

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Hippolytus of Rome

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: August 13

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IN BRIEF

Saint Hippolytus of Rome

Greek-speaking Roman priest, martyred in Sardinia around 235 with Pope Pontian.

Feast day	August 13
Born	Late 2nd century
Died	c. 235, Sardinia
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since the 4th century)
Era	3rd century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Hippolytus and Saint Pontian

Novena to Saint Hippolytus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Hippolytus of Rome

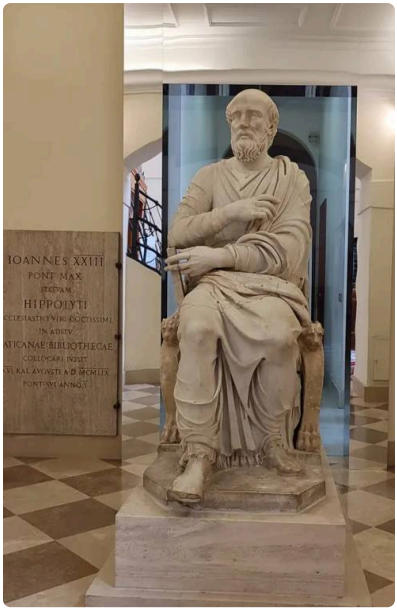
Saint Hippolytus of Rome was a Greek-speaking priest of the Church of Rome who died in exile in Sardinia around 235, together with Pope Saint Pontian. He is one of the most mysterious figures of the early centuries. Major works have been attributed to him, along with a fierce opposition to Pope Callixtus and even the title of first "antipope," but recent research has called much of this portrait into question. What remains solid is his martyrdom and his cult, celebrated in Rome on August 13 since the 4th century.

Who was Saint Hippolytus?

At the beginning of the 3rd century, the Christian community of Rome still spoke mostly Greek, although Latin was gaining ground. Hippolytus belonged to this circle of educated Greek-speaking Christians, many of whom had come from the East. The *Liber Pontificalis*, the ancient chronicle of the popes, describes him as a priest.

Around 235, Emperor Maximinus Thrax ordered a persecution aimed first of all at the leaders of the Church. Pope Pontian and Hippolytus were deported to the mines of Sardinia, where they died. Deportation to the mines was a slow death sentence: prisoners worked in chains, in exhausting conditions, far from their communities.

Pope Fabian later obtained permission to bring their bodies back to Rome. A Roman list of the feasts of martyrs, drawn up in the middle of the 4th century, records their memory on the same day, August 13: Hippolytus in the cemetery on the Via Tiburtina, Pontian in the catacomb of Callixtus. This ancient witness is the firmest ground on which our knowledge of him rests.



The so-called statue of Hippolytus, found in 1551 and kept at the Vatican.

Key dates in the life of Saint Hippolytus

- **Late 2nd century**: Born, at an unknown date and place.
- **Around 217-222**: Pontificate of Saint Callixtus, against whom an author often identified with Hippolytus wrote very harsh pages.
- **Around 235**: Deported to Sardinia with Pope Pontian under Emperor Maximinus; he dies there.
- **After 236**: His body is brought back to Rome and buried on the Via Tiburtina.
- **Mid-4th century**: His feast on August 13 is recorded in the Roman calendar of martyrs.
- **1551**: Discovery in Rome of a seated statue bearing a list of works, identified with Hippolytus.

A portrait that falls apart

For a long time, Hippolytus was considered the author of the *Refutation of All Heresies*, a treatise that accuses Pope Callixtus of laxity, in particular because he accepted marriages between slaves and free persons. In the 19th century, scholars concluded that Hippolytus had had himself elected bishop of Rome against Callixtus and had been the first antipope, before being reconciled with Pontian in exile.

But no document proves such an election, and many scholars today doubt that the Roman martyr wrote this treatise.

The statue discovered in 1551, which seemed to offer a 3rd-century witness, itself turned out to be a composite. The archaeologist Margherita Guarducci showed that it was originally the statue of a woman, completed in the 16th century. Historians now distinguish several authors named Hippolytus, including an Eastern bishop who is probably the author of biblical commentaries such as the one on the Book of Daniel.



The catacomb of Saint Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina in Rome.

The Apostolic Tradition

The most famous text placed under his name is the *Apostolic Tradition*, which describes the ordination of bishops, the Eucharist, baptism and the life of the community. It contains a very ancient Eucharistic prayer, which inspired the Second Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman Missal after the Second Vatican Council. Many Catholics who attend Mass hear words close to this ancient text without knowing it. Its attribution to Hippolytus, however, is disputed by a number of specialists.

Why is Saint Hippolytus remembered with Pope Pontian?

The Church does not give Saint Hippolytus a precise official patronage. His importance lies in the witness he shares with Pope Pontian: a priest and a pope, deported together, died together and were honored together on the same day.

If the story of a conflict between Hippolytus and the bishops of Rome contains some truth, their common feast speaks of reconciliation and of unity found again in the witness given to Christ. This is why he can be prayed to for unity in the Church, for those who suffer exile or forced labor, and for priests who share the trials of their people.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Hippolytus in art

Because so little is known about him, there is no fixed iconography of the Roman priest. In art he is often shown with the palm of martyrdom, sometimes with a book recalling the writings attributed to him. The ancient seated statue kept at the Vatican, long believed to represent him, is the best-known image linked to his name, even if it is now known to have been reworked.

Later tradition also confused him with other figures of the same name, which explains the variety of images found in churches dedicated to him.



The crypt of the popes in the catacomb of Saint Callixtus, where Saint Pontian was buried.

What his holiness teaches us

We know little about Saint Hippolytus, but we know the essential: a Roman priest shared the deportation and death of a pope, and the Church honored them together. Whatever the history of their relationship may have been, their common feast on August 13 speaks of unity restored in witness to Christ.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Hippolytus or follow the novena to Saint Hippolytus.

Where to pray to Saint Hippolytus

In Rome, the catacomb of Saint Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina marks the place where he was buried after his body was brought back from Sardinia. Pope Saint Pontian, his companion in exile, was buried in the crypt of the

popes in the catacomb of Saint Callixtus on the Appian Way. The statue long identified with Hippolytus is kept at the Vatican.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Hippolytus and Saint Pontian

Saint Hippolytus left no prayer addressed to him in tradition, but the Church prays with words linked to his name: the *Apostolic Tradition*, long attributed to him, contains one of the oldest Eucharistic prayers known. Below you will find a short passage from it, followed by an original prayer to Saint Hippolytus and Saint Pontian.

Words from the Apostolic Tradition

> *"We give you thanks, O God, through your beloved Child Jesus Christ, whom in these last times you sent to us as Savior, Redeemer and Messenger of your will."*

Source: *Apostolic Tradition*, chapter 4, Eucharistic prayer (3rd century, attribution to Hippolytus disputed); translation by Saintspedia. This ancient prayer inspired the Second Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman Missal.



The catacomb of Saint Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina.

Prayer to Saint Hippolytus

Saint Hippolytus, priest of the Church of Rome, you were sent into exile with Pope Pontian and you shared his suffering and his death: pray for us.

You loved the Word of God and the prayer of the Church: help me to give thanks to the Father, through Jesus Christ, at every Mass and every day of my life.

Whatever divisions you may have known, you died united with the pope in the witness of faith: obtain for the Church the grace of unity, and for me the humility to be reconciled with those I have opposed.

I entrust to you those who are exiled, deported or forced to work in harsh conditions, and all prisoners of conscience. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

With Saint Pontian, obtain for us a faith that remains firm in trial. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Hippolytus is celebrated on August 13, together with Pope Saint Pontian, a common feast attested in Rome since the 4th century. You can pray to him for the unity of the Church, for reconciliation after a conflict, for people deported or living in exile, and before Mass, to enter more deeply into the Eucharistic prayer.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Hippolytus, and read the life of Saint Hippolytus.

NOVENA

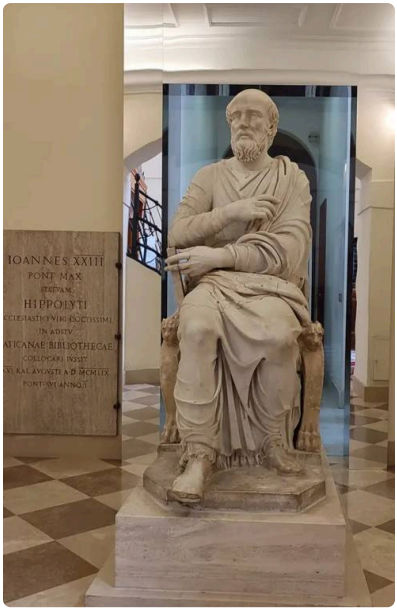
Novena to Saint Hippolytus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what we know of Saint Hippolytus, priest of Rome and martyr, and of his companion in exile, Pope Saint Pontian. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on their feast day, August 13, begin on August 5.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.

This novena is especially suited to those who pray for the unity of the Church or for reconciliation in their family or community, and to those who wish to pray for exiles and prisoners. It can be prayed at any time of the year.



The statue long identified with Saint Hippolytus, at the Vatican.

Day 1: A Church of many languages

In the time of Hippolytus, the Christians of Rome spoke mostly Greek, and many had come from the East. The Church was already a family of many peoples and languages. In our parishes too, people of many origins pray side by side, and each brings a gift to the whole body.

Prayer: Lord, make your Church a home for every people and every language.

Today: Greet warmly someone in your parish whom you do not know.

Day 2: A hidden life

We know very little for certain about Hippolytus. Much of what was said about him has been called into question. Yet the Church has honored him for seventeen centuries. Holiness does not depend on fame; God knows what remains hidden from history, and he remembers every act of faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to do good without needing to be seen.

Today: Do a good deed that no one will know about.

Day 3: Giving thanks

The *Apostolic Tradition*, long attributed to Hippolytus, contains one of the oldest Eucharistic prayers, which begins with thanksgiving to God through Jesus Christ. The Mass is first of all a great act of thanksgiving: the word Eucharist itself means thanksgiving.

Prayer: Father, I give you thanks through your beloved Son Jesus Christ for all the gifts of my life.

Today: Write down three things for which you want to thank God.

Day 4: The truth that serves love

The author of the *Refutation of All Heresies*, long identified with Hippolytus, was passionate about truth but harsh toward Pope Callixtus. Zeal for truth must always be joined to charity, or it wounds instead of healing.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me a love of truth that never forgets charity.

Today: Speak kindly of someone you are tempted to criticize.

Day 5: Persecution

Around 235, Emperor Maximinus Thrax struck first at the leaders of the Church. Pope Pontian and the priest Hippolytus were arrested and deported. In many countries today, Christians are still persecuted for their faith, and their pastors are often the first to be targeted.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen the Christians who are persecuted today, and convert the hearts of their persecutors.

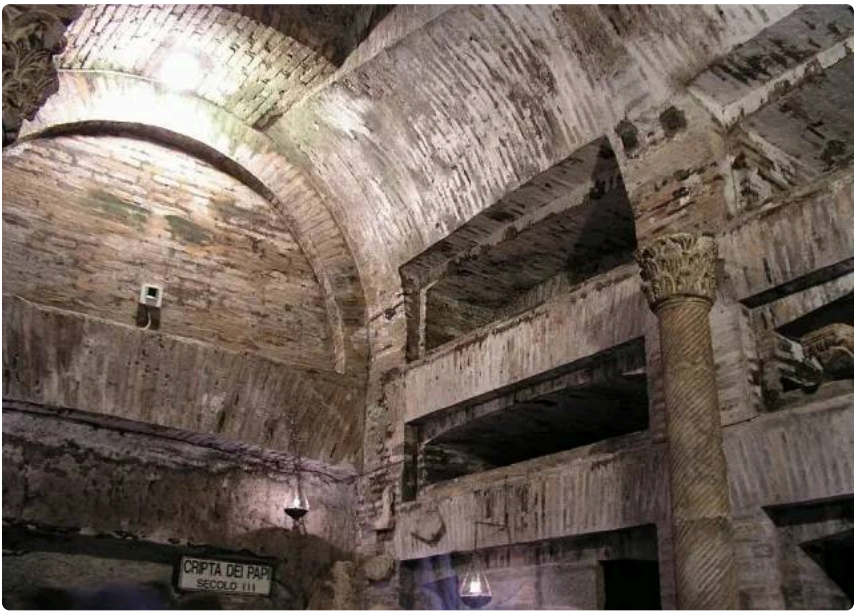
Today: Learn about a country where Christians suffer for their faith, and pray for them.

Day 6: Exile and forced labor

Hippolytus and Pontian were sent to the mines of Sardinia, far from their community, to exhausting labor. Many people today live in exile or work in inhuman conditions. Christ is present in them, and he asks us not to forget them.

Prayer: Lord, comfort exiles, refugees and all who are exploited in their work.

Today: Support an organization that helps refugees or victims of forced labor.



The crypt of the popes, where Saint Pontian was buried.

Day 7: United in trial

Whatever disagreements may have existed in the Church of Rome, the priest and the pope shared the same exile and the same death. Trials can bring together those whom quarrels had separated. We need not wait for a trial to seek peace.

Prayer: Lord, heal the divisions in your Church and in my family. Make us one.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation with someone from whom you are estranged.

Day 8: Brought home

Pope Fabian brought the bodies of Pontian and Hippolytus back to Rome, where they were buried with honor. The Church does not forget her children. Caring for the dead and praying for them is a work of mercy.

Prayer: Lord, grant eternal rest to all the faithful departed, especially those who died far from home.

Today: Visit a grave or pray for someone who has died.

Day 9: A shared feast

Since the 4th century, Rome has celebrated Hippolytus and Pontian on the same day, August 13. Their common feast is a sign of unity found again in Christ. Our differences are not the last word: communion in Christ is.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Hippolytus and Saint Pontian, keep me faithful in trial and united with your Church. Amen.

Today: If you can, attend Mass and pray for the unity of all Christians.

Closing prayer

Saint Hippolytus and Saint Pontian, priest and pope, companions in exile and in martyrdom, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for the unity of the Church, for persecuted Christians, for exiles and prisoners. Obtain for us a firm faith, a humble love of truth and a heart ready to be reconciled. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Hippolytus and the prayer to Saint Hippolytus.

Credits and sources

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