BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Onesiphorus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: September 6

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IN BRIEF

Saint Onesiphorus

1st-century Christian of Ephesus, friend of Saint Paul whom he comforted in prison.

Feast day	September 6
Born	1st century
Died	1st century, a martyr according to tradition, Hellespont, according to tradition
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	1st century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Onesiphorus for Prisoners and Faithful Friends

Novena to Saint Onesiphorus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Onesiphorus

Saint Onesiphorus was a Christian of Ephesus in the 1st century and a faithful friend of the apostle Paul. Saint Paul mentions him in his second letter to Timothy: Onesiphorus often refreshed him and, having come to Rome, searched for him until he found him in prison. According to tradition, he died a martyr in the region of the Hellespont. The Catholic Church celebrates him on September 6.

Who was Saint Onesiphorus?

Onesiphorus is known with certainty only through a few lines of the New Testament. In the second letter to Timothy, written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, the apostle laments having been abandoned by several of his companions. By contrast he names Onesiphorus, who was not ashamed of his chains. Everything else, his place among the seventy-two disciples, his episcopate and his martyrdom, comes from later traditions, which must be received with caution. His Greek name means "bringer of profit" or "one who is helpful", which suits him well. He should not be confused with Onesimus, the slave of Philemon, another companion of Paul.

Key dates in the life of Onesiphorus

- **1st century**: A Christian of the community of Ephesus, he renders many services to Paul during his stay in the city.
- **The 60s**: Having come to Rome, he searches for the imprisoned apostle, finds him and refreshes him several times.
- **Shortly after**: In his second letter to Timothy, Paul asks the Lord to show him mercy and greets his household.

- **According to tradition**: He is said to have been one of the seventy-two disciples sent out by Jesus.
- **According to tradition**: He is said to have been a bishop, perhaps of Colophon or of Coronea.
- **Late 1st century, according to tradition**: Arrested in the Hellespont with his servant Porphyrius, he dies a martyr.

The friend who was not ashamed of the chains

The passage of the second letter to Timothy (2 Tim 1:16-18) is brief but very moving. Paul asks the Lord to grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus. He recalls that Onesiphorus often refreshed him and was not ashamed to see him in chains. When he arrived in Rome, he made the effort to search for him and found him. Paul hopes that he in turn will find mercy from the Lord on the last day, and adds that Timothy knows better than anyone all the services Onesiphorus rendered at Ephesus.

At the end of the same letter (2 Tim 4:19), Paul greets the household of Onesiphorus, without greeting him personally. Commentators have drawn various conclusions from this: some think he was then away from Ephesus, others that he may already have died. The text does not allow us to decide.

Disciple, bishop and martyr according to tradition

Ancient traditions, especially Eastern ones, developed his figure. They count him among the seventy-two disciples whom Christ sent ahead of him, according to the Gospel of Luke. They also credit him with missionary work and perhaps an episcopate, at Colophon, in Asia Minor, or at Coronea, in Greece. His martyrdom is placed in the Hellespont, the region of the Dardanelles. According to the Roman Martyrology, he was arrested there with

his servant Porphyrius on the order of a proconsul named Hadrian; both were scourged, then dragged by horses until they died. These accounts cannot be verified, but they bear witness to an ancient veneration.

His cult

The Catholic Church celebrates Saint Onesiphorus on September 6. The Eastern Churches celebrate him on April 29, and he appears among the saints of the Menologion of Basil II, a famous illustrated Byzantine manuscript. No known shrine keeps his relics. His memory is carried above all by the text of Saint Paul, read throughout the Church.

What can we learn from Saint Onesiphorus?

Onesiphorus is the saint of faithfulness in trial. When others drew away from Paul in prison, he made the effort to search for him in a great foreign city, at the risk of being compromised. He gave no great speeches that we know of: he visited a friend in prison and comforted him. This is a work of mercy that Christ himself promised to reward. You can pray to him for prisoners and those who visit them, for friends who stay faithful and for families.

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

Where to pray to Saint Onesiphorus

- **Ephesus** (Turkey): the city of his community, where you can visit the ancient ruins and the places linked to Saint Paul and Saint John.
- **Rome**: the city where he visited Saint Paul in prison.
- **In any church**, by reading the passage of the second letter to Timothy that speaks of him.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Onesiphorus for Prisoners and Faithful Friends

Saint Onesiphorus, a Christian of Ephesus, searched for Saint Paul in Rome until he found him in prison, and was not ashamed of his chains. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him prisoners, those who visit them, and all who need a faithful friend.

Prayer to Saint Onesiphorus

Saint Onesiphorus,
faithful friend of the apostle Paul,
you were not ashamed of his chains
and you searched for him until you found him.
Teach me not to abandon those who suffer.

You who comforted the prisoner,
watch over those who are in prison,
over those who visit and accompany them,
and over their families who wait.
May no one be forgotten.

Obtain for my household the mercy
that Saint Paul asked for yours,
and give me a heart that is faithful in friendship.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Onesiphorus

- On his feast day, September 6.
- For people in prison, chaplains and prison visitors.
- When a friend is going through a trial and you hesitate to go to him or her.
- For your family, for whom you wish the mercy of God.

An invocation for prisoners

> *Lord, remember those who are in prison, as though we were in chains with them.*
> *Saint Onesiphorus, pray for them. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Onesiphorus from August 29 to September 6, and read the life of Saint Onesiphorus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Onesiphorus

This novena is inspired by Saint Onesiphorus, a Christian of Ephesus and faithful friend of Saint Paul. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, September 6, begin on August 29. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and 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. End with: "Saint Onesiphorus, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. What we know of him comes from the second letter to Timothy; the account of his martyrdom belongs to tradition.

Day 1: A Christian of Ephesus

Onesiphorus belonged to the Christian community of Ephesus, founded through Paul's preaching. He received the faith and lived it by serving.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the Christian community in which I grew in faith.

Act of the day: Pray for your parish and for those who keep it alive.

Day 2: Rendering service

Paul recalls the many services Onesiphorus rendered him at Ephesus. Faith is expressed in concrete deeds.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to the needs of those around me.

Act of the day: Do someone a service without being asked.

Day 3: Refreshing others

Onesiphorus often refreshed Paul. A friend can restore courage by presence alone.

Prayer: Lord, make me someone who consoles and encourages.

Act of the day: Call someone who is lonely or discouraged.

Day 4: Not being ashamed

Onesiphorus was not ashamed of Paul's chains. He was not afraid to be associated with a prisoner.

Prayer: Lord, free me from human respect and help me to be faithful to my friends.

Act of the day: Bear simple witness to your faith before someone.

Day 5: Searching until finding

Arriving in Rome, Onesiphorus eagerly searched for Paul and finally found him. Love does not lose heart.

Prayer: Lord, give me the perseverance of those who seek and who love.

Act of the day: Get back in touch with someone you have lost sight of.

Day 6: Visiting prisoners

Onesiphorus did what Jesus asked: "I was in prison and you came to me."

Prayer: Lord, remember prisoners and those who visit them.

Act of the day: Pray for people in prison or support a prison chaplaincy.

Day 7: A blessed household

Paul asks mercy for the whole household of Onesiphorus and greets his family. The faith of one person overflows onto those around him.

Prayer: Lord, bless my home and all who live in it.

Act of the day: Pray as a family, even for a moment.

Day 8: Proclaiming the Gospel

According to tradition, Onesiphorus was one of the disciples sent to proclaim the Kingdom, and perhaps a bishop. Service leads to mission.

Prayer: Lord, send laborers into your harvest.

Act of the day: Pray for missionaries and for vocations.

Day 9: The witness of blood

Tradition reports that Onesiphorus died a martyr in the Hellespont, with his servant Porphyrius. He remained faithful to the end.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful in trial. Through the intercession of Saint Onesiphorus, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and pray for persecuted Christians.

Closing prayer

Saint Onesiphorus,
friend of Paul and comforter of the prisoner,
you searched for your brother until you found him.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Obtain mercy for my household
and make me faithful in friendship.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Onesiphorus at any time, and read the life of Saint Onesiphorus.

Credits and sources

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