

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Celestine V

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 19

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IN BRIEF

Saint Celestine V

Hermit of the Abruzzo mountains elected pope in 1294, who freely resigned the papacy the same year.

Feast day	May 19
Born	c. 1215, Molise, Italy
Died	May 19, 1296, Fumone, Italy
Canonized	May 5, 1313, by Pope Clement V
Era	13th century
Patron saint of	bookbinders

In this booklet

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Prayer to Saint Celestine V for Humility and Forgiveness

Novena to Saint Celestine V

Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio in L'Aquila

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Celestine V

Saint Celestine V, born Pietro Angeleri and known as Peter of Morrone, was a hermit from the Abruzzo mountains who became pope in 1294, when he was nearly eighty. After five months, aware that he could not carry the burden, he freely resigned, a gesture almost unique in the history of the Church. He died in 1296, was canonized as early as 1313, and rests in L'Aquila, in the Basilica of Collemaggio. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on May 19.

Who was Saint Celestine V?

Pietro was born around 1215 in Molise, in southern Italy, into a peasant family; he was the second youngest of twelve children. At about fifteen he took the Benedictine habit at the nearby abbey of Santa Maria di Faifoli. But he longed for a harsher, more solitary life. Around 1231 he withdrew to a cave in the Majella mountains to live the original rule of Saint Benedict in all its strictness. After his ordination as a priest in Rome, he settled on Mount Morrone, above Sulmona, which gave him his name.

Disciples came to join him. He organized them into a hermit branch of the Benedictine family, later known as the "Celestines". His reputation for holiness drew so many pilgrims that he had to flee higher into the mountains. In 1273 he walked all the way to Lyon, in France, to have his congregation confirmed by Pope Gregory X.



The hermitage of Sant'Onofrio, on Mount Morrone, where Peter was living when he was elected pope.

Key dates

- **c. 1215**: Born in Molise.
- **c. 1231**: Becomes a hermit in the Majella mountains.
- **c. 1235-1240**: Settles on Mount Morrone; his congregation begins.
- **1273**: Walks to Lyon to have his foundation approved.
- **1293**: Retires to the hermitage of Sant'Onofrio, above Sulmona.
- **July 5, 1294**: Elected pope unanimously after more than two years without a pope.
- **August 29, 1294**: Crowned in the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, L'Aquila.
- **December 13, 1294**: Resigns before the cardinals at the Castel Nuovo in Naples.

- **May 19, 1296**: Dies at the castle of Fumone, where his successor kept him under guard.
- **May 5, 1313**: Canonized by Pope Clement V.
- **1517**: His body is moved to Collemaggio.

A hermit on the throne of Peter

In 1294 the papacy had been vacant for more than two years. The twelve cardinals, divided between the great Roman families, could not agree. The hermit wrote them a letter of warning. Cardinal Latino Malabranca then put forward his name, and on July 5, 1294, Peter of Morrone was elected unanimously. Taken by surprise, he accepted, seeing in it a call of the Holy Spirit, and took the name Celestine.

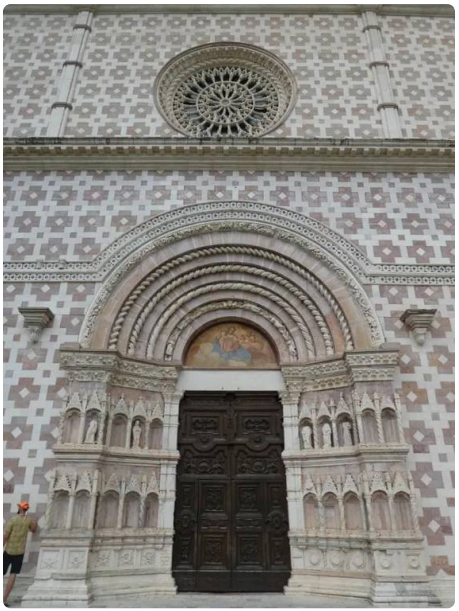
The old hermit had neither legal training nor experience of the Roman Curia. He quickly fell under the influence of the King of Naples, Charles II of Anjou, who installed him in his capital. Even so, Celestine restored the rule of the conclave, which requires cardinals to stay locked in until they elect a pope, created thirteen cardinals and favored reforming religious. At his coronation in L'Aquila he granted an indulgence to all who would visit the Basilica of Collemaggio: this is the origin of the *Perdonanza*, still celebrated every year.

The "great refusal"

Faced with difficulties and criticism, Celestine V consulted canon lawyers, who confirmed that a pope may resign his office. On December 13, 1294, he abdicated before the cardinals, giving as his reasons humility, physical weakness and his desire to return to the life of a hermit.

His successor, Boniface VIII, feared that his own election might be challenged and had the former pope watched. Peter tried to escape, was arrested, and ended his days in the castle of Fumone, in Lazio, where he died a natural death in 1296.

His decision divided opinion. In the *Inferno*, Dante seems to point to Celestine when he speaks of "him who made, through cowardice, the great refusal". Petrarch, on the contrary, admired the resignation as an act of courage. In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI came to pray at his tomb and left there the pallium he had received at the start of his pontificate, four years before resigning the papacy himself.



The Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, L'Aquila, where Celestine V was crowned and where he rests.

Why is Saint Celestine V venerated as a saint?

Celestine V was canonized not for his pontificate but for his life as a hermit, his penance and the reputation for holiness that surrounded him. His resignation, long judged a failure, now appears as an act of humility: recognizing his limits and putting the good of the Church before his own position. He is the saint of those who must know when to step aside, and of those who seek God in silence.

Why is Saint Celestine V the patron saint of bookbinders?

Under the name of Saint Peter Celestine, he is honored as the patron saint of bookbinders. Beyond this traditional patronage, many Catholics today turn to him when they face a hard decision, when they must hand over a responsibility, or when a task seems beyond their strength.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Celestine V in art

Celestine V is shown either as a pope or as a hermit, and often as both at once:

- the **papal tiara**, sometimes set down beside him, a sign of the office he gave up;
- the plain **habit of a hermit**;
- a **cave** where he kneels in prayer, recalling the Majella and Mount Morrone.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Celestine V and the novena to Saint Celestine V.

Where to pray to Saint Celestine V

- **L'Aquila** (Abruzzo, Italy): the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, where he was crowned and where he rests. The *Perdonanza* is celebrated there on August 28 and 29.
- **Sulmona**: the hermitage of Sant'Onofrio al Morrone and the former Abbey of the Holy Spirit, mother house of the Celestines.
- **Fumone** (Lazio): the castle where he died.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Celestine V for Humility and Forgiveness

Saint Celestine V left no writings: his Latin was basic, and no text from his hand has come down to us. Nor is there any old prayer to him whose source is well established. Saintspedia therefore offers an original prayer, inspired by his life as a hermit, his humility and his resignation from the papacy.

The Pardon of Collemaggio

The most living prayer linked to Celestine V is a pilgrimage. Every year at the end of August, the Celestinian *Perdonanza* gathers the faithful in L'Aquila. They pass through the Holy Door of the Basilica of Collemaggio in memory of the indulgence the pope granted at his coronation in 1294 to all who would come there to be reconciled with God.



Saint Celestine V at prayer.

Prayer to Saint Celestine V for humility and forgiveness

Saint Celestine, you who sought God in the silence of the mountains, teach me to make silence within me so that I may hear his voice.

Called to the highest office in the Church, you accepted it out of obedience, then laid it down out of humility, when you understood that it was beyond your strength. Give me the wisdom to recognize my limits and the freedom not to cling to positions and honors.

Pray for those who must make a difficult decision, for those who must hand over their responsibilities, and for those who carry a burden too heavy for them.

You who opened a door of forgiveness in L'Aquila, obtain for me the grace of reconciliation with God and with my brothers and sisters. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

May I seek, like you, to please God alone. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

This prayer suits moments of discernment: before an important choice, when you need to let go of a role or a project, when retirement or illness forces you to step back, or when you feel crushed by a responsibility. It can also accompany a time of confession, in the spirit of the Pardon of Collemaggio.

The Roman Martyrology commemorates Saint Celestine V on May 19, the day of his death in 1296. In L'Aquila, the *Perdonanza* on August 28 and 29 is the other great moment of devotion to him. For nine days of prayer with him, see the novena to Saint Celestine V.

A short invocation

> *Saint Celestine V, humble hermit and pope, pray for us, and for all who must choose between holding on and letting go.*

To learn more about his life, read the life of Saint Celestine V.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Celestine V

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia that follows the life of Saint Celestine V, from his hermitage in the mountains of Abruzzo to his resignation and his last days. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on the eve of his memorial on May 19, begin on May 10; it ends on May 18. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially before a difficult decision, or in late August, before the *Perdonanza* of L'Aquila.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to 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.



The hermitage of Sant'Onofrio, on Mount Morrone, above Sulmona.

Day 1: A child of the poor

Pietro was born into a peasant family of twelve children in Molise. He did not come from the powerful families who disputed the papacy. God often chooses the small and the forgotten to show where true greatness lies.

Prayer: Lord, you who lift up the lowly, help me to look at the poor as you look at them, and to recognize my own poverty before you.

Today: Thank God for the people who raised you and handed on the faith to you.

Day 2: The call to silence

Still young, Pietro left the abbey for a cave in the Majella mountains. He wanted to live the rule of Saint Benedict without any softening. Silence was not an escape for him but a way of listening to God.

Prayer: Lord, in the noise of my days, give me a place of silence where I can hear your voice.

Today: Spend ten minutes in silence, with no screen and no music, in God's presence.

Day 3: Brothers on the mountain

Disciples came to share his life on Mount Morrone, and a congregation was born. Holiness is never purely private: it attracts, it gathers, it builds communities.

Prayer: Lord, bless the communities I belong to, my family, my parish, my friends, and make me a builder of fraternity.

Today: Get in touch with someone in your community who is isolated.

Day 4: The road to Lyon

In 1273 the old hermit set out on foot for Lyon to have his congregation confirmed by Pope Gregory X. He left his mountain to serve his brothers, trusting the Church with what God had begun through him.

Prayer: Lord, give me the humility to submit my projects to the judgment of others, and the courage to set out when you call.

Today: Ask advice from someone you trust about a decision you are facing.

Day 5: An unexpected call

In 1294, after more than two years without a pope, the cardinals elected the hermit of Morrone. He accepted, seeing a call of the Holy Spirit in this choice he had never sought. God sometimes asks of us what we would never have chosen.

Prayer: Lord, when you call me to something beyond my strength, give me the trust to say yes and the grace to carry it.

Today: Accept with a good heart a task you would rather have avoided.

Day 6: The door of forgiveness

At his coronation in L'Aquila, Celestine opened a door of forgiveness: an indulgence for all who would come to Collemaggio to be reconciled with God. The *Perdonanza* has continued ever since.

Prayer: Lord, rich in mercy, open to me the door of your forgiveness, and help me open my heart to those who have hurt me.

Today: Plan a time for the sacrament of reconciliation, or forgive someone in your heart.

Day 7: Knowing one's limits

Celestine soon saw that he lacked the experience to govern the Church and that others were using his weakness. To recognize our limits is not a failure: it is the beginning of wisdom.

Prayer: Lord, free me from pride and from the fear of appearing weak. Teach me to accept help and to ask for it.

Today: Admit honestly to someone a difficulty you are facing.

Day 8: The freedom to let go

On December 13, 1294, Celestine resigned the papacy, preferring the good of the Church to his own position. Some called it cowardice; others saw great courage. Letting go can be the most demanding form of love.

Prayer: Lord, give me the freedom not to cling to roles, honors or control, and to hand over what you no longer ask me to carry.

Today: Let go of something you hold on to out of pride or habit.

Day 9: Peace in trial

Celestine wanted only to return to his hermitage. Instead he ended his days under guard at the castle of Fumone. He died there in 1296. In 1313 the Church proclaimed him a saint.

Prayer: Lord, when I am misunderstood or deprived of what I hoped for, keep me in your peace. Saint Celestine V, pray for us.

Today: Pray for a person who is in prison or living in confinement.

Closing prayer

> *God our Father, you called Saint Celestine from the silence of the mountains to the service of your Church, and you gave him the humility to lay that service down. Through his intercession, grant me the intention I have carried for these nine days, if it is your will. Teach me to seek you in silence, to welcome your forgiveness, and to hold every position lightly, for your glory alone. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Celestine V each day of the novena, and read his full life.

PILGRIMAGE

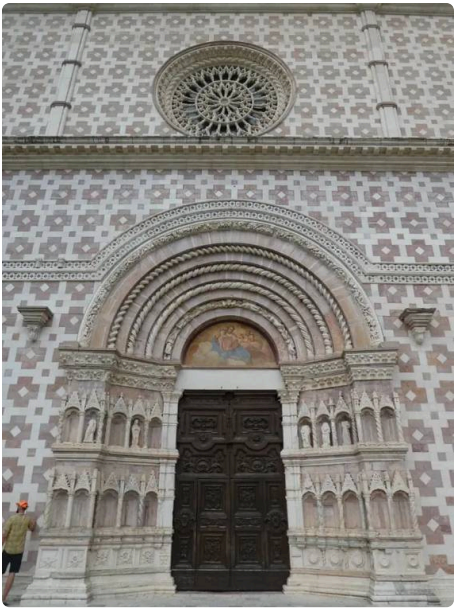
Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio in L'Aquila

In L'Aquila, in Abruzzo, the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio is the great shrine of Saint Celestine V. The hermit Peter of Morrone had it built, he was crowned pope there on August 29, 1294, and his body has rested there since 1517. It is also where the *Perdonanza*, the Celestinian pardon, is celebrated every year.

A church founded by a hermit

In the late 13th century, Peter of Morrone had a church dedicated to the Virgin built in L'Aquila and entrusted it to his fellow hermits. When he was elected pope in July 1294, he chose to be crowned there, in the lands of the Kingdom of Naples. On that occasion, he granted a plenary indulgence to all who, having confessed and repented, would visit the basilica on the anniversary of his coronation. This "pardon" is the origin of the *Perdonanza*, often described as the forerunner of the jubilees.

After his canonization in 1313, his body first remained in Lazio; it was moved to Collemaggio only in 1517. The basilica has suffered from several earthquakes, in particular the one on April 6, 2009, which brought part of the building down. Shortly afterward, on April 28, 2009, Benedict XVI came to pray before the saint's shrine and left there the pallium from his own inauguration. After long restoration work, the basilica was reopened for worship.



The facade of the Basilica of Collemaggio.

Visiting the basilica

The facade, covered in a checkerboard of white and pink stone, is one of the most famous in central Italy. On the left side is the Holy Door, through which pilgrims pass during the *Perdonanza*. Inside, the plain nave leads to the chapel where Saint Celestine rests, in a Renaissance mausoleum. His remains, vested in pontifical ornaments, can be seen there in a shrine.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Celestine V. At his tomb, ask for the grace of humility and forgiveness, and entrust to him those who must make a difficult decision. You can pray the prayer to Saint Celestine V on site. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Celestine V

- **Sulmona**: the hermitage of Sant'Onofrio al Morrone, perched on the mountain, where he was living when elected, and the Abbey of the Holy Spirit below, mother house of the Celestines.
- **Majella massif**: the caves and hermitages where he lived in solitude.
- **Naples**: the Castel Nuovo, where he resigned the papacy on December 13, 1294.
- **Fumone** (Lazio): the castle where he died on May 19, 1296.

Practical information

The basilica is a little outside the historic center of L'Aquila, at the end of a broad avenue. The *Perdonanza* takes place every year from the evening of August 28 to the evening of August 29, and draws large crowds. Since opening hours and celebration times may vary, notably because of the work still under way in the city, check the official website of the basilica or of the Archdiocese of L'Aquila before you come.

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