

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Pope Saint Paul I

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: June 28

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IN BRIEF

Pope Saint Paul I

Pope from 757 to 767, brother of Stephen II, who brought the relics of the martyrs to safety inside Rome.

Feast day	June 28
Born	c. 700, Rome, Italy
Died	June 28, 767, Rome, Italy
Era	8th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Paul I for the Sick and the Poor

Novena to Pope Saint Paul I

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Pope Saint Paul I

Pope Saint Paul I led the Church from 757 to 767. Brother and successor of Pope Stephen II, he governed the Church of Rome at a time when the papacy was drawing closer to the Frankish kings to escape the Lombard threat, while in Constantinople Emperor Constantine V was renewing the campaign against holy images. He is remembered above all as the pope who brought the relics of the martyrs to safety inside Rome and who visited the poor and the sick in secret, at night. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on June 28, the day of his death.

Who was Saint Paul I?

Paul was born in Rome around 700. Together with his brother Stephen, he was trained for the service of the Roman Church at the Lateran, the residence of the popes. When Stephen II died in 757, Paul, then a deacon, was chosen to succeed him, and he was consecrated on May 29, 757.

The sources are few: a few brief notices, the Roman tradition and above all the letters exchanged with the Frankish court. They give a glimpse of a man attentive to the most vulnerable as well as a careful political leader. It is rare to see two brothers follow one another on the chair of Peter, and Paul's pontificate largely continued the course set by Stephen.

Key dates in the life of Paul I

- **c. 700**: Born in Rome.
- **April 757**: Death of his brother, Pope Stephen II, and election of Paul.
- **May 29, 757**: Consecrated bishop of Rome.
- **757**: Becomes godfather to Gisela, daughter of Pepin the Short.

- **757-767**: Transfers many relics from the catacombs to the churches of Rome.
- **June 28, 767**: Dies in Rome.

Between the Lombards, the Franks and Byzantium

By the middle of the 8th century, the Byzantine emperor's protection over Rome was little more than a memory, and the Lombard kings were trying to take over central Italy. Stephen II had turned to Pepin the Short, king of the Franks. Paul I pursued this alliance steadily.

As a sign of friendship, he agreed to be godfather to Gisela, Pepin's daughter. He also had the remains of Saint Petronilla, greatly venerated by the Franks and honored by Paul himself, moved to a place near Saint Peter's. The gesture was both an act of devotion and a token of the bond between Rome and the Frankish kingdom.

At the same time, Emperor Constantine V hardened the iconoclast policy in the East. Many Greek monks, driven out for their attachment to icons, found refuge in Rome. Paul I welcomed them and had a monastery built for them in the city. Rome thus became a haven for those who defended the veneration of holy images.

In welcoming these exiled monks, Paul I did more than offer shelter. He kept alive in Rome a bond with the Christian East at the very moment when political ties with Byzantium were coming apart. Communion in faith and prayer could outlast the quarrels of emperors.

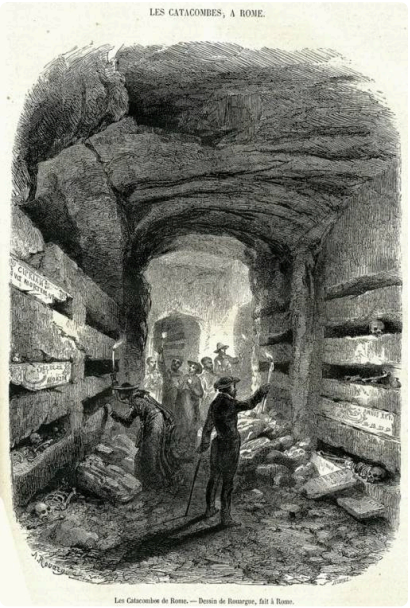
The pope of the relics

The catacombs, outside the walls of Rome, were then exposed to looting during Lombard raids and to neglect. Paul I had the relics of many martyrs carried inside the city and placed in churches and monasteries.

This work, continued by his successors, deeply shaped the religious map of Rome. The martyrs, once prayed to in the cemeteries outside the city, became present in the heart of its neighborhoods.

Why honor the relics of the martyrs?

For Catholics, the relics of the saints are not lucky charms. They are the remains of men and women whose bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit and who will rise on the last day. From the earliest centuries, Christians gathered at the tombs of the martyrs to celebrate the Eucharist and ask for their prayers. By bringing these remains into the city, Paul I protected a living memory: the witness of those who had given their lives for Christ, now close to the daily prayer of the people of Rome.



A gallery in the catacombs of Rome.

Why is Saint Paul I remembered today?

No particular patronage is attached to Saint Paul I. Tradition relates that he went out at night, without making himself known, to visit the sick and help the poor. This trait of discreet charity, reported by the ancient sources, sheds a different light on a pontificate that might otherwise be reduced to diplomacy.

His cult is attested only from the 14th century. He is a modest saint, whose memory fits in a few lines, but he reminds us that the highest office does not prevent the humblest gestures. In an age of great powers and alliances, the pope went quietly to the bedsides of the sick.

His commemoration on June 28, on the eve of the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, also invites us to pray for the Pope and for the Church of Rome, whose servant he was.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Paul I in art

- **Papal vestments**, in the series of portraits of the popes.
- **The mosaic medallion** of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, an imaginary portrait in the gallery of the popes.
- **The papal tiara**, in the woodcut of the Nuremberg Chronicle (1493).

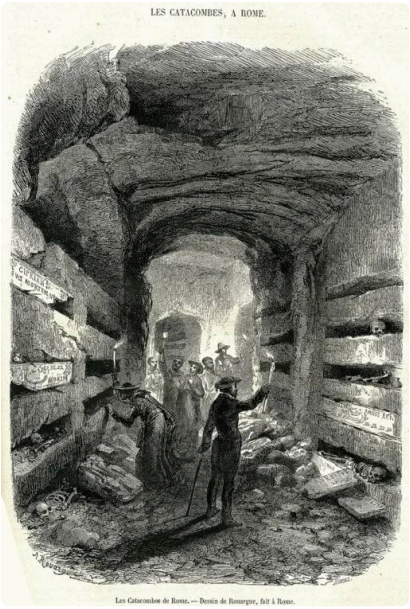
Where to pray to Saint Paul I

No major shrine is dedicated to Saint Paul I. In Rome, pilgrims can remember him in Saint Peter's Basilica, near the altar of Saint Petronilla, and in the churches that received the relics of the martyrs he brought in from the catacombs. A visit to the catacombs themselves is a good way to understand his work. You can also pray with him using the prayer to Saint Paul I and the novena to Saint Paul I.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Paul I for the Sick and the Poor

No traditional prayer to Pope Saint Paul I has come down to us, and none of his own words are commonly used in prayer. Tradition remembers him for two things: he brought the relics of the martyrs to safety inside Rome, and he went out at night, unknown, to visit the sick and help the poor. Here is an original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by that discreet charity.



The catacombs of Rome, from which Paul I brought the relics of the martyrs.

Prayer to Saint Paul I for the sick and the poor

Saint Paul I, shepherd of the Church of Rome, you went out at night, without being recognized, to visit the sick and to help the poor. Teach us a charity that does not seek to be seen, and open our eyes to those who suffer near us.

You gathered the relics of the martyrs to protect them from neglect and plunder. Help us to keep alive the memory of those who gave their lives for Christ, and to draw strength from their witness.

You welcomed the monks who had fled persecution for their love of holy images. Pray for all Christians forced into exile, and make our communities places of welcome.

Pray for the Pope and for the Church of Rome, which you served faithfully in difficult times.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Present it to the Lord, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Paul I is commemorated on June 28, the anniversary of his death in Rome in 767, on the eve of the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. This prayer is especially fitting:

- before visiting a sick person, an elderly relative or someone who lives alone;
- for volunteers who serve the poor, often unseen, at night or on the streets;
- for persecuted and exiled Christians;
- for the Pope, especially in the days around June 29.

To pray with him over nine days, see the novena to Saint Paul I, and discover the life of Saint Paul I.

NOVENA

Novena to Pope Saint Paul I

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Pope Saint Paul I, who led the Church from 757 to 767. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his commemoration of June 28, the eve of the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, begin on June 20. It can also be prayed at any time for the sick, the poor or persecuted Christians.

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 suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life; many of them are hidden acts of charity, in the spirit of the pope who visited the sick at night without making himself known.

You may begin each day with this prayer: *Lord, you gave your Church a humble and charitable shepherd in Saint Paul I. Through his intercession, make my love quiet and true, and hear the prayer I bring you today. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply continue where you stopped. What matters is perseverance and trust.

Day 1: Two brothers in the service of the Church

Paul and his brother Stephen were both trained for the service of the Roman Church, and both became pope. Their family was a school of faith and service. Our brothers and sisters can be our first companions on the way to God.

Prayer: Lord, bless my brothers and sisters, and heal what is wounded in our family.

Today: Contact a brother, sister or cousin you have not spoken to in a while.

Day 2: Following in another's footsteps

When Stephen II died in 757, Paul was chosen to succeed him and carried on the work his brother had begun. Faithfulness sometimes means continuing patiently what others started.

Prayer: Lord, help me to carry on faithfully the good work that others have entrusted to me.

Today: Thank God for someone whose work you continue, at home, at work or in your parish.

Day 3: Seeking peace in dangerous times

Threatened by the Lombards and abandoned by Byzantium, Paul kept up the alliance with the Franks to protect Rome. He worked for the safety of his people with prudence and patience.

Prayer: Lord, grant wisdom to those who govern, and give peace to lands threatened by war.

Today: Pray for a country at war, and for those who work for peace.

Day 4: A spiritual father

Paul agreed to be godfather to Gisela, daughter of King Pepin. A godparent promises to help a child grow in faith. This bond of the spirit can last a lifetime.

Prayer: Lord, bless my godparents and godchildren, and help me to be a true witness for them.

Today: Pray for your godchild or godparent, or send them a word of encouragement.

Day 5: Welcoming the exiles

Greek monks driven out by the iconoclast emperor found refuge in Rome, and Paul built a monastery for them. He opened the doors of his city to those persecuted for their faith.

Prayer: Lord, protect Christians who are persecuted and exiled, and make me welcoming to strangers.

Today: Support an organization that helps refugees or persecuted Christians.

Day 6: The memory of the martyrs

Paul brought the relics of many martyrs from the abandoned catacombs into the churches of Rome. He did not want their witness to be forgotten. The martyrs remind us that faith can be worth more than life.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayers of your martyrs, give me courage to bear witness to you.

Today: Read the story of a martyr, ancient or modern, and ask for his or her prayers.

Day 7: Charity at night

Tradition says he went out at night, unknown, to visit the sick and help the poor. He sought neither thanks nor praise. Hidden love is often the purest.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to do good in secret, seen only by you.

Today: Do an act of charity that no one will know about.

Day 8: Visiting the sick

Among all his works, the memory of his visits to the sick has lasted. Jesus said: "I was sick, and you visited me." In every sick person, Christ waits for us.

Prayer: Lord, comfort the sick, the lonely and the dying, and send them people who care.

Today: Visit or call someone who is sick, elderly or alone.

Day 9: On the eve of Peter and Paul

Paul I died in Rome on June 28, 767, on the eve of the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul. He bore the name of the Apostle of the Nations and served the Church founded on Peter. His life was spent for the Church of Rome.

Prayer: Lord, protect the Pope and the whole Church, and keep us faithful to the faith of the apostles.

Today: Pray for the Pope, and prepare to celebrate Saints Peter and Paul tomorrow.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Paul I, humble shepherd of the Church of Rome, you protected the relics of the martyrs, welcomed persecuted monks and visited the sick and the poor in secret. Teach me a charity that does not seek to be seen and a faith that does not forget the witnesses of Christ. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Continue with the prayer to Saint Paul I or read the life of Saint Paul I.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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