

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Pope Saint Martin I

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 13

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IN BRIEF

Pope Saint Martin I

Pope from 649 to 653, arrested by the Byzantine emperor and died in exile, the last pope venerated as a martyr.

Feast day	April 13
Born	c. 600, near Todi, Umbria, Italy
Died	September 16, 655 or April 13, 656, Chersonesus, Crimea
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Martin I

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Pope Saint Martin I

Saint Martin I was pope from 649 to 653. Because he defended an essential truth of the faith, that Christ has both a divine will and a human will, he was arrested on the orders of the Byzantine emperor, tried as a traitor in Constantinople, publicly humiliated and then exiled to Crimea, where he died in misery. He is the last of the popes venerated as martyrs. The Church celebrates him on April 13.

Who was Saint Martin I?

Martin was born around 600 near Todi, in Umbria, into a family of patrician rank; his father was named Fabricius. Before his election as pope, he had represented the bishop of Rome in Constantinople as *apocrisiarius*, a kind of papal ambassador. He therefore knew the imperial court well, along with the theological debates that stirred it.

Elected on July 5, 649, he had himself consecrated on August 5, without waiting for confirmation from the emperor or from his representative in Italy, the exarch of Ravenna, as was then the custom. In the eyes of Constantinople, he was therefore not a legitimate pope. This act of independence set the tone for his whole pontificate.



Pope Martin I, by Carlo Laurenti, in Todi, his native region.

Key dates in the life of Martin I

- **c. 600**: Born near Todi, in Umbria.
- **July 5, 649**: Elected pope, succeeding Theodore I.
- **October 5-31, 649**: The Lateran Council condemns Monothelitism and the imperial *Typos*.
- **June 17, 653**: Arrested in the Lateran Basilica by the exarch Theodore Calliopas.
- **September 17, 653**: Arrives in Constantinople, where he is imprisoned.
- **December 20, 653**: Tried before the Byzantine Senate and condemned to death.
- **April 654**: His sentence is commuted to exile; he is deported to Chersonesus, in Crimea.

- **September 8, 654**: Eugene I is elected pope in Rome during Martin's lifetime.
- **September 16, 655 or April 13, 656**: Dies in exile.

A question of faith: the two wills of Christ

In the 7th century, hoping to reconcile Christians divided since the Council of Chalcedon, the Byzantine emperors promoted a compromise formula: Christ, they said, had only one will. This teaching is called Monothelitism.

For Rome and for many monks, including Saint Maximus the Confessor, this doctrine mutilated the humanity of Christ. If he is truly man, he has a human will, which he freely unites to the will of the Father, as in the garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but yours be done."

The Lateran Council of 649

In 648, Emperor Constans II published the *Typos*, an edict that simply forbade any discussion of the question. The following year, Martin gathered at the Lateran, with the help of Maximus, a council of about a hundred bishops, which condemned both Monothelitism and the imperial edict. The pope made its decisions known in Italy, in Gaul and in the East. Some 20th-century historians have questioned the real size of this assembly, but its symbolic weight remained considerable.

The arrest and the trial

Constans II ordered the exarch Olympius to impose the *Typos*, and perhaps to arrest the pope. But faced with the resistance of the Romans, the exarch sided with Martin and proclaimed himself emperor, before dying of the plague. His successor, Theodore Calliopas, had the pope arrested on June 17, 653, inside the Lateran Basilica.

Suffering from gout, Martin was put on a ship for Constantinople. During the crossing he was denied care, adequate food and even the chance to wash. Carried ashore on a stretcher and insulted by the crowd, he was locked up with common criminals.

At his trial on December 20, 653, every religious question was set aside: he was accused only of treason, for having supported the usurpation of Olympius. Forced to stand, held up by two soldiers, he was struck, his garments were torn, and he was condemned to death while the emperor watched in secret.

Exile and death in Crimea

Loaded with chains in another prison, he received discreet help from two women. At the request of Patriarch Pyrrhus, who was near death, his sentence was commuted to perpetual exile. In April 654 he was deported to Chersonesus, in Crimea, where he suffered hunger and abandonment. Meanwhile, Rome elected a new pope, Eugene I. Martin died in exile on September 16, 655, or April 13, 656, depending on the sources.

Why is Saint Martin I honored as a martyr?

Saint Martin I was not killed by the sword, but by ill-treatment and neglect. The Catholic Church honors him as a martyr, the Orthodox Churches as a confessor of the faith. He has no official patronage, but Christians naturally turn to him for:

- **persecuted Christians**, who suffer for refusing to deny their faith;
- **prisoners and exiles**, especially those who are forgotten;
- **the Pope and bishops**, called to defend the truth even before political power.

His witness also reminds us that debates about Christ, sometimes judged abstract, touch the heart of what a human being is: a freedom called to unite itself with God.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Martin I and the novena to Saint Martin I.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Martin I in art

Martin I is shown as a **pope**, in papal vestments, sometimes with the **tiara**. As a martyr, he may hold the **palm**, the traditional sign of those who gave their lives for Christ. In Todi, near his birthplace, a painting by Carlo Laurenti in the church of Santa Maria della Consolazione represents him in his pontifical dignity.



The ruins of Chersonesus in Crimea, the place of his exile and death.

Where to pray to Saint Martin I

- **Todi, Italy**: the church of Santa Maria della Consolazione, which keeps the painting of Martin I by Carlo Laurenti, in his native region.

- **Rome**: the Archbasilica of Saint John Lateran, where he held his council in 649 and was arrested in 653.
- **Chersonesus, Crimea**: the ruins of the ancient city where he died in exile.

He is celebrated on April 13 in the West and on April 14 in the Eastern Churches.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Martin I for Persecuted Christians

Saint Martin I did not leave a prayer that became traditional. The Church prays to him in the liturgy of April 13, his memorial, as a shepherd who feared neither threats nor suffering. Here is an original prayer inspired by his witness, for persecuted Christians, prisoners and all who need courage to stand for the truth.



Saint Martin I, pope and martyr.

Prayer to Saint Martin I

Saint Martin, pope and martyr, you confessed that Christ is true God and true man, with a human will freely united to the will of the Father: teach me to say each day, as he did, "Not my will, but yours be done."

You were arrested, humiliated and judged for defending the truth: support those who are persecuted for their faith or their conscience, and give them the strength not to hate.

You died far from Rome, in hunger and neglect: remember prisoners, exiles and the sick whom no one visits. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for the Church and her shepherds the courage of truth and gentleness in trials, so that nothing may separate us from the love of Christ. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- For Christians persecuted for their faith, in prison or in exile.
- For prisoners, especially those who are sick, forgotten or unjustly condemned.
- For the Pope and the bishops, that they may defend the truth with courage.
- In a personal trial, when it is hard to accept God's will.

A prayer from the Gospel

The faith Martin I defended is summed up in the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, where his human will freely embraced the will of the Father. You can make it your own:

> *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done."*

Source: Gospel of Luke 22:42.

Saint Martin I is celebrated on April 13 in the Catholic Church and on April 14 in the Orthodox Churches. You can also pray the novena to Saint Martin I or read the life of Saint Martin I.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Martin I

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and martyrdom of Pope Saint Martin I. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast, begin on April 5: the ninth day then falls on April 13. It is especially suited to praying for persecuted Christians, prisoners and exiles, but can be prayed at any time of year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps turn prayer into a concrete step.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: *Lord, you gave Saint Martin I the strength to suffer for the truth of your Son. Through his intercession, make me faithful in trials and hear the prayer I bring you today. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. Perseverance matters more than perfection.

This novena can be prayed alone, in a family or in a parish group. Many communities pray it for a particular country where Christians suffer for their faith, naming that country each day.

Day 1: Formed for service

Before becoming pope, Martin served as the pope's representative in Constantinople. He learned there the ways of the imperial court and the great questions of faith. God prepares his servants through the experiences of their lives.

Prayer: Lord, use all that I have lived, even what seemed useless, for the service of your Kingdom.

Today: Thank God for one experience that has shaped you.

Day 2: Free to serve

Martin had himself consecrated without waiting for the emperor's approval. He wanted the Church to be free to choose its shepherds. Freedom of the Church is a gift to defend.

Prayer: Lord, keep your Church free from every pressure that would turn it away from the Gospel.

Today: Pray for the Church in countries where it is controlled or restricted.

Day 3: Not my will, but yours

Martin defended the truth that Christ has a human will, freely united to the Father's will. In Gethsemane, Jesus shows us what true freedom is: a will that says yes to God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to unite my will to the will of the Father, as you did in the garden.

Today: Accept with peace something you did not choose.

Day 4: Truth is worth defending

The emperor forbade any discussion of Christ's wills. Martin refused to be silent, and his council condemned both the error and the edict. Some truths cannot be negotiated, even for the sake of peace.

Prayer: Lord, give me love for the truth and the courage to profess it with charity.

Today: Read a passage of the Catechism or the Creed and pray it slowly.

Day 5: Arrested in the house of God

Martin was arrested inside the Lateran Basilica, though he was ill. He did not resist with violence. He let himself be taken, as Jesus did on the night of his arrest.

Prayer: Lord, when I am wronged, keep me from violence and resentment.

Today: Respond to a provocation with patience and silence.

Day 6: In the hands of his enemies

During the voyage, Martin was denied care, food and even the chance to wash. He was insulted by the crowd and locked up with criminals. He shared the condition of the poorest prisoners.

Prayer: Lord, remember all who are in prison, especially those who are mistreated or unjustly held.

Today: Pray for prisoners, or support a prison ministry.

Day 7: A trial without justice

At his trial, Martin was accused of treason, while the real question of faith was set aside. He was struck, stripped of his garments and condemned to death. Like Christ, he was judged unjustly.

Prayer: Lord, give strength to those who are falsely accused, and justice to those who judge.

Today: Refuse to repeat gossip or an unverified accusation.

Day 8: The kindness of strangers

In his second prison, two women discreetly came to Martin's aid. Their names are not recorded, but their kindness shines through the account of his suffering. Small acts of mercy can be a light in the darkest places.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to those who suffer near me, and let me bring them comfort.

Today: Visit or call someone who is sick, isolated or in difficulty.

Day 9: Forgotten, but not by God

In exile in Crimea, Martin suffered hunger and abandonment, while Rome elected another pope. He died far from everyone. Yet God did not forget him, and the Church honors him today as a martyr.

Prayer: Lord, be close to all who feel forgotten. Let them know that they are never abandoned by you.

Today: Pray for exiles and for persecuted Christians, naming a country where faith is in danger.

Closing prayer

Saint Martin I, pope and martyr, you confessed the true humanity of Christ and suffered prison, humiliation and exile without denying your faith. Pray for persecuted Christians, for prisoners and for all who are forgotten. Obtain for the Church the courage of truth, and for me the grace to say each day, "Not my will, but yours be done." Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You may also pray the prayer to Saint Martin I or read the life of Saint Martin I.

Credits and sources

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