone. He is also a good companion for anyone who teaches the faith or studies theology, and for those who want to live more simply.

A short way to pray with him is to read a passage of Scripture, then ask his intercession for one person with whom you disagree, praying for that person by name.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Anastasius I, and read the life of Saint Anastasius I.

NOVENA

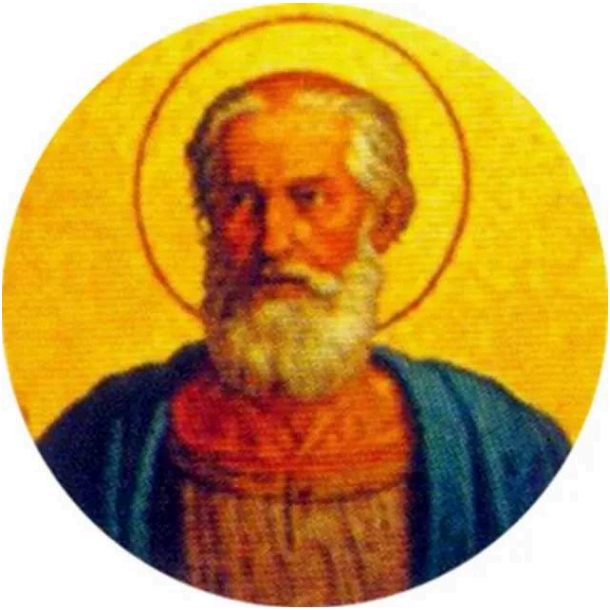
Novena to Saint Anastasius I

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Anastasius I, pope from 399 to 401. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast day, December 19, begin it on December 10. Prayed in the heart of Advent, it can help prepare for Christmas in a spirit of peace and simplicity. It can also be prayed at any time of the year, especially for peace in a family or a community.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.

This novena is suited to those who are going through a conflict, to those who carry responsibility in the Church, and to anyone who wants to learn to defend the truth with charity.



Pope Anastasius I, mosaic medallion in Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

Day 1: A hidden life

We know almost nothing of Anastasius before his election. For about sixty years he lived unnoticed, a Christian of Rome among others. Most of our lives, too, are hidden, and God sees them.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to live faithfully the hidden days of my life, without seeking to be noticed.

Today: Do a kindness that no one will know about.

Day 2: Accepting a responsibility

In 399 he was chosen to lead the Church of Rome. He did not know he would have only two years. Every responsibility we receive is a call to serve, whatever its length.

Prayer: Lord, help me to carry the responsibilities you entrust to me with humility and care.

Today: Pray for the Pope and for your bishop by name.

Day 3: In a time of quarrels

The Church of his time was divided over the writings of Origen. Learned and holy men were opposed to one another. Disagreement among believers is not new, and it can be painful. It becomes a scandal only when it destroys charity.

Prayer: Lord, when believers are divided, keep us united in charity.

Today: Pray for a community or a family torn by a disagreement.

Day 4: Firm in the faith

Anastasius did not avoid the question. He had a synod judge the disputed theses. Peace is not built by ignoring the truth, but by serving it.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the courage to speak the truth when it is needed.

Today: Read slowly the Creed and thank God for the faith of the Church.

Day 5: Gentle with persons

While condemning ideas, Anastasius sought to calm hearts and did not break with the people involved. He acted as a mediator rather than an accuser.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from confusing a person with their mistakes, and teach me to separate the two.

Today: Speak kindly about someone with whom you disagree.

Day 6: Rich in poverty

Saint Jerome described him as "rich in his poverty." In a Rome that was still wealthy, the pope lived simply. True wealth is not counted in possessions. A heart that is free of them has more room for God and for others.

Prayer: Lord, free me from attachment to things and make me rich toward you.

Today: Give away something you do not need, or make a gift to the poor.

Day 7: The gift of friendship

Paulinus of Nola, received kindly by the pope, and Augustine were among his friends. The saints supported one another, through visits, letters and prayer. No one becomes holy alone.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the friends who lead me to you. Help me to be that kind of friend.

Today: Write a word of encouragement to a friend in the faith.

Day 8: Listening to the Gospel

The *Liber Pontificalis* says that he asked priests to listen to the Gospel standing, with heads bowed. It is a gesture of respect for the Word of God, which we receive rather than possess.

Prayer: Lord, open my heart to your Word, and help me to receive it with reverence.

Today: Read the Gospel of the day and keep one sentence in your heart.

Day 9: A short life, a lasting memory

Anastasius died on December 19, 401, after barely two years as pope. Yet his friends remembered him as a saint. What matters is not how long we serve, but how we love.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Anastasius I, grant me what is good for me and for those I love. Amen.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation with someone.

Closing prayer

Saint Anastasius, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for the Church, that she may be one in truth and charity. Pray for those who are in conflict, that they may find peace. Obtain for me a simple heart, firm in faith and gentle toward all. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Anastasius I and the prayer to Saint Anastasius I.

Credits and sources

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