

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter Apselamus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 11

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IN BRIEF

Saint Peter Apselamus

Ascetic of Palestine, martyred at Caesarea during the persecution of Maximinus Daia.

Feast day	January 11
Born	late 3rd century, Anea, near Eleutheropolis (Palestine)
Died	January 11, 309 or 310, Caesarea, Palestine
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Peter Apselamus for Persecuted Christians

Novena to Saint Peter Apselamus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter Apselamus

Saint Peter Apselamus, also called Peter Balsamus, was a martyr of Palestine who died in the early fourth century, during the last great persecution of the Roman Empire. A native of a village near Eleutheropolis, he was burned alive at Caesarea for refusing to sacrifice to the gods, according to the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived at the same time. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on January 11.

Who was Saint Peter Apselamus?

We know Peter through a direct witness: Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, who recorded in his book *The Martyrs of Palestine* the condemnations he knew of in his own city, during the persecution begun under Diocletian and continued in the East by the emperor Maximinus Daia. His account is brief, but it is precious, because it was written shortly after the events.

Other, later documents, collected in the *Acta Sanctorum* under the name of Peter Balsamus, tell a somewhat different story of his passion, in which the martyr is crucified. Scholars have long debated whether these are the same man. The safest course is to keep to the testimony of Eusebius.

Key dates in the life of Saint Peter Apselamus

- **Late third century**: Born at Anea, a village in the territory of Eleutheropolis, in Palestine.
- **303**: The Great Persecution begins under the emperor Diocletian.
- **306-310**: In the East, the emperor Maximinus Daia repeatedly orders general sacrifices to the gods.
- **January 11, 309 or 310**: According to Eusebius, he is burned alive at Caesarea, together with a Marcionite bishop named Asclepius.

The testimony of Eusebius

Eusebius presents Peter as an ascetic, a Christian living a life of self-denial and prayer, from Anea near Eleutheropolis, today's Beit Guvrin. Arrested during the persecution, he was brought before the Roman governor of the province, who held court at Caesarea. He was pressed to sacrifice to the gods to save his life.

According to Eusebius, the judge and those around him even begged him to have pity on himself and on his youth. Peter refused. In a few lines, the historian conveys the scene: on one side, a whole court urging a young man to make a small gesture and live; on the other, a believer who will not deny his Lord.

Burned with a Marcionite bishop

Peter was condemned to the fire. Eusebius notes that he was burned at the same time as a certain Asclepius, described as a bishop of the sect of Marcion, a dissident Christian movement. The detail is remarkable: the historian, deeply attached to the Catholic Church, acknowledges that this man too faced death out of attachment to Christ, even though he did not share the orthodox faith. The persecution struck without distinction all who called themselves Christians.

The passion of Peter Balsamus

Another tradition, known through a text translated from Greek, calls the martyr Peter Balsamus. According to this account, when questioned by the governor, he answered firmly and sang psalms under torture, and the exasperated judge condemned him to be crucified, like Christ. The place of martyrdom is given as Aulana.

Scholars such as Le Nain de Tillemont, in the seventeenth century, thought this was a different martyr, later confused with the one of Caesarea. The current Roman Martyrology keeps the name Peter Apselamus and links him to Caesarea.

The setting: the last persecution

The persecution that began in 303 was the longest and harshest in the history of the Roman Empire. In Palestine it claimed many victims, whom we know thanks to Eusebius: men and women, clergy and laypeople, including the learned priest Saint Pamphilus of Caesarea, Eusebius's own teacher, who was put to death in the same period. In the East, it ended only in 311-313, with the edict of toleration of Galerius and then the policy of Constantine and Licinius.

Why is Saint Peter Apselamus prayed to for persecuted Christians?

Peter has no traditional patronage. But his story makes him a natural intercessor for Christians who suffer for their faith, especially in the Holy Land and the Middle East, where he lived and died. He is also a model for those who are pressed to compromise their conscience "just this once" to escape trouble, as he was urged to do by his judges.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter Apselamus in art

No tomb or relics of Peter Apselamus are known. His memory was kept alive by the account of Eusebius and then by the martyrologies. As far as we know, there is no early iconography specific to him. The early martyrs are usually shown with the palm, the sign of victory through faithfulness, and this is the simplest symbol to associate with him. The best "image" of him remains the short, vivid scene that Eusebius left us.

Devotion and feast day

He is celebrated on January 11 in the Catholic Church. Some lists have given other dates, because of confusion between his two traditions. His memory is a fitting occasion to pray for the Christians of the Middle East.

What can we learn from Saint Peter Apselamus?

Peter is an almost anonymous witness, known through only a few lines. But those lines say what matters: a young Christian, offered his life, chose to remain faithful to Christ. His story recalls the countless Christians who, even today, pay with their freedom or their lives for their attachment to the Gospel. We can pray to him for persecuted Christians, especially in the Middle East, and for faithfulness in times of trial.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Peter Apselamus and the novena to Saint Peter Apselamus, from January 3 to his feast on January 11.

Where to pray to Saint Peter Apselamus

- **Caesarea Maritima** (Israel): the ancient site of the city where he was martyred.
- **Beit Guvrin** (Israel): the region of ancient Eleutheropolis, where he came from.
- Any church, on January 11, in union with persecuted Christians.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter Apselamus for Persecuted Christians

Saint Peter Apselamus, a young ascetic from the region of Eleutheropolis, was burned alive at Caesarea in Palestine around 309 or 310 for refusing to sacrifice to the Roman gods. We know him only through a few lines by Eusebius of Caesarea, but those lines are enough to make him a model of faithfulness under pressure. No traditional prayer to him is known; this page offers an original prayer by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Peter Apselamus

Saint Peter Apselamus, you lived for God in prayer and self-denial, far from the noise of the world. Teach me to give God the first place in my life, in small things as in great ones.

When the judge and all those around him begged you to save your life with one small gesture, you remained faithful to Christ. Give me courage when I am pressed to compromise my faith or my conscience, even "just this once."

You died in the fire, alongside a man who did not share your faith but suffered for the name of Christ. Pray for the unity of all Christians, and for all who are persecuted because they believe.

Watch over the Christians of the Holy Land and of the Middle East, who live today where you lived and died. Strengthen those who are threatened, imprisoned or driven from their homes. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may I never be ashamed of the Gospel, and may I remain faithful until the day I see the face of God. Amen.

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

Intentions to entrust to Saint Peter Apselamus

- Christians persecuted for their faith, especially in the Middle East.
- Christians of the Holy Land.
- Those pressed to act against their conscience.
- Young people seeking to live their faith with courage.
- The unity of Christians.

A short invocation

Saint Peter Apselamus, faithful witness of Caesarea, pray for all who suffer for the name of Jesus. Amen.

Original invocation by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Peter Apselamus is commemorated on January 11. You can pray to him whenever news reaches you of Christians suffering for their faith, or when you yourself feel pressure to hide or deny what you believe. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Peter Apselamus, and read the life of Saint Peter Apselamus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter Apselamus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the martyrdom of Saint Peter Apselamus as told by Eusebius of Caesarea. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, January 11, begin it on January 3, in the days following New Year. It is especially suited to praying for persecuted Christians, and can be prayed at any time of the year.

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 you carry the prayer into your life and into solidarity with Christians who suffer today. You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group.

Day 1: A life given to God

Eusebius describes Peter as an ascetic, a man who had chosen self-denial and prayer. Long before the day of his trial, he had already given his life to God, day after day. Great faithfulness is prepared by small daily faithfulness. The courage he showed at Caesarea had roots in years of hidden prayer.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be faithful to you in the small things of each day.

Today: Choose one small act of self-denial and offer it for persecuted Christians.

Day 2: A village in Palestine

Peter came from Anea, a village near Eleutheropolis, in the land where Jesus himself had lived. The faith had reached the villages of Palestine, and humble people there lived the Gospel in the midst of a pagan empire.

Prayer: Lord, bless the Christians of the Holy Land, who keep the faith alive in the land of your earthly life.

Today: Learn something about the Christians who live in the Holy Land today.

Day 3: The time of persecution

The persecution that began in 303 lasted for years. Christians lost their goods, their freedom and often their lives. Yet the Church did not disappear; it grew stronger through the witness of its martyrs.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen your Church in times of trial, and make the witness of the martyrs bear fruit.

Today: Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted today.

Day 4: Brought before the judge

Peter was arrested and brought before the Roman governor at Caesarea. He stood alone before the power of the empire. Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would give his disciples the words to say in such moments.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the right words when I must speak of my faith.

Today: Do not hide your faith if an occasion arises to speak of it simply.

Day 5: "Have pity on yourself"

The judge and those around him begged Peter to have pity on himself and on his youth. The temptation was not brutal but gentle: just one small gesture, and life would go on. Often our faithfulness is tested in this quiet way, through kind voices that invite us to give in.

Prayer: Lord, when I am tempted to compromise "just this once," give me the strength to remain faithful.

Today: Refuse a small compromise with your conscience.

Day 6: Faithful to the end

Peter refused to sacrifice to the gods. He preferred to lose his life rather than deny Christ. Such faithfulness is not stubbornness: it is love for the One who gave his life for us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you gave your life for me; teach me to give mine to you.

Today: Spend a few minutes before a crucifix in silent prayer.

Day 7: Side by side in the fire

Peter was burned at the same time as Asclepius, a bishop of a dissident Christian sect. Eusebius honors the courage of both. Suffering for Christ can bring together those whom history has divided.

Prayer: Lord, heal the divisions among Christians, and make us one as you and the Father are one.

Today: Pray for Christians of another Church or community.

Day 8: Remembered by a witness

Without Eusebius, Peter would be forgotten. The historian took care to write down the names of the martyrs of his city. Keeping the memory of those who suffer is already a form of love and justice.

Prayer: Lord, do not let us forget those who suffer for your name.

Today: Share a story or a prayer intention about persecuted Christians with someone.

Day 9: A crown of glory

Peter's life was short, and his story fits into a few lines. But he received the crown promised to those who are faithful unto death. In God's eyes, no faithful life is ever small or forgotten.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Peter Apselamus, keep me faithful, and support all who suffer for your name. Amen.

Today: Attend Mass if you can, and offer it for persecuted Christians.

Closing prayer

Saint Peter Apselamus, faithful witness of Caesarea, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for persecuted Christians, for the Christians of the Holy Land and the Middle East, for all who are pressed to deny their conscience, and for the unity of the Church. Obtain for us courage, perseverance and love for Christ above all. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Peter Apselamus and the prayer to Saint Peter Apselamus.

Credits and sources

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