

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Hormisdas

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: August 6

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IN BRIEF

Saint Hormisdas

Pope from 514 to 523 who ended the Acacian Schism between Rome and Constantinople.

Feast day	August 6
Born	Frosinone, Italy
Died	August 6, 523, Rome, Italy
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Hormisdas for Christian Unity

Novena to Saint Hormisdas

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Hormisdas

Saint Hormisdas was pope from 514 to 523. A native of Frosinone, in the Lazio region south of Rome, he was married before entering the clergy and was the father of a future pope, Saint Silverius. His pontificate was dominated by a long effort to end the Acacian Schism, which had separated Rome and Constantinople for thirty years. The profession of faith he proposed to the bishops of the East remains famous as the "Formula of Hormisdas." His feast is August 6.

Who was Saint Hormisdas?

Hormisdas came from a well-to-do family of Frosinone; his father was named Justus. Before receiving holy orders, he married and had a son, Silverius, who would become pope in 536. This was not unique in the early Church, when married men could be ordained to the priesthood.

As a deacon under Pope Symmachus, he was one of that pope's main supporters during the schism of the antipope Laurentius, which tore the Roman clergy apart at the beginning of the 6th century. In 502, he served as notary at a synod held at Saint Peter's. The bishop and poet Ennodius of Pavia is said to have predicted at that time that he would become pope.



Saint Hormisdas, portrait in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.

Key dates

- **502**: Notary at the Roman synod held under Pope Symmachus.
- **July 20, 514**: Consecrated pope, the day after the funeral of Symmachus.
- **515**: First embassy to Constantinople, led by Ennodius of Pavia.
- **516-517**: New negotiations with Emperor Anastasius, who tries to turn the Roman Senate against him.
- **519**: Under Emperor Justin I, end of the Acacian Schism.
- **August 6, 523**: Death in Rome; he is buried in Saint Peter's.

Pope of a divided Church

Hormisdas was consecrated bishop of Rome on July 20, 514, the day after the funeral of Symmachus. He inherited two divisions at once. In Rome itself, the wounds of the Laurentian Schism were not fully healed. In the wider Church,

Rome and Constantinople had been out of communion for decades.

From the moment of his election, he worked to erase the last traces of the Laurentian Schism by bringing back into communion those who had not yet been reconciled. He also decreed that Church offices must not be granted in exchange for favors or gifts, a rule against what would later be called simony.

The Acacian Schism

In 482, Emperor Zeno published the *Henotikon*, a compromise text meant to win over the Christians who rejected the Council of Chalcedon and its teaching that Christ is one person in two natures, divine and human. Rome saw in it an abandonment of the faith and excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius. From then on, the two Churches were no longer in communion.

In 514, a rebel general, Vitalian, demanded among other things the restoration of unity with Rome. Emperor Anastasius promised to gather a council and invited the pope. Hormisdas answered with caution. He held a synod in Rome and sent an embassy to Constantinople, led in 515 by Ennodius of Pavia. New negotiations followed in 516 and 517, but the emperor dragged them out without ever giving way, and even tried to turn the Roman Senate against the pope.

The Formula of Hormisdas

The pope gave his legates a profession of faith, the *regula fidei* or "rule of faith," which the bishops of the East had to sign in order to return to communion with Rome. The text affirms that the orthodox faith has always been preserved in the Church of Rome. It condemns Nestorius and Eutyches, accepts the Council of Chalcedon and the *Tome* of Pope Leo the Great, and asks that the name of Acacius be removed from the liturgical lists of those remembered at the altar.

After the death of Anastasius in 518, his successor Justin I showed himself favorable to Chalcedon. In 519, the formula was signed in Constantinople, and communion between Rome and the East was restored. This text was still being quoted more than thirteen centuries later, by the First Vatican Council.

Why is Saint Hormisdas a saint of Christian unity?

Saint Hormisdas has no traditional patronage, but his whole life speaks of one thing: the unity of Christians. He devoted almost his entire pontificate to rebuilding communion without sacrificing the faith. He succeeded through patience rather than brilliance, through years of letters, embassies and waiting.

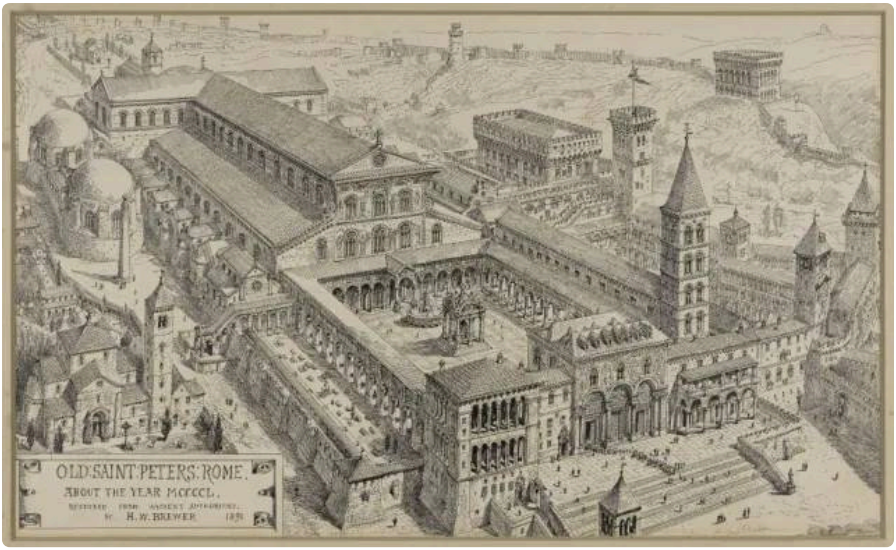
For this reason, he is a natural intercessor for those who work for reconciliation in the Church, for ecumenical dialogue, and for anyone trying to heal a long division with both firmness and patience. He is also a reminder that holiness can be lived in a family: a husband and father, he gave the Church a son who would himself become pope and a saint.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Hormisdas in art

No portrait of Hormisdas from his own time has survived. He is known mainly through the imaginary portrait in the series of papal medallions in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, where he appears, like the other popes, in pontifical vestments. Where he is depicted, he is identified by his name and his papal attributes rather than by a personal symbol.

Where to pray to Saint Hormisdas

Saint Hormisdas died on August 6, 523, after nine years as pope, and was buried in the old Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome, the church built under Constantine and later replaced by the present basilica. Pilgrims to Rome can remember him at Saint Peter's, and see his portrait among the papal medallions of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.



The old Basilica of Saint Peter, where he was buried.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Hormisdas for Christian Unity

No traditional prayer to Saint Hormisdas has come down to us. But this pope, who worked patiently for nine years to restore communion between Rome and Constantinople, is a natural intercessor for the unity of Christians. Here is an original prayer inspired by his life, followed by a short prayer from Scripture.

Prayer to Saint Hormisdas for Christian unity

Saint Hormisdas, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you gave your years as pope to healing the division between the Christians of East and West. Pray for the Church of today, still wounded by so many separations.

You sought unity without ever sacrificing the truth: obtain for us both firmness in the faith and gentleness toward those who think differently.

You waited with patience through letters, embassies and refusals: teach me not to give up when reconciliation is slow, in the Church, in my family or among my friends.

You were a husband and father before you were a pope: bless Christian families, and help parents to pass on the faith to their children.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). With you, I pray that all may be one, as the Father and the Son are one. Amen.

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

A prayer from the Gospel

The deepest prayer for unity is that of Jesus himself on the night before he died. Saint Hormisdas worked his whole life for what these words ask.

> *"That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."*

Source: Gospel of John 17:21, Douay-Rheims translation.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Hormisdas is celebrated on August 6, the anniversary of his death in Rome in 523. You can pray to him:

- during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 18 to 25;
- for ecumenical dialogue between Catholics, Orthodox and other Christians;
- when a division in your parish, community or family seems impossible to heal;
- for fathers of families and for the passing on of the faith.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Hormisdas

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Hormisdas, pope from 514 to 523, who ended the Acacian Schism between Rome and Constantinople. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on July 29; it ends on August 6. It is also well suited to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, or to any time when you are praying for reconciliation.

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 suggested each day helps bring the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

Day 1: A family of faith

Hormisdas was a husband and a father before he was a pope. His son Silverius also became pope and is honored as a saint. Faith is often first received and lived within a family, at table, in daily life.

Prayer: Saint Hormisdas, bless my family. Help us to pass on the faith to one another with love and patience.

Today: Pray together with a member of your family, even briefly.

Day 2: A faithful deacon

As a deacon, Hormisdas supported Pope Symmachus during the Laurentian Schism, when the clergy of Rome was divided. Faithfulness is tested in times of crisis, when it would be easier to step aside.

Prayer: Lord, make me faithful to your Church when she is wounded or divided, and help me to serve her humbly.

Today: Pray for your bishop and for your parish priest by name.

Day 3: Healing old wounds

Once elected, Hormisdas set out to reconcile those in Rome who had not yet returned to communion after the schism. Some divisions last long after their causes are forgotten. Healing them takes a first step.

Prayer: Lord, show me the old wounds I am still carrying, and give me the grace to take the first step toward reconciliation.

Today: Think of a relationship that has grown cold, and make one gesture of peace.

Day 4: Offices that are not for sale

Hormisdas decreed that Church offices must not be given in exchange for favors or gifts. Service in the Church is a gift received, not a possession to buy or exchange.

Prayer: Lord, purify the intentions of those who serve in your Church, and purify mine. May I serve freely, as I have freely received.

Today: Do a service for someone without expecting anything in return.

Day 5: A Church divided between East and West

For thirty years, Rome and Constantinople had been out of communion. Christians who confessed the same Lord no longer shared the same altar. This wound, under other forms, is still with us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you prayed that all may be one. Heal the divisions among Christians, and make us artisans of unity.

Today: Learn something about the Eastern Churches, or pray for an Orthodox or Eastern Catholic community.

Day 6: Patience in negotiation

Emperor Anastasius dragged out the talks for years without ever yielding. Hormisdas did not give up, nor did he give in. Patience is not weakness: it is trust that God's time is not our own.

Prayer: Saint Hormisdas, teach me patience when my efforts seem to lead nowhere. Help me to persevere without bitterness.

Today: Offer to God a situation that has not moved for a long time.

Day 7: Unity in truth

The Formula of Hormisdas asked the bishops of the East to confess the faith of Chalcedon. Unity, for him, was not a vague compromise but communion in the same faith. True peace is built on truth spoken with charity.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, Spirit of truth, guide the Church into all truth and keep her united in the faith of the apostles.

Today: Pray the Creed slowly, word by word.

Day 8: The fruit of waiting

In 519, under Emperor Justin I, the formula was signed in Constantinople, and communion was restored. After years of effort, the fruit came, perhaps when no one expected it. God brings to completion what is done in faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for every reconciliation you have already granted, in the Church and in my life. Increase my hope.

Today: Thank God for a reconciliation you have seen happen.

Day 9: A shepherd at rest

Hormisdas died on August 6, 523, after nine years as pope, and was buried at Saint Peter's. His work did not depend on brilliance but on faithful service. That is a holiness within reach of each of us.

Prayer: Saint Hormisdas, pray for the pope and for all who serve the unity of the Church. Obtain for me the grace of faithful service until the end.

Today: Pray for the pope, and for a Christian of another tradition whom you know.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Hormisdas, father, deacon and pope, you worked tirelessly for the unity of the Church, without sacrificing the truth of the faith. Pray for all Christians, that we may be one as Christ desired. Pray for families, for divided communities and for those who work for reconciliation. Obtain for me the intention I have entrusted to you during these nine days, if it is according to God's will. Amen.*

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

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