

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eusebius, Pope

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: August 17

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IN BRIEF

Saint Eusebius, Pope

Bishop of Rome in 309 or 310, exiled to Sicily for seeking to reconcile Christians who had fallen away during persecution.

Feast day	August 17
Died	c. 310, Sicily
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Eusebius for Reconciliation

Novena to Saint Eusebius, Pope

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Eusebius, Pope

Saint Eusebius was bishop of Rome for only a few months, in 309 or 310, in the aftermath of the great persecution of Diocletian. His brief pontificate was dominated by a burning question: should the Church welcome back those who had denied their faith under threat? Eusebius answered yes, on condition of penance, and paid for this position with exile in Sicily, where he died. His feast day is August 17; it was formerly celebrated on September 26.

Who was Saint Eusebius?

Very little is known about him. His Greek name suggests an Eastern origin, and the *Liber Pontificalis*, a chronicle of the popes compiled much later, says he was the son of a physician, or a physician himself.

He was elected after the disappearance of Pope Marcellus I, on April 18 of either 309 or 310: historians hesitate between the two years. His time as bishop lasted between four and six months, depending on the sources.

Our main source is a poem engraved on his tomb by one of his successors, Pope Damasus, in the second half of the fourth century. Fragments of this inscription were found in 1852 by the archaeologist Giovanni Battista de Rossi in the Catacombs of Saint Callixtus.

Key dates in the life of Saint Eusebius

- **303-305**: Persecution of Diocletian; many Christians deny their faith to escape death.
- **April 18, 309 or 310**: Elected bishop of Rome.
- **309 or 310**: Exiled to Sicily by order of the emperor Maxentius.

- **Around 310**: Dies in Sicily; his body is later brought back to Rome and buried in the Catacombs of Saint Callixtus.
- **1852**: Giovanni Battista de Rossi discovers fragments of his epitaph.

The quarrel over the "lapsed"

The persecution launched under Diocletian in 303 was the last great persecution of the Roman Empire and one of the most violent. Churches were destroyed, sacred books burned, and Christians were ordered to sacrifice to the gods on pain of imprisonment, torture or death.

The persecution had left the Church of Rome deeply wounded. Many Christians, known as the *lapsi* ("those who have fallen"), had offered sacrifice to the gods or handed over the sacred books in order to save their lives. When peace returned under Maxentius, they asked to be readmitted to the community.

Eusebius's predecessor, Marcellus, had required severe penance of them, which had provoked serious unrest. The question was painful on every side. Those who had suffered prison or torture for Christ, or who had lost loved ones, could find it hard to see the lapsed return as though nothing had happened. The lapsed, for their part, often wanted to come back to the sacraments and to the community they had abandoned out of fear.

A path of mercy

Eusebius seems to have adopted a more welcoming line. According to the epitaph by Damasus, he "taught that those who had fallen had the right to repent." Opposing him, a certain Heraclius, at the head of a rigorist party, rejected this possibility. The poem speaks of "sedition, slaughter, war, discord": the Christian community was tearing itself apart, even in the streets.

Eusebius did not deny the seriousness of apostasy. He asked for penance. But he refused to close the door of the Church to those who sincerely wanted to return. In this he stood in the line of earlier popes who had faced the same question, such as Saint Cornelius in the third century.

Exile and remembrance

Concerned with public order, the emperor Maxentius exiled both faction leaders. Eusebius was deported to Sicily, where he died soon after.

Damasus gave him the title of martyr, but other ancient sources do not repeat it. It is more accurate to say that he died in exile for remaining faithful to his office. After a vacancy of several months, Miltiades succeeded him, and the body of Eusebius was brought back to Rome to rest in the Catacombs of Saint Callixtus on the Appian Way, the burial place of many early popes.

What can we learn from his holiness?

Eusebius governed for only a short time, but on a question that remains relevant today: how can we unite faithfulness to the Gospel with mercy toward those who have failed? He chose the way of forgiveness accompanied by penance, at the cost of his freedom.

His story is a reminder that reconciliation is rarely easy. It asks those who have fallen to acknowledge their fault, and it asks the community to make room for them again. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, as the Church celebrates it today, carries the same conviction: no sin is too great for God's forgiveness when a person truly turns back to him.

Why is Saint Eusebius invoked for reconciliation?

Saint Eusebius has no traditional patronage. Yet because he suffered exile for defending the possibility of repentance, his figure invites us to pray for reconciliation in divided communities: parishes, families and groups torn apart by old wounds. He can also be invoked by those who feel they have fallen too far to come back to the Church, and by priests who hear confessions.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Eusebius in art

Few images of Saint Eusebius exist. Like the other early popes, he appears in the series of mosaic medallions of the popes in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. Later illustrations show him in papal vestments, sometimes wearing the tiara, an anachronism, since the tiara did not exist in his time.

Where to pray to Saint Eusebius

- **Rome**: the Catacombs of Saint Callixtus, on the ancient Appian Way, where he was buried and where his epitaph was found.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eusebius for Reconciliation

There is no widely known traditional prayer to Saint Eusebius, the pope who was exiled for defending the possibility of repentance for those who had denied their faith. Below you will find the key words of his epitaph, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia for reconciliation and mercy.

The words of his epitaph

In the fourth century, Pope Damasus engraved a poem on the tomb of Eusebius in the Catacombs of Saint Callixtus. It summarizes his teaching in one line: he "taught that those who had fallen had the right to repent." These words can be a starting point for prayer: no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy.

Prayer to Saint Eusebius for reconciliation

Saint Eusebius, bishop of Rome in a time of division, you opened the door of repentance to those who had fallen during persecution: pray for all who feel far from God and from his Church.

You did not deny the seriousness of sin, yet you believed in the power of forgiveness: help me to recognize my faults honestly and to trust in the mercy of the Lord.

You suffered exile rather than abandon those who wanted to come back: give me a heart that does not close itself to those who have hurt me or failed.

Pray for our parishes and families when they are torn apart by quarrels. Obtain for them the grace of reconciliation and peace. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Help me to be, in my turn, a witness of truth and of mercy, faithful to the Gospel to the end. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Eusebius is celebrated on August 17. This prayer is also fitting:

- before going to confession, especially after a long time away;
- when you pray for someone who has left the Church;
- when a family, a parish or a group is divided;
- for priests who hear confessions and for all who work for reconciliation.

A short prayer for the lapsed and the far away

> *Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Saint Eusebius, bring back to you those who have fallen away, heal the wounds of division in your Church, and make us all instruments of your peace. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eusebius, Pope

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Pope Saint Eusebius, exiled in the early fourth century for defending the possibility of repentance. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on August 17, begin on August 8; it ends on August 16. It is especially suited to praying for reconciliation in a family or community, or for someone who has drifted away from the faith.

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 you carry the prayer into your day. Because so little is known of Eusebius, the meditations stay close to what the sources tell us: the crisis of the lapsed, his choice of mercy, his exile. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off. You may also choose to end the novena by receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the gift of mercy that Eusebius defended for the lapsed of his time.

Day 1: A Church wounded by persecution

When Eusebius became bishop of Rome, the Church had just come through the persecution of Diocletian. Many had died for Christ; others had given in out of fear. The community bore deep wounds.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, pray for Christians who suffer persecution today, and for those who are tempted to give up their faith. Amen.

Today: Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted.

Day 2: Those who fell

The lapsed had offered sacrifice to the gods or handed over the sacred books to save their lives. Afterward, many longed to return. Weakness is not the last word when the heart turns back to God.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, pray for all who have denied or abandoned their faith. May they find the way back to the Father's house. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for someone who has left the Church.

Day 3: The right to repent

According to the epitaph by Damasus, Eusebius "taught that those who had fallen had the right to repent." He believed that God's mercy is greater than our failures.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, help me to believe that no sin is too great for the mercy of God, and to come back to him with confidence. Amen.

Today: Make a careful examination of conscience.

Day 4: Penance that heals

Eusebius did not take apostasy lightly: he asked for penance. Penance is not a punishment for its own sake, but a path that heals and restores. It allows the sinner to rebuild trust.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, teach me the value of true repentance, which changes the heart and repairs what can be repaired. Amen.

Today: Repair a wrong you have done, even a small one.

Day 5: Facing opposition

A rigorist party led by Heraclius rejected the return of the lapsed. The poem of Damasus speaks of sedition and discord. Eusebius held firm amid the conflict.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, give me the courage to stand for what is right, without bitterness toward those who oppose me. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who opposes you or criticizes you.

Day 6: Peace in divided communities

The Christian community of Rome was torn apart, even in the streets. Division in the Church is a deep sorrow, yet God can bring peace where people see only conflict.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, pray for our parishes, our families and our communities when they are divided. Obtain for them the grace of peace. Amen.

Today: Take a first step toward someone with whom you are in conflict.

Day 7: Exile

The emperor Maxentius exiled Eusebius to Sicily. Far from Rome and from his flock, he remained faithful to his office. Exile can become a place of trust in God.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, pray for exiles, refugees and all who are far from home. Help me to remain faithful when I feel alone. Amen.

Today: Pray for refugees, or support an organization that helps them.

Day 8: Faithful to the end

Eusebius died in Sicily soon after his exile. Damasus called him a martyr; others simply remember that he died faithful to his office. Faithfulness is often lived in hidden suffering.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, obtain for me the grace of perseverance, so that I may remain faithful to Christ in small things and in great ones. Amen.

Today: Be faithful to a commitment you find difficult.

Day 9: The Church remembers

His body was brought back to Rome, and decades later Pope Damasus honored him with an epitaph. The Church does not forget those who served her with love. Even a short life can bear lasting fruit.

Prayer: Saint Eusebius, pray for the pope and the bishops, that they may guide the Church with truth and mercy. Amen.

Today: Pray for the pope and for your bishop.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God, you gave Saint Eusebius the courage to open the door of repentance to those who had fallen, and the strength to suffer exile for your Church. Through his intercession, grant that we may never despair of your mercy, that we may welcome those who come back to you, and that our communities may live in peace. Hear the intention I have entrusted to you during this novena. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To continue praying with him, use the prayer to Saint Eusebius, or read the life of Saint Eusebius.

CREDITS

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