

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Hegesippus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 7

IN BRIEF

Saint Hegesippus

Christian writer of the 2nd century, often called the first historian of the Church.

Feast day	April 7
Born	early 2nd century, Palestine (probably)
Died	c. 180
Era	2nd century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Hegesippus for Fidelity to the Faith

Novena to Saint Hegesippus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Hegesippus

Saint Hegesippus was a Christian writer of the second century, often called the first historian of the Church. Coming from the East, he spent many years in Rome to make sure that the Churches were faithfully handing on the teaching of the apostles, and he wrote five books of "Memoirs." His work is lost, but Eusebius of Caesarea preserved precious extracts from it, especially about the first Christians of Jerusalem and the family of Jesus. His feast day is April 7.

Who was Saint Hegesippus?

Almost everything we know about him comes from the *Church History* of Eusebius of Caesarea, written in the early fourth century. Hegesippus was probably born at the beginning of the second century in the East, most likely in Palestine. Eusebius considered him a Christian of Jewish origin, because he knew Jewish traditions well and quoted texts in Hebrew and Aramaic. He died around 180.

His name is tied to a journey. Troubled by the spread of new doctrines, especially the Gnostic movements that claimed to possess a secret teaching, Hegesippus set out for the West to check the faith of the great Churches for himself. He passed through Corinth, where he spoke with the bishop, and then arrived in Rome in the time of Pope Saint Anicetus. He stayed there about twenty years, until the time of Pope Saint Eleutherius.

In an age when Christians had no printed Bible, no catechism and no easy way to compare what was preached from one city to another, this kind of patient inquiry mattered a great deal. Hegesippus did not invent a new theology. He went, he listened, he compared, and he wrote down what he found.

Key dates in the life of Saint Hegesippus

- **Early 2nd century**: Born in the East, probably in Palestine.
- **c. 155-160**: Travels to Rome by way of Corinth and arrives under Pope Anicetus.
- **c. 160-180**: Lives in Rome and writes the five books of the *Memoirs*.
- **c. 175**: Beginning of the pontificate of Eleutherius, under whom he is still writing.
- **c. 180**: Dies, perhaps in Jerusalem according to one tradition.

Checking the tradition of the apostles

The five books of Hegesippus, called *Hypomnemata* ("Memoirs"), were not a history in the modern sense. They were rather notes meant to show that the true faith is the one the apostles handed on openly, from bishop to bishop, in each Church. Hegesippus states that he found, in Corinth as in Rome, that people taught what the Law, the prophets and the Lord proclaimed.

He is also said to have drawn up a list of the succession of the bishops of Rome down to Anicetus. Eusebius may have used it, although historians still debate this point. Either way, the idea behind it is clear: a Church can show that its faith is apostolic because it can name the shepherds who received it and passed it on, one after another.

This approach foreshadows the method of Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, who a few years later used the succession of bishops to refute the Gnostics. Hegesippus therefore stands at the very beginning of a way of thinking that became central for Catholics: the faith is not a private discovery but a gift received through the living Church.

The first Christians of Jerusalem

The fragments preserved by Eusebius are especially precious for the history of the Church of Jerusalem. In them Hegesippus tells of the martyrdom of Saint James the Just, "the brother of the Lord" and leader of the Jerusalem community, and describes his life of prayer and self-denial.

He reports that after the death of James and the fall of Jerusalem, the apostles and the relatives of the Lord who were still alive chose Simeon, son of Clopas, to succeed him. Simeon was said to be a cousin of the Savior, because Clopas was the brother of Joseph.

Hegesippus also tells how the grandsons of Jude, another relative of the Lord, were brought before the emperor Domitian. They were simple farmers with hands hardened by work, and the emperor let them go when he saw how poor they were. The historical value of these stories is debated in their details, but they are among the very few ancient witnesses to the family of Jesus and to the Christians of Jewish origin.

What does his holiness teach us?

Hegesippus was neither a martyr nor a known bishop. His holiness is that of a seeker of truth, who traveled far to make sure the Church was faithful to the teaching received from the apostles. He reminds us that the Christian faith rests on a witness passed down from generation to generation.

He is listed in the Roman Martyrology on April 7 and is also honored by the Eastern Churches. For readers today, he is a quiet patron of everyone who studies Church history, checks sources carefully and wants to know what the first Christians really believed.

Is Saint Hegesippus the patron saint of anything?

The Church has not given Saint Hegesippus any official patronage. Because of his work, however, he is naturally invoked by historians, researchers, catechists and students of the early Church, and by anyone who wants to remain faithful to the teaching of the apostles in a time of confusion.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Hegesippus in art

Images of Hegesippus are rare. The best known is the woodcut of the Nuremberg Chronicle (1493), which shows him as a learned man holding a book. That is the simplest way to picture him: a scholar and a witness, with the book of the faith he received and handed on.

Where to pray to Saint Hegesippus

No major shrine or relic of Saint Hegesippus is known. One tradition places his death in Jerusalem, and he lived for some twenty years in Rome, where he gathered his information about the apostolic succession. Wherever you are, the best way to honor him is to read the Scriptures and the writings of the early Church, and to pray with the Church on his feast day, April 7.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Hegesippus or make the novena to Saint Hegesippus.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Hegesippus for Fidelity to the Faith

Saint Hegesippus left no prayer that has come down to us, and no traditional prayer to him exists in English. His life, however, gives a clear direction for prayer: he traveled from the East to Rome to make sure that the Churches were faithful to the teaching of the apostles. This prayer asks for that same love of the truth and that same fidelity to the faith received. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Hegesippus for Fidelity to the Faith

Saint Hegesippus, faithful witness of the early Church,
you left your homeland to seek the faith of the apostles,
and you found it handed on, whole and living,
in Corinth, in Rome and in every Church you visited.

Pray for me, that I may love the truth more than my own opinions,
that I may listen before I judge,
and that I may receive the Gospel as a gift from those who came before me.

You who recorded the courage of Saint James the Just
and the simple faith of the relatives of the Lord,
help me to treasure the memory of the Church
and to pass it on, unchanged, to those who come after me.

Protect all who study Scripture and the history of the Church,
all catechists, teachers and parents who hand on the faith.
In times of confusion, keep us united with the successors of the apostles.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me a steady and humble faith,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray this prayer

This prayer is well suited to his feast day, April 7, but it can be prayed at any time. It is especially fitting:

- before studying the Bible, theology or Church history;
- when you are unsure what the Church really teaches and want to seek the truth honestly;

- for catechists, teachers of religion and parents preparing children for the sacraments;
- for unity in the Church and fidelity to the faith of the apostles.

A short prayer with the Creed

Hegesippus spent his life checking that the faith preached in each city was the faith of the apostles. A simple way to pray with him is to recite the Apostles' Creed slowly, then add:

> *Saint Hegesippus, you who sought the faith of the apostles, help me to believe it, live it and hand it on. Amen.*

To learn more about him, read the life of Saint Hegesippus, or pray the novena to Saint Hegesippus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Hegesippus

This novena to Saint Hegesippus is an original composition by Saintspedia. For nine days, it walks with the second-century writer who traveled to Rome to verify the faith of the apostles and who preserved the memory of the first Christians of Jerusalem. To end on his feast day, April 7, begin it on March 30. It can also be prayed at any time of year, for example before a course of study, in a time of doubt or for a catechist you love.

How to pray this novena

Each day, choose a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, pray the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small concrete act suggested for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: A seeker of truth

Hegesippus was troubled by the many new doctrines circulating in his time. Instead of choosing what pleased him, he set out to find what the apostles had really taught. His first gift to us is this honest desire for the truth.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, give me a heart that seeks the truth and does not settle for easy answers. Help me to love Christ, who is the Truth. Amen.

Today: Name one question about the faith you have never taken the time to look into, and write it down.

Day 2: The courage to set out

He left the East and traveled to the West, through Corinth and on to Rome. Such a journey in the second century was long, costly and uncertain. Seeking God often asks us to leave our comfort.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, help me to leave my habits and my certainties when the Lord calls me further. Give me the courage to set out. Amen.

Today: Take one small step you have been putting off in your spiritual life, such as going to confession or joining a parish group.

Day 3: Listening before judging

In Corinth, Hegesippus spoke with the bishop and listened. He did not arrive with a verdict already written. Listening is a form of humility and of charity.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, teach me to listen to others with patience, and to hear the voice of the Church before I judge. Amen.

Today: In one conversation today, listen fully before giving your own opinion.

Day 4: The faith of the apostles

In Corinth and in Rome, he found that the Churches taught what the Law, the prophets and the Lord proclaimed. The faith is not our invention: it is received, and we are called to keep it whole.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, help me to receive the faith of the apostles with gratitude and to keep it without adding or removing anything. Amen.

Today: Pray the Apostles' Creed slowly, pausing on each article.

Day 5: Bishops who hand on the Gospel

Hegesippus paid close attention to the succession of bishops, one after another, in each Church. Through them, the Gospel has reached us across the centuries.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, I pray for the Pope, for my bishop and for all pastors. May they guard the faith and serve their people with love. Amen.

Today: Learn the name of your bishop and pray for him by name.

Day 6: Saint James the Just

Hegesippus recorded the prayerful life and the martyrdom of James, "the brother of the Lord" and leader of the Church in Jerusalem. Without him, much of this memory would have been lost.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, with Saint James the Just, pray for all who suffer for their faith today. Give them strength and peace. Amen.

Today: Pray one decade of the Rosary for persecuted Christians.

Day 7: The poor relatives of the Lord

He told of the grandsons of Jude, simple farmers with work-hardened hands, released by the emperor Domitian because of their poverty. The faith was carried by humble people.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, help me to recognize the greatness of the humble and to honor the faith of simple people. Amen.

Today: Thank someone whose quiet work usually goes unnoticed.

Day 8: Keeping memory alive

His books are lost, but the extracts preserved by Eusebius still speak to us. What we pass on can bear fruit long after us, in ways we will never see.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, help me to pass on the faith to the next generation, in my family, my parish and my work. Amen.

Today: Share a story of faith, from the saints or from your own family, with a child or a friend.

Day 9: Faithful to the end

Hegesippus died around 180, after a life given to checking and handing on the truth. He was not a martyr or a famous bishop, yet the Church remembers him as a saint.

Prayer: Saint Hegesippus, obtain for me the grace of perseverance, so that I may remain faithful to Christ and to his Church all my life. Amen.

Today: Make a simple resolution for the coming months to grow in knowledge of the faith, such as reading one Gospel chapter each day.

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you founded your Church on the apostles and gave them successors to guard the faith. Through the prayers of Saint Hegesippus, who sought and recorded the tradition of the apostles, keep us in the truth, unite us in charity and make us faithful witnesses of your Gospel. Hear the intention I entrust to you in this novena. You who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Hegesippus and the prayer to Saint Hegesippus.

Credits and sources

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