

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Pedro de Arbués

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: September 17

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IN BRIEF

Saint Pedro de Arbués

Canon regular of Zaragoza cathedral and inquisitor of Aragon, killed during the night office in 1485.

Feast day	September 17
Born	1441, Épila, Aragon (Spain)
Died	September 17, 1485, Zaragoza, Spain
Canonized	June 29, 1867, by Pope Pius IX
Era	15th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Pedro de Arbués

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Pedro de Arbués

Saint Pedro de Arbués (also called Peter of Arbués) was a fifteenth-century Aragonese priest, a canon regular of the cathedral of Zaragoza and the first inquisitor of the Kingdom of Aragon. On the night of September 14-15, 1485, he was stabbed while praying in the cathedral, and he died two days later. The Church recognized him as a martyr, and Pope Pius IX canonized him in 1867, a decision that is still debated because of his role in the Spanish Inquisition. His feast day is September 17.

Who was Saint Pedro de Arbués?

Pedro de Arbués is a difficult figure, and he deserves to be presented honestly. For his Catholic biographers, he was a learned, devout and humble priest, killed out of hatred for the faith while he was at prayer. For historians, he was also one of the first agents of the Spanish Inquisition, an institution created by the Catholic Monarchs to prosecute the *conversos*: Jews who had converted to Christianity, often under pressure, and who were suspected of secretly practicing Judaism.

His murder and the repression that followed are a dark episode in the history of Spain. The holiness recognized by the Church concerns his life of prayer and his death. It is not an approval of the methods of the Inquisition, which the Church has since acknowledged as contrary to the Gospel.

Key dates

- **1441**: Born at Épila, near Zaragoza, into a noble family.
- **1460s**: Studies philosophy, then leaves for Bologna and the Spanish College of Saint Clement.

- **December 27, 1473**: Doctor of theology at Bologna; he is also a doctor of law.
- **1474**: Religious profession as a canon regular of the cathedral of La Seo in Zaragoza.
- **May 4, 1484**: Appointed inquisitor for the Kingdom of Aragon.
- **Night of September 14-15, 1485**: Attacked and stabbed during Matins in the cathedral.
- **September 17, 1485**: Dies of his wounds.
- **1664**: Pope Alexander VII recognizes his cult as a martyr.
- **June 29, 1867**: Canonized by Pope Pius IX.

A learned priest of Zaragoza

Born in 1441 at Épila to Antonio de Arbués and Sancha Ruiz, Pedro received a careful education. After studies in Aragon, he went to Bologna, to the College of Saint Clement, founded in the fourteenth century for Spanish students. His contemporaries described him as a diligent and devout student. He came home a doctor of both theology and law.

Back in Zaragoza, he joined the chapter of the cathedral, La Seo, in 1474. Its canons lived according to the Rule of Saint Augustine. He was sometimes called "Master Épila," after his hometown. He taught, preached and led a regular life of prayer with his brother canons.

Inquisitor of Aragon

In 1478, Pope Sixtus IV authorized the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, to set up a tribunal of the Inquisition under royal authority. The Dominican Tomás de Torquemada became its inquisitor

general. In May 1484, Pedro de Arbués was appointed inquisitor for the Kingdom of Aragon, together with the Dominican Gaspar Juglar, who died a few months later.

The new Inquisition met fierce opposition in Aragon. Many saw it as an attack on the kingdom's traditional liberties, the *fueros*. *Converso* families, which included important figures at court and in the administration, felt directly threatened. The tribunal held its first autos-da-fé in Zaragoza as early as 1484.

The saint's defenders claimed that no death sentence could be attributed to him personally. Even so, he headed a tribunal that handed down severe sentences. Knowing that his life was in danger, Pedro wore a coat of mail and a helmet under his clothes.

Murder in the cathedral

On the night of September 14-15, 1485, as he knelt before the altar of the Virgin for the office of Matins, armed men attacked him from behind. The blows to his neck wounded him fatally. He died on September 17, at the age of forty-four. His biographers report that he forgave his murderers.

The killing set off a riot against the *conversos* and the Jewish quarter of Zaragoza, which the archbishop managed to contain only with great difficulty. Far from stopping the Inquisition, the murder strengthened its power in Aragon. The alleged killers and their accomplices, often from prominent converso families, were prosecuted, tortured and executed; others were burned in effigy.

Modern historians point out that responsibility for the attack, probably shared by Aragonese opponents of the Inquisition, was laid on the *conversos* alone, and that they paid a very heavy price for it.



The cathedral of La Seo in Zaragoza, where Pedro de Arbués was killed and where he is buried.

Cult and canonization

Popular veneration arose immediately, fed by accounts of miracles. The Catholic Monarchs had a tomb built for him in the cathedral. His cause as a martyr, requested by Torquemada, led to the recognition of his cult by Pope Alexander VII in 1664, then to his canonization by Pope Pius IX on June 29, 1867.

The canonization was criticized at the time, especially by Jewish and liberal voices, and it remains controversial today. Pedro de Arbués rests in the chapel that bears his name in the cathedral of La Seo.

In 2000, on the Day of Pardon of the Jubilee Year, Saint John Paul II asked forgiveness for the sins committed by Christians in the service of truth through intolerance and violence, and for the sufferings inflicted on the Jewish people.

This gesture shows how a Catholic today can look at a figure like Pedro de Arbués.

What can we learn from Saint Pedro de Arbués?

Pedro de Arbués is not invoked as a patron of any particular cause. What the Church holds up in him is fidelity to prayer to the very end, since he was struck down on his knees during the night office, and the forgiveness he gave his murderers.

Remembering his story can also lead us to pray that faith may never be imposed by force, for the victims of the Inquisition, and for reconciliation between Jews and Christians.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Pedro de Arbués and the novena to Saint Pedro de Arbués.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Pedro de Arbués in art

Paintings usually show the moment of his death: a priest in the habit of a canon, kneeling in prayer before an altar of the Virgin, attacked from behind by armed men. The Spanish painter José Luzán depicted him in glory among other saints of Zaragoza.

Where to pray to Saint Pedro de Arbués

- **Zaragoza**: the Cathedral of the Savior, La Seo, and the chapel of Saint Pedro Arbués, where his tomb is located.
- **Épila** (Aragon): his hometown, which honors him as its own saint.
- **Zaragoza**: the Museum of Zaragoza, which keeps a canvas by José Luzán showing him in glory with other saints of the city.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Pedro de Arbués for Fidelity and Forgiveness

Saint Pedro de Arbués, a canon of Zaragoza, was struck down while praying the night office in 1485. His memory is tied to the painful history of the Spanish Inquisition. This page offers an original prayer by Saintspedia that draws from his life fidelity to prayer and forgiveness, and that also entrusts to God the victims of that period.

Prayer to Saint Pedro de Arbués

Saint Pedro, you were struck down on your knees, in the middle of the night, while you were singing the praise of God. Teach me to be faithful to prayer, even when it is hard, even when I am afraid.

According to your biographers, you forgave those who wounded you. Give me a heart that is able to forgive, and free me from the spirit of revenge.

You lived in a time of violence and suspicion, when some wanted to impose the faith by force. Pray that the Church may always proclaim Christ with respect for every conscience, with gentleness and truth, as he did himself.

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.

Prayer for reconciliation

> *God of mercy, we entrust to you all the victims of religious intolerance: those who suffered in the name of the Christian faith, and those who fell to the violence of its enemies. Forgive the sins committed by your children. Heal wounded memories, especially between Jews and Christians, and make us builders of truth and peace. Amen.*

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Pedro de Arbués is celebrated on September 17, the day of his death. You can pray to him when you feel threatened or find it hard to stay faithful to prayer, when you have to forgive a serious offense, or for peace between religions. You can also pray the novena to Saint Pedro de Arbués, from September 9 to September 17.

To learn more about his story, read the life of Saint Pedro de Arbués.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Pedro de Arbués

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Pedro de Arbués, canon of Zaragoza, who was struck down while praying in 1485. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, September 17, begin it on September 9. It can be prayed at any time of the year, especially when prayer has become difficult or when forgiveness seems out of reach.

His story is also bound up with the suffering caused by the Spanish Inquisition. This novena does not hide it: it asks for fidelity and forgiveness, and it also prays for the victims of that time and for reconciliation between Jews and 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 the day helps turn the prayer into a concrete step. If you can, pray at a set time, as the canons of Zaragoza did with the hours of the office.

Day 1: A child of Épila

Pedro was born in 1441 in a small town of Aragon, into a noble family that gave him a careful education. Every vocation begins somewhere concrete, in a family, a parish, a place. God works through ordinary beginnings.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the family and the place where my life began. Help me recognize your hand in my own story.

Today: Pray for your parents and for those who raised you.

Day 2: The student of Bologna

At the College of Saint Clement in Bologna, Pedro became a doctor of theology and law. His contemporaries remembered him as diligent and devout. Study is a way of serving God when it is joined to humility and prayer.

Prayer: Lord, give students and teachers a love of truth, and keep knowledge from making us proud.

Today: Spend ten minutes reading something that nourishes your faith.

Day 3: A canon at prayer

In 1474, Pedro made his profession as a canon regular of La Seo, living under the Rule of Saint Augustine. His days were shaped by the hours of the office, sung in common. Prayer at fixed times keeps the heart turned toward God amid all our tasks.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to give you regular time each day, not only when I feel like it.

Today: Choose a fixed time for prayer and keep it.

Day 4: In a time of suspicion

Pedro was appointed inquisitor of Aragon in 1484, in a kingdom divided by fear and distrust. Many *conversos* lived under suspicion and threat. We cannot read his life without thinking of them. The Church has since asked forgiveness for the violence used in the service of the truth.

Prayer: Lord, we entrust to you the victims of the Inquisition and all who suffered for their faith or their origins. Have mercy on them and on us.

Today: Pray for a person or group you are tempted to distrust.

Day 5: Faith and freedom

Faith cannot be imposed. Christ invites; he does not force. A Christian proclaims the Gospel with gentleness and respect, as Saint Peter writes, ready to give an account of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

Prayer: Lord, make me a witness who proposes your love and never imposes it, who respects every conscience.

Today: Listen fully to someone whose beliefs differ from yours, without trying to win the argument.

Day 6: Living with fear

Knowing he was threatened, Pedro wore a coat of mail under his clothes, yet he kept going to the night office. Fear is human. The question is whether it keeps us from God or brings us closer to him.

Prayer: Lord, when I am afraid, do not let fear keep me from you. Be my refuge and my strength.

Today: Bring a specific fear to God in a short prayer, by name.

Day 7: Struck down on his knees

On the night of September 14-15, 1485, Pedro was kneeling before the altar of the Virgin when he was attacked. Death found him at prayer. To be found faithful in the ordinary hours is the grace we ask for the hour of our death.

Prayer: Lord, may the hour of my death find me turned toward you, and may the Virgin Mary be with me.

Today: Pray a Hail Mary slowly, thinking of the words "now and at the hour of our death."

Day 8: Forgiveness

His biographers report that he forgave his murderers before he died on September 17. After his death, however, his killing was followed by riots and harsh repression against the *conversos*. Forgiveness given by one man was not followed by others. Vengeance only multiplies suffering.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to forgive those who have hurt me, and free me from every desire for revenge.

Today: Name in prayer someone you find hard to forgive, and ask God to bless them.

Day 9: Healing memories

On his feast day, we remember a priest faithful to prayer, and we also remember the wounds of history. In 2000, Saint John Paul II asked forgiveness for the sins of Christians against the Jewish people. Holiness and repentance go together: the Church honors her saints while asking forgiveness for her faults.

Prayer: God of mercy, heal the memories wounded by intolerance, especially between Jews and Christians, and make us builders of truth and peace.

Today: Pray for the Jewish people, "our elder brothers in faith," as John Paul II called them.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Pedro de Arbués, faithful to prayer to the end, you were struck down on your knees and you forgave those who wounded you. Obtain for me fidelity in prayer, the courage to face my fears and a heart free of revenge. Pray that the Gospel may always be proclaimed with gentleness and respect, and that God may heal the wounds of the past. I entrust to you my intention for this novena. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To learn more about his life, read the page on Saint Pedro de Arbués, or pray the prayer to Saint Pedro de Arbués.

Credits and sources

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