

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Hermenegild

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 13

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IN BRIEF

Saint Hermenegild

Visigothic prince who converted from Arianism to the Catholic faith and was martyred on his father's orders in 585.

Feast day	April 13
Born	c. 560
Died	April 13, 585, Tarragona, Spain
Canonized	16th century, by Pope Sixtus V
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Hermenegild

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Hermenegild

Saint Hermenegild was a 6th-century Visigothic prince, the eldest son of King Leovigild of Spain. Raised in Arianism, the official religion of his people, he embraced the Catholic faith in Seville under the influence of his wife and of Bishop Leander, went to war against his father, and then, defeated and imprisoned, refused to receive communion from an Arian bishop. He was executed in Tarragona in 585. Spain venerates him as a martyr for the unity of the faith, and his feast is April 13.

Who was Saint Hermenegild?

Hermenegild was born around 560. He was the eldest son of Leovigild, king of the Visigoths in Spain, and of his first wife, Theodosia; his younger brother was Reccared. Like all the Visigoths, the royal family was Arian. Arianism taught that the Son is not equal to the Father, a doctrine rejected by the Council of Nicaea. The Hispano-Roman population, by contrast, was Catholic. This religious divide ran through the whole kingdom.

In 573, Leovigild made his two sons associates in power in order to secure his dynasty. The following year, Hermenegild received the government of Seville and of Baetica, present-day Andalusia. In 579, he married Ingund, a Frankish princess, daughter of King Sigebert of Austrasia and Queen Brunhild. She was Catholic and remained so despite the pressure of the court.



The Triumph of Saint Hermenegild, by Francisco Herrera the Younger (1654), Prado Museum, Madrid.

Key dates

- **c. 560**: Birth, eldest son of King Leovigild.
- **573**: He is associated with royal power alongside his brother Reccared.
- **574**: He receives the government of Seville.
- **579**: Marriage to the Catholic Frankish princess Ingund.
- **c. 580**: Conversion to the Catholic faith, under the influence of Ingund and Bishop Leander of Seville.
- **583**: He proclaims himself king; his father besieges Seville.
- **584**: Seville falls; Hermenegild is taken prisoner.
- **April 13, 585**: Executed in Tarragona after refusing Arian communion at Easter.
- **589**: His brother Reccared, now king, makes Catholicism the religion of the kingdom.

Conversion in Seville

In Seville, Hermenegild came into contact with Bishop Leander, a great shepherd of Catholic Spain and the elder brother of Isidore of Seville. Pope Gregory the Great, a friend of Leander, reports that it was Leander who converted him. The prince publicly renounced Arianism in the main church of the city.

The gesture was as political as it was religious. It broke with the faith of his father and of his own people, and it brought him closer to the Catholic population he governed. Leovigild summoned him to Toledo. Hermenegild refused to go and was deposed. In 583, supported by the Catholic Hispano-Romans, by the Suevi of Galicia, and by the hope of Byzantine and Frankish help, he proclaimed himself king.

War against his father

Leovigild laid siege to Seville. He diverted the Guadalquivir River to block a Byzantine fleet and cut the city's aqueduct. A year of hunger and disease decimated the inhabitants. To spare them an assault, Hermenegild left the city by night with six hundred loyal men and took refuge in a nearby fortress.

Abandoned by his allies, he eventually surrendered. His men laid down their arms, and he took refuge alone in a chapel.



The church of San Hermenegildo in Seville, the city of his conversion.

The Easter refusal and martyrdom

As a captive, Hermenegild was taken to Valencia, then to Tarragona. At Easter 585, his father sent him an Arian bishop so that he would receive communion from his hands, promising him freedom and the return of his rank if he accepted. The prince refused and called the bishop a heretic. When Leovigild learned of it, he ordered his execution. According to the tradition of Tarragona, he was beheaded on April 13, 585, in the underground rooms of the city's old Roman palace.

His death did not stop the movement he had begun. In 589, at the Third Council of Toledo, his brother Reccared, now king, abandoned Arianism and made the Catholic faith the religion of the whole Visigothic kingdom.

A debated saint

Hermenegild's conduct has been judged severely by several writers, including some on his own side: he had himself crowned without right and called on foreign armies against the legitimate king. The Church, for her part, has honored the prince's faithfulness to his faith until death.

Pope Sixtus V canonized him in the 16th century, and the Roman Martyrology presents him as a king who "exchanged an earthly kingdom for the kingdom of heaven." The Spanish poet Luis de Góngora dedicated an ode to him.

Why do Catholics pray to Saint Hermenegild?

Saint Hermenegild has no widely recognized patronage outside Spain, and he is not a model of political conduct. His holiness is concentrated in one final act: at the hour when everything was lost, he preferred death to a communion that would have denied his faith.

His story also touches on the family wounds that religious choices can cause. He is prayed to for converts, for people who must choose between their conscience and their interests, and for the reconciliation of divided families.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Hermenegild in art

Spanish Baroque painters often represented him as a young prince in armor or royal dress, sometimes crowned, holding a cross or the palm of martyrdom. Some works show him in chains in his prison, refusing the cup offered by an Arian bishop. The most famous image, the *Triumph of Saint Hermenegild* by Francisco Herrera the Younger (1654), shows him carried to heaven by angels above his defeated father and the Arian bishop.



The Roman praetorium in Tarragona, which tradition links to his martyrdom.

Where to pray to Saint Hermenegild

- **Seville, Spain**: the church of San Hermenegildo, in the city of his conversion.
- **Tarragona, Spain**: the Roman remains that tradition associates with his captivity and death.
- **Madrid, Spain**: the Prado Museum, which holds the *Triumph of Saint Hermenegild* by Francisco Herrera the Younger.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Hermenegild for Faithfulness and Divided Families

There is no ancient prayer to Saint Hermenegild that has remained in common use outside Spain. Yet the Roman Martyrology sums up his life in one sentence that lends itself to meditation. You will find it below, followed by an original prayer for faithfulness and for divided families.

The witness of the Roman Martyrology

> *"Having been cast into prison for the confession of the Catholic faith, and having refused to receive communion from the hand of an Arian bishop at the solemnity of Easter, he was struck with an axe by order of his faithless father; and so, king and martyr, he exchanged an earthly kingdom for the kingdom of heaven."*

Source: Roman Martyrology, April 13, traditional text.

Prayer to Saint Hermenegild for faithfulness and divided families

Saint Hermenegild, prince and martyr, you discovered the Catholic faith as an adult and proclaimed it before all: pray for those who are journeying toward baptism or returning to the faith.

You preferred prison and death to a communion that would have betrayed your conscience: help me to remain faithful when the truth is costly, and never to buy my comfort at the price of my faith.

You knew war with your own father: pray for families torn apart by conflict, resentment or religious choices. Obtain for them peace and forgiveness.

Your sacrifice came before the conversion of your whole people: help us to believe that faithfulness bears fruit, even when we cannot see it. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

May I seek first the kingdom of heaven, and may the Lord keep me in his love. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Hermenegild is celebrated on April 13, the day of his martyrdom in Tarragona in 585. This date often falls in the Easter season, which recalls his refusal of Arian communion at Easter. You may pray to him in particular:

- for adults preparing for baptism or for reception into the Church, especially during the Easter season;
- when you face a choice between your conscience and your interest;

- for families divided by conflict or by differences of faith;
- for Christians who suffer for their faith.

To go further, pray the novena to Saint Hermenegild, or read the life of Saint Hermenegild.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Hermenegild

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and martyrdom of Saint Hermenegild, the Visigothic prince who died for his Catholic faith in 585. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on April 5; it ends on April 13. You can also pray it at any time, for a convert, for a difficult decision of conscience, or for a divided family.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act proposed each day helps the prayer take root in daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

Day 1: Born a prince

Hermenegild was born to power, the eldest son of a king. He received a great deal: rank, education, a future. But none of these gifts could give him what he would later find in Christ. What we receive is meant to serve something greater than ourselves.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all I have received. Teach me to place my gifts at the service of your kingdom.

Today: Write down three gifts you have received, and thank God for each one.

Day 2: A faith received from others

Hermenegild came to the Catholic faith through his wife Ingund, who remained faithful despite pressure, and through Bishop Leander of Seville. Faith often passes through the witness of people close to us, a spouse, a friend,

a pastor.

Prayer: Saint Hermenegild, bless those who led me to the faith. Make me, in my turn, a witness for others.

Today: Pray for the person who first spoke to you of God, and thank them if you can.

Day 3: A public choice

The prince renounced Arianism publicly, in the main church of Seville. Faith is personal, but it is not private: there comes a time to say openly what we believe, even when it costs us.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage not to hide my faith out of fear of what others will think.

Today: Make a simple sign of faith in public: a sign of the cross before a meal, a word of witness.

Day 4: Converts and catechumens

Hermenegild discovered the Catholic faith as an adult. Every year, many adults ask for baptism or enter into full communion with the Church. They need our prayer and our welcome.

Prayer: Saint Hermenegild, accompany those who are preparing for baptism or returning to the faith. May they find in the Church a true home.

Today: Pray for the newly baptized of your parish, or welcome a newcomer warmly.

Day 5: A family torn apart

The conversion of Hermenegild led to war with his own father. Few wounds are deeper than those inside a family. Faith does not always bring immediate peace, but God can heal what seems broken forever.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the divided families I know, and my own. Heal the wounds and open paths of reconciliation.

Today: Take a small step toward a family member from whom you are distant: a message, a call, a prayer.

Day 6: The cost of mistakes

Hermenegild was not a perfect man. His revolt and his appeal to foreign armies brought suffering to Seville, besieged and starving. The saints are not people without faults, but people who let God have the last word over their lives.

Prayer: Lord, I recognize my wrong choices and their consequences for others. Have mercy on me, and bring good out of what I have spoiled.

Today: Examine your conscience honestly, and consider going to confession.

Day 7: Captivity

Defeated and abandoned by his allies, Hermenegild was led from prison to prison. Everything he had relied on fell away. In that poverty, only his faith remained, and it was enough.

Prayer: Saint Hermenegild, pray for prisoners, for those who have lost everything, and for those who feel abandoned.

Today: Pray for prisoners, or support a work that helps them.

Day 8: The Easter refusal

At Easter 585, he was offered freedom and his rank in exchange for receiving communion from an Arian bishop. He refused. For him, communion was not a formality: it expressed the faith of the whole Church, and he would not deny it.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, increase my respect and love for your Body. May I never receive you out of habit.

Today: Spend a few minutes in adoration, or prepare carefully for your next communion.

Day 9: An earthly kingdom for the kingdom of heaven

Hermenegild died on April 13, 585. Four years later, his brother Reccared led the whole Visigothic kingdom into the Catholic faith. Faithfulness bears fruit, often after us and beyond us.

Prayer: Saint Hermenegild, king and martyr, help me to seek first the kingdom of heaven and to trust that nothing given to God is lost.

Today: Offer to God a sacrifice whose fruit you may never see.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Hermenegild, prince and martyr, you found the true faith in Seville and kept it to the end, preferring death to betrayal. Pray for converts and catechumens, for families divided by conflict, and for all who must choose between their conscience and their interest. Obtain for me the grace of faithfulness, and the intention I have entrusted to you during these nine days. Amen.*

To continue praying with him, use the prayer to Saint Hermenegild, or read his life.

CREDITS

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