

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Lawrence of Rome

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 10

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Lawrence of Rome

Deacon of the Church of Rome, martyred in 258, patron saint of deacons, the poor and cooks.

Feast day	August 10
Born	Early 3rd century
Died	August 10, 258, Rome
Era	3rd century
Patron saint of	deacons, the poor, cooks, chefs, librarians, comedians

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr

Novena to Saint Lawrence

Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls, Rome

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 Lawrence of Rome

Saint Lawrence was a deacon of the Church of Rome who died a martyr on August 10, 258, during the persecution of Emperor Valerian. Entrusted with the Church's goods and its care for the poor, he is said, according to a tradition recorded by Saint Ambrose, to have presented the poor to the prefect of Rome as the true treasures of the Church. Tradition holds that he was roasted on a gridiron. One of the most venerated martyrs of Rome, he is celebrated on August 10 and is the patron saint of deacons, the poor and cooks.

Who was Saint Lawrence?

Lawrence (Laurentius in Latin, Lorenzo in Italian, Lorenzo or Laurence elsewhere) was one of the seven deacons of the Church of Rome in the time of Pope Saint Sixtus II. Deacons were then responsible for serving the poor, widows and orphans, and for managing the goods of the community. Lawrence was the first among them, the archdeacon, the Pope's trusted assistant. A later tradition says he was born in Spain, at Huesca in Aragon, but this is not established.

What is certain is the date of his death and the place of his burial on the Via Tiburtina, recorded in the oldest calendars of the Church of Rome. His veneration spread very early, and his feast has always held a high rank in the Roman liturgy. He is one of the martyrs named in the Roman Canon, the First Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass.

Key dates

- **Early 3rd century**: Birth, at an unknown date and place (in Spain, according to a later tradition).
- **257-258**: Archdeacon of Rome under Pope Sixtus II.

- **August 6, 258**: Martyrdom of Pope Sixtus II and several deacons.
- **August 10, 258**: Martyrdom of Lawrence in Rome; he is buried on the Via Tiburtina.
- **4th century**: Emperor Constantine builds a basilica near his tomb; Saint Ambrose and Prudentius write about his martyrdom.
- **6th century**: Pope Pelagius II rebuilds the basilica directly over his grave.
- **July 19, 1943**: The Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls is badly damaged by bombing; it is later restored.

The persecution of Valerian

In 258 Emperor Valerian ordered the immediate execution of bishops, priests and deacons. On August 6 Pope Sixtus II was arrested while celebrating the liturgy in an underground cemetery, the Catacomb of Callixtus, and was put to death together with several of his deacons. Lawrence was executed four days later, on August 10.

Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan in the 4th century, records a tradition that Lawrence, seeing the Pope led away to martyrdom, begged not to be left behind. Sixtus is said to have told him that he would follow three days later, in an even harder struggle.

The treasures of the Church

According to Ambrose's account, the prefect of Rome demanded that Lawrence hand over the treasures of the Church. Lawrence asked for a few days, gave everything he had to the poor, then gathered the sick, the blind, the lame, the widows and the orphans whom the community supported. He presented them to the prefect, saying that these were the treasures of the Church. The story has no doubt been embellished, but it says what matters: for Lawrence, the wealth of the Church is the poor.

Martyrdom on the gridiron

According to the tradition passed on by Saint Ambrose and the poet Prudentius, Lawrence was put to death slowly on an iron grill set over hot coals. In the middle of his torment, he is said to have told his executioners, with good humor, to turn him over because he was done on that side. This famous saying made him the patron saint of cooks and, with a smile, of comedians.

Many historians think, however, that he was more likely beheaded, like Pope Sixtus II, in keeping with Valerian's edict, and that the story of the gridiron developed later. Either way, his courage and serenity in the face of death made a deep impression on the Christians of Rome, and his tomb quickly became a place of pilgrimage.

Why is Saint Lawrence the patron saint of deacons, the poor and cooks?

As archdeacon of Rome, Lawrence is the model for deacons, who are called to the service of charity, liturgy and the Word. Because he gave the Church's goods to the poor and called them "treasures," he is the patron of the poor and of those who serve them. The story of the gridiron made him the patron of cooks, chefs and those who work near fire. As guardian of the Church's goods and records, he is also sometimes considered the patron of librarians and archivists.

The "tears of Saint Lawrence"

Every year, around August 10, the summer sky is crossed by the Perseid meteor shower. In Italy and elsewhere, these shooting stars are traditionally called the "tears of Saint Lawrence," as if the sky remembered the burning coals of his martyrdom.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Lawrence in art

Saint Lawrence is shown as a young man wearing the dalmatic, the liturgical vestment of deacons. His main symbol is the gridiron. He often also holds the martyr's palm, a Book of the Gospels, or a purse or coins recalling his almsgiving. Fra Angelico painted his life in the Niccoline Chapel in the Vatican, and Titian painted his martyrdom in a dramatic night scene now in Venice.



The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence by Titian (c. 1548-1559), church of the Gesuiti, Venice.

Where to pray to Saint Lawrence

The great shrine of Saint Lawrence is the Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls (San Lorenzo fuori le Mura) in Rome, built over his tomb and one of the seven pilgrim churches of Rome. In the same city, the church of San Lorenzo in Panisperna marks, according to tradition, the place of his martyrdom, and San Lorenzo in Lucina keeps a gridiron venerated as the one

on which he died. In Spain, the royal monastery of El Escorial, built by King Philip II, is dedicated to him. Many parishes in the United States, Ireland, the Philippines and around the world bear his name.

How to pray to Saint Lawrence

Catholics pray to Saint Lawrence for deacons, for the poor and those who serve them, for courage in trials and for the grace to keep joy in difficult times. You can pray the prayer to Saint Lawrence or follow the novena to Saint Lawrence, from August 1 to 9, so that it ends on the eve of his feast.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr

The liturgy of the Church offers a beautiful prayer for the feast of Saint Lawrence: the collect of the Mass of August 10, which you will find below. First comes an original prayer to the holy deacon by Saintspedia, inspired by the ancient accounts of his life and martyrdom.

Prayer to Saint Lawrence

Saint Lawrence, deacon of the Church of Rome, you who served Christ in the poor and called them the treasures of the Church, teach me to see the Lord in those who need me.

You who gave away freely what had been entrusted to you, free me from attachment to money and possessions, and make me generous with all I have received.

You who kept your peace, and even your good humor, in the middle of suffering, give me courage in my trials and a joy that nothing can put out.

Watch over deacons and all who serve the poor, over those who work in kitchens and near fire, and over Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

Saint Lawrence, pray for us. Amen.

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

The collect for the feast of Saint Lawrence

> *"O God, who gave Saint Lawrence such ardent love that he shone as a faithful servant and a glorious martyr, grant that we may love what he loved and put into practice what he taught. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen."*

Source: collect of the Mass of August 10, Roman Missal (Saintspedia translation from the Latin "Deus, cuius caritatis ardore beatus Laurentius servitio claruit fidelis et martyrio gloriosus...").

When to pray this prayer

You can pray to Saint Lawrence at any time, especially on August 10, his feast day, and on the day of an ordination to the diaconate. Many people turn to him to ask for generosity toward the poor, for courage in suffering, or to entrust those who work in restaurants and kitchens. On August evenings, watching the Perseid shooting stars, you can also remember the "tears of Saint Lawrence." For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Lawrence and read the life of Saint Lawrence.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Lawrence

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the ancient accounts of the life and martyrdom of Saint Lawrence, especially those recorded by Saint Ambrose. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on August 1; it ends on August 9, the day before the feast of August 10. You can also pray it at any time of the year for courage, generosity or the needs of the poor.

Why pray a novena to Saint Lawrence?

Saint Lawrence is one of the best-loved martyrs of Rome. As a deacon he cared for the poor, and when the authorities demanded the treasures of the Church, he showed them the people he served. His feast on August 10 has been celebrated in Rome since the earliest centuries. A novena to Saint Lawrence is a good way to ask for a generous heart, courage in suffering and joy in the middle of trials. It is also a fitting prayer for deacons, for those preparing for ordination, and for all who serve the poor in soup kitchens, shelters and parishes. Each day follows one step of his story, from his service at the altar to his witness unto death.

How to pray this novena

Each day, 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. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. A novena is not a formula that obliges God to answer; it is nine days of perseverance, in the company of a deacon who served Christ in the poor.

Day 1: Called to serve

Lawrence is a deacon, which means a servant. In the Church, serving is not a lesser place: it is the very way Christ lived among us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came not to be served but to serve; teach me to serve in my turn. I place my intention in your hands for these nine days.

Today: Do a quiet act of service without expecting thanks.

Day 2: Servant of the altar

The deacon assists the bishop at the altar and proclaims the Gospel. Lawrence draws from the Eucharist the strength to serve his brothers and sisters.

Prayer: Lord, may the Eucharist be the source of my charity.

Today: Attend a weekday Mass if you can.

Day 3: Friend of Pope Sixtus

Lawrence is the close collaborator of Pope Sixtus II. He does not want to let him go to martyrdom alone. Faithfulness shows itself in times of trial.

Prayer: Lord, make me faithful to those who count on me, especially when it is hard.

Today: Pray for the Pope and for your bishop.

Day 4: Goods held in trust

Lawrence manages the goods of the Church, but he is not attached to them. Everything he has, he regards as belonging to the poor.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the love of money, and show me how to share.

Today: Make a donation to a charity or a food bank.

Day 5: The treasures of the Church

Before the prefect, Lawrence points to the poor, the sick and the orphans: these are the treasures of the Church. God does not see as the world sees.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to recognize your presence in the poor.

Today: Greet and take time to talk with someone who is homeless or alone.

Day 6: Courage

Lawrence knows what awaits him, and he does not turn back. His courage does not come from himself, but from his trust in God.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to stay faithful when faith costs me something.

Today: Pray for Christians who are persecuted today.

Day 7: Joy in suffering

According to tradition, Lawrence kept his sense of humor even under torture. This astonishing peace is the sign of a heart already turned toward God.

Prayer: Lord, keep me in peace and joy, even in the middle of difficulties.

Today: Bring a smile to someone who is going through a hard time.

Day 8: The fire of love

Christians have often reflected on this paradox: in Lawrence, the fire of Christ's love burned stronger than the flames of his torment. It was the love of God that made him strong.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, kindle in me the fire of your love.

Today: Light a candle and spend some time in prayer.

Day 9: Witness to the end

On August 10, 258, Lawrence gives his life for Christ. His tomb on the Via Tiburtina has become one of the great places of pilgrimage in Rome.

Prayer: Saint Lawrence, help me to love what you loved and to remain faithful to the end. Amen.

Today: Pray for deacons and, if you can, attend Mass on August 10.

Closing prayer

Saint Lawrence, deacon and martyr, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you once more my intention. Obtain for me a generous heart, courage in trials and a joy that does not fade. Watch over deacons, over the poor and over all who serve them, and help me to recognize Christ in every person in need. May I never be ashamed of the Gospel, and may my life, like yours, become a gift for others. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls, Rome

The Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls (San Lorenzo fuori le Mura), in Rome, is built over the grave of the deacon and martyr, on the Via Tiburtina, near the great Verano cemetery. It is one of the seven churches that pilgrims traditionally visited in Rome. People come here to pray at the tomb of Saint Lawrence, one of the best-loved martyrs of the Eternal City.



The Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls, in Rome.

A basilica over a tomb

After his martyrdom on August 10, 258, Lawrence was buried in a cemetery outside the walls of Rome, on the Via Tiburtina. In the 4th century, Emperor Constantine had a basilica built near his tomb. At the end of the 6th century,

Pope Pelagius II raised a new church directly above the tomb. In the 13th century, under Pope Honorius III, a second church was joined to the first, which gives the present building its particular form, with a raised choir.

What to see in the basilica

- **The confessio**, beneath the choir, where the relics of Saint Lawrence rest, along with those tradition attributes to Saint Stephen, the first martyr.
- **The triumphal arch of Pelagius II**, decorated with a 6th-century mosaic showing Christ surrounded by saints, including Saint Lawrence.
- **The portico and bell tower**, from the medieval period.
- **The Cosmatesque pavement** and the marble ambos.
- **The tomb of Blessed Pius IX**, pope from 1846 to 1878, in a chapel of the basilica.

The 1943 bombing

On July 19, 1943, during the Second World War, the San Lorenzo district was bombed. The basilica was badly hit: the portico and part of the facade collapsed. Pope Pius XII went to the site at once to be with the victims. The basilica was then carefully restored, reusing the old elements.

Pilgrimage tips

The basilica is served by trams and buses in the San Lorenzo district, near Termini station. Admission is free; modest dress is requested. On August 10, the feast day, a solemn Mass is celebrated there. You can combine the visit with the nearby monumental Verano cemetery.

Other places of Saint Lawrence in Rome

Several churches in Rome bear his name. San Lorenzo in Panisperna, on the Esquiline, marks according to tradition the place of his martyrdom. San Lorenzo in Lucina keeps a grill venerated as the one used in his torture. San Lorenzo in Damaso, in the Palazzo della Cancelleria, is among the oldest. Outside Rome, the royal monastery of El Escorial, near Madrid, was dedicated to Saint Lawrence by King Philip II.

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).

Images

- Cover: Illustration Saintspedia
- The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence by Titian (c. 1548-1559), church of the Gesuiti, Venice.: Image: Titian, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls, in Rome.: Image: Livioandronico2013, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

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

saintspedia.com