

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Boniface I

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: September 4

IN BRIEF

Saint Boniface I

Pope from 418 to 422, elected against his will amid a schism, who restored peace and discipline in the Church.

Feast day	September 4
Born	Rome
Died	September 4, 422, Rome
Era	5th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Boniface I for Peace in Times of Division

Novena to Saint Boniface I

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Boniface I

Saint Boniface I was bishop of Rome from 418 to 422. Elderly, and elected almost against his will, he first had to face a double election that divided the city for several months. Once recognized, he worked to restore peace and discipline in the Churches, from Gaul to Illyricum, and supported Saint Augustine against Pelagianism. The Catholic Church celebrates him on September 4. He should not be confused with Saint Boniface of Mainz, the 8th-century English missionary to Germany.

Who was Saint Boniface I?

According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, the ancient book of the lives of the popes, Boniface was a Roman, the son of a priest named Jocundus. He is thought to have been ordained by Pope Saint Damasus and to have represented Saint Innocent I in Constantinople around 405. A priest of the church of San Lorenzo in Damaso, he was known for his experience and integrity when Pope Zosimus died at the end of December 418. Beyond these few details, little is known of his life before his election, except that he was already an old man.

Key dates

- **c. 405**: Represents Pope Innocent I in Constantinople.
- **December 27, 418**: Funeral of Zosimus; part of the clergy elects the archdeacon Eulalius.
- **December 28, 418**: The majority of the clergy elects Boniface.
- **December 29, 418**: Both men are consecrated on the same day, in two different churches.
- **April 3, 419**: Emperor Honorius recognizes Boniface as the legitimate pope.

- **July 1, 420**: At his request, an imperial law provides for a new election in case of a double choice.
- **422**: Letters to the bishops of Thessaly and Gaul on the authority of the see of Rome.
- **September 4, 422**: Dies in Rome; buried on the Via Salaria, near the tomb of Saint Felicity.

A disputed election

When Zosimus died, a group of deacons occupied the Lateran Basilica and elected the archdeacon Eulalius. The next day, most of the priests, gathered in another church, chose the aged Boniface, who had not sought the office. The two men were consecrated on the same Sunday.

The prefect of Rome, who favored Eulalius, at first persuaded Emperor Honorius to confirm him, and Boniface was even led out of the city under guard. His supporters appealed. The emperor called a synod of bishops, then ordered both claimants to stay outside Rome while awaiting a decision.

Eulalius ignored the order: he returned to the city for Easter 419 and occupied the Lateran. This show of force cost him the emperor's support. On April 3, Honorius recognized Boniface, who returned to Rome cheered by the crowd. To prevent such a crisis from happening again, the pope obtained in 420 a law providing that, in a disputed election, neither candidate would be accepted and a new vote would take place.

Restoring peace in the Churches

Once in office, Boniface corrected several decisions of his predecessor. In Gaul, he limited the powers Zosimus had granted to the bishop of Arles and gave back to the metropolitan archbishops their rights over their provinces. He thus

supported the bishop of Narbonne over the appointment at Lodève, and asked that the bishop of Valence, accused of serious faults, be judged by a council of the bishops of Gaul.

In Illyricum, a region disputed between Rome and Constantinople, he defended the role of the bishop of Thessalonica as the pope's representative, and obtained from the Eastern emperor Theodosius II that he reverse a decision favorable to Constantinople. In a letter of 422, he used the word *principatus* to describe the place of the Church of Rome.

The friend of Saint Augustine

Pelagianism, which played down the role of grace in salvation, was then troubling the Church in Africa and in Rome. Boniface sent Saint Augustine two Pelagian letters that slandered him. In return, the bishop of Hippo dedicated his reply to the pope: the treatise *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*.

The pope also examined the appeal of Anthony of Fussala, a bishop deposed in Numidia, asking that he be restored if his innocence was proven. Finally, tradition credits him with the rule of singing the *Gloria in excelsis* on Holy Thursday.

Why pray to Saint Boniface I?

Saint Boniface I has no traditional patronage. He did not seek power and did not answer violence with violence. His holiness is that of a churchman who, in a divided city, looked for fair rules so that the election of a shepherd would no longer depend on factions. He then governed with firmness and a sense of measure, giving back to each their rights instead of concentrating authority.

Christians can turn to him in times of division, in a parish, a community or a family; for those who must govern with fairness; for elections and discernment in the Church; and for all who are given a responsibility they did not seek.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Boniface I in art

No portrait from his lifetime survives. He appears, bearded, in the series of mosaic medallions of the popes at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, an imaginary portrait made long after his time. As with most early popes, he is recognized by his name and his papal attributes rather than by a personal symbol.

Where to pray to Saint Boniface I

Boniface was buried on the Via Salaria in Rome, near the tomb of Saint Felicity. In Rome, visitors can also remember him at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, before his medallion in the gallery of popes, and at the church of San Lorenzo in Damaso, where he served as a priest.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Boniface I or the novena to Saint Boniface I.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Boniface I for Peace in Times of Division

No traditional prayer to Saint Boniface I has come down to us. This elderly pope, elected against his will in a divided Rome, refused to answer violence with violence and then worked to restore peace and fair rules in the Churches. Here is an original prayer for peace in divided communities, followed by a verse from the Gospel that echoes his way of governing.

Prayer to Saint Boniface I for peace in times of division

Saint Boniface, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you did not seek honor or power, and when your election was disputed you waited patiently for justice instead of taking it by force: teach me to remain calm and humble when I am contested or misunderstood.

You sought fair rules so that the Church would no longer be torn apart by rival factions: pray for our parishes, our communities and our families when they are divided. Help us to find the paths of peace, truth and justice.

You gave back to each bishop his rights instead of gathering all authority to yourself: bless all who hold responsibility, so that they may serve without dominating.

Friend of Saint Augustine, you defended the primacy of God's grace: help me to rely not on my own strength, but on the grace that alone can save.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me a peaceful heart and a faithful love for the Church. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

A word of the Gospel

> *"Whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister: and he that will be first among you, shall be your servant."*

Source: Gospel of Matthew 20:26-27, Douay-Rheims translation.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Boniface I is celebrated on September 4, the anniversary of his death in Rome in 422. You can pray to him:

- when a parish, community or family is divided into rival groups;
- before an election or an important appointment in the Church;
- when you receive a responsibility you did not seek;
- when you are contested or unjustly accused, to keep peace of heart.

To go further, pray the novena to Saint Boniface I, or read the life of Saint Boniface I.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Boniface I

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Boniface I, pope from 418 to 422, elected against his will in a divided Rome, who restored peace and discipline in the Churches and supported Saint Augustine. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on August 27; it ends on September 4. You can also pray it at any time for a divided community or family.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the 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.

You may begin each day with the sign of the cross and this short invocation:

> *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Saint Boniface, peacemaker and shepherd, pray for us. Amen.*

Day 1: A son of a priest's household

Boniface was the son of a priest named Jocundus. He grew up in a family where the service of God was part of daily life. Faith is often first learned at home, through the example of those who love us.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who first showed me the way to you. Bless my family and make it a school of faith.

Today: Thank someone who passed on the faith to you, in person or in prayer.

Day 2: Faithful service

Before he became pope, Boniface served Innocent I as his representative in Constantinople and was a priest of a Roman church for many years. His long, faithful service prepared him for a heavier task.

Prayer: Saint Boniface, help me to be faithful in small things, day after day.

Today: Carry out a task you have been putting off, carefully and without complaint.

Day 3: Not seeking power

Boniface did not seek to become pope. He was an old man when the clergy chose him. Those who do not cling to honors are often the most free to serve.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the desire to be first. Teach me to serve gladly wherever you place me.

Today: Give way to someone else, in a conversation, a line or a decision.

Day 4: In the midst of division

Rome was split between two elected popes. Boniface was even led out of the city under guard. Division wounds the Church, but God remains present in the storm.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you prayed that your disciples may be one. Heal the divisions in my parish, my family and my heart.

Today: Pray for a person with whom you are in conflict.

Day 5: Patience instead of force

While his rival seized the Lateran by force, Boniface waited for justice to be done. Patience is not passivity: it is trust that truth will make its way without violence.

Prayer: Saint Boniface, give me patience when I am contested, and keep me from answering injustice with anger.

Today: When you feel irritated, take a breath and say a short prayer before answering.

Day 6: Fair rules

Boniface asked for a law so that disputed elections would be decided by a new vote. He knew that peace also needs just structures and clear rules, not only good intentions.

Prayer: Lord, inspire those who govern, in the Church and in society, to make just and wise decisions.

Today: Pray for your bishop, your pastor and those who lead your country.

Day 7: Giving each their due

In Gaul, Boniface gave back to the bishops the rights his predecessor had taken from them. Justice means recognizing what belongs to others, even when it would be easier to keep control.

Prayer: Saint Boniface, help me to respect the rights and the place of others, at home, at work and in the Church.

Today: Recognize aloud the good work of a colleague, family member or volunteer.

Day 8: The grace of God first

Boniface supported Saint Augustine against the Pelagians, who played down the role of grace. Everything good in us is first a gift of God. We cooperate, but he goes before us.

Prayer: Lord, I know that without you I can do nothing. Let your grace guide and strengthen me.

Today: Before each important action of your day, ask God for his help in a few words.

Day 9: Peace restored

When Boniface returned to Rome, the crowd welcomed him with joy. The trials of division had ended in peace. God can bring reconciliation where it seemed impossible.

Prayer: Saint Boniface, obtain for us the peace that only Christ can give, in our hearts, our families and our Church.

Today: Take one concrete step toward reconciliation: a message, a call or a word of forgiveness.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Boniface, humble shepherd of Rome, you did not seek power and you did not answer violence with violence. You worked for justice, for peace among the Churches and for the primacy of God's grace. Pray for all who are divided, for those who govern, and for me. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Help me to be a servant of peace wherever I am. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

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