

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Miltiades

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 10

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IN BRIEF

Saint Miltiades

Bishop of Rome from 311 to 314, at the time of the Edict of Milan and the Donatist crisis.

Feast day	January 10
Died	January 10 or 11, 314, Rome
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Miltiades for Reconciliation

Novena to Saint Miltiades

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Miltiades

Saint Miltiades, also called Melchiades, was bishop of Rome from about 311 until his death in January 314. His short pontificate, between the last great persecution and the Edict of Milan, made him the first pope to receive a letter from an emperor and the first to settle, at the emperor's request, a conflict between Christians. He was the first pope to live at the Lateran. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on January 10.

Who was Saint Miltiades?

The sources say little about him. The *Liber Pontificalis*, a chronicle of the popes written much later, says he was an African; historians lean toward a Roman origin. He is thought to have been a priest under Bishop Marcellinus.

His election ended a troubled period. His predecessor, Eusebius, had been exiled by Emperor Maxentius, and the see of Rome had remained vacant for a length of time we do not know. The Church of Rome was emerging, wounded and divided, from years of persecution.

Key dates in the life of Saint Miltiades

- **c. 310 or 311**: Elected bishop of Rome.
- **October 312**: Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge.
- **February 313**: The Edict of Milan grants freedom of worship to Christians.
- **October 2-4, 313**: Council of Rome on the Donatist affair, held at the Lateran Palace.
- **January 10 or 11, 314**: Dies in Rome and is buried in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus.

A bishop at the end of the persecution

The persecution of Diocletian, launched in 303, had led to the confiscation of churches and Christian property. In Rome, Emperor Maxentius ordered that this property be returned, and it was Miltiades who made the restitution effective: he sent two deacons, Cassianus and Strato, to present the imperial rescript to the prefect of the city.

For the Christians of Rome, this was a turning point. Places of worship and cemeteries that had been seized could once again be used for prayer and for the burial of the faithful.

Constantine, the Edict of Milan and the Lateran

After Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in 312, the situation of the Church changed. In February 313, the agreement reached at Milan between Constantine and Licinius, known as the Edict of Milan, granted Christians freedom of worship throughout the Empire. Miltiades, however, does not seem to have played any role in the edict itself.

The new emperor placed at the disposal of the bishop of Rome a palace on the Caelian Hill that had belonged to Empress Fausta: the Lateran. It would become the residence of the popes for centuries, and the Lateran Basilica, the cathedral of Rome, still stands beside it today.

The arbiter of the Donatist crisis

The best-known episode of his pontificate concerns North Africa. In Carthage, the election of Bishop Caecilian was contested by a rigorist party. They accused him of having been ordained by a bishop who had handed over the Scriptures to the authorities during the persecution. This party, called "Donatist" after its leader Donatus, appealed to the emperor, who entrusted the case to Miltiades and three bishops from Gaul.

Miltiades skillfully turned this commission into a true Church synod by inviting some fifteen Italian bishops. Meeting at the Lateran in October 313, the council confirmed Caecilian and condemned Donatus.

Yet Miltiades also offered the Donatist bishops the chance to keep their rank if they returned to communion. The offer was refused, and the case was judged again at Arles in 314, after his death. The Donatist schism would divide the Church of Africa for more than a century.

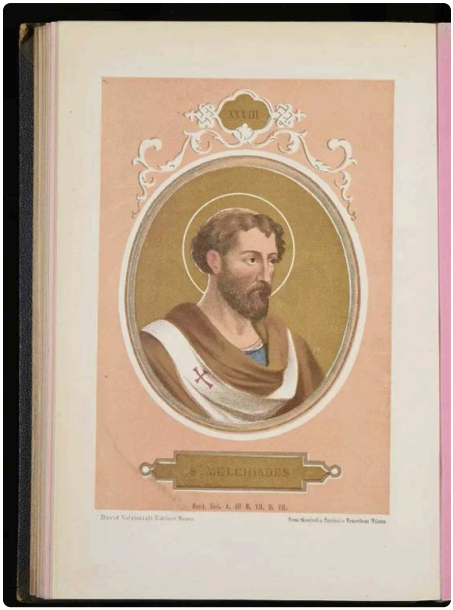
Why is Saint Miltiades remembered as a peacemaker?

We have neither writings nor sayings of Miltiades. What emerges from the sources is a pastor who sought reconciliation rather than the victory of one side. The Roman Martyrology sums him up in these terms: though strongly opposed by the Donatists, he worked wisely to bring about reconciliation.

Nearly a century later, when the Donatists in turn accused him of having betrayed the faith during the persecution, Saint Augustine came to his defense and called him a true father of the Christian people. He has no traditional patronage, but he can be invoked for reconciliation in divided communities and for those who must arbitrate conflicts.

A feast day that moved

In the 13th century his feast was placed in the Roman calendar on December 10, with the mistaken title of martyr. The calendar reform of 1969 moved it to January 10, the presumed day of his death, without that title.



Saint Miltiades, imaginary portrait.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Miltiades in art

No contemporary image of Miltiades exists. Later artists portrayed him as a pope, in papal vestments, sometimes with the papal tiara or the keys, the usual signs of the successors of Saint Peter. His imaginary portrait also appears in the series of papal portraits of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, in Rome, which shows every pope since Peter. Older images that call him a martyr reflect the mistaken title he received in the Middle Ages.

What his holiness teaches us

Miltiades lived at a hinge of history: he knew the Church persecuted and then the Church free. In this new freedom, he did not seek revenge, nor did he use imperial favor to crush his opponents. He offered a way back to those who had

broken communion. His example speaks to anyone who must lead a community through division.

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

Where to pray to Saint Miltiades

- **Rome, Catacomb of Saint Callixtus** (Via Appia): his burial place, though the exact location of his tomb remains unknown.
- **Rome, Basilica of Saint John Lateran**: the cathedral of Rome, beside the palace where he held the council of 313.

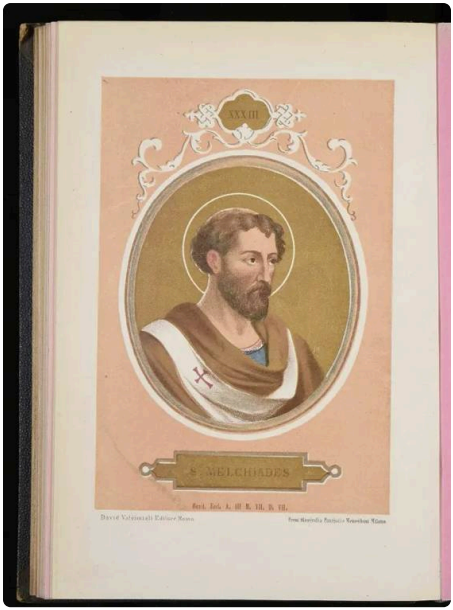
PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Miltiades for Reconciliation

No prayer or writing of Saint Miltiades has come down to us, and no traditional prayer to him has become common. His memory is that of a peacemaker: a bishop of Rome who, at the end of the persecutions, sought to reconcile Christians divided by the Donatist crisis. Below you will find the words of praise that Saint Augustine gave him, followed by an original prayer to Saint Miltiades for reconciliation and unity in the Church.

A tribute from Saint Augustine

Writing nearly a century after his death, Saint Augustine defended Miltiades against the accusations of the Donatists. He praised his wisdom and his gentleness toward his opponents, and called him a true father of the Christian people (Augustine, Letter 43).



Saint Miltiades, bishop of Rome from 311 to 314.

Prayer to Saint Miltiades for reconciliation

Saint Miltiades, bishop of Rome at the end of the persecutions, you saw the Church pass from suffering to freedom: teach us to receive God's gifts without pride and to use them for the good of all.

You gave back to the Christians of Rome the churches and cemeteries that had been taken from them: help us to repair what violence and injustice have destroyed.

You judged the conflict of the Church of Africa with wisdom, and offered a way back to those who had broken communion: make us peacemakers in our families, our parishes and our communities. Give us the courage of truth and the gentleness of mercy.

Pray for the Pope and for all bishops, that they may guide the Church in unity. 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 Miltiades is commemorated on January 10 in the Roman Martyrology, the presumed day of his death in 314. Before the reform of 1969, his feast was kept on December 10. You can pray to him:

- when a family, a parish or a community is divided;
- when you must settle a dispute or make a fair decision between two sides;
- for the Pope and the bishops;
- for Christians who have left the Church, that they may find the way back;
- during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which begins a few days after his feast.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Miltiades, from January 2 to 10, and read the life of Saint Miltiades.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Miltiades

This novena to Saint Miltiades is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what history tells us about the bishop of Rome who led the Church out of the persecutions. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his commemoration, January 10, begin it on January 2. You can also pray it at any time of the year, especially when a family, a parish or a community is divided and needs reconciliation.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to 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 proposed for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: A Church wounded by persecution

When Miltiades became bishop of Rome, the Church was emerging from the persecution of Diocletian. Churches had been confiscated, Christians had died, others had given way under pressure. His predecessor had died in exile. Miltiades received a wounded flock.

Prayer: Lord, look upon your Church where it is wounded today, and heal what suffering has broken. Amen.

Today: Pray for a Christian community that is going through a time of trial.

Day 2: A humble pastor

We know almost nothing of Miltiades' life before his election, not even his place of birth with certainty. Holiness does not need to be remembered in detail: God knows his faithful servants.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve without seeking to be noticed. Amen.

Today: Do a service for someone without telling anyone.

Day 3: Restoring what was taken

Miltiades sent two deacons to present the emperor's order for the return of Christian property. Churches and cemeteries were given back for prayer. Justice was not revenge: it was the restoration of what had been unjustly taken.

Prayer: Lord, help me to repair the wrongs I have done, and to forgive the wrongs done to me. Amen.

Today: Return something you borrowed, or repair a wrong, however small.

Day 4: From persecution to freedom

In 312 Constantine won at the Milvian Bridge, and in 313 the Edict of Milan gave Christians freedom of worship. After years of fear, the Church could pray openly. Freedom is a gift, and it is also a responsibility.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the freedom to believe and to pray. Strengthen those who do not have it. Amen.

Today: Pray for Christians who still cannot practice their faith freely.

Day 5: The house of the Lateran

The emperor gave the bishop of Rome the palace of the Lateran, which would become the home of the popes for centuries. The Church received a house, but its true dwelling remains the heart of the faithful.

Prayer: Lord, make my home a place where you are welcome, and where others find peace. Amen.

Today: Offer hospitality to someone: a meal, a visit, a phone call.

Day 6: A Church divided

In Africa, Christians were tearing one another apart over the election of the bishop of Carthage. Some accused others of having betrayed the faith during the persecution. Wounds of the past easily become walls between brothers and sisters.

Prayer: Lord, free us from the bitterness that divides us, and heal the memories that keep us apart. Amen.

Today: Pray for a person with whom you are in conflict.

Day 7: Judging with wisdom

Asked by the emperor to settle the dispute, Miltiades gathered bishops at the Lateran to judge as a Church. He listened, weighed the case and decided. Wisdom is not neutrality: it seeks the truth.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give wisdom to all who must judge and decide, and give me a fair heart. Amen.

Today: Before a decision, take time to hear both sides.

Day 8: Leaving the door open

After confirming Caecilian, Miltiades offered the Donatist bishops the chance to keep their rank if they returned to communion. They refused. But the door had been opened, and that is the mark of a true pastor.

Prayer: Lord, make me ready to welcome back those who have hurt me, and to leave the door of my heart open. Amen.

Today: Take a first step toward someone who has drifted away.

Day 9: Father of the Christian people

Miltiades died in January 314 and was buried in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus. Nearly a century later, Saint Augustine called him a true father of the Christian people. His legacy is not a text or a building, but a way of leading: with wisdom and mercy.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Miltiades, make me an artisan of peace and unity. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Pope and your bishop by name.

Closing prayer

Saint Miltiades, bishop of Rome and peacemaker, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for the Church, that it may be one; for divided families and communities, that they may be reconciled; and for all who lead, that they may lead with wisdom and mercy. Amen.

If you wish, add to this closing prayer the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, which Christians have repeated in every age of division: "That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you" (John 17:21).

To go further, read the life of Saint Miltiades and pray the prayer to Saint Miltiades.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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