

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Marcellinus, Pope

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 26

IN BRIEF

Saint Marcellinus, Pope

Bishop of Rome from 296 to 304, during the persecution of Diocletian.

Feast day	April 26
Born	3rd century, Rome, according to tradition
Died	304 (October 25, according to the Liberian Catalogue), Rome
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Marcellinus in Times of Fear and Failure

Novena to Saint Marcellinus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Marcellinus, Pope

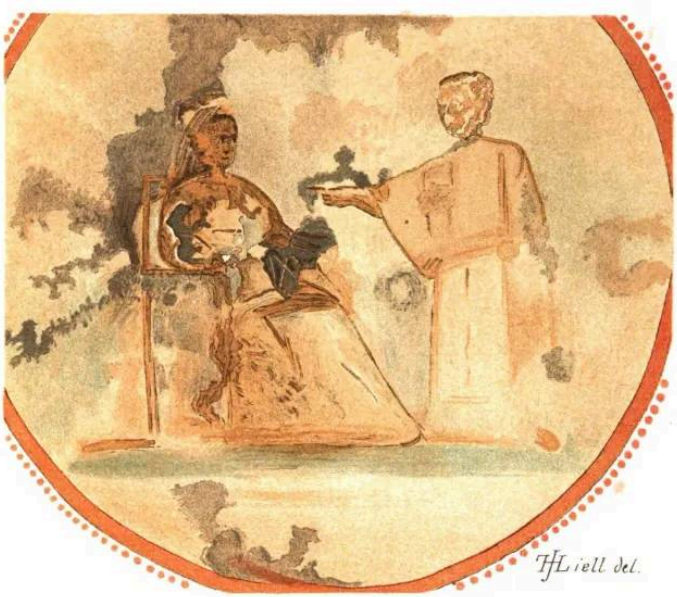
Saint Marcellinus was bishop of Rome from 296 to 304, at the moment when the last and most violent persecution of the Roman Empire broke out, under Emperor Diocletian. His memory is surrounded by a question that divided Christians as early as antiquity: did he give way before the persecutors before dying as a martyr? The sources contradict one another, and that is precisely what gives his figure its particular depth. He is traditionally celebrated on April 26.

Who was Saint Marcellinus?

Almost nothing is known of his life before his election. Tradition says he was a Roman. He succeeded Saint Caius in 296 and governed the Church of Rome for eight years, first in a time of relative peace, then in the storm. It was during his pontificate, in 301 according to the traditional date, that Armenia became the first kingdom to adopt Christianity officially, a sign that the faith was then spreading far beyond the borders of the Empire.

In 303, Emperor Diocletian issued a series of edicts against the Christians: churches were destroyed, sacred books confiscated and burned, and Christians were ordered to sacrifice to the gods of Rome. For the Church of Rome, it was a trial of unprecedented scale.

Pope Saint Marcellinus should not be confused with the martyrs *Saints Marcellinus and Peter*, a Roman priest and an exorcist who also died under Diocletian and are celebrated on June 2, nor with Saint Marcellin Champagnat, the 19th-century French founder of the Marist Brothers.



The Catacomb of Priscilla, where Saint Marcellinus was buried.

Key dates in the life of Saint Marcellinus

- **June 30, 296**: Beginning of his pontificate, according to the ancient lists.
- **301**: Traditional date of the official conversion of Armenia.
- **303**: First persecution edicts of Diocletian.
- **304**: Death of Marcellinus, on October 25 according to the Liberian Catalogue.
- **After 304**: Burial in the cemetery of Priscilla, on the Via Salaria.
- **308**: After several years without a bishop, Marcellus I becomes bishop of Rome.

A pope accused of having given way

The *Liber Pontificalis*, a collection of notices on the popes compiled much later, draws on Acts of Marcellinus that are now lost. It reports that the pope, ordered to sacrifice, offered incense to the idols, then repented, confessed Christ and died a martyr with several companions. Other documents speak only of his failure, which might explain why his name is missing from some ancient calendars.

The question was a painful one for the early Church. Since the persecution of Decius in the 3rd century, Christians had debated how to receive back the "lapsed," those who had given way under threat. A bishop who had faltered was an even greater scandal for some.

The Donatist accusation

At the beginning of the 5th century, the Donatist bishop Petilian of Cirta, in North Africa, took up the accusation: Marcellinus and his priests had supposedly handed over the Scriptures and sacrificed to false gods. Saint Augustine answered him by denying the facts and treating them as slander.

The forged Council of Sinuessa

As for the acts of a so-called Council of Sinuessa, where three hundred bishops supposedly refused to judge the repentant pope, historians regard them as a forgery from the early 6th century. This false document mainly served to illustrate a principle: "the first see is judged by no one."

Even the martyrdom of Marcellinus is not established with certainty. What can honestly be said is that Christian memory kept the image of a shepherd caught in the storm, and that the question of his fall was raised very early.

The version of the Golden Legend

In the 13th century, Jacobus de Voragine combined the two traditions in the *Golden Legend*. Seized with fear, Marcellinus sacrificed to save his life; then, consumed with remorse, he went of his own accord to give himself up to the executioner. This account belongs to hagiography, not history, but it greatly contributed to the saint's popularity in the Middle Ages. It makes him a figure close to the apostle Peter, who denied his Master before giving his life for him.



Saint Marcellinus, medallion in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.

Why is Saint Marcellinus a patron for those who have fallen?

Saint Marcellinus has no official patronage. But the tradition of his fall and repentance makes him a close companion for:

- **Those who are afraid**, especially in the face of threats or pressure because of their faith.
- **Those who have denied what they believed**, and who wonder whether God can still welcome them.
- **Persecuted Christians** of today, who live what the Church of Rome lived under Diocletian.

Saint Marcellinus is not a flawless hero, and the sources do not allow us to settle the matter. But the Church has always counted him among her saints, and the tradition that shows him rising after his fall echoes a deep Christian conviction: God's mercy is greater than our weaknesses, and it is never too late to bear witness.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Marcellinus in art

Saint Marcellinus is depicted as a pope, in pontifical vestments. Old engravings show him with the papal tiara and the palm of martyrdom, the sign that tradition counts him among the martyrs. His portrait also appears among the mosaic medallions of the popes in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome.



Saint Marcellinus, pope and martyr according to tradition.

Where to pray to Saint Marcellinus

According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Saint Marcellinus was buried in the cemetery of Priscilla, on the Via Salaria in Rome. The Catacomb of Priscilla, one of the best known in Rome, can be visited today with a guide, and it is a moving place to pray for the persecuted Church.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Marcellinus in Times of Fear and Failure

No ancient prayer to Saint Marcellinus has come into common use. But the tradition of his life, a pope caught in the storm of persecution, who according to some sources gave way before rising again and bearing witness, speaks to everyone who has known fear or failure. Below you will find a word of the Gospel that recalls the apostle Peter, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia.

A word of the Gospel

> *"Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter said to him: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him: "Feed my sheep."*

Source: Gospel according to Saint John, chapter 21, verses 15-17 (abridged). Translation by Saintspedia. After his triple denial, Peter is confirmed in his mission by the risen Lord. The tradition of the *Golden Legend* sees in Marcellinus a successor of Peter who, like him, rose again after his fall.

Prayer to Saint Marcellinus in times of fear and failure

Saint Marcellinus, shepherd of the Church of Rome in the hour of persecution, you knew the fear of those who are threatened because of their faith. Pray for me when I am afraid, and for all who are pressured to deny what they believe.

Tradition says that you gave way, then repented and gave your life for Christ. Whatever the truth of your story, you remind me that God's mercy is greater than my falls. When I have betrayed my convictions or my friends, help me not to despair, but to return to the Lord with confidence.

I entrust to you the Christians persecuted today: give them strength, and give their persecutors a change of heart. I entrust to you also those who have left the faith out of fear or weariness: may they find the way back home.

Obtain for me the grace to bear witness to Christ with courage and humility, every day of my life.

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 Marcellinus is traditionally celebrated on April 26. You can pray to him after a confession, when you feel unworthy because of a past failure, before a situation where you are afraid to show your faith, or for the Church in countries where Christians are persecuted.

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

NOVENA

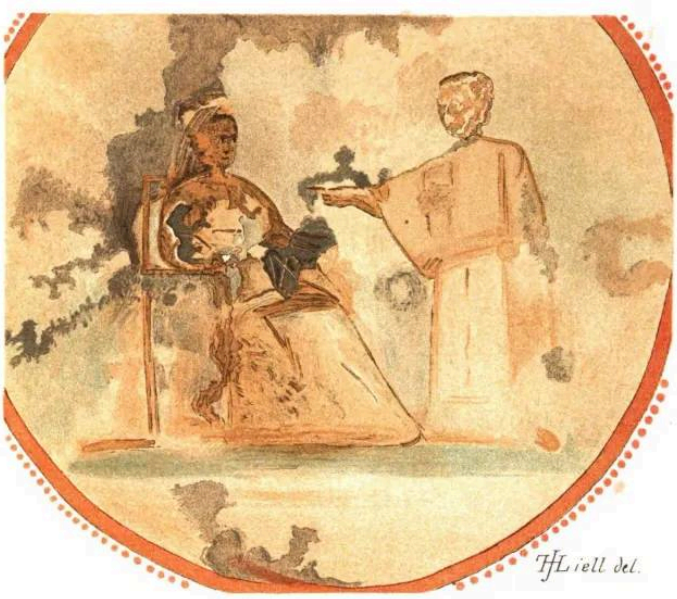
Novena to Saint Marcellinus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Marcellinus and by the traditions that surround it. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on April 17; it ends on April 25, the day before his traditional feast on April 26. It can also be prayed at any time of year, especially in times of fear, after a fall, or for persecuted Christians.

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. If you can, make a good confession during these nine days: it fits the spirit of a saint remembered for his repentance.

This novena does not ask you to decide what really happened in 303 and 304; historians themselves cannot. It invites you to walk with a shepherd of the early Church through the stages that tradition has kept: peace, persecution, fear, fall, repentance and witness. Many of us recognize our own story in that path. You may pray it alone, as a family, or with a prayer group for persecuted Christians.



The Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome, where Saint Marcellinus was buried.

Day 1: A shepherd in times of peace

For the first years of his pontificate, Marcellinus governed the Church of Rome in relative peace. Times of calm are a gift: they allow us to put down roots in prayer before the storms come.

Prayer: Lord, help me to use the peaceful days you give me to grow in faith and in love.

Today: Set aside ten minutes of silent prayer.

Day 2: The faith spreading far away

Under his pontificate, according to the traditional date, Armenia became the first kingdom to embrace Christianity officially. The Gospel was moving beyond all borders.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the spread of your Word. Bless missionaries and the young Churches of today.

Today: Pray for a missionary or support a mission work.

Day 3: When persecution comes

In 303, Diocletian ordered churches destroyed and sacred books burned. Christians had to choose between their faith and their safety.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen Christians who suffer for their faith today. Give them courage and peace.

Today: Learn about a country where Christians are persecuted and pray for them by name.

Day 4: The weight of fear

According to some sources, Marcellinus gave way under threat. Whatever happened, fear is a human reality, and even shepherds can tremble.

Prayer: Lord, you know my fears. Do not let them separate me from you. Be my strength when I am weak.

Today: Name one fear before God and entrust it to him.

Day 5: Like Peter

The tradition compares Marcellinus to the apostle Peter, who denied Jesus three times and was then forgiven and sent to feed the flock. The Lord does not take back his call.

Prayer: Jesus, you looked at Peter with love after his denial. Look at me with the same love, and give me tears of true repentance.

Today: Read John 21:15-19, the dialogue between the risen Jesus and Peter.

Day 6: Rising again

The *Golden Legend* tells that Marcellinus, overcome with remorse, went of his own accord to bear witness. A fall is never the last word for those who turn back to God.

Prayer: Merciful Father, I come back to you. Forgive me and help me to begin again.

Today: Go to confession, or prepare for it with an examination of conscience.

Day 7: Not judging too quickly

The accusations against Marcellinus were taken up by his opponents, and Saint Augustine treated them as slander. Rumors can wound a person deeply, and the truth is not always easy to know.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from rash judgment and gossip. Teach me to speak of others with justice and charity.

Today: Refuse to repeat a criticism or a rumor about someone.

Day 8: Witness to the end

Tradition counts Marcellinus among the martyrs. Bearing witness to Christ is not reserved to heroes: it is the vocation of every baptized person, in small daily choices and, if need be, in great trials.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to show my faith simply, at home, at work and among my friends.

Today: Make a visible sign of your faith: grace before a meal in public, a word about God to a friend.

Day 9: Mercy greater than our weakness

The Church has always venerated Marcellinus as a saint. His story, with its shadows, proclaims that holiness is not the absence of weakness, but the victory of grace.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Marcellinus, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Make me trust in your mercy all the days of my life. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who has left the Church, asking God to welcome them home.

Closing prayer

Saint Marcellinus, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. You lived through the storm of persecution and, according to tradition, rose again after your fall to give your life for Christ. Pray for persecuted Christians, for those who are afraid, and for those who think they are too far from God to return. Obtain for us the humility to admit our weakness and the confidence to rely on God's mercy. Amen.

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

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