

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Linus, Pope

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 23

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Linus, Pope

First successor of Saint Peter as Bishop of Rome, in the 1st century.

Feast day	September 23
Born	1st century, Tuscany, according to tradition (Volterra)
Died	c. 76-79, Rome
Canonized	Pre-congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Era	1st century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Linus, Successor of Saint Peter

Novena to Saint Linus

St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Burial Place of Saint Linus

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 Linus, Pope

Saint Linus is, according to the oldest lists, the first successor of the apostle Peter as head of the Church of Rome. Very little is known about him, but that little is precious: his name appears in a letter of Saint Paul, Saint Irenaeus of Lyon places him first in the list of the bishops of Rome, and the Church still names him today in the First Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass. His feast day is September 23.

Who was Saint Linus?

Linus was a Christian of the first generation, who knew the apostles. The end of the Second Letter to Timothy passes on his greetings: "Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren" (2 Timothy 4:21). In the mid-60s, then, he belonged to the small community gathered around Paul, a prisoner in Rome. The identification of this Linus with Peter's successor was already made in the 2nd century by Saint Irenaeus.

The rest comes from later traditions. The *Liber Pontificalis*, a collection of notes on the popes compiled from the 6th century onward, says he came from Tuscia, the region of present-day Tuscany, and was the son of a certain Herculanus; the town of Volterra claims the honor of being his birthplace. These details cannot be verified and should be received with caution.

Key dates

- **1st century**: Born, according to tradition, in Tuscany.
- **c. 64-67**: Martyrdom of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Rome, under Nero.
- **c. 66-67**: He is in Rome with Saint Paul, who passes on his greetings to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:21).

- **After Peter's death**: He becomes the first of his successors as Bishop of Rome.
- **c. 76-79**: Dies in Rome; tradition holds that he was a martyr and that he was buried near Saint Peter on the Vatican Hill. His successor is Anacletus (or Cletus).
- **c. 180**: Saint Irenaeus of Lyon names him first in the list of the bishops of Rome.

The testimony of Saint Irenaeus

The most important document about Saint Linus is the treatise *Against Heresies* by Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, written around 180. To show that the teaching of the apostles had been faithfully handed down, Irenaeus gives the list of the bishops of Rome from Peter and Paul onward. He writes, in substance, that the two apostles, having founded and built up the Church of Rome, entrusted the office of bishop to Linus, and he adds that this is the Linus whom Paul mentions in the letters to Timothy (Book III, chapter 3). Then come Anacletus and Clement.

This testimony is not meant to tell a life story but to bear witness to a continuity: the faith received in Rome is the faith the apostles preached. That is precisely what makes Linus important. He did not stand out through writings or journeys, but through faithfulness: receiving an inheritance and passing it on intact.

The early days of the Church of Rome

We should not imagine the papacy of the 1st century on the model of later centuries. The Christian community of Rome was then small, meeting in private houses, and had just come through Nero's persecution, which cost the lives of Peter, Paul and many of the faithful. Historians discuss how it was

organized and the exact role of its leaders. But by the end of the 2nd century, the Church of Rome recognized itself in a succession of bishops of whom Linus is the first after the apostle.

The *Liber Pontificalis* credits him with a decision requiring women to cover their heads in the assembly, echoing the First Letter to the Corinthians. This is more likely a later attribution. Likewise, his martyrdom, affirmed by tradition, is not attested by sources from the 1st or 2nd century.

A name spoken at Mass

The name of Saint Linus entered the prayer of the Church through the Roman Canon, the oldest Eucharistic Prayer of the Latin rite, now called Eucharistic Prayer I. In the prayer known as the *Communicantes*, after the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and the apostles, the priest names the first successors of Peter and then other martyrs: "Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus, Cornelius, Cyprian..." Each time this canon is prayed, the Church recalls that it is built on the witness of the apostles and of those who came after them.

His feast, September 23, once appeared in the General Roman Calendar; since the reform of 1969 it remains listed on that date in the Roman Martyrology. The Diocese of Volterra venerates him as one of its saints.



The cathedral of Volterra, Tuscany.

Why pray to Saint Linus?

Saint Linus has no traditional patronage, but his life speaks clearly. He reminds us that holiness does not always need to be spectacular. He took over from a martyred apostle, in a wounded community, and kept what he had received. Catholics can pray to him for the pope and the bishops, for the unity of the Church, and for anyone who takes on a responsibility after a famous predecessor.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Linus in art

As no authentic portrait exists, Saint Linus is shown as a pope: with papal vestments, often the tiara and a gesture of blessing. In the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, his medallion comes right after Peter's in the long series of papal portraits that runs around the nave.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Linus, which includes the passage of the Roman Canon where he is named, or follow the novena to Saint Linus, from September 14 to 22, ending on the eve of his feast.

Where to pray to Saint Linus

- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Basilica, where tradition places his burial, near that of the apostle.
- **Volterra** (Tuscany): the cathedral, in the town that tradition gives as his birthplace.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, where his portrait opens the gallery of popes after Peter's.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Linus, Successor of Saint Peter

No writings of Saint Linus have come down to us, and no ancient prayer is attributed to him. But his name is written at the heart of the Latin liturgy: he is named in the Roman Canon, the oldest Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman rite. This page presents that passage, followed by an original prayer to Saint Linus.

Saint Linus in the Roman Canon

In the *Communicantes* of the Roman Canon (today Eucharistic Prayer I), the Church unites its offering with the memory of the Virgin Mary, the apostles and the martyrs. After the twelve apostles come the first bishops of Rome, with Linus at their head. Here is the passage from the Roman Missal, in Latin, with an English rendering by Saintspedia.

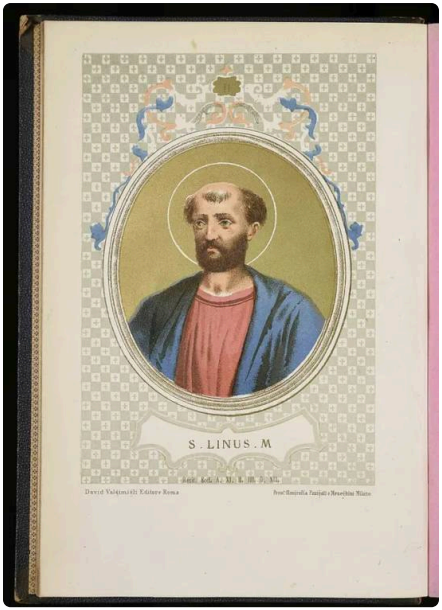
> *Communicantes, et memoriam venerantes, in primis gloriosae semper Virginis Mariae, Genetricis Dei et Domini nostri Iesu Christi [...] et beatorum Apostolorum ac Martyrum tuorum, Petri et Pauli, Andreae [...], Lini, Cleti, Clementis, Xysti, Cornelii, Cypriani, Laurentii, Chrysogoni, Ioannis et Pauli, Cosmae et Damiani, et omnium Sanctorum tuorum; quorum meritis precibusque concedas, ut in omnibus protectionis tuae muniamur auxilio.*
>
> *In communion with the whole Church, we honor first the memory of the glorious ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of our God and Lord Jesus Christ [...], and of your blessed apostles and martyrs Peter and Paul, Andrew [...], Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus, Cornelius, Cyprian, Lawrence, Chrysogonus, John and Paul, Cosmas and Damian, and of all your saints: through their merits and prayers, grant that in all things we may be defended by the help of your protection.*

Source: Roman Missal, Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), *Communicantes*. This liturgical text, attested since the early Middle Ages, is in common use.

A word of Scripture

> *"Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren." (2 Timothy 4:21)*

This is the only mention of Linus in the New Testament. Around 180, Saint Irenaeus of Lyon identified him with the first successor of Peter (*Against Heresies*, Book III, chapter 3).



Saint Linus, pope and successor of Saint Peter.

Prayer to Saint Linus for the Pope and the Church

Saint Linus, you knew the apostles and received from their hands the care of the Church of Rome: pray for us.

You took up Peter's task in the aftermath of persecution, when the community was mourning its martyrs: teach us to keep courage in difficult times and to stay faithful to the Gospel we have received.

I entrust to you the pope, the bishops and all who are charged with handing on the faith. I entrust to you those who take on a responsibility after someone else and wonder whether they are worthy of it. Finally, I entrust to you my own intention (name it in silence).

Obtain for the Church unity, peace and faithfulness, and for each of us the grace to pass on in our turn what we have received. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, September 23, when the Roman Martyrology commemorates him. The Diocese of Volterra, in Tuscany, honors him in a special way.
- Whenever you hear the Roman Canon at Mass and his name is spoken.
- For the pope, especially at the beginning of a pontificate or in times of trial for the Church.
- When you take over a role from someone you admire and feel unequal to the task.

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

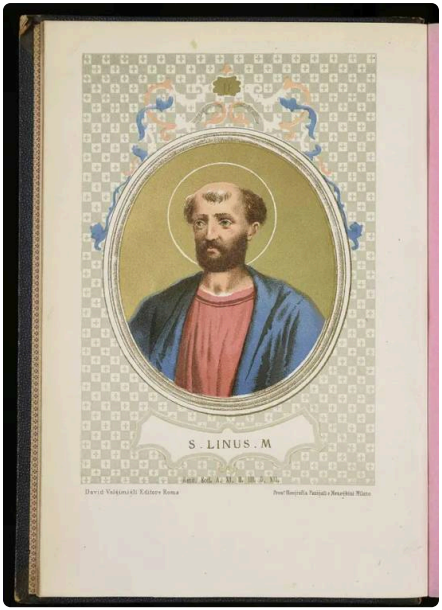
NOVENA

Novena to Saint Linus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the little we know about Saint Linus and by the faith of the Church in the first centuries. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast of September 23, begin on September 14; it ends on September 22. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially for the pope and for the unity of the Church.

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 the Apostles' Creed, the profession of faith received from the apostles. 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. Because so little is known of Saint Linus, this novena is less about the details of his life than about what he stands for: the faithful handing on of the faith, from the apostles down to us.



Saint Linus, pope, church window or statue.

Day 1: A name in a letter

Linus appears only once in Scripture, among the brethren who send greetings to Timothy. A simple mention, but it says what matters: he belonged to the community gathered around Paul in Rome, in the hour of trial.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the Christian community that welcomed me. Make me a faithful brother or sister.

Today: Read the end of the Second Letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:6-22).

Day 2: With the apostles

Linus listened to Peter and Paul. He received the Gospel from men who had seen the Lord or met him on the road to Damascus. His faith was not secondhand; it was a living tradition, received from witnesses.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to listen to your Word as the first Christians listened to the apostles.

Today: Read a chapter of the Acts of the Apostles slowly.

Day 3: After the persecution

When Linus took up Peter's task, the community of Rome had just lost its apostles and many martyrs. It had to go on, in spite of fear and mourning. The Church has often been rebuilt by quiet people after great storms.

Prayer: Lord, support the Christians who are persecuted today, and give them strength to remain faithful.

Today: Pray for a country where Christians suffer for their faith.

Day 4: Receiving an inheritance

Linus founded nothing: he received. His greatness lies in welcoming what had been entrusted to him without distorting it. Faithfulness is not lack of imagination; it is a form of love.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to receive the faith of the Church with gratitude, without reducing it to my own tastes.

Today: Thank God for someone who passed on the faith to you.

Day 5: Following someone greater

Taking Peter's place was enough to make anyone feel crushed. Linus agreed to serve without comparing himself. He knew that the Church does not rest on the talents of its leaders but on Christ.

Prayer: Lord, when a task seems too big for me, remind me that it is you who are at work.

Today: Pray for someone who has just taken on a new responsibility.

Day 6: A united Church

Saint Irenaeus quoted the list of the bishops of Rome to show the unity of the faith. Linus is one link in the chain that joins the Church of today to the apostles.

Prayer: Lord, keep your Church in unity. Heal our divisions and gather all Christians together.

Today: Pray for Christian unity.

Day 7: Praying for the pope

Today, the successor of Linus is the pope. He carries the same charge: to strengthen his brothers and sisters in the faith. He needs our prayer more than our commentary, as Peter needed the prayer of the Church when he was in prison.

Prayer: Lord, bless our Holy Father. Give him wisdom, strength and peace to guide your people.

Today: Read an excerpt from a recent text of the pope.

Day 8: A hidden holiness

We know almost nothing about Linus. His life remained hidden, like the lives of so many faithful Christians whom God alone knows. Their names are written in heaven, even if history has forgotten them.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to do good without seeking to be seen. You who see in secret, that is enough for me.

Today: Do someone a kindness without telling anyone.

Day 9: Passing it on

Linus handed on to Anacletus what he had received from Peter. Each of us is called to pass on the faith to those who come after us: children, friends, colleagues, neighbors.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Linus, make me a faithful witness of the Gospel. Amen.

Today: Share with a child or a friend one reason you believe.

Closing prayer

Saint Linus, first successor of the apostle Peter, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for the pope, for the bishops and for the whole Church. Obtain for us the grace to keep the faith of the apostles and to pass it on with joy. May we, like you, be faithful links in the long chain of witnesses that leads from Christ to the people of our time. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Burial Place of Saint Linus

According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Saint Linus was buried on the Vatican, near the body of Saint Peter. No tomb bearing his name has been identified with certainty today, but Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, built over the tomb of the Apostle, remains the natural place to come and pray to him, together with the first popes who rest in the same ground.

The Vatican, cemetery of the first Christians

In the 1st century, the Vatican hill was outside the city. There was a circus there, where executions took place under Nero, and a necropolis where Christians buried Saint Peter. Tradition reports that several of his first successors, including Linus, were buried beside him. In the 4th century, Emperor Constantine had a great basilica built over the Apostle's tomb; it was replaced beginning in 1506 by the present basilica.

The necropolis and the confessio of Saint Peter

Excavations carried out beneath the basilica beginning in 1939 uncovered a Roman necropolis and, at its center, a small 2nd-century monument that Christians venerated as Peter's tomb. The high altar and Bernini's baldachin stand exactly above it. In front of the altar, the confessio, surrounded by lamps, allows you to pray as close as possible to this place. This is where you can remember Saint Linus and the first popes. The necropolis can be visited only in small groups, by reservation with the Excavations Office of the Fabbrica of Saint Peter.

Praying to Saint Linus at Saint Peter's

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Linus and the end of the second letter to Timothy. On site, a time of silence before the confessio lets you pray for the pope and for the unity of the Church. The prayer to Saint Linus, which draws on the Roman Canon, suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Linus

- **Volterra** (Tuscany): the city that tradition names as his homeland, whose diocese honors him as one of its saints.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, where the gallery of papal portraits begins with Peter and then Linus.
- **Rome**: the Mamertine Prison, in the Forum, which tradition associates with Saint Peter's captivity.

Practical information

Saint Peter's Basilica is open to visitors every day, with a security check at the entrance; modest dress is required. Mass times and visiting hours, as well as reservation details for the necropolis, are published on the basilica's official website, basilicasanpietro.va.

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: Unknown author, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The cathedral of Volterra, Tuscany.: Image: sailko, CC BY 2.5, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Linus, pope and successor of Saint Peter.: Image: Oleografia Panigati e Meneghini Milano, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Linus, pope, church window or statue.: Image: Oleografia Panigati e Meneghini Milano, CC0, 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