

BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Pope Saint Gregory II

*Life, prayer and novena*

Feast day: February 11

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IN BRIEF

## Pope Saint Gregory II

*Pope from 715 to 731, who sent Saint Boniface to Germany and opposed iconoclasm.*

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| **Feast day** | February 11 |
| **Born** | 669, Rome, Italy |
| **Died** | February 11, 731, Rome, Italy |
| **Era** | 8th century |

## In this booklet


Life

Prayer to Saint Gregory II for Missionaries

Novena to Pope Saint Gregory II

Credits and sources



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LIFE

# Pope Saint Gregory II

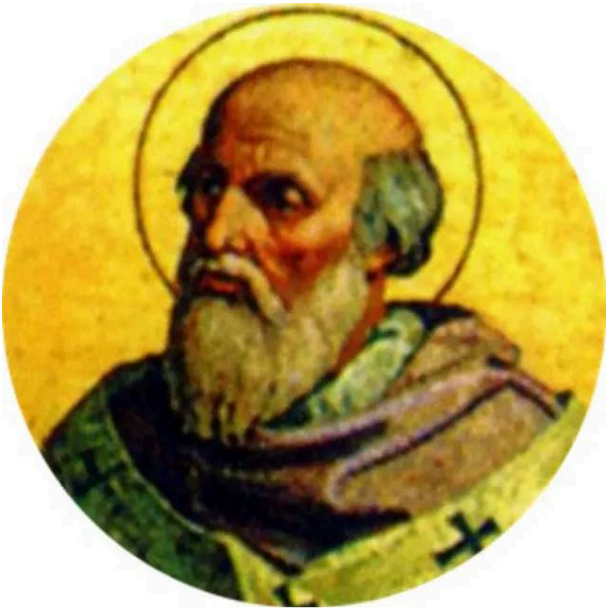
Pope Saint Gregory II led the Church from 715 to 731, at a time when Rome was still, in theory, subject to the Byzantine emperor, but when the popes had more and more to rely on themselves. A Roman monk and deacon, he sent missionaries to Germany, had the abbey of Monte Cassino rebuilt and firmly refused the iconoclast policy of Emperor Leo III. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on February 11, the day of his death. English-speaking Catholics know him above all as the pope who sent the Englishman Saint Boniface to evangelize Germany.

## Who was Saint Gregory II?

Gregory was born in Rome in 669 into a wealthy and cultured patrician family. According to ancient sources, he founded a community of monks in his own villa, a sign of his deep attachment to monastic life.

He entered the service of the Church of Rome, where he became a deacon, sacellarius (in charge of finances) and librarian. As a deacon, he was part of the delegation that Pope Constantine led to Constantinople in 710-711 to negotiate with Emperor Justinian II. It was valuable experience for a man who would later have to stand up to Byzantium.

After the see had been vacant for forty days, he was elected bishop of Rome and consecrated on May 19, 715. Our sources, mainly the *Liber Pontificalis* and the letters of the period, allow us to follow the main lines of his pontificate, but we know little about his inner personality.



*Imaginary portrait of Gregory II, Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.*

## Key dates in the life of Gregory II

- **669**: Born in Rome.
- **710-711**: As a deacon, member of the papal embassy to Constantinople.
- **May 19, 715**: Consecrated bishop of Rome.
- **715-716**: Sends Corbinian on mission to Bavaria.
- **718**: Asks Petronax to restore the abbey of Monte Cassino.
- **May 15, 719**: Gives Wynfrith of Wessex the name Boniface and sends him to evangelize Germany.
- **727**: Refuses the iconoclast edicts of Emperor Leo III.
- **729**: Persuades the Lombard king Liutprand to lift the siege of Rome.
- **February 11, 731**: Dies in Rome.

## A missionary pope

Gregory II's most lasting act was probably the mission he entrusted to the Anglo-Saxon monk Wynfrith, from the kingdom of Wessex in England. In 719 he gave him the name Boniface and sent him to proclaim the Gospel in Hesse and Thuringia; he consecrated him bishop in 722. Saint Boniface would become known as "the apostle of Germany."

In the very first year of his pontificate, the pope had already sent Corbinian, the future bishop of Freising, to Bavaria. Gregory understood that the future of the faith lay also among the peoples beyond the old borders of the Empire.

## Monte Cassino reborn

Having founded a monastery himself, Gregory also supported monastic life. In 718 he asked the monk Petronax to restore Monte Cassino, the monastery founded by Saint Benedict and destroyed by the Lombards about one hundred and forty years earlier. The abbey came back to life and gradually regained its influence.

For the many Benedictines, oblates and friends of Benedictine spirituality in the English-speaking world, this is a debt worth remembering: the great abbey that is the cradle of their tradition owes its rebirth in part to this pope.

## Standing firm against iconoclasm

In 726-727, Emperor Leo III the Isaurian forbade the veneration of holy images. Ordered to apply his edicts under threat of being deposed, Gregory II refused and warned the faithful to guard themselves against this doctrine.

In Italy, the crisis turned into revolt against the imperial officials: the exarch of Ravenna was killed in a riot, and the Romans set up a form of self-government in which the pope played a growing role.

Caught between Byzantium and the Lombards, he relied above all on the power of words. In 729, when King Liutprand and the exarch Eutychius appeared before Rome, he went out to meet the Lombard king and convinced him to lift the siege. These years prepared the slow drawing together of the papacy and the Frankish West, which his successors would carry on.

## Why is Saint Gregory II remembered today?

No particular patronage is attached to Saint Gregory II, and we know of no miracles or spiritual writings by him. What the Church honors in him is a shepherd who held firm on the faith without seeking a break, and who looked beyond the quarrels of his time toward peoples who did not yet know Christ.

His successor, Gregory III, immediately renewed the condemnation of iconoclasm.

His pontificate holds together three things the Church always needs: the mission to those who have not heard the Gospel, the life of prayer kept alive in monasteries, and fidelity to the faith even when the powerful demand otherwise. In sending Boniface, an Englishman, to the Germanic peoples, he also showed how the young Churches of the British Isles had become, in turn, a source of missionaries for the Continent.

## Symbols and how to recognize Saint Gregory II in art

- **Papal vestments** and a halo, in the series of papal portraits.
- **The mosaic medallion** of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, an imaginary portrait in the gallery of the popes.

## Where to pray to Saint Gregory II

No major shrine is dedicated to Saint Gregory II. In Rome, pilgrims can remember him at Saint Peter's Basilica and at Saint Paul Outside the Walls, where his portrait appears among the popes. Monte Cassino, which he helped restore, and Fulda in Germany, where Saint Boniface is buried, also keep the memory of his work. You can pray with him using the prayer to Saint Gregory II and the novena to Saint Gregory II.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Gregory II for Missionaries

No traditional prayer to Pope Saint Gregory II has come down to us, and none of his spiritual writings survive. His memory lives on through the missions he launched, the abbey he helped restore and his firm defense of holy images. Here is an original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by his pontificate.

## Prayer to Saint Gregory II for missionaries

*Saint Gregory II, monk and shepherd of the Church of Rome, you sent Boniface and Corbinian to peoples who did not yet know Christ. Pray for all missionaries today, that they may proclaim the Gospel with courage and love.*

*You loved the life of prayer and had the house of Saint Benedict rebuilt on Monte Cassino. Pray for monks and nuns, and for all who seek God in silence and work.*

*You refused to abandon the veneration of holy images when the emperor demanded it. Obtain for us the grace to hold fast to the faith with gentleness and firmness, without fear of the powerful.*

*You went out to meet a king at the gates of Rome and won peace by your words. Make us peacemakers in our families, our cities and our world.*

*I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Present it to the Lord, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.*

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

## When to pray this prayer

Saint Gregory II is commemorated on February 11, the anniversary of his death in Rome in 731. This prayer is especially fitting:

- for missionaries, catechists and all who share the faith with those who do not know Christ;
- on World Mission Sunday, in October, or when supporting a missionary;
- for monasteries and for vocations to religious life;
- in times of pressure against the faith, at work or in public life;
- for peace when a city or a family is threatened by conflict.

To pray with him over nine days, see the novena to Saint Gregory II, and discover the life of Saint Gregory II.

NOVENA

# Novena to Pope Saint Gregory II

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Pope Saint Gregory II, who led the Church from 715 to 731. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his commemoration of February 11, begin on February 3. It can also be prayed at any time for missionaries, for monasteries or for courage in the faith.

## How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. If you can, pray in front of an icon or a sacred image, in the spirit of the pope who defended them. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life.

You may begin each day with this prayer: *Lord, you gave your Church a faithful and missionary shepherd in Saint Gregory II. Through his intercession, make me a witness to your Gospel, and hear the prayer I bring you today. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply continue where you stopped. What matters is perseverance and trust.

## Day 1: A house given to God

Born in Rome in 669 into a wealthy family, Gregory founded a community of monks in his own villa. He put what he owned at the service of prayer. Our homes, too, can become places where God is welcome.

**Prayer:** Lord, make my home a place of prayer, peace and welcome.

**Today:** Set up a small prayer corner at home, with a cross or an image.

## Day 2: Serving the Church

Gregory served the Church of Rome as deacon, in charge of finances and of the library. Before leading, he learned to serve in practical tasks. Every service in the Church, even the most hidden, builds up the Body of Christ.

**Prayer:** Lord, bless all who serve in my parish, seen and unseen.

**Today:** Offer to help with a task in your parish.

## Day 3: Learning to speak with the powerful

As a young deacon, he went with Pope Constantine to Constantinople to negotiate with the emperor. He learned there how to speak with courage and respect to those in power.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me the right words when I must defend what is true and just.

**Today:** Pray for those who govern your country, and for Christians in public life.

## Day 4: Sent to the nations

In 719 Gregory gave the English monk Wynfrith the name Boniface and sent him to Germany. A new name meant a new mission. Each of us receives at baptism a name and a calling to bear witness to Christ.

**Prayer:** Lord, bless all missionaries, and show me how to share my faith where I live.

**Today:** Support a missionary or a mission society through prayer or a gift.

## Day 5: Beginning again

Monte Cassino, the monastery of Saint Benedict, had lain in ruins for about one hundred and forty years. In 718 Gregory asked Petronax to restore it, and it came back to life. With God, what has been destroyed can be rebuilt.

**Prayer:** Lord, rebuild what is broken in my life, and give me the courage to begin again.

**Today:** Take one step to repair something damaged: a relationship, a habit, a promise.

## Day 6: Pray and work

By restoring Monte Cassino, Gregory helped Benedictine life flourish again: a life of prayer and work, of stability and welcome. That rhythm can shape our ordinary days too.

**Prayer:** Lord, teach me to unite prayer and work, and to find you in both.

**Today:** Begin your work with a short prayer and offer it to God.

## Day 7: Holding fast to the faith

When Emperor Leo III forbade the veneration of images, Gregory refused, even under threat. He knew that honoring an image of Christ or of the saints is honoring the one it represents. Faithfulness sometimes means saying no.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me firmness in faith and gentleness in the way I defend it.

**Today:** Pray before an icon or holy image, and thank God for sacred art.

## Day 8: The power of words

In 729 the Lombard king stood before Rome. Gregory went out to meet him and persuaded him to lift the siege. He did not rely on arms but on the word spoken with courage.

**Prayer:** Lord, make me a peacemaker, and let my words build peace and not division.

**Today:** Speak a word of peace in a tense situation, or keep silent instead of answering harshly.

## Day 9: A shepherd's death

Gregory died in Rome on February 11, 731, after sixteen years of service. He left behind missions that would bear fruit for centuries. We rarely see the full harvest of what we sow.

**Prayer:** Lord, let the good I do bear fruit beyond my life, for your glory.

**Today:** Pray for the Pope, for the missions and for the dying.

## Closing prayer

> *Saint Gregory II, shepherd of the Church and friend of monks, you sent missionaries to the nations, rebuilt the house of Saint Benedict and held fast to the faith before the emperor. Pray for missionaries, for monasteries and for all who are tempted to give up their faith. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days, and make me a faithful witness to the Gospel. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Continue with the prayer to Saint Gregory II or read the life of Saint Gregory II.

CREDITS

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