BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Aristobulus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 15

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IN BRIEF

Saint Aristobulus

1st-century disciple, honored by tradition as the first bishop of Roman Britain.

Feast day	March 15
Born	1st century BC or 1st century
Died	between 65 and the end of the 1st century, according to traditions, Glastonbury (England), according to medieval traditions
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	1st century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Aristobulus for Missionaries

Novena to Saint Aristobulus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Aristobulus

Saint Aristobulus was a Christian of the 1st century whom the ancient lists of the seventy disciples of Jesus present as the first bishop of Roman Britain, that is, present-day Great Britain. One tradition identifies him with the Aristobulus whose household Saint Paul greets in his Letter to the Romans. His life is very poorly known and traditions differ about his death. His feast day is March 15.

Who was Saint Aristobulus?

Aristobulus is one of those figures of Christian origins of whom we mainly know the name. The Gospel according to Saint Luke says that Jesus sent out on mission, besides the Twelve, seventy (or seventy-two) other disciples, without giving their names. From the 3rd century onward, Christian authors drew up lists of these disciples, and Aristobulus always appears in them, with the note "bishop of Britain". These lists are very brief and late compared with the events: they reflect the conviction of the early Churches that the Gospel had reached the ends of the Empire very early. His story must therefore be read with caution, distinguishing the few ancient texts from the traditions that developed later.

Key dates in the life of Aristobulus

- **1st century**: According to tradition, he is one of the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus.
- **c. 54 - 58**: In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul greets "those who belong to the household of Aristobulus" (Romans 16:10).
- **Then**: According to the lists of disciples, he becomes the first bishop of the Roman province of Britain.

- **Between 65 and the end of the 1st century**: Dies, at Glastonbury according to medieval traditions; the sources hesitate between martyrdom and a natural death.
- **Early 3rd century**: A list of disciples attributed to Saint Hippolytus of Rome mentions him as bishop of Britain.
- **4th century**: A list attributed to Dorotheus of Tyre identifies him with the Aristobulus greeted by Saint Paul.

The Aristobulus of the Letter to the Romans

At the end of his Letter to the Romans, written around 54 - 58, Saint Paul greets many Christians in Rome. He writes: "Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsman Herodion." Paul does not greet Aristobulus himself, but the members of his household: servants, slaves or freedmen living in the house of a wealthy man. In the 4th century, the list attributed to Dorotheus of Tyre states that this Aristobulus is the disciple who became bishop of Britain. Many historians today think rather of a prince of Herod's family, Aristobulus of Chalcis, who had a residence in Rome; others see no link at all between the two mentions. The question remains open.

The apostle of Britain according to tradition

The lists of the seventy disciples, the oldest of which is attributed to Saint Hippolytus of Rome in the early 3rd century, make Aristobulus the first bishop of the province of Britannia, conquered by the Romans from the year 43. Christian tradition counts him, with Joseph of Arimathea, among the first evangelizers of the island. Medieval traditions have him die at Glastonbury, in the south-west of England, but they agree neither on the date nor on the circumstances of his death. Some have even suggested identifying him with

Joseph of Arimathea, without solid proof. What is certain is that in the early 3rd century Tertullian could write that Christ was already proclaimed even in the parts of Britain beyond the reach of the Romans.

In Wales, the region of Arwystli, in present-day Powys, is said by tradition to bear the Welsh form of his name. Eastern tradition adds other details: it makes him the brother of Saint Barnabas, a companion of the apostle Andrew, and a preacher in Hispania before he left for Britain. These stories are difficult to verify.

Devotion and art

Saint Aristobulus is celebrated on March 15, in the Catholic as well as the Orthodox calendar. The Eastern Churches also commemorate him with all of the seventy disciples. Eastern icons show him as a bishop, holding the Gospel book. His cult has remained discreet in the West, but it bears witness to a strong conviction: from the first generations, the Gospel sought to reach the most distant peoples.

What can we learn from Saint Aristobulus?

We know very little about Saint Aristobulus. But his name, recorded in the oldest lists of disciples, reminds us that the Church was built thanks to a crowd of witnesses who remained almost anonymous. He invites us to carry the Gospel where it is not yet known, without seeking recognition. You can pray to him for the Church in Great Britain, for missionaries and for all who serve Christ in the shadows.

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

Where to pray to Saint Aristobulus

- **Glastonbury** (England): the place where medieval traditions locate his death.
- **Anywhere**, especially on March 15, by rereading the end of the Letter to the Romans (chapter 16).

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Aristobulus for Missionaries

Saint Aristobulus, a disciple of the first days of the Church, is honored by tradition as the first bishop of Roman Britain, present-day Great Britain. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him missionaries, the Church in the British Isles and all who serve God without being known.

Prayer to Saint Aristobulus

Saint Aristobulus,
disciple of the first days of the Church,
your name has crossed the centuries
while your life remained hidden in God.
Teach me to serve Christ
without seeking to be seen or admired.

Tradition presents you as the messenger of the Gospel
as far as the distant islands of Britain.
Give the Church of today
the courage to proclaim Christ
to those who do not yet know him.

Watch over the Christians of Great Britain,
over missionaries and their families,
and keep us united in the faith of the apostles.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Aristobulus

- On his feast day, March 15.
- For the Church in England, Scotland and Wales.
- For missionaries far from home.
- When you serve in the shadows, without recognition.
- While reading Saint Paul's greetings at the end of the Letter to the Romans.

A prayer for missionaries

> *Lord, send laborers into your harvest,*
> *and keep those who proclaim your Gospel.*
> *Saint Aristobulus, pray for them. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Aristobulus from March 7 to 15, and discover the life of Saint Aristobulus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Aristobulus

This novena is inspired by the figure of Saint Aristobulus, a 1st-century disciple whom tradition presents as the first bishop of Roman Britain. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, March 15, begin on March 7. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

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: "Saint Aristobulus, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. His life is very little known: these meditations rely on the few ancient texts and on tradition.

Day 1: Sent out two by two

Jesus sent seventy disciples ahead of him, two by two, into every town where he was to go. Tradition counts Aristobulus among them.

Prayer: Lord, you send me too, where I live. Make me available for your mission.

Act of the day: Read the sending of the seventy-two disciples (Luke 10:1-12).

Day 2: A name in a letter

Saint Paul greets "those who belong to the household of Aristobulus". A simple name, in the middle of a long list, reminds us that the Church is made of real and beloved people.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for knowing each of us by name. Teach me to carry in prayer the people I know.

Act of the day: Read Romans 16 and pray for the members of your parish.

Day 3: An open house

In the household of Aristobulus lived Christians, probably servants or freedmen. Faith was lived in homes, at the heart of daily life.

Prayer: Lord, make my home a place where people pray and are welcomed.

Act of the day: Pray as a family, or invite someone who is alone.

Day 4: Going far away

According to tradition, Aristobulus left for Britain, at the edge of the known world. The Gospel is meant to be carried to everyone.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to leave my habits behind to proclaim your love.

Act of the day: Pray for a country where Christ is little known.

Day 5: Shepherd of a young Church

Tradition makes Aristobulus the first bishop of Britain. Shepherds were needed to help the first communities grow.

Prayer: Lord, bless bishops and priests, and give them the heart of a shepherd.

Act of the day: Pray for your bishop.

Day 6: Sowing without seeing

Aristobulus did not see the faith flourish in Britain. Others, after him, reaped what he had sown.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to sow with trust, even if I do not see the fruit.

Act of the day: Do a quiet good deed that no one will know about.

Day 7: A life hidden in God

We know almost nothing of him. His life remained hidden, like that of so many faithful Christians.

Prayer: Lord, may my life be hidden with Christ in you, and may it bear fruit.

Act of the day: Thank God for a humble person who helped you in your faith.

Day 8: The Church in Great Britain

Tradition links Aristobulus to the Christian origins of Great Britain. This Church has known martyrs, monks, divisions and renewals.

Prayer: Lord, bless the Christians of Great Britain and lead them toward unity.

Act of the day: Pray for Christian unity.

Day 9: The faithful witness

Traditions hesitate between martyrdom and a peaceful death. In either case, Aristobulus was faithful to the end.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Aristobulus, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if possible, and pray for missionaries.

Living the novena with Saint Aristobulus

Aristobulus is the witness of all who carried the Gospel without leaving many traces. During these nine days, you can carry missionaries, the Christians of Great Britain and all who serve in the shadows.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Aristobulus,*
> *disciple and messenger of the Gospel,*
> *you carried the name of Jesus to distant lands.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Give me a humble and missionary heart,*
> *faithful to the end.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Aristobulus at any time, and read the life of Saint Aristobulus.

Credits and sources

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