

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gordian

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 10

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IN BRIEF

Saint Gordian

Roman martyr of the 4th century, buried on the Via Latina, patron saint of Kempten.

Feast day	May 10
Died	c. 362, according to his Passion, Rome
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Kempten (Bavaria)

In this booklet

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Basilica of Saint Lawrence in Kempten

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Gordian

Saint Gordian is a martyr of Rome, buried on the Via Latina in a cemetery that later took his name. According to his Passion, he was a judge who was converted by the Christian he was supposed to condemn, before being beheaded himself around 362, under Emperor Julian. He is honored with Saint Epimachus, who was buried in the same tomb. He is the patron saint of the town of Kempten, in Bavaria. His feast day is May 10.

Who was Saint Gordian?

Reliable history tells us little about Gordian: a Roman martyr, honored very early in a cemetery on the Via Latina, whose memory was celebrated on May 10 together with Saint Epimachus. The account of his martyrdom, written later, is not considered reliable by historians. Yet it tells a beautiful story of conversion, taken up in the Middle Ages by the *Golden Legend*. It can be read as a meditation on grace rather than as a court record.

Key dates

- **4th century**: According to his Passion, he is a judge in Rome.
- **c. 362**: Under Emperor Julian, charged with making a Christian priest named Januarius sacrifice, he is converted with his family.
- **c. 362**: Denounced, he is tortured and then beheaded; his body is laid on the Via Latina, near that of Saint Epimachus.
- **752**: Founding of the abbey of Kempten, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to Saints Gordian and Epimachus.
- **774**: According to tradition, Queen Hildegard, wife of Charlemagne, gives the abbey of Kempten relics of the two martyrs.

- **1652-1673**: Construction of the Basilica of Saint Lawrence in Kempten, of which they are co-patrons.

The converted judge

According to his Passion, Gordian served as a judge in Rome in the time of Emperor Julian, who tried to restore the worship of the pagan gods. A Christian priest named Januarius was brought before him, to be forced to sacrifice to the idols. But instead of breaking the accused, it was the judge who was moved. Listening to the priest, Gordian discovered Christ. He asked for baptism, and with him his wife and many members of his household.

This turnaround is the heart of his story: the one who was supposed to judge let himself be judged by the truth. He preferred to lose his office, his rank and his life rather than deny the faith he had just discovered.

Martyrdom on the Via Latina

Denounced, Gordian in turn appeared before a magistrate. He refused to sacrifice. He was tortured, then beheaded. Christians gathered his body and laid it in a crypt on the Via Latina, beside that of Epimachus, a martyr buried there a short time before. The cemetery took the name of the two saints, and from then on the Church of Rome honored them together.

Relics all the way to Bavaria

Devotion to Gordian crossed the Alps. Founded in 752, the Benedictine abbey of Kempten, in the Allgäu, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to Saints Gordian and Epimachus. According to tradition, Queen Hildegard, wife of Charlemagne, gave it relics of the two martyrs in 774. Gordian became the patron saint of the town, and his name appears on an old seal of Kempten. Many of its inhabitants bore his name, such as the mayor Gordian Seuter in the 16th century.

Other remains attributed to Saint Gordian made a long journey: given around 1670 to an English Jesuit, they passed through the Jesuit college of Saint-Omer before being placed in the chapel of Stonyhurst College, in England.

Devotion and art

Gordian is listed in the Roman Martyrology on May 10. Before the calendar reform of 1969, his memory and that of Saint Epimachus were celebrated on that day throughout the Latin Church. The Orthodox Churches and the Armenian Church also honor him. He is shown as a soldier or a man of high rank, in armor, with the sword of his beheading and the palm of martyrdom. Many churches, especially in Germany, are dedicated to Saints Gordian and Epimachus.

What can we learn from Saint Gordian?

Gordian shows that no one is too settled to be converted. He had the power to judge; he chose to let himself be transformed by the witness of a man he was supposed to condemn. You can pray to him for judges, for leaders, and for all who hesitate to follow Christ because they have a lot to lose.

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

Where to pray to Saint Gordian

- **Kempten** (Bavaria, Germany): the Basilica of Saint Lawrence, the former abbey church of which he is co-patron. See the page Basilica of Saint Lawrence in Kempten.
- **Rome**: the Via Latina, where the cemetery of Saints Gordian and Epimachus once stood.
- **Saint-Paul-d'Oueil** (Haute-Garonne, France): a church is dedicated to him.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gordian for Those in Authority

Saint Gordian is a martyr of Rome, buried on the Via Latina near Saint Epimachus. According to his Passion, he was a judge who was converted through the priest he was supposed to condemn, before giving his life for Christ around 362. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to his intercession those who hold authority, those who seek the truth and those who hesitate to convert.

Prayer to Saint Gordian

Saint Gordian,
you sat in judgment over others,
and it was the truth of Christ that judged you.
Listening to the witness you were meant to condemn,
you opened your heart to grace.

You left everything, your rank, your office and your security,
to follow Jesus even to martyrdom.
Your body rests beside that of Saint Epimachus,
and your memory has crossed centuries and mountains.

Pray for judges and for all who hold authority:
may they serve justice and truth.
Pray for those who seek God but dare not take the step,
and for our families, that they may welcome the faith together.
Give us your courage when we must choose Christ.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Gordian

- On his feast day, May 10.
- For judges, lawyers and all who administer justice.
- For someone who is seeking God or preparing for baptism.
- When your faith asks you to give up an advantage.
- For the town of Kempten and those who call on him as their patron.

A prayer for conversion

You can say this short prayer each day:

> *Lord, touch my heart as you touched the heart of Gordian.*
> *Let nothing keep me from following you.*
> *Saint Gordian, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Gordian from May 2 to 10, and read the life of Saint Gordian.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gordian

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Gordian, a martyr of Rome buried on the Via Latina and patron saint of Kempten, in Bavaria. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, May 10, begin on May 2. It is suited to asking for the grace of conversion, courage in faith or justice, and you can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present 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: "Saint Gordian, pray for us." The small act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A settled man

According to his Passion, Gordian was a judge in Rome. He had a position, authority, a family. Nothing seemed to call him to change. Yet God knocks at everyone's door, even the door of those who think they are comfortably settled.

Prayer: Lord, do not let me fall asleep in my habits. Come and find me where I am.

Today: Look back over your day and notice where God gave you a sign.

Day 2: Facing the witness

A Christian priest, Januarius, was brought before Gordian to be forced to sacrifice. The judge thought he would have the last word. But this man's peace and faith made him think.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the witnesses of faith you have put on my path. Make me, in turn, a peaceful witness.

Today: Thank God for someone whose faith has touched you.

Day 3: Listening

Gordian agreed to listen. That is the first step of every conversion: letting the other speak, without closing yourself off in advance.

Prayer: Lord, give me a listening heart, and open my mind to your truth.

Today: Really listen to someone today, without interrupting.

Day 4: Conversion

The judge asked for baptism. The heart of stone became a heart of flesh. God can change everything, at any age and in any situation.

Prayer: Lord, convert my heart. I also entrust to you those who are far from you.

Today: Pray by name for someone who does not know Christ.

Day 5: A family that believes

According to the account, Gordian's wife and many of his household received the faith with him. Faith is lived and passed on in the family.

Prayer: Lord, bless my family. Help us learn to pray together.

Today: Suggest a time of prayer, even a short one, as a family.

Day 6: Losing everything for Christ

In becoming a Christian, Gordian knew he was risking his office and his life. He preferred Christ to everything else. "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

Prayer: Lord, may I prefer nothing to your love. Free me from whatever holds me back.

Today: Give up something you are too attached to.

Day 7: Martyrdom

Denounced, Gordian refused to sacrifice to idols. He was tortured and beheaded. His faithfulness went all the way. Even today, Christians pay for their faith with their lives.

Prayer: Lord, support persecuted Christians, and help me to be faithful in small trials.

Today: Pray for a persecuted Church somewhere in the world.

Day 8: Together in memory

Christians laid Gordian's body near that of Epimachus. The Church honors them together. The saints are never alone: they form a communion.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the communion of saints. May I never walk toward you alone.

Today: Entrust your intention to a saint you feel close to, and pray for your departed loved ones.

Day 9: A patron for a town

Centuries later, the relics of Gordian were honored in Kempten, which took him as its patron. The memory of a martyr can carry the faith of a whole people.

Prayer: Lord, bless my town and those who govern it. Through the intercession of Saint Gordian, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for the leaders of your town or city.

Living the novena with Saint Gordian

The story of Saint Gordian has come down to us through a late account, but its message is clear: grace can touch even the most settled heart. During these nine days, let yourself be questioned: what in your life needs conversion? Pray also for those who administer justice, that they may hold fast to the truth.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Gordian,*
> *converted judge and martyr of Christ,*
> *you let the truth transform you*
> *and gave everything to follow it.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Obtain for me a heart open to grace*
> *and the courage to stay faithful.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Gordian at any time, and read the life of Saint Gordian.

PILGRIMAGE

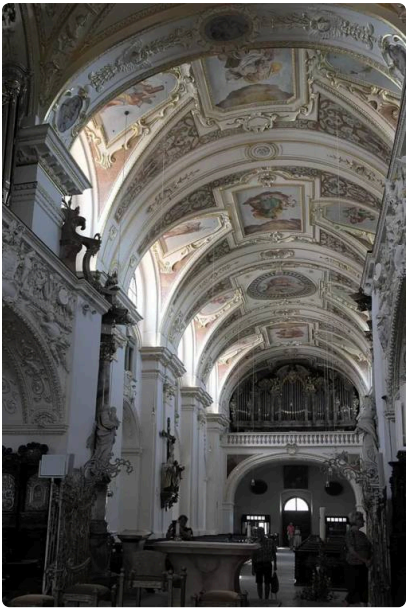
Basilica of Saint Lawrence in Kempten

The Basilica of Saint Lawrence (*Basilika St. Lorenz*) stands in the heart of Kempten, in the Allgäu, Bavaria. The former church of the Benedictine princely abbey, it is dedicated to Saint Lawrence, with the Virgin Mary and Saints Gordian and Epimachus, patrons of the town, as secondary patrons. It is the main place outside Rome where Saint Gordian is honored.

An abbey under the protection of the martyrs

The abbey of Kempten was founded in 752 and dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to Saints Gordian and Epimachus, two martyrs buried on the Via Latina in Rome. According to tradition, Queen Hildegard, wife of Charlemagne, gave the monastery relics of the two saints in 774. The abbey became one of the most powerful in the Empire, and its abbots bore the title of princes. Gordian became the patron saint of the town, whose name appears on an old seal.

The present church was built from 1652, on the orders of Abbot Roman Giel von Gielsberg, by the architects Michael Beer and then Johann Serro. Completed in 1673, it is considered the first great church built in Germany after the Thirty Years' War. Since the secularization of the abbey, it has served as a parish church in the Diocese of Augsburg. Pope Paul VI gave it the title of minor basilica in 1969.



The Baroque interior of the Basilica of Saint Lawrence in Kempten.

Visiting the basilica

The basilica forms a monumental ensemble with the former residence of the prince-abbots, which adjoins it. The Baroque interior is striking for its light and the richness of its stucco. As you walk through it, look for the images of the town's patrons, Saint Gordian and Saint Epimachus, often shown as Roman soldiers with the sword and the palm of martyrdom.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Gordian. In the basilica, entrust to him leaders, judges and those who are seeking God, then recite the prayer to Saint Gordian. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Gordian

- **Rome**: the Via Latina, where the cemetery of Saints Gordian and Epimachus once stood.
- **Stonyhurst** (Lancashire, England): the chapel of the Jesuit college, where remains attributed to him are kept.
- **Saint-Paul-d'Oueil** (Haute-Garonne, France): a church under his patronage.

Practical information

Kempten is in southern Bavaria, about 80 miles (130 kilometers) from Munich, and is easy to reach by train. The basilica is in the old abbey town (*Stiftsstadt*), next to the residence. It is a working parish church: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the parish of Saint Lawrence or the Kempten tourist office before you come.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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