

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Anterus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Anterus

Bishop of Rome from November 235 to January 236, one of the shortest pontificates in history.

Feast day	January 3
Died	January 3, 236, Rome, Italy
Era	3rd century
Patron saint of	Giaveno

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Anterus for Faithfulness in Trials

Novena to Saint Anterus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Anterus

Saint Anterus, also called Anteros, had one of the shortest pontificates in history: elected on November 21, 235, he died on January 3, 236, after about forty days. Christian memory has kept two things from this brief passage: a tomb found in the Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus, and the tradition that he wanted to gather and preserve the acts of the martyrs. His feast day is January 3.

Who was Saint Anterus?

The *Liber Pontificalis*, the ancient book of the lives of the popes, presents him as the son of a man named Romulus and says he was of Greek origin; another tradition places his birth at Petilia, in Calabria. His Greek name may suggest that he was a freed slave or the descendant of freedmen, which would have been nothing unusual in the Christian community of Rome in the third century. Nothing is known of his life before his election, nor how old he was at the time.

His election came at a moment of crisis. The emperor Maximinus Thrax, who seized power in 235, struck at the leaders of the Church. Anterus's predecessor, Saint Pontian, was deported to the mines of Sardinia together with the priest Hippolytus, who had long been his rival. Pontian gave up his office on September 28, 235, so that the Church of Rome would not be left without a shepherd, and he died in exile soon afterward. Anterus was chosen to succeed him.

To accept the office of Bishop of Rome at that moment meant accepting a real danger. The predecessor was a deportee, condemned to forced labor, and the new pope could expect the same treatment. It is in this light that his short pontificate should be read.

Key dates

- **September 28, 235**: Pontian, exiled in Sardinia, gives up his office.
- **November 21, 235**: Beginning of the pontificate of Anterus.
- **January 3, 236**: Anterus dies in Rome.
- **236**: Saint Fabian succeeds him; the body of Pontian is brought back from Sardinia and laid near his.
- **1595**: His relics are found in Rome, in the church of San Silvestro al Quirinale.
- **1611**: Part of his relics is given to the town of Giaveno, in Piedmont.
- **1854**: The archaeologist Giovanni Battista de Rossi finds his tomb in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus.

The guardian of the memory of the martyrs

The only act that tradition attributes to Anterus concerns the martyrs. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, he had the acts of the martyrs carefully searched out, the records written by notaries whose office was traditionally traced back to Saint Clement, so that they could be kept in the archives of the Church, the *scrinium*. Some see in this a distant ancestor of the library and archives of the Holy See. These documents were later destroyed, it is said, during the persecution of Diocletian.

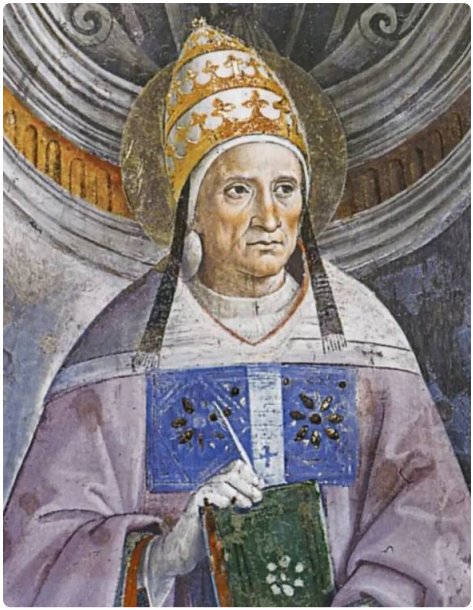
The same source states that Anterus was martyred precisely because of this zeal. Historians remain cautious. The *Liber Pontificalis* was compiled much later, and the older Liberian Catalogue uses for him the phrase "he fell asleep," which usually indicates a natural death. He may have died in the troubled context of the persecution of Maximinus, but nothing more can be said with certainty.

Whatever the exact circumstances of his death, the care for the memory of the martyrs that tradition attaches to his name says something true about the Church of Rome in the third century. The community kept the names, the dates and the tombs of its witnesses, and celebrated them on the anniversary of their death. Our liturgical calendar, with its feasts of saints, grew out of that faithful remembrance.

A rediscovered tomb

Anterus was one of the first popes buried in the "Crypt of the Popes" in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus, on the Appian Way, where several of his successors would later be laid. In 1854, Giovanni Battista de Rossi, the great explorer of the Roman catacombs, discovered there fragments of the slab that closed his tomb. The inscription is in Greek, a sign that Greek was still the language of the Church of Rome; the word "bishop" can still be read on it.

His relics later traveled. They were found in Rome in 1595 in the church of San Silvestro al Quirinale, and in 1611 part of them was given to the town of Giaveno, in Piedmont, which honors him as its protector.



Saint Anterus, portrait attributed to Perugino (Sistine Chapel).

Why is Saint Anterus remembered?

Saint Anterus has no traditional patronage, apart from his role as protector of Giaveno. A long biography of him cannot be written, and it would be dishonest to fill the gaps with imagination. But his brief memory says the essential: a shepherd who accepted his office in the middle of persecution, and who wanted the witness of the martyrs not to be lost.

He reminds us of the value of memory in the Church, and of the faithfulness of those who serve, even for a short time. Archivists, historians, librarians and all who preserve the memory of the Christian community can see in him a discreet friend. So can anyone called to take up a responsibility in a difficult hour, without knowing how long it will last.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Anterus in art

Very few images of Saint Anterus exist. The best known is his portrait among the series of early popes painted on the walls of the Sistine Chapel, attributed to Perugino, where he wears papal vestments. Like other early popes, he is sometimes shown with the tiara, an anachronism for a third-century bishop. The most moving trace of him is not a painting but his Greek epitaph, still visible at the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus.



zweifelhaft. Sein Grab u. Teile des Epitaphs (s. Abb.) im Coemeterium Callisti wurden 1854 wieder aufgefunden. Fest 3. Jan.

The Greek epitaph of Saint Anterus.

Where to pray to Saint Anterus

- **Rome**: the Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus, on the Appian Way.
- **Giaveno** (Piedmont, Italy): the town that has kept part of his relics since 1611.

You can also pray with him using the prayer to Saint Anterus or the novena to Saint Anterus.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Anterus for Faithfulness in Trials

No prayer by Saint Anterus has survived, and there is no traditional prayer to him in common use. What tradition remembers of him is short but strong: he accepted to lead the Church of Rome in a time of persecution, and he wanted the witness of the martyrs to be preserved. The prayer below draws on that memory.

Prayer to Saint Anterus for faithfulness and the memory of the martyrs

Saint Anterus, you accepted the care of the Church of Rome when your predecessor had been sent into exile and danger was at the door. Teach me to say yes to the responsibilities God gives me, even when the hour is difficult.

You wanted the acts of the martyrs to be gathered and kept, so that their witness would not be lost. Help me to remember with gratitude those who gave their lives for Christ, in the past and today.

Pray for Christians who are persecuted in our time, that they may remain faithful and find comfort in the communion of saints.

Pray for those who serve the Church quietly and for a short time, and for those whose work no one sees.

I entrust to you today: (name your intention in silence).

Through Christ our Lord, the faithful witness. 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, **January 3**, the anniversary of his death in Rome in 236.
- When you are asked to take on a responsibility in your parish, your family or your work at a hard moment.
- On days of prayer for persecuted Christians.
- If you work as an archivist, librarian, historian or teacher, entrusted with preserving memory.
- When you visit the catacombs of Rome or a place where martyrs are honored.

Remembering the martyrs with the Church

The Church has always named her martyrs in prayer. The First Eucharistic Prayer, the Roman Canon, still lists early martyrs of Rome such as Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus, Cornelius, Agnes and Cecilia. Praying it attentively, or simply reading those names slowly, is a way of joining the work that tradition attributes to Saint Anterus: keeping alive the memory of those who bore witness to Christ.

A short invocation

> *Saint Anterus, faithful shepherd in time of trial, pray for us and for all who suffer for the name of Jesus.*

To know him better, read the life of Saint Anterus, or pray the novena to Saint Anterus from December 25 to January 2.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Anterus

This novena to Saint Anterus is an original composition by Saintspedia. His pontificate lasted only about forty days, in a time of persecution, and tradition remembers him for his care for the acts of the martyrs. This novena follows those few known facts to pray for faithfulness, courage and the persecuted Church. To end on the eve of his feast, January 3, begin it on December 25, so that it runs through the Christmas octave. It can of course be prayed at any time of year.

Praying this novena during the Christmas season has a particular meaning. The day after Christmas, the Church celebrates Saint Stephen, the first martyr, and on December 28 the Holy Innocents. The memory of the martyrs is woven into the joy of the Nativity: the Child of Bethlehem is the one for whom so many would later give their lives. Saint Anterus, guardian of their memory, helps us hold these two together.

How to pray this novena

Each day, take a few quiet minutes. Make the Sign of the Cross, read the meditation of the day and say its prayer. Add an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act suggested for the day.

Day 1: Little known, but known to God

We know almost nothing of Anterus before his election: not his age, not his story. Yet the Church remembers him as a saint. What matters is not to be famous, but to be faithful.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, you were little known to the world but known and loved by God. Free me from the need to be noticed, and teach me to live under his gaze. Amen.

Today: Do a hidden service for someone, without saying anything.

Day 2: A humble origin

His Greek name may suggest that he came from a family of freed slaves. In the Church, the last can become first, and the humble can become shepherds.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, pray for all who are looked down on because of their origin or their poverty. Teach me to see every person with the eyes of Christ. Amen.

Today: Treat with special respect someone who is often overlooked.

Day 3: Saying yes in a dark hour

Anterus was chosen just after his predecessor Pontian had been deported to the mines of Sardinia. To accept was to accept danger.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, give me the courage to say yes to God when the moment is hard and the future uncertain. Amen.

Today: Accept, without complaining, a task you would rather avoid.

Day 4: For the Pope and the bishops

Pontian gave up his office so that Rome would not remain without a shepherd. The Church has always needed pastors who put the flock before themselves.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, pray for the Pope, for our bishops and priests. Give them generous hearts, ready to serve and, if necessary, to step aside for the good of the Church. Amen.

Today: Pray for your parish priest and your bishop by name.

Day 5: Keeping the memory of the martyrs

Tradition says that Anterus had the acts of the martyrs gathered and kept in the archives of the Church. Remembering is a way of loving.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, help me to remember with gratitude those who gave their lives for Christ. Let their witness strengthen my faith. Amen.

Today: Read the life of a martyr, ancient or recent.

Day 6: For persecuted Christians

Anterus lived under the persecution of Maximinus Thrax. Today, too, many Christians are threatened, imprisoned or killed for their faith.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, pray for Christians who suffer for the name of Jesus. Give them strength, peace and hope, and help us not to forget them. Amen.

Today: Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted, or support an organization that helps them.

Day 7: A short life of service

Anterus served for only forty days. A short service can still be complete if it is given with love.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, teach me to live each day as a gift, without waiting for tomorrow to do good. Pray for those whose lives are short, and for families grieving a loved one who died young. Amen.

Today: Do today the good you have been putting off.

Day 8: Resting among the saints

Anterus was buried in the Crypt of the Popes, where his Greek epitaph was found in 1854. The catacombs remind us that the Church is a family that rests together, waiting for the resurrection.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, pray for our deceased loved ones, that they may rest in peace and share in the resurrection of Christ. Amen.

Today: Pray for your deceased relatives, or visit a cemetery.

Day 9: The communion of saints

From the third century to our own, the Church has never stopped calling on her saints. Anterus, who cared for the memory of the martyrs, is now remembered himself.

Prayer: Saint Anterus, with all the saints and martyrs, pray for me and for the intentions I have carried during this novena. Help me one day to join you in the joy of God. Amen.

Today: Thank God for a saint who has helped you in your life.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Anterus, faithful shepherd in a time of persecution, thank you for accompanying me during these nine days. Obtain for me the courage to remain faithful, the gratitude to remember those who went before us in the faith, and the hope of the resurrection. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To continue, pray the prayer to Saint Anterus or read his life.

CREDITS

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