

BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Mark, Pope

*Life, prayer and novena*

Feast day: October 7

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IN BRIEF

## Saint Mark, Pope

*Bishop of Rome in 336, founder of the Basilica of San Marco near the Capitoline Hill.*

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| **Feast day** | October 7 |
| **Born** | Rome |
| **Died** | October 7, 336, Rome |
| **Era** | 4th century |

## In this booklet


Life

Prayer to Pope Saint Mark for Faithful Service

Novena to Pope Saint Mark

Credits and sources



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LIFE

# Saint Mark, Pope

Pope Saint Mark was bishop of Rome for only a few months, from January to October 336, at the end of the reign of Emperor Constantine. His pontificate, one of the shortest of antiquity, is poorly known. Yet he left a lasting mark on the city: the church he founded near the Capitoline Hill, which became the Basilica of San Marco, where his relics rest today. He is celebrated on October 7, the day of his death. He should not be confused with Saint Mark the Evangelist, whose feast is April 25.

## Who was Pope Saint Mark?

What we know about him fits in a few lines, drawn from three sources: the fourth-century list of the bishops of Rome known as the Liberian Catalogue, the *Chronicle* of Eusebius of Caesarea, and the *Liber Pontificalis*, compiled much later. The *Liber Pontificalis* says he was a Roman, the son of a man named Priscus.

Historians wonder whether he is the Mark whom Emperor Constantine mentions, around 313, in a letter addressed to Pope Saint Miltiades. If so, he would have been an important member of the Roman clergy for more than twenty years before becoming pope.

He succeeded Saint Sylvester I on January 18, 336. The Church had just emerged from the persecutions: since Constantine's reign, Christians could build their churches freely, and great buildings were rising in Rome. But the East was torn by the Arian crisis, the debate over the divinity of Christ that the Council of Nicaea, in 325, had not been able to settle.

## Key dates

- **Around 313**: A Mark, perhaps the future pope, is named in a letter from Constantine to Pope Miltiades.
- **January 18, 336**: He succeeds Sylvester I.
- **336**: He founds two churches in Rome, one near the Capitoline Hill and the other on the Via Ardeatina.
- **October 7, 336**: Death in Rome; burial in the cemetery of Balbina, on the Via Ardeatina.
- **337**: Saint Julius I succeeds him after a vacancy of several months.

## A pope on the sidelines of the Arian crisis?

During the few months of his pontificate, the defenders of the faith of Nicaea were under pressure in the East: Athanasius of Alexandria was in exile, Marcellus of Ancyra was deposed, and Arius himself died in Constantinople. Nothing suggests, however, that Mark took part in these debates. A correspondence between him and Athanasius circulated in the Middle Ages, but it comes from the ninth-century "False Decretals" and is not authentic.

## What is attributed to him

### The consecration of the bishops of Rome

The *Liber Pontificalis* attributes to him a decision on the ordination of the bishops of Rome: the bishop of Ostia, to whom he is said to have granted the pallium, would always be the principal consecrator of a new pope. The rule is well attested by Saint Augustine a few decades later, but the granting of the pallium at such an early date remains doubtful.

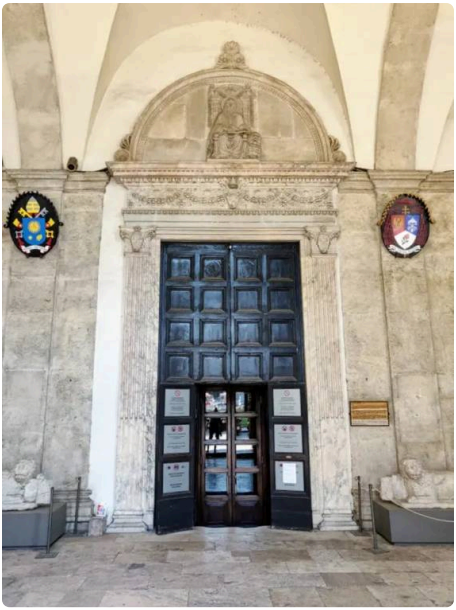
### The first Roman calendars

With more likelihood, he is credited with beginning the lists of anniversaries of the bishops and martyrs of Rome, the *Depositio episcoporum* and the *Depositio martyrum*. These lists are among the oldest witnesses to the liturgical calendar of the Church of Rome. In a sense, every calendar of saints owes something to this kind of careful remembering.

## Two churches for Rome

The most concrete memory of Mark is a building. He probably turned his own house into a church near the Capitoline Hill. At first called by his name, it was later placed under the patronage of the Evangelist Saint Mark. It is today's Basilica of San Marco, now built into the Palazzo Venezia, on Piazza Venezia.

He also had a funerary basilica built on the Via Ardeatina, in the cemetery of Balbina, where he was buried. Its ruins, which had disappeared from view by the seventeenth century, were identified in the early 1990s.



*The Basilica of San Marco at the Capitol, in Rome, founded by Pope Mark.*

## What his holiness teaches

Pope Saint Mark is not the patron saint of a particular cause. He is one of those shepherds of whom history has kept only the essentials: a short service, carried out in a Church that was learning to live in the open, and a house given to become a place of prayer. He reminds us that holiness is not measured by the length of an office or by the noise it makes. Those who give their home, their time or their goods for the life of a parish can see in him a friend.

## Symbols and how to recognize Pope Saint Mark in art

No authentic portrait of him exists. He is shown as a pope in papal vestments, as in the series of mosaic medallions at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, in Rome. Unlike the Evangelist, he is not shown with a lion or a book of

the Gospel; the lion of Saint Mark that decorates the Basilica of San Marco refers to the Evangelist, its later patron.

## Where to pray to Pope Saint Mark

The Basilica of San Marco at the Capitol, on Piazza Venezia in Rome, keeps his tomb. It stands on the site of the church he founded in his own house. Visitors to Piazza Venezia and the Capitoline Hill can step inside to pray where the fourth-century pope's memory has been kept for nearly seventeen centuries.

His feast on October 7 falls on the same day as the memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, so in most parishes he is remembered quietly. The Roman Martyrology lists him on that day, and anyone can honor him by praying for the Church of Rome and for the pope, the successor of the shepherds Mark served.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Pope Saint Mark for Faithful Service

Pope Saint Mark led the Church of Rome for only nine months, in 336, yet he left the city a lasting gift: the church he founded near the Capitoline Hill, probably in his own house, today's Basilica of San Marco. This prayer asks his help to serve faithfully, even briefly and without being noticed, and to open our homes and our lives to God. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

## Prayer to Pope Saint Mark for Faithful Service

*Saint Mark, shepherd of the Church of Rome,*
*you served the Lord for many years among the clergy of the city,*
*and for only a few months as its bishop.*
*You did not ask for a long life or a great name,*
*but you gave what you had, even your own house,*
*so that it might become a place of prayer.*

*Teach me to serve God faithfully in the time he gives me,*
*whether it is long or short.*
*Make my home a place where Christ is welcome,*
*where prayer is spoken and where the poor find a door open.*

*You helped the Church of Rome remember its bishops and martyrs:*
*help me not to forget those who handed on the faith to me,*
*my parents, my teachers and my priests,*
*and to pray for them, the living and the dead.*

*Pray for the pope and for all who serve the Church today,*
*that they may build up the house of God with humility and joy.*
*Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## When to pray this prayer

- On October 7, the feast of Pope Saint Mark, the day of his death in 336.
- When you take on a new responsibility in your parish or community, or when it ends sooner than you expected.
- When you bless a new home or wish to make your house a place of prayer.
- When you pray for deceased priests, bishops and catechists who passed on the faith.
- When visiting Rome and the Basilica of San Marco, near Piazza Venezia.

## A short prayer for the Church of Rome

> *Pope Saint Mark, who gave your house to become a church, pray for the Church of Rome and for the Holy Father. May all the baptized become living stones of the house of God. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia. To learn more, read the life of Pope Saint Mark or pray the novena to Pope Saint Mark, from September 29 to October 7.

NOVENA

# Novena to Pope Saint Mark

This novena to Pope Saint Mark is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the bishop of Rome who served only a few months, in 336, but who gave the city a church that still stands, the Basilica of San Marco near the Capitoline Hill. To end on October 7, his feast day, begin it on September 29. You can also pray it at any time of the year, especially for faithfulness in small things, for your home and for the Church.

## How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act proposed for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

## Day 1: A life known by God

We know only a few lines about Pope Mark: the son of a Roman named Priscus, he became bishop of Rome in January 336. History kept little, but God knows every day of his life, as he knows every day of ours.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, help me to live before God, without worrying about being seen or remembered by others. Amen.

**Today:** Do one good deed in secret, known only to God.

## Day 2: Long years of service

Mark may be the member of the Roman clergy named by Emperor Constantine in a letter around 313. If so, he served the Church for more than twenty years before becoming its bishop. Faithfulness is built day after day.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, give me perseverance in the service of God and of my neighbor. Amen.

**Today:** Thank someone who has served your parish or community faithfully for many years.

## Day 3: A Church out of the shadows

Mark became pope after the end of the persecutions, when Christians could at last build churches openly. Freedom was a new gift and also a new responsibility: to bear witness in full light.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, pray for Christians who still cannot practice their faith freely, and help me to use my freedom well. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted.

## Day 4: Holding to the faith of Nicaea

In Mark's time, the East was torn by the Arian crisis over the divinity of Christ. The Council of Nicaea had confessed that the Son is "one in being with the Father," the words we still say in the Creed every Sunday.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, strengthen my faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Amen.

**Today:** Pray the Nicene Creed slowly, word by word.

## Day 5: A house given to God

Mark probably turned his own house into a church near the Capitoline Hill. What he owned became a place where the people of God could gather and pray.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, help me to make my home a place of prayer, peace and hospitality. Amen.

**Today:** Set aside a corner of your home for prayer, with a cross, an icon or a Bible.

## Day 6: Building for the future

Mark also built a funerary basilica on the Via Ardeatina, where he was buried. He did not see the fruit of his work, but the church he founded near the Capitol still welcomes worshipers seventeen centuries later.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, teach me to sow without needing to see the harvest. Amen.

**Today:** Support your parish with a gift of time, talent or money.

## Day 7: Remembering the saints

Mark is credited with beginning the lists of the anniversaries of the bishops and martyrs of Rome. The Church remembers her dead, because in Christ no one is forgotten.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, help me to remember with gratitude those who have gone before me in the faith. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for your deceased relatives, and for priests who have died.

## Day 8: A short pontificate

Mark was pope for only nine months. He died on October 7, 336. Holiness is not measured by the length of an office, but by the love with which it is carried out.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, help me to accept the limits of my time and strength, and to give my best today. Amen.

**Today:** Do today the good thing you keep putting off until tomorrow.

## Day 9: Living stones

The church founded by Mark later took the name of the Evangelist, Saint Mark. The pope's own name faded behind the Gospel. This is perhaps the best sign of a good shepherd: pointing beyond himself to Christ.

**Prayer:** Saint Mark, make me a living stone in the Church, humble and useful, so that others may meet Christ. Amen.

**Today:** Read a page of the Gospel of Mark and share a word of it with someone.

## Closing prayer

Lord God, you gave your Church in Pope Saint Mark a shepherd who served briefly but faithfully, and who gave his house to become a place of prayer. Through his intercession, make our homes open to you and to our neighbors, keep us firm in the faith of the Creed, and grant us to serve you all the days you give us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

On October 7, if you can, go to Mass and offer it for the pope and for all who serve the Church. You may also continue to pray the prayer to Pope Saint Mark when you bless a home or begin a new service in your parish.

CREDITS

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