BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Astius of Durrës

*Life, prayer and novena*

Feast day: July 7

**Saintspedia** · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

## Saint Astius of Durrës

*Bishop of Dyrrachium, today Durrës in Albania, martyred under Trajan according to tradition.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Feast day** | July 7 |
| **Born** | 1st century |
| **Died** | c. 98-117, Dyrrachium, today Durrës, Albania |
| **Canonized** | Pre-Congregation (immemorial cult) |
| **Era** | 2nd century |
| **Patron saint of** | Durrës |

## In this booklet


Life

Prayer to Saint Astius, Bishop and Martyr of Durrës

Novena to Saint Astius of Durrës

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

# Saint Astius of Durrës

Saint Astius was a bishop of Dyrrachium, today Durrës in Albania, who according to tradition died a martyr at the beginning of the second century under the Emperor Trajan. He is the patron saint of Durrës and one of the oldest figures of Albanian Christianity. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on July 7.

## Who was Saint Astius?

Astius, in Albanian *Shën Asti*, is known almost only through hagiographical tradition and the martyrologies. No contemporary document tells us about his life, and the accounts of his passion were written much later. It is therefore important to distinguish what is known, his name, his office as bishop of Dyrrachium and his very ancient cult, from what the legend reports.

In the second century, Dyrrachium was a large port city of the Roman province of Macedonia, on the Adriatic coast. It stood at the start of the *Via Egnatia*, the great road that linked the Adriatic to Thessalonica and Byzantium. Christianity arrived there very early: in his Letter to the Romans, the apostle Saint Paul says he preached the Gospel "as far as Illyricum" (Romans 15:19). Local tradition links the founding of the Church of Durrës to the apostolic age.

## Key dates in the life of Saint Astius

- **First century**: Born, at an unknown date and place.
- **Late first century**: Bishop of Dyrrachium, according to tradition.
- **Reign of Trajan (98-117)**: Arrested by the governor Agricola, he refuses to sacrifice to the god Dionysus; he is tortured and then crucified, according to his passion.

- **Shortly after**: Seven Christians from Italy who witnessed his martyrdom are in turn put to death by drowning, according to the same tradition.
- **After 1991**: With the fall of the communist regime, his cult is honored again in Albania.

## The passion of Saint Astius

According to the traditional account, Astius saw in a dream the sufferings that awaited him. Arrested by Agricola, the governor of the city, he was ordered to offer sacrifice to Dionysus. He refused. He was beaten with lead-weighted whips, and then, to increase his suffering, his body was smeared with honey so that insects would sting him. Finally he was crucified. Christians took his body and buried it.

### The seven martyrs from Italy

Tradition joins to his memory that of seven Christians who had come from Italy to escape persecution: Peregrinus, Lucian, Pompeius, Hesychius, Papias, Saturninus and Germanus. Having seen the bishop's steadfastness, they publicly praised his courage. Arrested in their turn, they were thrown into the sea. Their bodies, washed ashore by the waves, were buried on the coast. These martyrs are honored on the same day as Astius in tradition.

These accounts follow patterns common to the passions of martyrs, and their details are hard to verify. But they bear witness to an ancient memory of the first persecutions on the shores of the Adriatic.

## Devotion to Saint Astius

Astius is venerated by both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. The Roman Martyrology names him on July 7 as bishop and martyr of Dyrrachium. In the Orthodox Church he is commemorated on a nearby date in early July, and the Orthodox Church of Albania holds him in special honor.

Durrës regards him as its patron saint. After decades of state atheism, which had closed or destroyed most places of worship in the country, a large Orthodox cathedral dedicated to Saint Paul and Saint Astius was built in Durrës and opened in 2009. Catholics of the Archdiocese of Tirana-Durrës also keep his memory, together with that of the other martyrs of Albania, from the first centuries to the twentieth.



*The Cathedral of Saint Paul and Saint Astius, Durrës.*

## Why is Saint Astius the patron saint of Durrës?

Astius is the patron of Durrës because, according to tradition, he was its bishop and shed his blood there for Christ. He represents the earliest roots of the local Church, planted in a busy Roman port where travelers, merchants and missionaries passed on their way between Italy and the East.

His witness has taken on a new meaning since the twentieth century. Albania lived through a persecution without precedent, when the communist regime declared the country officially atheist in 1967 and banned all religious practice. For Albanian Christians, Catholic and Orthodox alike, the memory of a first-

century martyr speaks of a faith that has survived many trials. He can be invoked for the Church in Albania, for unity between Catholic and Orthodox Christians, and for all who are persecuted for their faith.

## What Saint Astius teaches today

We know very little about Astius, and that is part of his lesson. Most of the early martyrs left no writings and no detailed biography. What the Church has kept is their faithfulness: they would not put anything above Christ. For English-speaking Catholics who may never have heard of him, Astius is a reminder that the faith reached many lands, including the Balkans, long before it reached our own, and that it was handed on at great cost.

The seven Christians who praised his courage and died for it also speak to us. They were refugees, far from home, yet they did not keep silent. Their story honors everyone who speaks up for a person who is being treated unjustly.

## Symbols and how to recognize Saint Astius in art

In icons, Astius is shown as a bishop of the Eastern tradition, wearing the omophorion, the broad stole decorated with crosses, and holding the Gospel book. He is sometimes shown crucified, or surrounded by the seven martyrs who witnessed his death.

## Where to pray to Saint Astius

- **Durrës** (Albania): the Orthodox Cathedral of Saint Paul and Saint Astius.
- **Durrës**: the Catholic churches of the city, which keep his memory.
- **Durrës**: the Roman amphitheater, which contains an early Christian chapel decorated with mosaics, a witness to the city's first Christians.

To pray with him, you can use the prayer to Saint Astius or the novena to Saint Astius, prayed from June 29 to July 7.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Astius, Bishop and Martyr of Durrës

Saint Astius, bishop of Dyrrachium (today Durrës, in Albania), was crucified under the Emperor Trajan according to tradition, for refusing to sacrifice to the gods. He is the patron saint of Durrës and a witness to the very first roots of Christianity on the Adriatic coast. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

## Prayer to Saint Astius

*Saint Astius, bishop and martyr of Durrës,*
*you shepherded the Church of Christ in a busy port of the Adriatic*
*and, when you were ordered to worship idols,*
*you chose the cross of your Lord.*
*Beaten, mocked and crucified,*
*you remained faithful to the end.*

*Obtain for me a faith that does not give way under pressure,*
*patience in suffering,*
*and the courage to bear witness to Jesus where I live.*

*Watch over the people of Albania,*
*who kept the faith through years of persecution.*
*Pray for the unity of Catholic and Orthodox Christians,*
*who honor you together.*
*Support all who are persecuted today for the name of Christ,*
*and those who, like the seven martyrs who stood by you,*
*dare to speak up for the oppressed.*

*Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, July 7, or during the novena from June 29.
- For the Church in Albania and for Albanian communities around the world.
- For Christians persecuted for their faith.
- For the unity of Christians, especially between Catholics and Orthodox.
- In a time of suffering, to unite your pain to the cross of Christ.

## A prayer for persecuted Christians

You can add this short intercession, inspired by the witness of Saint Astius:

> *Lord Jesus, crucified and risen, strengthen all who suffer today for your name. Through the prayers of Saint Astius and of all the martyrs of Albania, give them courage, give their persecutors a change of heart, and give us generous hearts to help them. Amen.*

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

NOVENA

# Novena to Saint Astius of Durrës

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the memory of Saint Astius, bishop of Dyrrachium (Durrës, Albania) and martyr. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast day, begin on June 29, the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul: the ninth day then falls on July 7, the day the Roman Martyrology commemorates him.

Almost everything we know about Astius comes from a later account of his passion, whose details cannot be verified. The meditations follow that tradition with simplicity. What remains certain is the heart of his witness: a bishop who gave his life for Christ in the early days of the Church.

You can pray this novena alone, with your family or with a parish group, for the Church in Albania, for persecuted Christians, for Christian unity, or for any personal intention.

## How to pray this novena

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

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: *Lord God, you gave Saint Astius the strength to follow your Son to the cross. Through his intercession, hear the prayer I bring you today and make me faithful in every trial. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

## Day 1: Rooted in the apostles

The novena begins on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Paul preached the Gospel as far as Illyricum, near Durrës. Astius received the faith passed on by the apostles and gave his life for it.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for the faith of the apostles that has reached me. Through Saint Astius, help me to keep it and pass it on. Amen.

**Today:** Read Romans 15:17-21, where Paul speaks of his mission.

## Day 2: A shepherd in a crossroads city

Dyrrachium was a busy port at the start of the Via Egnatia, where people from many lands passed through. Astius served a Church open to the world.

**Prayer:** Good Shepherd, bless the bishops and priests who serve in cities full of travelers and strangers. Make our parishes welcoming. Amen.

**Today:** Greet and welcome someone new at your parish or workplace.

## Day 3: Facing what is coming

According to his passion, Astius saw in a dream the sufferings that awaited him. He did not run away. He entrusted himself to God.

**Prayer:** Father, when I fear what lies ahead, help me to place my future in your hands. Amen.

**Today:** Name in prayer one fear you carry and give it to God.

## Day 4: Refusing the idols

Ordered to sacrifice to Dionysus, Astius refused. Idols today may look different: money, success, pleasure, the approval of others. Faith asks us to put God first, and to let everything else find its proper place.

**Prayer:** Lord, free me from the idols that take your place in my heart. Be my one Lord. Amen.

**Today:** Give up for the day something that has too much hold on you.

## Day 5: Strength in suffering

Astius was beaten with whips and smeared with honey to be tormented by insects. He endured cruelty without denying Christ.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you suffered for me. Be close to all who are in pain today, and give them strength. Amen.

**Today:** Visit, call or write to someone who is sick or suffering.

## Day 6: Sharing the cross

Like his Master, Astius was crucified. The cross, a sign of shame in the Roman world, became for him the way to glory.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, help me to carry my daily crosses with love and to see them united to yours. Amen.

**Today:** Pray before a crucifix for a few minutes in silence.

## Day 7: The courage of the witnesses

Seven Christians from Italy saw the bishop's courage and praised it openly. They paid with their lives and were thrown into the sea. Courage can be contagious.

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, give me the courage to speak up for what is right, even when it costs me. Amen.

**Today:** Defend someone who is criticized or treated unfairly.

## Day 8: A faith that survives

Centuries later, Albania lived through decades of state atheism. Churches were closed, priests imprisoned. Yet the faith survived, and today Durrës honors Astius again.

**Prayer:** God of the martyrs, bless the Church in Albania. Strengthen Christians who are persecuted today, wherever they live. Amen.

**Today:** Learn about a persecuted Christian community and pray for it.

## Day 9: One faith, honored together

Catholics and Orthodox both venerate Saint Astius. In Durrës, a cathedral is dedicated to him and to Saint Paul. The martyrs remind divided Christians of the faith they share.

**Prayer:** Saint Astius, I place before you the intention of this novena. Present it to the Lord, and pray that all Christians may be one. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for an Orthodox or other Christian you know, and for the unity of the Church.

## Closing prayer

Lord God, you gave Saint Astius the grace to shepherd your people and to follow your Son even to the cross. Through his intercession and that of the martyrs who died with him, grant what I have asked during these nine days, if it is your will. Make me steadfast in faith, patient in trial and generous in witness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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**

- The Cathedral of Saint Paul and Saint Astius, Durrës.: Image: Erik Albers, CC BY-SA 4.0, 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**