BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gregory the Decapolite

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 20

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Gregory the Decapolite

9th-century Byzantine monk, pilgrim and defender of icons during the second iconoclast period.

Feast day	November 20
Born	late 8th century, Eirenopolis, Decapolis of Isauria (present-day Turkey)
Died	November 20, 842, Constantinople
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	9th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Gregory the Decapolite for Pilgrims and Travelers

Novena to Saint Gregory the Decapolite

Bistrița Monastery (Vâlcea)

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Gregory the Decapolite

Saint Gregory the Decapolite was a Byzantine monk born at the end of the 8th century in Isauria, in the south of present-day Turkey, who died in Constantinople on November 20, 842. A great traveler, from Asia Minor to Rome and Sicily, he defended the veneration of icons during the second iconoclast period. His feast is November 20. Since the end of the 15th century his relics have been venerated at the monastery of Bistrița, in Romania.

Who was Saint Gregory the Decapolite?

Gregory takes his name from the Decapolis of Isauria, a group of ten cities in the mountainous region north of the southern coast of Asia Minor. He belongs to the generation of monks who resisted iconoclasm, the imperial policy that forbade and destroyed images of Christ and the saints. His life is well known thanks to a text written shortly after his death by Ignatius the Deacon, a renowned Byzantine author. This Life follows Gregory in his many journeys and shows a monk who was at once an ascetic, a pilgrim and a spiritual master. Like every hagiographical account, it includes marvelous episodes, but it rests on the testimony of his close disciples.

Key dates in the life of Gregory

- **Late 8th century**: Born at Eirenopolis, in the Decapolis of Isauria; his mother, Mary, is very devout.
- **Around the age of eight**: According to his Life, he begins to study the Holy Scriptures.
- **Youth**: To escape the marriage his parents want for him, he leaves home and spends fourteen months in a monastery of his region, then lives in a cave.

- **Following years**: He stays near Ephesus, on Mount Olympus in Bithynia, in Constantinople and on the island of Proconnesus.
- **Then**: He crosses Thrace and Macedonia to Thessalonica, then goes to Italy: Reggio di Calabria, Rome, Syracuse, Otranto.
- **830s**: Back in Thessalonica, he becomes friends with the young monk Joseph, the future Saint Joseph the Hymnographer.
- **c. 840**: With Joseph, he settles in Constantinople, near the church of Saint Antipas, a center of the defenders of icons.
- **November 20, 842**: Dies in Constantinople, four months before the official restoration of the veneration of images.
- **1498**: His relics, taken to Wallachia after the fall of Constantinople, are placed in the monastery of Bistrița.

The pilgrim monk

Very early, Gregory felt called to consecrated life. When his parents wanted him to marry, he ran away. So began his life as a wandering monk, which the Life describes in detail. After a few months in a monastery of his homeland, he withdrew to a cave, then crossed Asia Minor. We find him near Ephesus, then on Mount Olympus in Bithynia, a great center of Byzantine monasticism. He passed through Constantinople and the island of Proconnesus, then through Thrace and Macedonia to Thessalonica, where he stayed for a time near the church of Saint Menas.

Taking to the road again, he reached Corinth and crossed the sea to Reggio di Calabria. He stayed in Rome, Syracuse and Otranto. These journeys were not tourism: for the monks of that time, voluntary exile was a form of asceticism, a way of having no homeland but God. They also allowed him to meet other communities and, in the midst of the iconoclast crisis, to stay in contact with the Church of Rome, which supported the veneration of images.

The defender of icons

In the 830s, Gregory returned to Thessalonica. There he met a young Sicilian monk, Joseph, who became his disciple and friend. Around 840, they both settled in Constantinople, near the church of Saint Antipas, where the iconodules, the defenders of holy images, gathered. Gregory also had another disciple, John, who like him came from Isauria. In 841, Joseph was sent to Rome to carry a message to Pope Gregory IV, but he was captured by pirates and held in Crete. When he returned, his master was dead. Gregory died on November 20, 842. Four months later, in March 843, Empress Theodora and Patriarch Methodius officially restored the veneration of icons: what Gregory had defended triumphed.

Cult and relics

His disciples spread his cult in Constantinople. A few years later, Joseph the Hymnographer founded a monastery dedicated both to the apostle Bartholomew and to Gregory the Decapolite, and composed a liturgical canon in his honor. Ignatius the Deacon wrote his Life. After the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, his relics were taken to Wallachia. In 1498, the boyar Barbu Craiovescu bought them at great cost and placed them in the church of the monastery of Bistriţa, which he had just founded, in what is now Vâlcea County, Romania. They are still venerated there. Gregory is honored by the Catholic Church and by the Orthodox Churches on November 20. Icons show him as an elderly monk with a long beard, often holding a scroll or a cross.

What can we learn from Saint Gregory the Decapolite?

Gregory made his life a pilgrimage. He sought neither security nor recognition, but God alone, and he passed on to his disciples the love of Christ and of his image. He reminds us that the faith is also defended by quiet faithfulness, and

that the trials of the Church do not last forever. We can pray to him for travelers and pilgrims, for monks, and for those who keep the faith in difficult times.

Where to pray to Saint Gregory the Decapolite

- **Bistrița Monastery** (Vâlcea County, Romania): the church where his relics have rested since 1498.
- **Thessalonica** (Greece): the city where he stayed and met Joseph the Hymnographer.
- In any church, on November 20, praying for Christians who defend their faith.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gregory the Decapolite for Pilgrims and Travelers

Saint Gregory the Decapolite, a Byzantine monk of the 9th century, traveled through Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, and defended the veneration of icons until his death in Constantinople in 842. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him travelers and pilgrims, monks, and all who remain faithful in times of trial.

Prayer to Saint Gregory the Decapolite

Saint Gregory,
you left your home and your homeland
to have no dwelling but God.
Teach me to live my life as a pilgrimage
and not to cling to what passes away.

You who loved the image of Christ
when others wanted to destroy it,
help me to contemplate his face
and to recognize it in my brothers and sisters.

Watch over those who travel by land and sea,
over pilgrims and those far from home.
Keep in the faith those who are going through trials,
and give them hope in the day when the light returns.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Gregory the Decapolite

- On his feast day, November 20.
- Before a journey or a pilgrimage.
- For monks and nuns, especially those of Bistrița.
- When the faith is mocked or opposed around you.
- Before an icon, to learn to pray with the eyes of the heart.

A short invocation

> *Lord, let your face shine on us, and we shall be saved.*
> *Saint Gregory, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Gregory the Decapolite from November 12 to 20, and discover the life of Saint Gregory the Decapolite.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gregory the Decapolite

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is inspired by the life of Saint Gregory the Decapolite, pilgrim monk and defender of icons in the 9th century. To finish it on his feast day, November 20, begin on November 12. You can also pray it at any other time, for example before a journey or a pilgrimage.

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: "Saint Gregory, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come from the Life written by Ignatius the Deacon shortly after his death.

Day 1: A praying mother

Gregory's mother, Mary, was very devout. It was with her that the child learned to love God and the Scriptures.

Prayer: Lord, bless mothers who pray for their children, and make the love of your Word grow in us.

Act of the day: Read a passage of the Gospel slowly.

Day 2: Choosing God

When his parents wanted him to marry, Gregory left home to follow the call he felt within him.

Prayer: Lord, give young people the courage to answer your call, whatever it may be.

Act of the day: Pray for a young person seeking their vocation.

Day 3: The cave and the silence

After a time in the monastery, Gregory lived alone in a cave. In solitude, he learned to listen to God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be silent so as to hear you.

Act of the day: Take fifteen minutes of complete silence.

Day 4: The pilgrim on the roads

From Ephesus to Thessalonica, from Corinth to Rome, Gregory walked and sailed. He had no homeland but God.

Prayer: Lord, protect travelers and pilgrims, and remind me that I am on my way to you.

Act of the day: Make a usual journey on foot while praying.

Day 5: The one Church

Gregory stayed in Rome, Sicily and Calabria. A monk of the East, he also prayed with the Church of the West.

Prayer: Lord, gather your Churches of East and West in the unity you desire.

Act of the day: Pray for Christian unity.

Day 6: Spiritual friendship

In Thessalonica, Gregory met the young Joseph. A deep friendship grew between master and disciple.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the friends who lead me to you. Make me a faithful friend.

Act of the day: Thank a friend who helps you in your faith.

Day 7: Loving the face of Christ

In Constantinople, Gregory and his disciples defended the veneration of icons. Because God became man, his face can be depicted and contemplated.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Word made flesh, show me your face.

Act of the day: Pray for a few minutes before an icon or an image of Christ.

Day 8: Persevering in trial

Gregory died four months before the triumph of icons. He did not see the end of the trial, but he remained faithful to the end.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to persevere even when I do not see the fruits of my faithfulness.

Act of the day: Patiently take up again a good resolution you had abandoned.

Day 9: A saint who still travels

His relics were carried to Wallachia, to the monastery of Bistrița, where people still come to venerate them. The pilgrim still draws pilgrims.

Prayer: Lord, bless the monks and pilgrims of Bistrița. Through the intercession of Saint Gregory, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass, or pray for those setting out on pilgrimage.

Closing prayer

Saint Gregory the Decapolite,
pilgrim of God and friend of holy icons,
you left everything to follow Christ
and remained faithful in the storm.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Guide my steps on the path that leads to him.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Gregory the Decapolite at any time, and discover the life of Saint Gregory the Decapolite.

PILGRIMAGE

Bistrița Monastery (Vâlcea)

The monastery of Bistrița is in Romania, in Vâlcea County, at the foot of the Southern Carpathians, not far from the town of Râmnicu Vâlcea. An Orthodox monastery founded at the end of the 15th century, it has kept since 1498 the relics of Saint Gregory the Decapolite, the Byzantine monk who died in Constantinople in 842. It is one of the best-known places of pilgrimage in the region of Oltenia.

The history of the monastery

The monastery was founded by the Craioveşti, a powerful family of Wallachian boyars. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the relics of Saint Gregory the Decapolite had been taken to the Romanian principalities. In 1498, the boyar Barbu Craiovescu bought them for a considerable sum and placed them in the main church of his new foundation. For more than five centuries, they have been venerated there by the faithful from all over Romania.

Like many Romanian monasteries, Bistrița has known destruction and rebuilding over the centuries, and not all of its present buildings date from the foundation. Monastic life continues there today.

What you can see

The heart of the pilgrimage is the monastery church, where the relics of Saint Gregory are kept in a reliquary. The faithful come to pray there and venerate them, according to Orthodox custom. The monastery is surrounded by wooded hills and forms, with the other monasteries of the region, such as Hurezi, a remarkable group of places of prayer. On the saint's feast day, November 20, pilgrims come in great numbers.

Praying there

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Gregory the Decapolite. Before his relics, entrust to him travelers, monks and the unity of Christians of East and West, then say the prayer to Saint Gregory the Decapolite. Bistriţa is an Orthodox monastery: Catholics are welcome there as pilgrims and visitors, respecting the customs of the place. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

The monastery can be reached by road from Râmnicu Vâlcea. Modest dress is required: shoulders and legs covered and, according to local custom, a headscarf for women. Service and visiting times may vary: check with the monastery or the tourist services of Vâlcea County before your visit.

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com