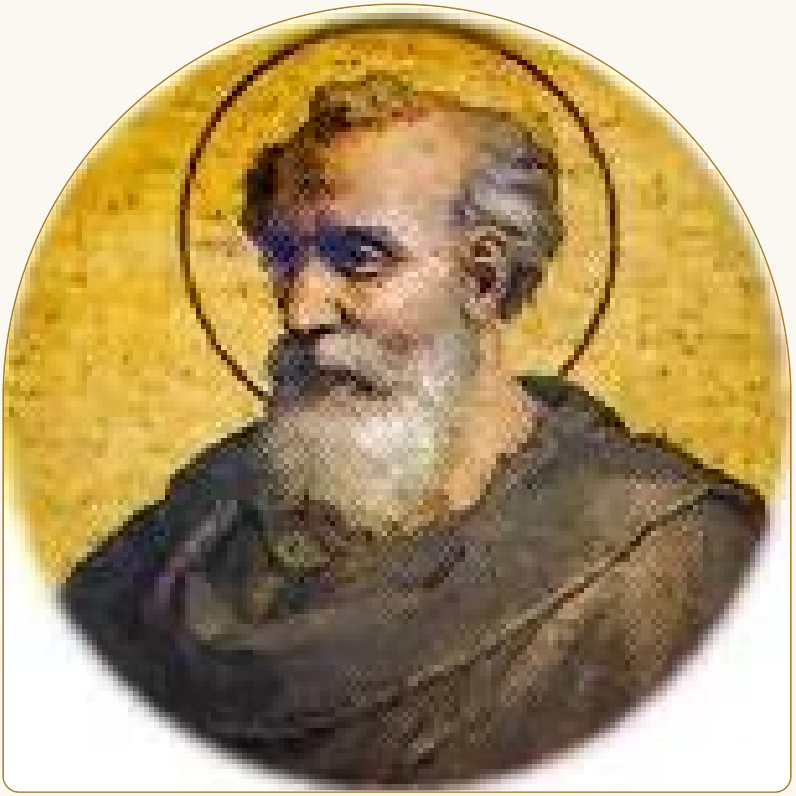


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eleutherius

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 26

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IN BRIEF

Saint Eleutherius

Bishop of Rome around 175-189, at the time of the martyrs of Lyon and the Montanist crisis.

Feast day	May 26
Died	Rome
Canonized	Pre-Congregation
Era	2nd century
Patron saint of	Cupramontana

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Eleutherius for the Unity of the Church

Novena to Saint Eleutherius

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Eleutherius

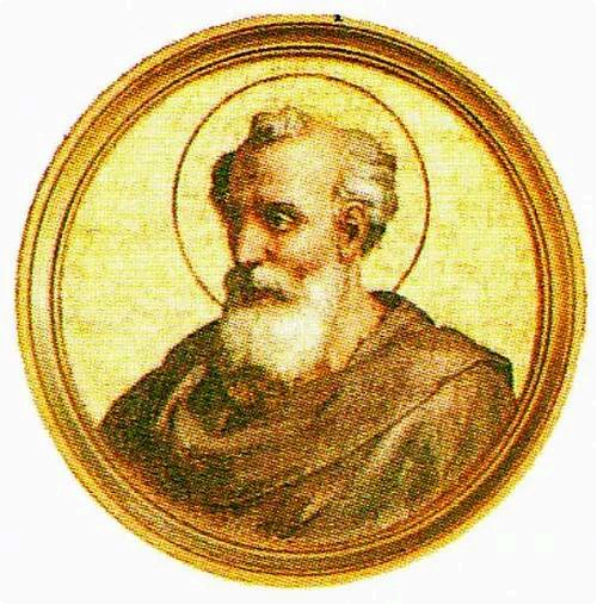
Saint Eleutherius, also spelled Eleutherus, was according to the traditional list the thirteenth Bishop of Rome, at the end of the 2nd century. A former deacon of Pope Saint Anicetus, he led the Church of Rome for about fifteen years, under the emperors Marcus Aurelius and then Commodus, while the martyrs of Lyon were shedding their blood and Montanism was dividing Christians. His name, which means "free man" in Greek, is also linked to a famous legend, that of a British king who asked him for baptism. His feast day is May 26.

Who was Saint Eleutherius?

The oldest information about him comes from the Christian historian Hegesippus, who stayed in Rome in the 2nd century: Eleutherius was then a deacon there under Bishop Anicetus. Hegesippus says he was Greek. A later tradition, taken up by some Roman sources, places his birth in Nicopolis, in Epirus, in what is now Greece, near Albania.

He succeeded Saint Soter around 175 and died, according to Catholic tradition, around 189; other chronologies suggest 171-185 or 177-193. He is the last pope named by Saint Irenaeus in his list of the Bishops of Rome.

The title "pope" was not yet in use for the Bishop of Rome in his time. Yet the Church of Rome already held a special place, and Christians from Gaul and from the East turned to it for advice and for communion.



Saint Eleutherius in the gallery of popes at Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.

Key dates in the life of Eleutherius

- **Around 155-166**: Deacon of the Church of Rome under Saint Anicetus, according to Hegesippus.
- **Around 175**: Succeeds Saint Soter.
- **177**: Persecution in Lyon and Vienne; Saint Irenaeus brings a letter from the confessors of Lyon to Rome.
- **180**: Death of Marcus Aurelius; under Commodus, the Church enjoys a calmer period.
- **Around 189**: Dies in Rome; Saint Victor I succeeds him.

The martyrs of Lyon and the Montanist question

In 177, a violent persecution struck the Christians of Lyon and Vienne, in Gaul. The elderly bishop Saint Pothinus died in prison, and the young slave Saint Blandina was thrown to the beasts in the amphitheater. Eusebius of Caesarea reports that the imprisoned confessors then wrote to Eleutherius and entrusted their letter to the priest Irenaeus, whom they warmly recommended.

A pastor facing division

These letters also dealt with Montanism. This movement, born in Phrygia, announced a new outpouring of the Spirit and preached a very strict asceticism, and it was then at its height. Eleutherius seems to have delayed his judgment, perhaps to avoid a sudden break. On the other hand, he stood firm against the followers of Marcion and Valentinus.

A decree on food

The *Liber Pontificalis* credits him with a decision that Christians must not reject any food created by God, provided it is fit for human beings. It may have been aimed at the restrictive food practices of certain groups. Historians see it perhaps as a later measure attributed to an early pope.

Whatever its origin, the rule echoes the teaching of Saint Paul that everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected when it is received with thanksgiving.

The legend of King Lucius of Britain

The same *Liber Pontificalis* tells that a king of the island of Britain, named Lucius, wrote to Eleutherius asking to become a Christian, and that the pope sent him missionaries. Saint Bede the Venerable repeated this story in the 8th century, and it became part of the traditional history of Christianity in Britain.

Historians consider it without foundation: Roman Britain at the end of the 2nd century had no king of this kind. Some have suggested a confusion with King Abgar IX of Edessa, in Mesopotamia. The legend nonetheless explains why the name of Eleutherius holds a place in the old traditions of Christianity in Britain.



The church of San Giovanni della Pigna, Rome.

Was Saint Eleutherius a martyr?

We do not know how Eleutherius died: he is called a martyr only in a 9th-century text. Tradition says he was buried near the tomb of Saint Peter, on the Vatican Hill.

What does his holiness teach us?

The figure of Eleutherius is that of a shepherd standing at the crossroads of the Churches of his time. He received the letters of the martyrs, listened to delegations coming from the East and from Gaul, and tried to keep united Christians who were tempted by division. His holiness lies in patience, discernment and care for communion.

Why is Saint Eleutherius the patron saint of Cupramontana?

Saint Eleutherius is the patron saint of Cupramontana, a town in the Marche region of Italy. This local patronage shows how the memory of the early popes spread through the Church in Italy. More broadly, Catholics can turn to him to pray for the unity of the Church and for Christians who are persecuted.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Eleutherius in art

All images of Eleutherius were made long after his time. He is shown as a pope in pontifical vestments, sometimes with the tiara. In the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, in Rome, he appears in the long series of mosaic medallions portraying every pope since Saint Peter.

Where to pray to Saint Eleutherius

In Rome, the church of San Giovanni della Pigna has an altar dedicated to him. Saint Peter's Basilica, near which tradition places his tomb, and the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, with its gallery of papal portraits, also keep his memory. The town of Cupramontana honors him as its patron.

Wherever you are, you can pray to him with the prayer to Saint Eleutherius or the novena to Saint Eleutherius.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eleutherius for the Unity of the Church

No prayer written by Saint Eleutherius has come down to us, and little is known of his life. Yet the few certain facts speak clearly: he led the Church of Rome while the martyrs of Lyon were giving their lives, he received their letter brought by Irenaeus, and he tried to keep Christians united in a time of division. Here is an original prayer that entrusts to him the unity of the Church and persecuted Christians.

Prayer to Saint Eleutherius

Saint Eleutherius, deacon and then shepherd of the Church of Rome, you served the poor before you served as bishop, and you guided the people of God in a time of trial.

You received the letter of the martyrs of Lyon, who suffered for Christ with Saint Pothinus and Saint Blandina: pray for all Christians who are persecuted today, that they may remain faithful and find comfort.

You listened with patience to those who disagreed, and you sought to keep the Church united: obtain for our pastors the gift of discernment, and for all of us the desire for unity and peace.

Your name means "free man": help me to be free from fear, from pride and from all that keeps me far from God, so that I may serve him with a joyful heart.

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.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Eleutherius is remembered on May 26. This prayer is especially suited:

- on his feast day, May 26;
- when praying for the pope and for the unity of the Church;
- for Christians persecuted for their faith;
- for those who must make a difficult decision and need discernment;
- for the people of Cupramontana, who honor him as their patron.

A prayer with the martyrs of Lyon

Saint Eleutherius was Bishop of Rome when the Church of Lyon and Vienne gave its great witness in 177. You can join their memory in this short prayer.

> *Lord, you gave to Saint Pothinus, Saint Blandina and their companions the strength to remain faithful to you unto death. Through their prayers and that of Saint Eleutherius, strengthen the Church in times of trial and keep us united in your love. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Eleutherius, or pray the novena to Saint Eleutherius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eleutherius

This novena to Saint Eleutherius is an original composition by Saintspedia. Little is known of his life, so each day draws on what is certain: he was a deacon in Rome, then Bishop of Rome at the end of the 2nd century, at the time of the martyrs of Lyon and of the Montanist crisis. To end on his feast day, May 26, begin it on May 18. It is especially suited to praying for the unity of the Church and for persecuted Christians.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and 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. End with the small act proposed. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Day 1: A free man

The name Eleutherius means "free man" in Greek. Christ came to set us free, not to do whatever we please, but to love and to serve. True freedom is found in following him.

Prayer: Lord, free me from what keeps me far from you, and make me free to love. Amen.

Today: Name one habit that enslaves you, and offer it to God.

Day 2: A deacon who served

Before becoming Bishop of Rome, Eleutherius was a deacon under Saint Anicetus. Deacons served the poor, the widows and the sick of the community. Leadership in the Church begins with humble service.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came not to be served but to serve. Teach me to serve with joy. Amen.

Today: Do a hidden service for someone in your home or at work.

Day 3: Faithful to what was received

Eleutherius succeeded Saint Soter around 175, and Saint Irenaeus named him in the list of Bishops of Rome that goes back to the apostles. He received the faith of Peter and Paul and handed it on.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to the faith of the apostles, and help me to pass it on. Amen.

Today: Pray the Apostles' Creed slowly.

Day 4: The martyrs of Lyon

In 177, the Christians of Lyon and Vienne were persecuted. The elderly bishop Pothinus died in prison, and the young slave Blandina was thrown to the beasts. In Rome, Eleutherius learned of their witness. Their courage became a light for the whole Church, and their memory is still honored today in Lyon and far beyond.

Prayer: Lord, give strength to Christians who suffer for your name today, and make me faithful in my small trials. Amen.

Today: Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted.

Day 5: A letter carried by Irenaeus

The confessors of Lyon wrote to Eleutherius and entrusted their letter to the priest Irenaeus. Even in prison, they cared for the life of the whole Church. Communion between Churches was already a living reality: Lyon looked to

Rome, and Rome listened to Lyon. Irenaeus would later become bishop of Lyon and one of the great teachers of the faith.

Prayer: Lord, unite all the Churches in one faith and one love. Amen.

Today: Write or send a message to someone you have neglected.

Day 6: Discernment in times of division

Montanism, a movement that claimed a new outpouring of the Spirit, was dividing Christians. Eleutherius seems to have taken time before judging, perhaps to avoid a brutal break. Patience can be a form of charity, and it leaves room for the Holy Spirit to work.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me wisdom and patience before I judge or decide. Amen.

Today: Before reacting to a disagreement, take time to listen.

Day 7: Firm in the truth

Eleutherius also stood firm against the followers of Marcion and Valentinus, who distorted the Gospel. Charity does not mean giving up the truth. A shepherd must both welcome and guard the faith.

Prayer: Lord, help me to hold to the truth with love, and to speak it with gentleness. Amen.

Today: Read a page of the Catechism on a point of faith you know less well.

Day 8: Everything God made is good

Tradition credits him with a rule that Christians must not reject any food created by God. Creation is a gift. We are invited to receive it with thanksgiving, without contempt and without excess.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the gifts of your creation. Teach me to use them with gratitude and moderation. Amen.

Today: Say grace before each meal today, and share a meal or food with someone.

Day 9: A shepherd for all

The legend of King Lucius of Britain, though without historical basis, shows how Eleutherius was remembered: as a shepherd attentive to distant peoples who wanted to know Christ. Tradition says he was buried near Saint Peter, on the Vatican Hill.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Eleutherius, keep your Church united and faithful. Amen.

Today: Pray for the pope and for missionaries who carry the Gospel to new peoples.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Eleutherius, faithful shepherd of the Church of Rome, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you my intention. Pray for the unity of the Church, for persecuted Christians and for all who serve. Obtain for us the true freedom of the children of God, through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To go further, read the life of Saint Eleutherius and the prayer to Saint Eleutherius.

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