

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Leo IX

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 19

IN BRIEF

Saint Leo IX

11th-century pope from Alsace, former bishop of Toul, champion of the reform of the Church.

Feast day	April 19
Born	June 21, 1002 (traditional date), Eguisheim, Alsace, France (according to tradition)
Died	April 19, 1054, Rome, Italy
Canonized	Immemorial cult
Era	11th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Leo IX for the Church

Novena to Saint Leo IX

Chapel of Saint Leo IX in Eguisheim, Alsace

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Leo IX

Saint Leo IX was an 11th-century pope from Alsace. Born Bruno of Eguisheim, he served as bishop of Toul for more than twenty years before being elected pope in 1048. In barely five years he launched the great reform of the Church that would later bear the name of his collaborator, Gregory VII. A traveling pope, he crossed Italy, Germany and France to hold councils against simony and the disorders of the clergy. He died in Rome on April 19, 1054, and his feast is kept on that day, especially in Alsace and Lorraine.

Who was Saint Leo IX?

Bruno was born on June 21, 1002, according to the traditional date, into a powerful family of Alsatian counts. The village of Eguisheim, near Colmar, claims him as its son; Dabo, in Moselle, where his mother came from, also keeps his memory. He was related to the Salian imperial dynasty.

As a child he was entrusted to the cathedral school of Toul, in Lorraine, known for the quality of its teaching, and he entered the clergy of the cathedral. As a young deacon he served Emperor Conrad II, his relative, and even led the troops of the diocese of Toul during an expedition to Italy.

In 1026 the see of Toul fell vacant. Although a far more brilliant career awaited him at the imperial court, Bruno agreed to become bishop of this modest and exposed diocese, on the border between the Empire and the kingdom of France.

Key dates in the life of Saint Leo IX

- **June 21, 1002**: Born, according to tradition, at Eguisheim, in Alsace.
- **Around 1007**: Entrusted to the cathedral school of Toul.

- **1026**: Elected bishop of Toul; he is consecrated the following year.
- **December 1048**: At Worms, Emperor Henry III designates him for the see of Rome.
- **February 12, 1049**: Enthroned in Rome after being acclaimed by the Roman clergy and people; he takes the name Leo IX.
- **April 1049**: First Roman council against simony.
- **October 1049**: Consecrates the abbey church of Saint-Remi in Reims and holds a council there.
- **June 18, 1053**: His troops are defeated by the Normans at Civitate, in southern Italy; he remains their captive for several months at Benevento.
- **Spring 1054**: Sends a legation led by Cardinal Humbert to Constantinople.
- **April 19, 1054**: Dies in Rome and is buried in Saint Peter's Basilica.

The bishop of Toul

For more than twenty years Bruno governed the diocese of Toul with energy. He visited the parishes, took care of the training of the clergy and supported the reform of monasteries, relying on monks from the abbeys of Saint-Èvre and Moyenmoutier, in the wake of the great reform movement that started at Cluny and Gorze.

His contemporaries praised his piety, his love of the liturgy and his taste for chant. Tradition even credits him with composing pieces of music for the Divine Office.

A reforming and pilgrim pope

In December 1048, at the imperial assembly of Worms, Emperor Henry III chose him to succeed Pope Damasus II, who had died after only a few weeks in office. Bruno accepted on one condition: that he be freely recognized by the

clergy and people of Rome. He crossed the Alps dressed as a pilgrim and, according to his biographers, entered the city barefoot. Acclaimed, he was enthroned on February 12, 1049, as Leo IX.

He surrounded himself with reformers from Lorraine and elsewhere: the monk Humbert of Moyenmoutier, whom he made a cardinal; Frederick of Lorraine, the future Pope Stephen IX; and a young Roman monk named Hildebrand, the future Gregory VII. He turned the college of cardinals into an instrument of government at the service of the whole Church.

Above all, he refused to govern from Rome alone. In five years he crossed the Alps several times and held councils in Rome, Pavia, Reims, Mainz and many other cities. There he condemned simony, the buying and selling of Church offices, as well as the marriage of clerics, and he recalled that bishops must be elected by the clergy and the people.

At Reims, in October 1049, he consecrated the new abbey church of Saint-Remi and required the bishops present to declare publicly whether they had paid for their office. Everywhere he went he consecrated churches and altars, notably in Alsace and Lorraine.

The final trials

The end of his pontificate was darkened by two trials. In southern Italy, the Normans were seizing land and threatening the population. Leo IX raised an army and marched against them, but he was defeated at Civitate on June 18, 1053. The victors treated him with respect but held him for nearly nine months at Benevento. Even in his own time, this military venture was criticized by reformers such as Saint Peter Damian.

At the same time, relations with the Church of Constantinople grew tense. The pope sent a legation led by Cardinal Humbert. Leo IX died in Rome on April 19, 1054, after having himself carried near the tomb of Saint Peter.

A few weeks later, on July 16, 1054, Humbert laid a bull of excommunication against Patriarch Michael Cerularius on the altar of Hagia Sophia, and the patriarch excommunicated the legates in turn. That date has remained the symbol of the separation between Catholics and Orthodox. The mutual excommunications were lifted in 1965 by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras.

Why is Saint Leo IX venerated in Alsace and Lorraine?

Saint Leo IX is not officially the patron of a particular profession, but he is a much-loved figure in eastern France. Alsace honors him as one of its own, born, according to tradition, at Eguisheim. Lorraine remembers the bishop who governed Toul for more than two decades. His feast is celebrated in particular in the dioceses of Strasbourg, Metz and Nancy-Toul.

For all Catholics, he is a model of the pastor who does not condemn abuses from afar but goes out to meet the Churches, listens, corrects and encourages. His holiness shows in his courage as a reformer, and also in the humility with which he accepted defeat and captivity. He was honored as a saint very early, by immemorial cult.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Leo IX in art

- **Papal vestments**: he is shown as a pope, often wearing the tiara and blessing.
- **The church offered to him**: an 11th-century manuscript shows an abbot presenting him with a church, a reminder of the many churches and altars he consecrated.
- **The Eguisheim fountain**: in his traditional birthplace, a statue of the blessing pope stands above the fountain of the central square.



The statue of Saint Leo IX on the castle square in Eguisheim, Alsace.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Leo IX, or follow the novena to Saint Leo IX from April 10 to 18, so that it ends on the eve of his feast.

Where to pray to Saint Leo IX

- **Eguisheim** (Alsace): the Chapel of Saint Leo, built in the 19th century within the walls of the family castle.
- **Dabo** (Moselle): the Chapel of Saint Leo, on top of the rock overlooking the village.
- **Toul** (Lorraine): the Cathedral of Saint-Étienne, the seat of his episcopate.
- **Reims**: the Basilica of Saint-Remi, which he consecrated in 1049.
- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Basilica, where he was buried.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Leo IX for the Church

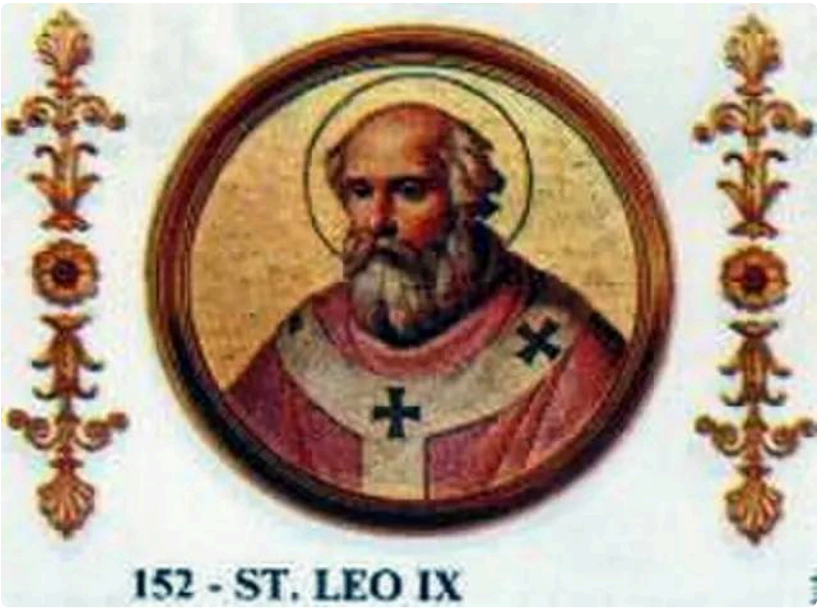
No prayer written by Saint Leo IX has come down to us with certainty, although tradition credits him with liturgical chants. This page therefore offers a Gospel passage that sheds light on his mission as pope, followed by an original prayer inspired by his life as bishop of Toul and reforming pope.

A Gospel passage to pray with him

Leo IX wanted to give the Church back its freedom and purity, recalling that the pope is first of all the servant of unity. He died in Rome, near the tomb of the apostle Peter. These words of Christ to Peter illuminate his whole life:

> *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers."*

Source: Gospel of Luke 22:31-32.



Saint Leo IX, 11th-century pope from Alsace.

Prayer to Saint Leo IX for the Church

Saint Leo IX, you left the honors of the court to serve the modest diocese of Toul: teach me to prefer service to success.

You entered Rome as a pilgrim, asking to be welcomed by its people and clergy: give me the humility never to impose anything by force and always to seek the agreement of my brothers and sisters.

You traveled the roads of Europe to free the Church from money and corruption: obtain for the Church of today upright and courageous pastors, and help me live my faith with integrity.

You knew defeat and captivity without losing your peace: I entrust to you all who are going through failure, and all who work for the unity of Christians. I also entrust to you my own intention: (name it in silence).

Saint Leo IX, pray for us, that each of us, in our own place, may help renew the Church. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Leo IX is celebrated on April 19, the anniversary of his death in Rome. His feast is kept especially in the dioceses of Strasbourg, Metz and Nancy-Toul, and it usually falls during the Easter season.

This prayer is fitting:

- when you pray for the pope, for bishops and for priests;
- during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, or whenever you pray for reconciliation between Catholics and Orthodox;

- when a project has failed and you need to find peace again;
- when you are tempted to compromise your honesty at work.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Leo IX

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Leo IX. It is neither an official liturgical text nor a text written by the saint. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on April 10; it then ends on April 18, the day before his feast on April 19.

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 and a Hail Mary. This novena often falls during the Easter season, so it can be prayed in the joy of the Resurrection. The suggested act helps you carry the prayer into your day. You may pray it alone, as a family or with your parish, and offer it in particular for the Church, her pastors and the unity of Christians.



Saint Leo IX, church window or statue.

Day 1: Receiving and passing on

Young Bruno was formed at the cathedral school of Toul. What he received from his teachers he gave back to the Church a hundredfold. Every vocation is rooted in something handed on by others, and every believer is called to hand it on in turn.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who passed on the faith to me. Make me able to pass it on in my turn.

Today: Thank, or pray for, a teacher or catechist who mattered to you.

Day 2: Choosing service

A brilliant career was open to Bruno at the imperial court. Yet he chose the small diocese of Toul, poor and exposed on a border. Serving others is worth more than any honor, and God often waits for us in the humbler place.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the ambition that draws me away from you, and teach me to serve wherever you send me.

Today: Do a discreet favor for someone without expecting any thanks.

Day 3: Caring for the flock

As bishop of Toul for more than twenty years, Bruno visited his parishes, trained his clergy and reformed the monasteries. A good shepherd knows his own and goes to them. The Church needs pastors who are close to their people.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you our bishops and priests. Give them the closeness and patience of good shepherds.

Today: Pray by name for your bishop and for the priests of your parish.

Day 4: Entering as a pilgrim

Chosen by the emperor, Bruno would only become pope with the consent of Rome. He entered the city as a pilgrim, barefoot according to his biographers. True authority is not seized: it is received as a gift and exercised as a service.

Prayer: Lord, give me the humility not to impose myself, and the simplicity to receive what you entrust to me.

Today: Take a short walk while praying, like a small pilgrimage.

Day 5: Refusing corruption

Leo IX fought tirelessly against simony, the trade in Church offices. Money must never buy what is sacred, nor corrupt those who serve. His councils called the clergy back to honesty and freedom.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from the love of money, and make me honest in my work and in my commitments.

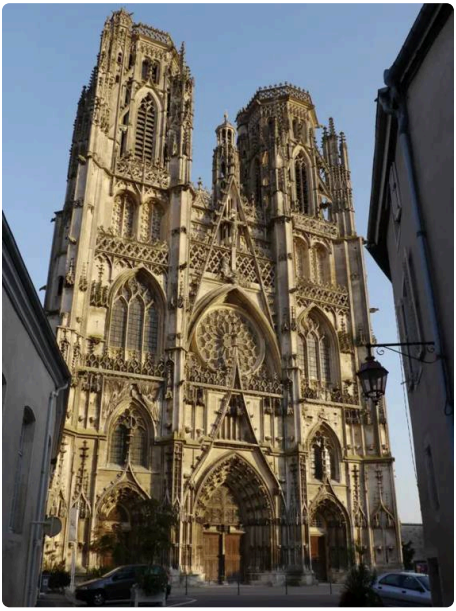
Today: Give to a charity, or set right a small injustice.

Day 6: Going out to meet others

Leo IX crossed the Alps several times to hold councils. He did not govern from a distance: he went to see, to listen and to correct. Charity moves; it does not wait for others to come.

Prayer: Lord, do not let me stay shut up in my comfort. Send me toward those who need me.

Today: Visit or call someone you have not seen in a long time.



The Cathedral of Saint-Étienne in Toul, seat of Bruno of Eguisheim as bishop.

Day 7: Accepting failure

Defeated at Civitate, Leo IX spent months in captivity. His plans had failed. Yet he went on praying and governing the Church in peace. Failure does not have the last word for those who place their trust in God.

Prayer: Lord, when my plans fail, keep me from bitterness. Teach me to place my failures in your hands.

Today: Entrust a recent failure to God and draw one lesson from it.

Day 8: Praying for unity

At the end of his life, relations between Rome and Constantinople broke down, and that separation still endures. Praying for the unity of Christians continues the mission of Pope Leo.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you prayed that all may be one: gather together your divided disciples.

Today: Pray for Orthodox Christians, or spend a moment before an icon.

Day 9: Near Peter

As he was dying, Leo IX had himself carried near the tomb of Saint Peter. He placed his unfinished work in the hands of God. Others after him would carry it on, and the reform he began would transform the Church.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention before you. Through the intercession of Saint Leo IX, renew your Church and keep her faithful. Amen.

Today: Pray for the pope.

Closing prayer

Saint Leo IX, shepherd and pilgrim, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I carry. Pray for the Church, for her unity and her holiness. Pray for Alsace and Lorraine, where you were born and grew up, and for all the places where the faith has grown cold. Obtain for me the courage of renewal and the humility of service. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Chapel of Saint Leo IX in Eguisheim, Alsace

Eguisheim, a wine-growing village near Colmar, claims to be the birthplace of Saint Leo IX, the Alsatian pope. In the center of the village, built in concentric circles around the former castle of the Counts of Eguisheim, the Saint Leo chapel and the fountain topped with his statue keep his memory alive. It is the chief place of devotion to the saint in Alsace.

The castle of the Counts of Eguisheim

In the 11th century, Eguisheim was one of the seats of the powerful family of the Counts of Nordgau, to which Bruno, the future pope, belonged. The octagonal castle at the center of the village has been altered several times over the centuries. Local tradition holds that Bruno was born there in 1002, though Dabo, in Lorraine, also keeps the memory of his birth.

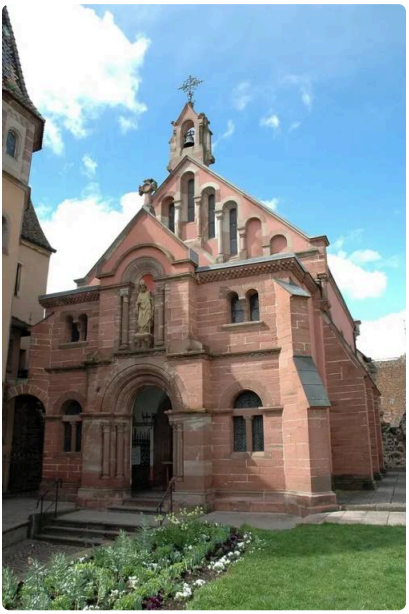
The Saint Leo chapel

In the late 19th century, a Neo-Romanesque chapel was built within the castle grounds in honor of Saint Leo IX. Its interior decoration is devoted entirely to the holy pope, a native son. On the neighboring square, a fountain bears a statue of the pope giving a blessing, which has become one of the village's emblems.

A few steps away, the parish church of Saints Peter and Paul keeps a sculpted Romanesque portal and a statue of the Virgin that opens up, witnesses to the long religious history of Eguisheim.

Praying in Eguisheim

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Leo IX. On site, a time of silence in the chapel is a good moment to entrust an intention, for example for the Church, for its unity or for Alsace. The prayer to Saint Leo IX can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia for a personal visit.



The Saint Leo chapel in Eguisheim, the interior.

Other places associated with Saint Leo IX

- **Dabo** (Moselle): the Saint Leo chapel, built on top of the Dabo rock, on the site of the former castle of his mother's family.
- **Toul** (Meurthe-et-Moselle): the Cathedral of Saint-Étienne, seat of his episcopate from 1026 to 1051.
- **Reims**: the Basilica of Saint-Remi, whose abbey church he consecrated in October 1049.

- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Basilica, where he was buried in 1054.

Practical information

Eguisheim is a few kilometers south of Colmar, on the Alsace Wine Route. The village is very popular with visitors, especially in summer and during Advent. The feast of Saint Leo IX, on April 19, is marked there by celebrations. Ask the parish or the tourist office about the chapel's opening and Mass times.

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