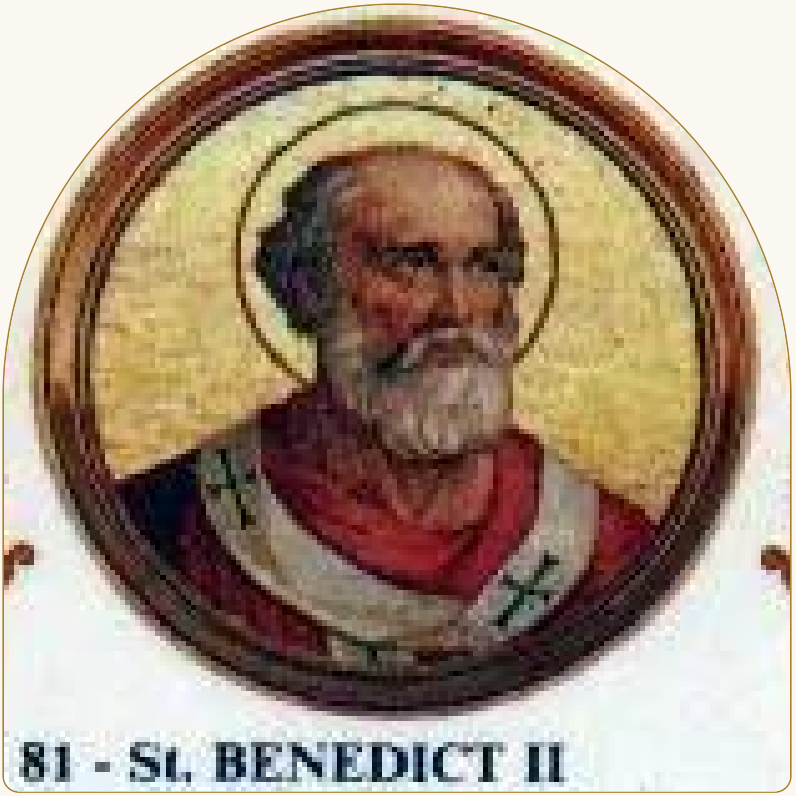


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Benedict II

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 8

IN BRIEF

Saint Benedict II

Pope from 684 to 685, who freed papal elections from long waits for imperial approval.

Feast day	May 8
Born	c. 635, Rome
Died	May 685, Rome
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Benedict II for the Unity of the Church

Novena to Saint Benedict II

Credits and sources

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LIFE

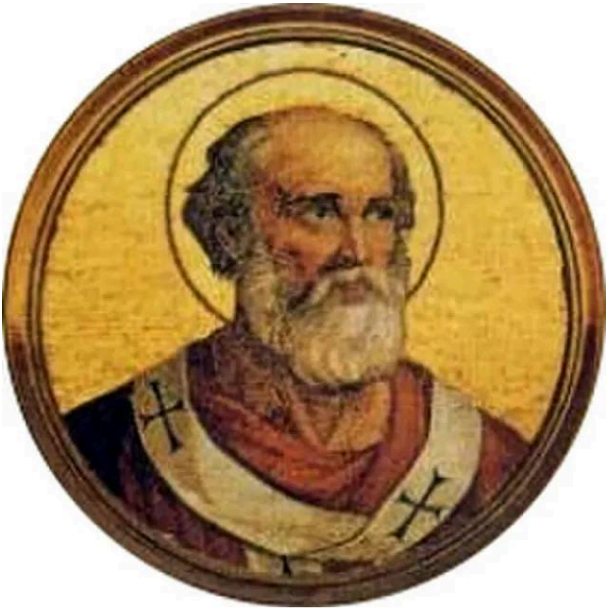
Saint Benedict II

Saint Benedict II was a Roman pope of the late 7th century who governed the Church for only ten months, from June 684 to May 685. Yet this short pontificate left its mark on history: Benedict II obtained that papal elections would no longer remain suspended for long months while waiting for the confirmation of the emperor in Constantinople. The sources also describe him as a pastor devoted to the poor. His feast day is May 8.

Who was Saint Benedict II?

What we know about him comes mainly from the *Liber pontificalis*, the collection of short lives of the popes written by Roman clerics. According to this source, Benedict was born in Rome around 635, the son of a man named John. From childhood he was trained at the *Schola cantorum*, the singing school of the Roman Church, where he also studied Holy Scripture.

The *Schola cantorum* was more than a choir. It was a place where boys of the Roman clergy grew up with the psalms, the readings and the chants of the liturgy, learning the faith through the prayer of the Church. Benedict came out of this school as a man of the Word and of worship. Once a priest, he was noted for his knowledge of the sacred texts, his gentleness and his love for the poor.



Saint Benedict II in the gallery of popes at Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

Key dates

- **c. 635**: Born in Rome.
- **680-681**: The Third Council of Constantinople condemns Monothelitism, under Pope Agatho.
- **July 683**: Death of Pope Leo II; Benedict is elected to succeed him.
- **June 26, 684**: Benedict II is consecrated, after a long wait for imperial confirmation.
- **May 685**: Dies in Rome and is buried in Saint Peter's Basilica.

A pope waiting for the emperor

To understand why Benedict II matters, we need to remember that in the 7th century Rome was part of the Byzantine Empire. For more than a century, a newly elected pope could be consecrated only after receiving the approval of

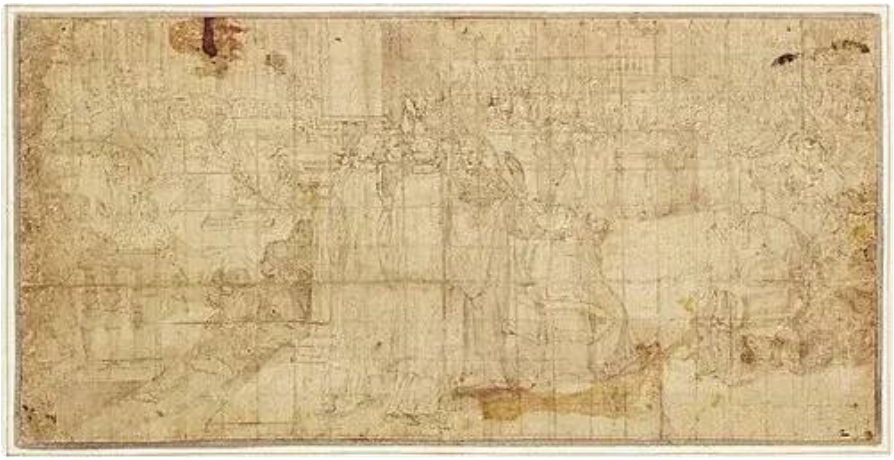
the emperor in Constantinople. Letters traveled slowly, by land and sea, and the delays were long.

Benedict, elected after the death of Saint Leo II in 683, had to wait almost a year before being consecrated on June 26, 684. During all that time, the Church of Rome was without a consecrated bishop.

A decree that changed papal elections

According to the *Liber pontificalis*, Emperor Constantine IV then agreed, by decree, that the pope-elect could be consecrated without waiting for confirmation from Constantinople. Other sources say that approval could from then on be given by the exarch of Ravenna, the emperor's representative in Italy, which still greatly shortened the wait. Either way, the measure gave the Church of Rome more freedom in choosing its shepherds.

The same account reports a gesture of friendship: Constantine IV sent the pope locks of hair of his two sons, Justinian and Heraclius. This was a sign of a kind of spiritual adoption of the princes by the pontiff, placing the young heirs under the fatherly protection of the bishop of Rome.



The Third Council of Constantinople (680-681).

Completing the victory over Monothelitism

Benedict II came at the end of a long crisis. For decades, a doctrine called Monothelitism, which allowed Christ only one will, had divided East and West. Pope Saint Martin I had died in exile for opposing it, and the monk Saint Maximus the Confessor suffered the same fate.

The question was not a dispute over words. If Christ is truly man, he must have a human will, the capacity to consent and to obey, as he did in the garden of Gethsemane: "not my will but yours be done." The Third Council of Constantinople (680-681), prepared by Saint Agatho and then confirmed by Leo II, affirmed that Christ has two wills, divine and human, in perfect harmony.

A council's decisions still have to be received by the whole Church. Benedict II worked to make these decisions accepted, in particular by the bishops of Spain, whom he invited to adhere to them.

What can we learn from Saint Benedict II?

The sources are too brief to paint a detailed portrait of Benedict II. They remember a priest formed by the liturgy and the Scriptures, humble and generous toward the poor, who also had several churches in Rome restored. Above all, they show a pope who, in a few months, managed to strengthen both the unity of the faith and the freedom of the Church.

His example speaks to anyone given a short time or a small task: what counts is not the length of a mission but the faithfulness with which it is carried out. He has no traditional patronage, but he can be invoked for the unity of Christians, for those who serve in the liturgy and church music, and for the freedom of the Church.

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

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Benedict II in art

No portrait of Benedict II from his own time has survived. He appears, like all the popes, in the series of mosaic medallions of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, an imaginary portrait made centuries later. When he is depicted, it is in papal vestments, without any particular attribute.

Where to pray to Saint Benedict II

Benedict II died in May 685 and was buried in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, the burial place of many popes of his time. His cult is ancient, both in Rome and in the East, where he is celebrated on May 7. Pilgrims to Rome can remember him at Saint Peter's, and at Saint Paul Outside the Walls, where his medallion is part of the long line of the successors of Peter.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Benedict II for the Unity of the Church

No traditional prayer to Saint Benedict II has come down to us. The *Liber pontificalis* remembers him as a priest formed by the chant and the Scriptures of the Roman Church, gentle and generous to the poor, and as a pope who, in ten months, strengthened the unity of the faith and the freedom of the Church. The prayer below draws on these features.

Prayer to Saint Benedict II for the Unity of the Church

Saint Benedict II, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you learned from childhood to sing the praises of God and to love his Word. Teach me to pray with the Church, and to let the Scriptures shape my heart.

You waited long months before you could serve as bishop, and you did not lose patience. Help me to wait for God's time when my plans are delayed and my prayers seem unanswered.

You worked so that all Christians would confess the same faith in Christ, true God and true man, who said to the Father: "not my will but yours be done." Obtain for me the grace to unite my will to the will of God, and pray for the unity of all who believe in Christ.

You loved the poor and cared for them. Open my eyes and my hands to those in need around me.

Your time as pope was short, but you served faithfully. Help me to do well the task entrusted to me today, whether it is great or small. 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 Benedict II is celebrated on May 8. You can pray to him:

- for the unity of Christians, especially between Catholics and Orthodox, since his cult is shared by East and West;
- for the pope and the bishops, and for the freedom of the Church in choosing its pastors;

- for choir members, organists, cantors and all who serve in the liturgy, in memory of his training at the *Schola cantorum*;
- in times of waiting, when a decision or an answer is slow to come.

A short invocation

> *Saint Benedict II, faithful servant of the unity of the faith, pray for us and for the whole Church.*

To go further, pray the novena to Saint Benedict II from April 30 to May 8, or read the life of Saint Benedict II.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Benedict II

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Benedict II, pope from 684 to 685. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on April 30; it ends on May 8. You can also pray it at any time for the unity of the Church, for the pope, or in a period of waiting.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act proposed for each day helps carry the prayer into ordinary life. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

Because Benedict II was formed in the singing school of the Roman Church, you may like to end each day with a sung prayer you know, such as the Salve Regina or a simple hymn. Praying together as a family or a parish group is a good way to honor a pope who served the unity of the Church.

You may begin each day with this invocation:

> *Lord Jesus, you prayed that all may be one. Saint Benedict II, servant of the unity of the faith, pray for us. Amen.*

Day 1: A child of Rome

Benedict was born in Rome around 635, the son of a man named John. We know almost nothing of his family, but we know that he grew up close to the Church, in a city full of the memory of Saints Peter and Paul.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the place and the family where I received life. Bless my city and my parish.

Today: Pray for the people who brought you to the faith.

Day 2: The school of song

From childhood, Benedict was trained at the *Schola cantorum*, where he learned the chants of the liturgy and the Scriptures. Singing the psalms day after day shaped his heart long before he became a pastor.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to praise you with my lips and with my life.

Today: Pray or sing a psalm slowly, perhaps Psalm 23 or Psalm 100.

Day 3: The Word of God

The *Liber pontificalis* remembers Benedict as a priest who knew the sacred texts well. The Word of God was his daily bread and the source of his gentleness.

Prayer: Lord, give me a hunger for your Word, and let it change the way I speak and act.

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

Day 4: Love for the poor

Benedict was known for his love of the poor. A pastor formed by the Scriptures cannot ignore those whom Christ calls "the least of these."

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to the poor around me, and give me a generous heart.

Today: Make a concrete gesture for someone in need: a meal, a donation, a visit.

Day 5: The patience of waiting

Elected in 683, Benedict had to wait almost a year for the emperor's confirmation before he could be consecrated. He accepted this long delay without bitterness.

Prayer: Lord, when I must wait, give me patience and peace. Teach me to trust your timing.

Today: Offer to God a situation in which you are waiting for an answer.

Day 6: The freedom of the Church

Benedict obtained from Emperor Constantine IV that the election of popes would no longer be held up for long months in Constantinople. He served the freedom of the Church to choose its shepherds.

Prayer: Lord, protect your Church from every pressure that would keep it from proclaiming the Gospel freely.

Today: Pray for Christians who cannot practice their faith freely.

Day 7: Fatherly friendship

The emperor sent the pope locks of hair of his two sons, as a sign that he entrusted them to the pope's spiritual fatherhood. Benedict became a kind of godfather to the young princes.

Prayer: Lord, bless the godparents, parents and mentors who watch over young people in faith.

Today: Pray for your godchildren, or for a young person you know, and send them a word of encouragement.

Day 8: Two wills in harmony

Benedict worked so that the whole Church would receive the teaching of the Third Council of Constantinople: Christ has a human will, perfectly united to the will of the Father. In Gethsemane, he prayed: "not my will but yours be done."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to say with you: "your will be done," even when it is hard.

Today: In a difficult decision, ask sincerely what God wants, before asking what you want.

Day 9: A short and faithful mission

Benedict was pope for only ten months. He died in May 685 and was buried in Saint Peter's. His short pontificate shows that faithfulness counts more than length of years.

Prayer: Saint Benedict II, obtain for me the grace to serve faithfully in the time God gives me, without wasting the present day.

Today: Do one task you have been putting off, carefully and for the love of God.

Closing prayer

Saint Benedict II, you were formed by the praise of God and by his Word, you loved the poor, you waited patiently, and you served the unity and freedom of the Church. At the end of this novena, I entrust to you the intention I have carried for nine days. Pray for the pope and the bishops, for the unity of all Christians, and for me, that I may unite my will to the will of the Father. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Credits and sources

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