

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Pope Saint Paschal I

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: February 11

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IN BRIEF

Pope Saint Paschal I

Pope from 817 to 824, builder of the great mosaic churches of Santa Prassede and Santa Cecilia in Rome.

Feast day	February 11
Born	Rome
Died	824, Rome
Era	9th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Paschal I for the Beauty of Worship

Novena to Saint Paschal I

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Pope Saint Paschal I

Saint Paschal I was pope from 817 to 824, in the age of the Carolingian Empire. His pontificate, full of contrasts, combined active diplomacy with the Frankish emperors, a warm welcome in Rome for Greek monks driven out by iconoclasm, and a style of government his contemporaries found harsh. Above all, he left Rome some of its most beautiful mosaics, still visible today. The Roman Martyrology mentions him on February 11.

Who was Saint Paschal I?

Paschal was a Roman, but almost nothing is known of his family, which was probably of modest origin. Educated at the Lateran school, he was ordained a priest by Pope Leo III. He made his career in the papal administration and became abbot of the monastery of Saint Stephen, near Saint Peter's Basilica.

On January 24, 817, the day after the sudden death of Pope Stephen IV, he was elected pope. He was consecrated the very next day, probably to forestall any intervention by Emperor Louis the Pious.

Key dates in the life of Paschal I

- **January 25, 817**: Consecrated pope.
- **817**: Louis the Pious confirms the territories of the Holy See in the *Pactum Ludovicianum*.
- **c. 820**: Welcomes to Rome Greek monks fleeing Byzantine iconoclasm.
- **822**: Entrusts Archbishop Ebbo of Reims with the mission to the Danes.
- **Easter 823**: Crowns the co-emperor Lothair I in Rome.
- **824**: Dies in Rome amid unrest; he is buried at Santa Prassede.

The builder pope

In seven years, Paschal rebuilt three major churches in Rome: Santa Prassede (Saint Praxedes), Santa Cecilia in Trastevere and Santa Maria in Domnica. He also undertook works at Saint Mary Major and Saint Peter's.

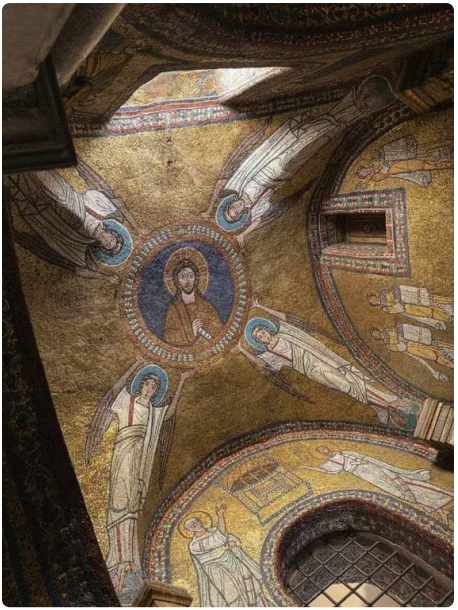
In the apses of his churches, the pope had himself portrayed holding a model of the building, his head surrounded by a **square halo**. This square nimbus was the sign that the person was still alive when the work was made. His monogram also appears in the mosaics.

Pilgrims to Rome can still admire these works today, more than twelve centuries later. Santa Prassede, a short walk from Saint Mary Major, is often overlooked by visitors in a hurry, yet its small Chapel of San Zeno, entirely covered in gold mosaics, has long been nicknamed the "Garden of Paradise." It is one of the best places to pray quietly in the heart of the city.

The relics of the martyrs

This building program grew out of an intense devotion to the martyrs. Paschal had many relics transferred from the catacombs, then under threat, into the churches of the city, where they could be honored and protected.

Roman tradition remembers in particular that he found the body of Saint Cecilia and had it placed in the basilica that bears her name in Trastevere. For lovers of sacred music, whose patron Cecilia is, this is one of the treasures of Rome.



The Chapel of San Zeno, the jewel of Paschal I's mosaics at Santa Prassede.

Between Franks, Byzantines and Romans

With the Carolingians, Paschal obtained confirmation of the papal territories, listed for the first time, and began the custom by which the emperor was crowned in Rome by the pope.

Toward Byzantium, where Emperor Leo V had revived the campaign against holy images, he refused to receive the imperial embassy. Near Santa Prassede he founded a monastery for the Greek monks who had taken refuge in Rome, so that they could continue to pray and venerate the icons freely.

A contested authority

In Rome itself, part of the aristocracy challenged his authority and sought the support of Lothair. Two high officials of the Lateran who favored the Franks were blinded and then beheaded. Suspected of involvement, Paschal denied any complicity by an oath before a synod of bishops.

Historians describe him as an authoritarian pontiff, little loved by the people of Rome. When he died in 824, unrest prevented his burial at Saint Peter's. He was laid to rest only after the installation of his successor, Eugene II, in Santa Prassede.

What can we learn from Saint Paschal I?

Paschal I has no official patronage, and his life invites an honest reading. The Church honors in him a shepherd who loved the beauty of the liturgy, protected the relics of the martyrs and welcomed persecuted Christians, without hiding the shadows of his government. He reminds us that the Church's saints are not always flawless rulers, and that holiness and beauty can grow even in troubled times.

He can be a companion for:

- artists, architects and all who serve the beauty of churches;
- those who care for the memory of the martyrs;
- Christians who welcome refugees persecuted for their faith.

His cult has remained discreet. Cardinal Baronius added him to the calendar in the 16th century on May 14. He was removed from it in 1963 and remains in the Roman Martyrology on February 11.

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

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Paschal I in art

Paschal I is one of the few early popes whose portrait was made during his lifetime. In the apse mosaics of Santa Prassede, Santa Cecilia and Santa Maria in Domnica, he can be recognized by:

- the **square halo**, the sign of a living person;

- the **model of the church** he holds in his hands, as its donor;
- his **monogram**, set into the mosaics.

At Santa Maria in Domnica, he is shown kneeling at the feet of the Virgin Mary.



The apse mosaic of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, commissioned by Paschal I.

Where to pray to Saint Paschal I

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Prassede, near Saint Mary Major, where he is buried and portrayed in the apse mosaic.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, which he rebuilt.
- **Rome**: Santa Maria in Domnica, on the Caelian Hill, whose apse shows him at the feet of the Virgin.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Paschal I for the Beauty of Worship

No traditional prayer to Saint Paschal I has come down to us. This pope, who adorned the churches of Rome with mosaics, gathered the relics of the martyrs and welcomed Greek monks persecuted for venerating icons, can be invoked for the beauty of worship and for Christians who suffer for their faith. Here is an original prayer inspired by his life.

Prayer to Saint Paschal I

Saint Paschal, shepherd of Rome, you filled the house of God with light and gold so that the faithful might glimpse the glory of heaven: help me to love the beauty of the liturgy and to give God the best of myself.

You gathered the bodies of the martyrs from the catacombs and gave them an honored resting place: teach me to remember those who gave their lives for Christ, and to draw courage from their witness.

You opened your city to monks driven from their homes because they honored the holy images: make me welcoming toward refugees and toward Christians persecuted for their faith.

You knew the weight of power and the conflicts of your time: pray for all who govern in the Church and in the world, that they may serve with humility and justice. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- For artists, architects, musicians and all who serve the beauty of churches.
- Before visiting a church or shrine, especially in Rome.
- For refugees and for Christians persecuted for their faith.
- For those who hold authority, that they may govern with justice.

A prayer before a holy image

Paschal I welcomed the monks who defended the veneration of icons. You may pray in the same spirit before a crucifix, an icon or a statue:

> *Lord Jesus, as I look upon this image, lift my heart beyond what my eyes can see. May the beauty of your saints lead me to you, the source of all beauty, and may I one day see your face in the glory of heaven. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia.

Saint Paschal I is commemorated in the Roman Martyrology on February 11. You can also pray the novena to Saint Paschal I or read the life of Saint Paschal I.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Paschal I

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Pope Saint Paschal I. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on the day he is commemorated in the Roman Martyrology, begin on February 3: the ninth day then falls on February 11. You may pray it at any time, especially for the beauty of worship, for the memory of the martyrs or for persecuted Christians.

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 your Church in Saint Paschal I a shepherd who loved the beauty of your house and honored your martyrs. Through his intercession, draw my heart toward you 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.

Day 1: A Roman of humble origins

Almost nothing is known of Paschal's family, probably modest. He was formed at the Lateran school and ordained a priest by Pope Leo III. God does not look at our origins, but at our readiness to serve.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for calling me as I am. Help me to serve you with what I have received.

Today: Thank God for one gift you have received from your family or your education.

Day 2: Abbot near Saint Peter's

Before becoming pope, Paschal led the monastery of Saint Stephen, near the tomb of the apostle Peter. Prayer and community life prepared him for the service of the whole Church.

Prayer: Lord, give me a heart that prays, so that all my work may come from you.

Today: Set aside ten minutes of silent prayer.

Day 3: Beauty for God

Paschal rebuilt three great churches in Rome and filled them with mosaics of gold and color. He wanted the faithful to glimpse the glory of heaven in the house of God.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to the beauty of your creation and of your Church.

Today: Visit a church and spend a few minutes looking at its art in prayer.

Day 4: The square halo

In his mosaics, Paschal appears with a square halo, the sign of a living man. He offers his church to Christ with his own hands. Each of us can offer our life and work to God while we are still on earth.

Prayer: Lord, I offer you my day, my work and my efforts. Accept them as a humble gift.

Today: Make a morning offering and renew it at midday.

Day 5: Honoring the martyrs

Paschal brought the relics of many martyrs from the threatened catacombs into the churches of Rome. He did not want their witness to be forgotten.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of your martyrs, give me courage to bear witness to you in my daily life.

Today: Read the life of a martyr and ask for their intercession.

Day 6: With Saint Cecilia

Roman tradition says Paschal found the body of Saint Cecilia and laid it to rest in her basilica in Trastevere. Cecilia, patron of musicians, reminds us that praise can be a song of the whole life.

Prayer: Lord, make my life a song of praise to you, in joy and in trial.

Today: Sing or listen prayerfully to a hymn.

Day 7: Welcoming the persecuted

When Greek monks fled the persecution of holy images in Byzantium, Paschal welcomed them and founded a monastery for them in Rome. Hospitality to the persecuted is a work of mercy.

Prayer: Lord, protect Christians persecuted for their faith, and make me generous toward refugees.

Today: Support a charity that helps persecuted Christians or refugees.

Day 8: The weight of power

Paschal's government was contested and judged harsh, and his pontificate knew violence and suspicion. The Church does not hide the shadows of its saints' lives. Holiness grows through struggle and the need for mercy.

Prayer: Lord, have mercy on my failings, and teach me to exercise any authority I have with gentleness and justice.

Today: Examine how you treat those who depend on you, and correct one attitude.

Day 9: Resting among the martyrs

Paschal died in 824 amid unrest and was buried in Santa Prassede, among the relics he had gathered. His body rests in the church he built for God and his saints.

Prayer: Lord, grant that one day I may join your saints in the joy of heaven.

Today: Pray for the dead of your family and entrust them to the communion of saints.

Closing prayer

Saint Paschal I, pope and builder, you adorned the house of God with beauty, honored the martyrs and welcomed Christians persecuted for their faith. Pray for artists and all who serve the beauty of worship, for refugees and for those who govern. Obtain for me a heart open to God's glory, faithful to the witness of the saints and humble in the face of my weaknesses. 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 Paschal I or read the life of Saint Paschal I.

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