

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Leo II

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Leo II

Pope from 682 to 683, who confirmed the Third Council of Constantinople against monothelitism.

Feast day	July 3
Born	c. 611, Sicily or Calabria (uncertain)
Died	July 3, 683, Rome
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since the early Middle Ages)
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Leo II for Unity and Faithfulness

Novena to Saint Leo II

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Leo II

Saint Leo II was pope from 682 to 683, for barely a year. His pontificate was nevertheless important. He confirmed the decisions of the Third Council of Constantinople, which had taught that Christ has both a divine will and a human will, and he restored peace between Rome and the Byzantine Empire. A cultured man, known for his command of Greek and his skill in sacred chant, he is celebrated on July 3.

Who was Saint Leo II?

His origins are uncertain. According to some sources, he was born in Calabria, the son of a physician named Paul. According to others, he was Sicilian, from Messina, like his predecessor Saint Agatho. He was trained in Rome at the *Schola cantorum*, the school of liturgical chant of the Roman Church.

The ancient chronicles describe him as eloquent, learned in both Latin and Greek, skilled in the chanting of the psalms and attentive to the poor. His knowledge of Greek mattered a great deal in his time: the great theological debates were conducted in that language, and the pope had to read and answer documents coming from Constantinople.

Key dates in the life of Saint Leo II

- **c. 611**: Probable birth, in Sicily or Calabria.
- **November 680 to September 681**: Third Council of Constantinople, which condemns monothelitism.
- **January 10, 681**: Death of Pope Agatho; Leo is elected soon after, but his consecration is delayed.
- **August 682**: Consecration as bishop of Rome, once the agreement of Emperor Constantine IV has been obtained.

- **682-683**: Confirmation of the council's decisions and their spread in the West.
- **July 3, 683**: Death in Rome; burial in Saint Peter's Basilica.

Christ has two wills

In the 7th century, a doctrine supported by the imperial court, monothelitism (from the Greek for "one will"), taught that Christ had only one will, a divine one. It was meant to reconcile the Christians who had been divided since the Council of Chalcedon in 451. But it amounted to diminishing Christ's full humanity: a man without a human will would not be fully a man.

The Third Council of Constantinople, the sixth ecumenical council, met in 680-681 at the initiative of the emperor, with the participation of the legates of Rome sent by Pope Agatho. It rejected monothelitism and taught that Christ, true God and true man, has two wills, his human will freely submitting to his divine will. The Church still professes this today. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus prays "not my will, but yours be done," we see this human will freely embracing the will of the Father.

The case of Pope Honorius

The council also condemned several leaders of the monothelite party, and among them Pope Honorius I, who had died some forty years earlier and was accused of having favored that doctrine. Emperor Constantine IV made the confirmation of this sentence a condition for recognizing Leo's election. This explains why the new pope had to wait more than a year and a half before being consecrated.

A pope of reconciliation

Leo II accepted the decisions of the council and confirmed them. He specified that the fault of Honorius had been his failure to fight error with the vigor his office required. He had the acts of the council translated into Latin and made them known to the Churches of the West, in particular to the bishops of Spain, so that they would adhere to them.

In return, the emperor recognized his election, accepted the permanent presence of a representative of the pope in Constantinople and lightened the taxes weighing on Sicily and Calabria. The pope also obtained that the archbishop of Ravenna, who claimed independence from Rome, return under his jurisdiction. In a few months, Leo II had settled questions that had troubled relations between East and West for decades.



The Third Council of Constantinople, which Leo II confirmed.

Why is Saint Leo II invoked for Christian unity and for church musicians?

Saint Leo II has no official patronage. But two aspects of his life make him a natural intercessor:

- **Unity between East and West**: his short pontificate sealed a reconciliation between Rome and Constantinople, founded on a shared confession of faith in Christ.
- **Liturgical music**: trained at the *Schola cantorum* and praised for his skill in chanting the psalms, he can be invoked by choir members, cantors and all who serve the liturgy through singing.

Leo II left no spiritual writings, and little is known of his inner life. He served the unity of the Church by defending a central truth of the faith: Christ willed our salvation with a human heart. His cult is ancient: he appears in the martyrologies of Saint Bede the Venerable and of Ado of Vienne.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Leo II in art

Representations of Saint Leo II are few. He appears among the mosaic medallions of all the popes in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. Like the other popes of the early centuries, he is generally shown in pontifical vestments, without a personal attribute that would distinguish him from his predecessors. Images of the Third Council of Constantinople, which he confirmed, are the best way to recall his role in the history of the Church.



Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, where Leo II was buried.

Where to pray to Saint Leo II

Saint Leo II was buried in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, where many popes of the early Middle Ages were laid to rest. Pilgrims who visit the basilica can remember him there, especially on his feast day, July 3. His portrait can also be seen among the papal medallions of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

To pray with him, you can use the prayer to Saint Leo II or the novena to Saint Leo II.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Leo II for Unity and Faithfulness

No traditional prayer to Saint Leo II has come down to us, and he left no spiritual writings. But his short pontificate, entirely devoted to confirming the faith of the Third Council of Constantinople, offers a beautiful theme for prayer: Christ, true God and true man, who freely united his human will to the will of the Father. Below you will find a word of the Gospel at the heart of that teaching, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia.

A word of the Gospel

> *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done."*

Source: Gospel according to Saint Luke, chapter 22, verse 42. Translation by Saintspedia. In this prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Olives, the Church recognizes his human will freely submitting to the divine will, as the council confirmed by Leo II taught.

Prayer to Saint Leo II for unity and faithfulness

Saint Leo II, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you confirmed the faith of the Church in Christ, true God and true man, who loved us with a human heart and a human will. Help me to believe in him with my whole mind and to follow him with my whole life.

Like Jesus in the Garden of Olives, teach me to say to the Father: "not my will, but yours be done." When I resist what God asks of me, obtain for me the grace of trusting obedience.

You restored peace between the Churches of East and West: pray for the unity of all Christians. May they recognize one another as brothers and sisters, and confess together the same Lord.

You loved the chant of the psalms and cared for the poor: bless those who serve the liturgy with their voices, and those who serve Christ in the poor.

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

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Leo II is celebrated on July 3, the anniversary of his death in 683. This prayer fits well during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18 to 25), before choir practice or a sung liturgy, or at any moment when it is hard to accept God's will. You can also pray it for the pope and the bishops, that they may guard the faith with courage and gentleness.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Leo II, and discover the life of Saint Leo II.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Leo II

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Leo II and by the faith of the Third Council of Constantinople, which he confirmed. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on June 24; it ends on July 2, the day before the feast of Saint Leo II on July 3. It can also be prayed at any time of year, for example for Christian unity or for a parish choir.

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 suggested act helps you live the prayer during the day. Since the life of Leo II was centered on the mystery of Christ, true God and true man, you may want to keep a Gospel close at hand during these nine days.

Day 1: A life formed by the liturgy

Leo was trained at the *Schola cantorum*, the school of liturgical chant of the Roman Church. From his youth, the psalms shaped his prayer and his heart. The liturgy is a school of faith for all of us.

Prayer: Lord, let the prayer of your Church shape my heart. Teach me to pray the psalms with faith and love.

Today: Pray one psalm slowly, for example Psalm 23 or Psalm 100.

Day 2: Learning to serve the truth

Leo was learned in Latin and Greek. He put his knowledge at the service of the Church, so that the faith would be understood and shared. Study, too, can be a way of loving God.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me a love for the truth and the desire to know my faith better.

Today: Read a page of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the person of Christ.

Day 3: Attentive to the poor

The ancient chronicles remember Leo as a pope attentive to the poor. Defending the faith and serving the needy were, for him, two sides of the same love.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you made yourself poor for us. Open my eyes and my hands to those in need around me.

Today: Give a meal, an offering or some of your time to a person in need.

Day 4: True God and true man

The council confirmed by Leo II professed that Christ is fully God and fully man. He did not pretend to be human: he took on our whole humanity, including a human will, in order to save it.

Prayer: Jesus, Son of God made man, I adore you. Thank you for sharing everything in our human life except sin.

Today: Pray the Creed slowly, pausing on the words "and became man."

Day 5: "Not my will, but yours"

In the Garden of Olives, Jesus prayed: "not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). His human will freely chose the will of the Father. This is the heart of the faith Leo II defended, and the model of all Christian obedience.

Prayer: Father, I often want my own will. Give me, like your Son, the grace to accept yours with trust.

Today: Accept with peace one thing you would not have chosen.

Day 6: Waiting with patience

After his election, Leo waited more than a year and a half before he could be consecrated. He did not force events; he waited for the right moment to serve.

Prayer: Lord, teach me patience when things do not go as fast as I would like. Help me to trust your timing.

Today: In a moment of waiting (in line, in traffic, on the phone), offer a short prayer instead of growing impatient.

Day 7: Truth spoken with fairness

Leo confirmed the condemnation of Pope Honorius, but he explained precisely where the fault lay: Honorius had not fought error with enough vigor. Truth must be spoken clearly, but also justly.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak the truth, and the charity to speak it without harshness or injustice.

Today: Avoid any unfair criticism; if you must correct someone, do it gently.

Day 8: Peace between East and West

Through his agreement with Emperor Constantine IV, Leo II restored peace between Rome and Constantinople. Unity among Christians is a gift of God that must be received, guarded and rebuilt.

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

Today: Pray for Orthodox and Eastern Christians, or learn something about an Eastern Catholic Church.

Day 9: A short life fully given

Leo II was pope for only about a year. Yet in that short time he served the Church faithfully. What counts is not the length of a life, but the love with which it is given.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Leo II, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Make each of my days useful to your Kingdom. Amen.

Today: Pray for the pope and for your bishop by name.

Closing prayer

Saint Leo II, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. You confessed Christ, true God and true man, and served the unity of his Church. Pray for the pope and the bishops, for Christians divided by history, and for all who praise God through song. Obtain for us the grace to unite our will to the will of the Father, as Jesus did, and to remain faithful to the end. Amen.

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

CREDITS

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