

BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Lucius I

*Life, prayer and novena*

Feast day: March 5

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IN BRIEF

## Saint Lucius I

*Pope in 253 and 254, exiled and then welcomed back to Rome, who defended the reconciliation of fallen Christians.*

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| **Feast day** | March 5 |
| **Died** | March 254, Rome |
| **Era** | 3rd century |
| **Patron saint of** | Zealand (Denmark) |

## In this booklet


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Novena to Saint Lucius I

Credits and sources



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LIFE

# Saint Lucius I

Saint Lucius I was bishop of Rome for barely eight months, from June 253 to March 254. Exiled shortly after his election, he returned to Rome when a new emperor came to power, and he continued his predecessor's policy of mercy toward Christians who had given way during persecution. Long honored, wrongly, as a martyr, he is listed in the Roman Martyrology on March 5. He is also the patron saint of Zealand, the Danish island where Copenhagen stands.

## Who was Saint Lucius I?

The ancient sources say little about him. The *Liber Pontificalis* places his birth in Lucca, but more reliable witnesses say he was a Roman. Of his family, only the name of his father, Porphyrianus, is known.

He was elected, probably on June 25, 253, in a tense climate. His predecessor, Saint Cornelius, had just died in exile, and the Roman community was still divided by the schism of Novatian.

## Key dates

- **June 253**: Death of Cornelius in exile at Centumcellae (today Civitavecchia).
- **June 25, 253**: Probable date of the election of Lucius.
- **Summer 253**: He is banished on the orders of Emperor Trebonianus Gallus.
- **Fall 253**: After the emperor's death, he returns to Rome and is welcomed with joy.
- **March 4 or 5, 254**: Dies in Rome of natural causes; buried in the Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Callixtus.

- **c. 1100**: A skull venerated as his is brought to Roskilde, and he becomes patron of Zealand.
- **1969**: His feast is removed from the General Roman Calendar but remains in the Martyrology.

## Exile and return

Barely consecrated, Lucius was banished, probably like Cornelius, by the imperial authorities. The exile was short. Emperor Trebonianus Gallus was assassinated, and his successor Valerian at first showed himself well disposed toward Christians, so Lucius could come home. An ancient catalog of the popes says that he returned "safe and sound, by the will of God."

From Carthage, Bishop Saint Cyprian wrote to him twice: first to congratulate him on his election and his courage in exile, then to rejoice at his return. Cyprian describes the joy of the Roman community at finding its shepherd again, and insists on one point: coming back safe and sound takes nothing away from the glory of one who has confessed the faith.

## Mercy toward the "fallen"

The great question of the time was that of the *lapsi*, the "fallen": Christians who, during the persecution of Emperor Decius, had sacrificed to the gods or bought a certificate to escape death. Novatian and his followers refused to readmit them to communion.

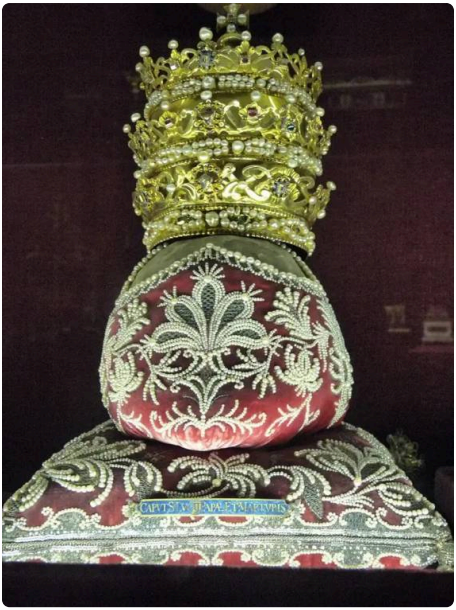
Lucius, like Cornelius before him, held that they could be welcomed back after doing penance. This position drew the attacks of the Novatianists, and Cyprian defended him in his letters.

## A false martyr, a true memory

The *Liber Pontificalis* claims that Lucius was beheaded under Valerian. That is impossible: this emperor's persecution only began in 257. The title of martyr that Cyprian gives him probably refers to his exile. This is partly why his feast was removed from the general calendar in 1969, while his memory remains in the Roman Martyrology.

His burial, on the other hand, is well attested. The archaeologist Giovanni Battista de Rossi found in the Crypt of the Popes a fragment of his funeral slab, bearing his name in Greek, *Loukios*.

The story of his relics is more complex. They are said to have been moved in the 8th and then the 9th century to churches inside the city. A skull venerated as his was brought to Roskilde around 1100, when Pope Paschal II made Lucius the patron of the Danish region of Zealand. Legend says that only this skull could drive the demons out of the Isefjord. It is kept today in the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Ansgar in Copenhagen, but radiocarbon dating has attributed it to a man who died about a century after Lucius.



*A reliquary of Saint Lucius.*

## Why is Saint Lucius I the patron saint of Zealand?

His patronage comes from the arrival of his presumed relics in Denmark around 1100. Roskilde, then the main see of Zealand, received a skull venerated as his, and Pope Paschal II gave the island Lucius as its patron. Today the reliquary is kept in the Catholic cathedral of Copenhagen, dedicated to Saint Ansgar, the apostle of the North. Even if science has cast doubt on the skull, the patronage remains a sign of the ancient bond between Rome and the Church in Denmark.

## Why pray to Saint Lucius I?

The pontificate of Lucius lasted only a few months, but it captures the essence of an era: a shepherd exposed to persecution, who took no revenge on his opponents and refused to close the door on those who had been weak. His

holiness is one of quiet faithfulness and mercy, in a Church tempted by harshness.

He can be invoked for those who have fallen away from the faith and wish to return, for those who welcome them, and for Christians who suffer exile or are separated from their community.

## Symbols and how to recognize Saint Lucius I in art

No portrait from his lifetime survives. He appears in the series of imaginary papal portraits at Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. The most striking object linked to him is the head reliquary in Copenhagen. As with many early popes, he is recognized by his name and papal attributes rather than by a personal symbol.




*The funeral inscription of Lucius in the Crypt of the Popes.*

## Where to pray to Saint Lucius I

- **Rome, Appian Way**: the Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Callixtus, where his gravestone survives.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Prassede, where his relics are said to have been placed in the 9th century.
- **Copenhagen, Denmark**: the Cathedral of Saint Ansgar, which keeps the Roskilde reliquary.

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

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Lucius I for Those Who Have Fallen Away

No traditional prayer to Saint Lucius I has come down to us. This pope of the 3rd century, exiled and then welcomed home with joy, defended the reconciliation of Christians who had fallen away under persecution. Here is an original prayer for those who wish to return to the Church and for those who welcome them, followed by a verse from the Gospel that sums up his mercy.

## Prayer to Saint Lucius I for those who have fallen away

*Saint Lucius, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you knew exile and the joy of returning to your flock: pray for all who are far from home, from their families or from their Christian community.*

*You refused to close the door on those who had been weak in time of persecution: intercede for all who have drifted away from the faith and wish to come back. May they find the courage to take the first step, and a Church that welcomes them with mercy.*

*Help me, too, to rise again after my falls, and never to look down on those who have been weaker than me. Give me a heart that forgives and that rejoices when the lost return.*

*Patron of Zealand, bless the Church in Denmark and in all the countries of the North, where Catholics are few.*

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

*Obtain for me quiet faithfulness in trial and a merciful heart in all things. Amen.*

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

## A word of the Gospel

> *"I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."*

Source: Gospel of Luke 15:7, Douay-Rheims translation.

## When to pray this prayer

Saint Lucius I is commemorated on March 5 in the Roman Martyrology, the anniversary of his death in Rome in 254. This date usually falls during Lent, a fitting time to pray for those who wish to return to confession and to the sacraments. You can pray to him:

- for a loved one who has left the Church;
- before going back to confession after a long time;
- for exiles, refugees and those far from home;
- for Catholics in Denmark and Scandinavia.

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

NOVENA

# Novena to Saint Lucius I

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Lucius I, pope in 253 and 254, exiled and then welcomed back to Rome, who defended mercy toward Christians who had fallen away under persecution. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on February 25 (February 26 in a leap year); it ends on March 5. You can also pray it at any time for someone who wishes to return to the faith.

## 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 proposed for each day helps carry the prayer into ordinary life. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

You may begin each day with the sign of the cross and this short invocation:

> *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Saint Lucius, merciful shepherd, pray for us. Amen.*

This novena is especially suited to praying for a specific person who has left the Church or stopped practicing the faith. You may write that person's name on a piece of paper and keep it with you during the nine days. Do not expect immediate results: Lucius himself saw the fruit of mercy only little by little, and God works at his own pace in each heart.

## Day 1: Elected in a time of trial

Lucius became pope just after his predecessor Cornelius had died in exile. He accepted a task that could cost him his freedom. Sometimes God calls us precisely when the road looks hardest.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me the courage to say yes to you even in difficult times.

**Today:** Accept a task or a duty you would rather avoid.

## Day 2: A divided community

The Church of Rome was torn by the schism of Novatian. Lucius took up his office in the middle of these wounds. Every community knows divisions; the shepherd's task is to hold it together in truth and love.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, heal the divisions in your Church and in my parish.

**Today:** Speak a kind word to someone in your community you usually avoid.

## Day 3: Exile

Barely consecrated, Lucius was banished from Rome. Exile means losing one's home, one's people and one's bearings. Many people today live this experience.

**Prayer:** Saint Lucius, pray for exiles, refugees and migrants. Give them protection and a welcome.

**Today:** Pray for a refugee family, or support an organization that helps them.

## Day 4: The joy of return

When Lucius came home, the Roman community welcomed him with great joy. Saint Cyprian wrote of this joy from Carthage. Reunions in faith are a foretaste of heaven.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for the joy of meeting again those we love. Bring back those who are far away.

**Today:** Contact someone you have not spoken to for a long time.

## Day 5: Friendship between bishops

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, encouraged and defended Lucius in his letters. Even shepherds need friends who support them and tell them the truth.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for the friends who strengthen my faith. Make me a faithful friend in return.

**Today:** Write a word of encouragement to a friend, a priest or a religious.

## Day 6: The fallen

Under the persecution of Decius, many Christians had denied their faith out of fear. Some wanted to shut them out forever. Lucius held that they could return after penance. Weakness is not the last word.

**Prayer:** Saint Lucius, pray for all who have fallen and dare not come back. Give them hope.

**Today:** Pray by name for someone who has drifted away from the faith.

## Day 7: Mercy and truth

Lucius did not pretend that the fall of the *lapsi* did not matter: he asked for penance. But he opened the door. True mercy neither excuses everything nor condemns forever.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me a heart that is both truthful and merciful, toward others and toward myself.

**Today:** Make an examination of conscience and prepare to go to confession.

## Day 8: Holiness without spectacle

For a long time Lucius was wrongly called a martyr. In fact he died in peace. His holiness lies not in a dramatic death, but in quiet faithfulness and mercy. God sees the hidden good.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to be faithful in ordinary life, without seeking to be noticed.

**Today:** Do a good deed in secret.

## Day 9: From Rome to the North

Centuries after his death, Lucius became the patron of Zealand in Denmark. His memory crossed Europe and still links Rome to the Church of the North, where Catholics are a small flock.

**Prayer:** Saint Lucius, bless the Catholics of Denmark and of all places where the faithful are few. Keep them united and joyful.

**Today:** Pray for Christians who live their faith as a small minority.

## Closing prayer

> *Saint Lucius, shepherd of Rome, you knew exile and the joy of return, and you opened the door of the Church to those who had fallen. Pray for all who are far from God and wish to come back, for those who welcome them, and for me. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Obtain for me a faithful and merciful heart, so that I may rejoice with heaven over every sinner who returns. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To continue, pray the prayer to Saint Lucius I or read his life.

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