

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Caius

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 22

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IN BRIEF

Saint Caius

Bishop of Rome from 283 to 296, a native of Salona in Dalmatia.

Feast day	April 22
Born	Salona, Dalmatia (near Split, Croatia)
Died	April 22, 296, Rome, Italy
Era	3rd century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Caius

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Caius

Saint Caius, also called Gaius, was bishop of Rome from 283 to 296, in the years leading up to the Great Persecution under Diocletian. A native of Salona in Dalmatia, he is one of the 3rd-century popes about whom the fewest facts are certain: his figure reaches us mostly through legendary accounts connected with Saint Susanna of Rome. His feast is April 22, the day of his burial in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus.

Who was Saint Caius?

The ancient lists agree on the essentials. Caius succeeded Pope Eutychian on December 17, 283, and died on April 22, 296, after an episcopate of about twelve years. His name appears in English sources both as Caius and as Gaius. He was born in Salona, a great Roman city near present-day Split, in Croatia.

The *Liber Pontificalis*, a collection of papal biographies compiled much later, says he was a relative of Emperor Diocletian, who also came from Dalmatia. This late statement cannot be verified. The other details of his life come from a 6th-century account, the Passion of Saint Susanna, whose historical value is low. What follows therefore distinguishes carefully between what is known and what tradition tells.



Imaginary portrait of Saint Caius at Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.

Key dates

- **Mid-3rd century**: Born in Salona, Dalmatia.
- **December 17, 283**: He becomes bishop of Rome, succeeding Eutychian.
- **284**: Diocletian becomes emperor; the first years of his reign remain fairly peaceful for Christians.
- **April 22, 296**: Burial in the Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus.
- **303**: Beginning of the Great Persecution under Diocletian, after the death of Caius.

A Church getting organized

The years of Caius were a time of growth for the Church of Rome. New meeting places were built and the cemeteries were enlarged. Diocletian, who became emperor in 284, left Christians in relative peace during the first years of his reign.

The *Liber Pontificalis* credits Caius with two measures: dividing the districts of Rome among the deacons, who were in charge of helping the poor, and the rule that no one could become a bishop without having received the successive orders, from porter up to priest. Historians see these more as a reflection of practices in use in the writer's own time than as authentic decrees. Still, they speak of a Church that was taking shape and caring for its poor.

This quiet growth matters. When the persecution came in 303, the Church of Rome had communities, ministers and places of worship that allowed it to endure. The patient work of shepherds like Caius, little known to us, helped prepare the Church to survive the storm that followed.

The house of Caius and Saint Susanna

According to the legend of Saint Susanna, Caius was the uncle of the young martyr, the daughter of his brother Gabinus. Around 280, a house where Christians gathered, a *domus ecclesiae*, stood on the site of the present church of Santa Susanna in Rome. The 6th-century Acts say it belonged to the brothers Caius and Gabinus.

The same account credits him with baptizing many converts and taking refuge in the catacombs. These traditions have nourished devotion, but they cannot be confirmed.

Martyr or confessor?

Tradition made Caius a martyr, beheaded under Emperor Maximian; a painting by Lorenzo Monaco from around 1390 depicts his execution. But the Roman calendar of the 4th century lists him among the bishops and not among the martyrs, and the general persecution only began in 303, seven years after his death.

His tomb was found in the Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus. His relics were later kept in a chapel of the Barberini family in Rome. His cult remains alive in Dalmatia and in Venice.

Why pray to Saint Caius?

Saint Caius has no widely recognized patronage in the English-speaking world, though his cult remains alive in Dalmatia and Venice. His memory speaks of the ordinary, patient work of a shepherd: organizing help for the poor, preparing ministers, gathering the faithful in their homes. He led the Church of Rome through a time of peace that came just before a great storm, and he used those years to strengthen the community entrusted to him.

He can be prayed to for those who serve the Church in hidden ways, for deacons and those who care for the poor, and for Christians of Croatia and the Balkans, the land of his birth. The legend linking him to Saint Susanna also makes him a figure of the domestic Church: faith lived and shared within a household.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Caius in art

No portrait from his lifetime survives. Because tradition long counted him as a martyr, some artists depicted his death: the panel by Lorenzo Monaco, around 1390, shows him being beheaded. Elsewhere he appears as a pope in pontifical vestments, as in the series of mosaic medallions at Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome.



The Martyrdom of Pope Caius, by Lorenzo Monaco (c. 1390).

Where to pray to Saint Caius

- **Rome, Catacomb of Saint Callixtus**: the Crypt of the Popes on the Appian Way, where his tomb was found. Saint Felix I, bishop of Rome a few years before him, was also buried there. The underground chamber can be visited today with a guide, and it remains one of the most moving places of early Christian Rome.
- **Rome, church of Santa Susanna**: built on the site of the ancient Christian house that tradition links to Caius and his brother Gabinus.
- **Dalmatia and Venice**: regions where his cult remains alive.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Caius for the Church and Christian Homes

No traditional prayer to Saint Caius has come down to us in common use. Yet this 3rd-century pope, who guided the Church of Rome in the years before the Great Persecution and whom tradition links to a house where Christians gathered, can inspire our prayer for the Church, for the poor and for Christian homes. Here is an original prayer, followed by a word of Scripture about the house churches of the first Christians.

Prayer to Saint Caius for the Church and for Christian homes

Saint Caius, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you guided the faithful in a time of peace that came just before the storm: teach me to use the calm days of my life to grow in faith and charity.

Tradition tells that your house welcomed the Christians to pray and break bread: bless our homes, and make them places of faith, welcome and peace.

You entrusted the care of the poor to the deacons of each district of Rome: make me attentive to the needs of those around me, and bless all who serve the poor.

Born in Dalmatia, you remain honored in your homeland: pray for the Christians of Croatia and of the Balkans, and for all who live far from their native land.

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

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

A word of Scripture

The house churches of the first Christians, like the one tradition attributes to Caius and his brother, are already mentioned by Saint Paul:

> *"Salute Prisca and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus... and the church which is in their house."*

Source: Letter to the Romans 16:3-5, Douay-Rheims translation.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Caius is celebrated on April 22, the day of his burial in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus in 296. This date usually falls in the Easter season. You can pray to him:

- for your family and your home;
- for deacons and for all who serve the poor;
- for the Church in Croatia and the Balkans;
- in times of calm, to prepare your heart for times of trial.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Caius

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Caius, pope from 283 to 296, and by the traditions that surround him. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on April 14; it ends on April 22. You can also pray it at any time for your family, for the poor or for the Church in a time of trial.

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 suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily 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 Caius, shepherd of the early Church, pray for me, for my home and for all who serve the poor. Amen.*

Choose a quiet moment, ideally at the same time each day. Nine days of faithful prayer matter more than long words: a few sincere minutes are enough.

Day 1: From Salona to Rome

Caius was born in Salona, in Dalmatia, and became bishop of Rome. God called him far from his homeland. Many people today live far from where they were born, as migrants, students or workers.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who live far from their homeland. May they find a welcome and a family in your Church.

Today: Greet warmly someone in your parish or neighborhood who comes from another country.

Day 2: A shepherd for twelve years

Caius led the Church of Rome for about twelve years. We know little about what he did, but we know he was faithful for a long time. Faithfulness over the years is a hidden form of holiness.

Prayer: Lord, give me faithfulness in the long run, in my commitments, my family and my prayer.

Today: Renew a commitment you have let slip.

Day 3: The care of the poor

Tradition credits Caius with dividing the districts of Rome among the deacons, who were in charge of helping the poor. Charity needs organization as well as generosity.

Prayer: Lord, bless the deacons and all who serve the poor. Show me how I can help, concretely, where I live.

Today: Give time or support to a parish or local work that helps people in need.

Day 4: Preparing ministers

According to tradition, Caius asked that a bishop pass through the successive orders before being ordained. The Church needs ministers who are well prepared and tested in service.

Prayer: Lord, send workers into your harvest. Bless seminarians and those discerning a vocation.

Today: Pray for a seminarian or a young person discerning a vocation.

Day 5: The house church

Tradition says Caius and his brother Gabinus owned a house where Christians gathered, on the site of today's church of Santa Susanna. The faith was lived first in homes, around a table.

Prayer: Lord, make my home a place where you are welcome, where we pray, forgive and share.

Today: Pray together at a family meal, or bless your home.

Day 6: Saint Susanna

The legend of Saint Susanna makes her the niece of Caius, a young woman who gave her life for Christ. Whatever history can confirm, her witness reminds us that faith is passed on within families, from one generation to another.

Prayer: Saint Susanna and Saint Caius, pray for young people, that they may find in their families a living faith.

Today: Speak of your faith simply to a young person in your family.

Day 7: Peace before the storm

Caius lived in a time of relative peace, just before the Great Persecution. Times of calm are a gift: they allow us to strengthen our faith before the trials come.

Prayer: Lord, help me not to waste the peaceful days you give me, but to root myself more deeply in you.

Today: Take extra time for prayer or spiritual reading.

Day 8: The Church under persecution

Seven years after the death of Caius, the Great Persecution began. Today, many Christians in the world still suffer for their faith. We remember them before God.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen persecuted Christians. Give them courage and hope, and soften the hearts of their persecutors.

Today: Learn about a country where Christians are persecuted, and pray for them.

Day 9: Resting among the popes

Caius was buried on April 22, 296, in the Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus. There he rests among the shepherds of the early Church, waiting for the resurrection. The catacombs remind us that death is not the end.

Prayer: Risen Lord, receive into your peace all who have died in faith. Keep us in the communion of saints.

Today: Pray for your loved ones who have died.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Caius, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you guided the faithful in a time of peace before the storm, and tradition tells that your house welcomed the Christians. Pray for our families and our homes, for the poor and those who serve them, for the Christians of your native Dalmatia and for all who suffer for their faith. Obtain for me the intention I have entrusted to you during these nine days. Amen.*

To continue praying with him, use the prayer to Saint Caius, or read his life.

Credits and sources

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