

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Boniface IV

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 8

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IN BRIEF

Saint Boniface IV

Pope from 608 to 615 who consecrated the Pantheon in Rome to the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs.

Feast day	May 8
Born	c. 550, Marsica, Abruzzo, Italy
Died	May 8, 615, Rome
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Boniface IV with Mary and All the Martyrs

Novena to Saint Boniface IV

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Boniface IV

Saint Boniface IV was pope from 608 to 615. A native of the Abruzzo region and a disciple of Saint Gregory the Great, he is remembered as the pope who turned the Pantheon, the great ancient temple of Rome, into a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs. He led the Church through years of famine, plague and floods, supported monks and kept a close eye on the young Church in England. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on May 8, the anniversary of his death.

Who was Saint Boniface IV?

Boniface was born around 550 in the Marsica, a mountainous area of the Abruzzo, into a family of Marsian origin according to the *Liber Pontificalis*. His father, John, was a physician. Under the pontificate of Saint Gregory the Great, he was a deacon of the Church of Rome and administered the Patrimony of Saint Peter, that is, the estates whose income supported the Roman Church and its poor. One tradition makes him a Benedictine monk; this fits with the place he gave to monks once he became pope.

Elected to succeed Boniface III, he had to wait more than nine months for confirmation from the emperor in Constantinople, as was then the rule. He was consecrated in 608, on September 15 according to the date accepted by the Vatican.

Key dates in the life of Saint Boniface IV

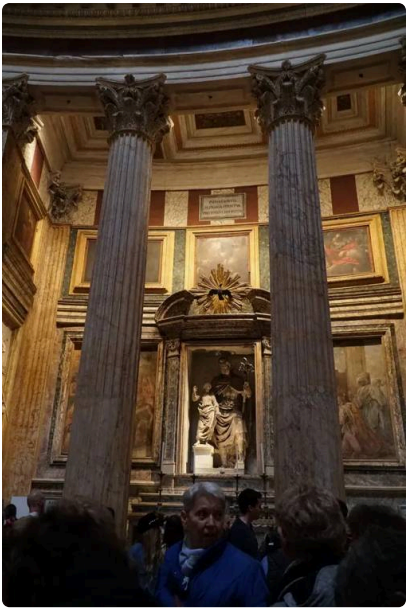
- **c. 550**: Born in the Marsica, in the Abruzzo.
- **590-604**: Deacon and administrator of the patrimony of the Roman Church under Gregory the Great.
- **September 15, 608**: Consecrated Bishop of Rome.

- **May 13, 609**: Consecrates the Pantheon as the church of Saint Mary and the Martyrs.
- **610**: Roman synod attended by Mellitus, Bishop of London.
- **August 23, 613**: Grants the pallium to Florianus, Archbishop of Arles.
- **May 8, 615**: Dies in Rome, in his own house, which he had turned into a monastery.
- **October 21, 1603**: His remains are moved into the new Saint Peter's Basilica.

The Pantheon becomes Saint Mary and the Martyrs

The Pantheon, a Roman temple first built by Agrippa and later rebuilt under Emperor Hadrian, had been closed since pagan worship was banned. Boniface obtained permission from Emperor Phocas to make it a church. On May 13, 609, he consecrated it in honor of the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs, under the name *Sancta Maria ad Martyres*, Saint Mary and the Martyrs. It was one of the first ancient temples in Rome to become a church. According to tradition, many bones of martyrs were then taken from the catacombs and placed beneath the high altar.

This consecration left a lasting mark on the calendar. The anniversary of the dedication became, in Rome, a feast of all the martyrs, then of all the saints: it lies at the origin of All Saints' Day, which Pope Gregory IV later fixed on November 1. It is also thanks to this transformation that the Pantheon is today one of the best-preserved ancient buildings in Rome. Millions of visitors who step under its great dome each year are, often without knowing it, entering a church consecrated by Boniface IV.



Inside the Pantheon, now the church of Saint Mary and the Martyrs.

The monks and the Church in England

Following Gregory's example, Boniface surrounded himself with monks and entrusted them with responsibilities in the Church of Rome. In 610 he received Mellitus, first Bishop of London, who came to consult him on the needs of the young English Church. Mellitus attended a synod devoted in particular to the life of monks, then returned home with letters from the pope for Archbishop Laurence of Canterbury, for King Ethelbert and for the English people. Historians debate the authenticity of some of these documents.

His pontificate also had its tensions. Between 612 and 615, the Irish monk Columbanus, settled at Bobbio, wrote him a forceful letter about the Three Chapters controversy and urged him to prove his orthodoxy. No reply from

the pope is known. After his death, his successor Adeodatus I gave back to the secular clergy the offices that had been entrusted to monks.

What does his holiness teach us?

Boniface IV governed the Church in a Rome tried by hunger, epidemics and the floods of the Tiber. His most famous act is an act of transformation: a temple of the gods became the house of the Mother of God and of the martyrs. It speaks of Christian hope amid the ruins of a passing world. Faithful to Gregory's ideal, he ended his life as a monk, in his own house that he had turned into a monastery. His cult is attested at the end of the 13th century, when Pope Boniface VIII chose his name in his honor.

Why pray to Saint Boniface IV?

No traditional patronage is attached to Saint Boniface IV outside his native region: Luco dei Marsi, in the Abruzzo, honors him as its patron. His life makes him a fitting intercessor in times of calamity, for those who live through epidemics, famine or natural disasters and for those who help them. He also invites us to live in communion with Mary and all the saints, the "great cloud of witnesses" whom the Church celebrates on All Saints' Day. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Boniface IV and the novena to Saint Boniface IV.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Boniface IV in art

No portrait of Boniface IV from his own time survives. His imaginary portrait appears in the series of mosaic medallions of the popes in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, made in the 19th century. His true monument is the Pantheon itself, the church of Saint Mary and the Martyrs, which he gave to Christian worship.



The Pantheon in Rome, consecrated by Boniface IV in 609.

Where to pray to Saint Boniface IV

- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Basilica, where his remains have rested in the left transept since 1603.
- **Rome**: the Pantheon, church of Saint Mary and the Martyrs, which he consecrated in 609.
- **Abruzzo** (Italy): San Benedetto dei Marsi, where a bust recalls him as a son of the region, and Luco dei Marsi, which celebrates him as its patron in August.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Boniface IV with Mary and All the Martyrs

No traditional prayer to Saint Boniface IV and no authentic saying of his have come down to us in the sources. But his most famous act, the consecration of the Pantheon to the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs, is a prayer in itself. The original prayer below is inspired by it.

A temple that became a church

On May 13, 609, Boniface IV consecrated the Pantheon in Rome under the name of Saint Mary and the Martyrs. The building raised for all the gods was now entrusted to the Mother of Christ and to the great crowd of witnesses to the faith. This dedication is the distant origin of the feast of All Saints.

Prayer to Saint Boniface IV with Mary and all the martyrs

Saint Boniface, you opened a temple of the ancient gods to Christ: pray that our hearts, too, may become a dwelling place of God. May what was closed open to his light.

You entrusted that place to the Virgin Mary and to all the martyrs: teach me to live in communion with the saints who have gone before us, and to pray with them for the Church of today.

You governed the Church in years of famine, plague and floods: support those who are going through times of misfortune, and those who come to their aid.

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

You withdrew among the monks at the end of your life: obtain for me the grace to keep, in the midst of my responsibilities, a love for prayer and simplicity. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Boniface IV is celebrated on May 8, the anniversary of his death in 615. You can also remember him on May 13, the anniversary of the consecration of the Pantheon, and on All Saints' Day, November 1. His prayer is especially fitting in times of epidemic, famine, flood or other disaster, for those who suffer and for those who help them.

If you visit Rome, you can pray it inside the Pantheon, under the great dome, or at his tomb in Saint Peter's Basilica. You can end it by invoking Mary, Queen of Martyrs, and all the saints.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Boniface IV, and read the life of Saint Boniface IV.

NOVENA

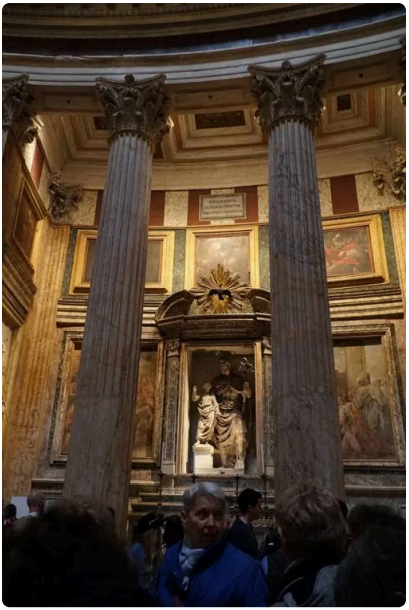
Novena to Saint Boniface IV

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Boniface IV, the pope who consecrated the Pantheon to the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast day, May 8, begin it on April 29. You can also pray it from October 23 to 31, so that it leads into All Saints' Day, whose distant origin is the dedication of the Pantheon. It is especially suited to times of trial and calamity.

How to pray this novena

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

This novena can be prayed for those affected by an epidemic, a famine or a natural disaster, for those who help them, and for anyone who wants to grow in friendship with the saints.



Inside the Pantheon, church of Saint Mary and the Martyrs.

Day 1: A doctor's son

Boniface was born in the mountains of the Abruzzo, the son of a physician named John. He grew up in a family devoted to caring for others. The faith we receive often begins with the example of those who serve.

Prayer: Lord, bless doctors, nurses and all who care for the sick.

Today: Pray for a caregiver you know, or thank one in person.

Day 2: Administering for the poor

As a deacon under Gregory the Great, Boniface managed the estates whose income fed the Church of Rome and its poor. Even administrative work can be a work of charity.

Prayer: Lord, help me to use what I manage, my money, my time, my talents, for the good of others.

Today: Set aside a sum or some time for those in need.

Day 3: Learning from a master

Boniface was formed in the school of Gregory the Great, and he continued his work. We all need teachers who show us the way to God, and one day we are called to become such guides for others.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who have taught me the faith. Make me a faithful disciple.

Today: Read a few lines written by a saint.

Day 4: Patience

After his election, Boniface waited more than nine months for the emperor's confirmation before he could be consecrated. God's timing is not always ours. Waiting can become a time of preparation rather than frustration.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to wait patiently, trusting in your providence.

Today: Accept a delay or a wait without complaining.

Day 5: A temple open to Christ

On May 13, 609, Boniface consecrated the Pantheon, once a temple of the gods, to Mary and all the martyrs. What was closed was opened to the light of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, enter the closed places of my heart and fill them with your light.

Today: Bring to God, in confession or in prayer, an area of your life you have kept from him.



The Pantheon in Rome.

Day 6: With Mary and all the martyrs

By dedicating the Pantheon to Mary and the martyrs, Boniface placed Rome under the protection of the Mother of God and of the witnesses to the faith. We are never alone: the saints pray with us.

Prayer: Holy Mary, Queen of Martyrs, and all you saints of God, pray for us.

Today: Ask the intercession of a saint you love, and learn about one you do not know.

Day 7: In times of calamity

Rome under Boniface suffered famine, plague and floods. The pope led the Church through these trials. God does not abandon his people in misfortune. He often comes to them through the hands of those who help.

Prayer: Lord, comfort those who suffer from disasters, epidemics or hunger, and strengthen those who help them.

Today: Support a charity that helps victims of a disaster.

Day 8: The communion of the Church

Boniface received Mellitus, the Bishop of London, and wrote to the young Church in England. He also received a sharp letter from Saint Columbanus. Communion in the Church includes both friendship and frank words.

Prayer: Lord, keep your Church united, and give us the humility to receive correction.

Today: Pray for the Church in a country far from yours.

Day 9: Ending as a monk

At the end of his life, Boniface turned his own house into a monastery, and he died there on May 8, 615. After great responsibilities, he returned to prayer and simplicity.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Boniface IV, of Mary and of all the martyrs, grant me what is good for me. Amen.

Today: Simplify one thing in your life to make more room for prayer.

Closing prayer

Saint Boniface, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for all who are going through times of misfortune. Help me to live in communion with Mary and all the saints, and to make my heart a house of God. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Boniface IV and the prayer to Saint Boniface IV.

Credits and sources

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