

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Charalambos

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: February 10

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IN BRIEF

Saint Charalambos

Priest of Magnesia in Asia Minor, martyr under Septimius Severus, regarded as the oldest of the Christian martyrs.

Feast day	February 10
Born	c. 89 or 95 (according to tradition), Magnesia, Asia Minor
Died	February 10, 202 (according to tradition), Asia Minor
Canonized	immemorial cult, celebrated in the Byzantine calendar of the Greek Catholic Churches
Era	3rd century
Patron saint of	protection against epidemics, livestock, bees

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Charalambos for the Sick and Against Epidemics

Novena to Saint Charalambos

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Charalambos

Saint Charalambos, also spelled Haralambos (in French, Charalampe), was a priest of Magnesia, in Asia Minor, martyred according to tradition in 202 under Emperor Septimius Severus, at more than a hundred years of age. Regarded as the oldest of the Christian martyrs, he is deeply loved in Greece and throughout the Christian East, where he is invoked against epidemics and for the protection of livestock. His feast day is February 10, kept in the Byzantine calendar of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches.

Who was Saint Charalambos?

As with most martyrs of the first centuries, almost nothing is known of his life before his arrest. Tradition presents him as a priest, sometimes as a bishop, of Magnesia, a city of Asia Minor near Ephesus, in the second century. Other traditions place his city in Thessaly, in Greece.

His Greek name, Charalambos, joins two words: *chara*, joy, and *lampo*, to shine. It can be rendered as "radiant joy" or "shining grace." The name suits a man remembered for his serenity in the face of suffering.

The story of his martyrdom comes down to us through a Greek *Passion*, full of wondrous episodes. Historians do not read it as a precise historical record, but as the witness of an ancient and very popular devotion. What follows should therefore be read as the tradition of the Eastern Church.

Key dates according to tradition

- **Around 89 or 95**: Born, according to calculations based on his age at martyrdom.
- **Second century**: As a priest of Magnesia, he preaches the Christian faith.

- **Early third century**: Denounced to the governor, he is arrested and tortured.
- **February 10, 202**: Martyred, at the age of 107 according to some sources, or 113 according to Orthodox tradition.
- **Seventeenth century**: His cult spreads widely in Greece during outbreaks of plague.

The martyrdom of an old man

According to his *Passion*, Charalambos proclaimed the Gospel with such zeal that he troubled some of the pagans of the city. He was denounced to the governor, who handed him over to the military commander. Ordered to sacrifice to the idols, he refused.

Despite his great age, he was cruelly tortured: among other torments, his skin was torn with iron hooks. The story shows him patient and peaceful in the midst of suffering, praying for his executioners.

A prayer for the world before his death

Before he was beheaded, tradition says, he asked God that his relics would protect the places and people that honored them, and that those who called on him would be spared famine and disease, together with the animals that feed mankind. His two executioners, Porphyrius and Dauctus, deeply moved, were converted, as were three women in the crowd, and they died as martyrs with him. The *Passion* adds that Galena, the emperor's daughter, gathered up his body with reverence.

Why is Saint Charalambos invoked against epidemics?

Because of the prayer attributed to him at the moment of his death, Charalambos became the great protector of Eastern Christians against plague, cholera and contagious diseases. In the seventeenth century, when plague

struck Greece, especially its port cities, his cult spread everywhere, and his name became one of the most common among Greeks. The many Greek men named Charalambos, Haralambos or simply Babis carry his memory to this day, including in Greek communities across the English-speaking world.

For the same reason he is invoked for the protection of cattle and other livestock, and of bees: the animals that feed people, as his last prayer asked.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Charalambos in art

Icons of Saint Charalambos are easy to recognize:

- **A very old man with a long white beard**, recalling his great age at martyrdom.
- **Priestly vestments**, as a priest (sometimes shown as a bishop).
- **The Gospel book** in one hand, while he blesses with the other.
- **The devil under his feet**, in some icons, as a sign of victory over evil.

The Byzantine liturgy sings of him in a kontakion: "Having been found worthy of the grace of the priesthood, you adorned the Church with light by the holy passion you suffered for Christ, full of joy and courage."

A saint of the Byzantine tradition

Saint Charalambos belongs above all to the Byzantine tradition. His feast on February 10 is kept by the Orthodox Churches and by the Eastern Catholic Churches of Byzantine rite, the Greek Catholic Churches, which are in full communion with Rome. For Latin Catholics, he is a reminder that the Church breathes with "two lungs," East and West, and that the saints loved in the East are part of the common treasure of all Christians.

In Greece, where his name is among the most common, he remains one of the most popular saints of the year.

What can we learn from Saint Charalambos?

Charalambos is a witness to a faithfulness that does not weaken with age. As an old man, he could have tried to protect his last days. He chose instead to stay faithful to Christ to the end. His memory also recalls the trust of Christians who, in times of epidemic and misfortune, turn to God through the intercession of the saints. People pray to him for the sick, for the elderly and for protection from epidemics.

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

Where to pray to Saint Charalambos

- **Meteora, Greece**: the Monastery of Saint Stephen keeps his skull in a reliquary under a marble canopy. In times of epidemic it was once carried in procession through the region.
- **Kalavryta, Greece**: the Monastery of Mega Spilaio, in the Peloponnese, venerates a relic of his left hand.
- **Greece and the Christian East**: the many churches dedicated to Saint Charalambos.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Charalambos for the Sick and Against Epidemics

In Greece and the Christian East, Saint Charalambos is honored above all with the hymns of the Byzantine liturgy. Saintspedia offers here an original prayer inspired by his tradition: the aged priest of Magnesia who remained faithful under torture, and who, before dying, prayed that those who called on him would be spared famine and disease.

The oldest of the martyrs

According to tradition, Charalambos was more than a hundred years old when he was martyred in 202. His great age did not weaken his faith. His name means "radiant joy," and the Church remembers him as a peaceful witness, praying for his executioners and for the whole world.

Prayer to Saint Charalambos

Saint Charalambos, priest and martyr of Christ, you remained faithful to the end, in old age and in suffering: strengthen my faith when it grows weary.

Before your death you prayed that those who call on you would be spared famine and disease. I entrust to you the sick, especially (name the person), those who suffer from contagious illness, and all who care for them with courage.

Protect the elderly, that they may live their last years in peace and in the light of God. Watch over the animals and the fields that feed us, and over those who tend them.

You prayed for those who tortured you: teach me to forgive. I also entrust to you my own intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for us the radiant joy of your name, the joy of those who belong to Christ. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Charalambos is celebrated on February 10 in the Byzantine calendar. You can also pray to him:

- in times of epidemic or contagious illness;
- for an elderly person, or as you grow older yourself;
- for farmers, herders and beekeepers, and for the health of their animals;
- when you need patience in suffering.

To pray with him over nine days, follow the novena to Saint Charalambos. To know him better, read the life of Saint Charalambos.

The kontakion of Saint Charalambos

The Byzantine liturgy sings of him in a short hymn, the kontakion, which can be used as a prayer:

> *Having been found worthy of the grace of the priesthood, you adorned the Church with light by the holy passion you suffered for Christ, full of joy and courage.*

Novena to Saint Charalambos

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the tradition of Saint Charalambos, priest of Magnesia and martyr, remembered as the oldest of the Christian martyrs. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, February 10, begin it on February 2. You can also pray it at any time: in an epidemic, for a sick or elderly person, or for the protection of animals and harvests.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you live in the spirit of Saint Charalambos. You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group.

Because Saint Charalambos is honored above all in the Byzantine tradition, you may like to pray before an icon of him, lighting a candle as Eastern Christians do. This simple gesture expresses the prayer that rises toward God like the flame.

Day 1: Radiant joy

The name Charalambos joins two Greek words, joy and shining. Christian joy is not the absence of trouble; it is the light of Christ that shines even in difficulty. Tradition remembers Charalambos as a man whose peace did not leave him even in torment.

Prayer: Saint Charalambos, obtain for me a joy that does not depend on circumstances, but on Christ.

Today: Bring a smile or a word of encouragement to someone who is sad.

Day 2: A priest for his people

Tradition presents Charalambos as a priest of Magnesia, near Ephesus, who served his community for many years. The Church has always needed shepherds who give their whole lives to their people.

Prayer: Lord, bless the priests of your Church, and especially the priests of my parish.

Today: Pray for a priest by name, or thank him for his ministry.

Day 3: Proclaiming the Gospel

According to his *Passion*, Charalambos preached the Gospel with such zeal that it troubled some of the pagans of his city. The Good News is not a private possession; it is meant to be shared.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak of you when the occasion comes.

Today: Read a page of the Gospel and share one sentence of it with someone.

Day 4: Faithful in old age

At more than a hundred years old, Charalambos could have sought to protect his last days. He chose to stay faithful. Old age is not a time of uselessness: it can be a time of witness, prayer and wisdom.

Prayer: Saint Charalambos, watch over the elderly, and help me to honor and care for them.

Today: Visit or call an elderly person, and take time to listen.

Day 5: Refusing the idols

Ordered to sacrifice to the idols, Charalambos refused. Our idols today may be money, success or the opinion of others. To belong to Christ is to refuse to bow before anything that takes God's place.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the idols that take your place in my heart.

Today: Name one thing that has too much power over you, and give it to God.

Day 6: Patient in suffering

The tradition shows Charalambos peaceful under torture. He did not seek suffering, but he did not let it separate him from Christ. Many sick people today live the same quiet courage.

Prayer: Saint Charalambos, support all who suffer in body and spirit, and give them patience and peace.

Today: Offer a difficulty of this day, small or great, in union with Christ.

Day 7: Praying for his executioners

Charalambos prayed for those who tortured him, and two of them, Porphyrius and Dauctus, were converted and died with him. Forgiveness can open hearts that seemed closed.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray for those who have hurt me, and to forgive them.

Today: Pray by name for someone who has wronged you.

Day 8: Protector against disease

Before his death, Charalambos prayed that those who called on him would be spared famine and disease. During the plagues of Greece, Christians turned to him with confidence. We too can entrust our fears to God through the saints.

Prayer: Saint Charalambos, protect us from epidemics, and comfort the sick, doctors, nurses and caregivers.

Today: Pray for health workers, or do a service for someone who is ill.

Day 9: Care for creation

Charalambos also prayed for the animals that feed mankind, and he is invoked for cattle and bees. Creation is a gift entrusted to us. On his feast day, we give thanks for the fields, the flocks and those who tend them.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayers of Saint Charalambos, bless the farmers, herders and beekeepers, and their work.

Today: Thank God for your food, and avoid wasting any of it.

Closing prayer

Saint Charalambos, priest and martyr, you remained faithful to Christ to the end of a very long life. You prayed for your executioners and for the whole world, asking that those who call on you be spared hunger and disease. Protect the sick, the elderly and those who care for them. Watch over the animals and the fields that feed us. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days, and obtain for me a radiant joy and a faith that does not grow weary. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CREDITS

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