

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter Chrysologus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 30

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IN BRIEF

Saint Peter Chrysologus

Fifth-century bishop of Ravenna, preacher known as the "golden word" and Doctor of the Church.

Feast day	July 30
Born	c. 380, Imola, Italy
Died	c. 450, Imola, Italy
Era	5th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Peter Chrysologus for Preachers

Novena to Saint Peter Chrysologus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter Chrysologus

Saint Peter Chrysologus was bishop of Ravenna in the fifth century, at a time when the city was the residence of the Western Roman emperors. A tireless preacher, he left a collection of 176 short, clear and dense sermons, which earned him in the ninth century the nickname Chrysologus, "golden word." A guardian of the unity of the faith in the controversies of his age, he was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1729. He died around 450 in his hometown of Imola and is celebrated on July 30.

Who was Saint Peter Chrysologus?

Peter was born in Imola, in the Emilia region of northern Italy, around 380 according to tradition, perhaps a little later according to some historians. Little is known of his youth. The ease of his style, his command of rhetoric and his knowledge of classical literature show that he received a careful education. In Imola he was ordained a deacon by Bishop Cornelius, whom he always regarded as his father in the faith.

In the early fifth century the Western Roman Empire was faltering. Rome had been sacked by the Visigoths in 410, and the imperial court had moved to Ravenna, protected by its marshes. The city became a political capital and an artistic center, and some of its famous mosaics date from this period. It was in this setting that Peter was called, around 433, to become bishop of Ravenna.



Saint Peter Chrysologus, bishop of Ravenna and Doctor of the Church.

Key dates in the life of Saint Peter Chrysologus

- **c. 380**: Born in Imola, according to the traditional date.
- **Early fifth century**: Ordained a deacon by Cornelius, bishop of Imola.
- **c. 433**: Becomes bishop of Ravenna, the imperial residence, with the support of Pope Sixtus III.
- **448 or 449**: Writes to the monk Eutyches, urging him to submit to the pope.
- **c. 450**: Dies in Imola.
- **Eighth century**: Bishop Felix of Ravenna gathers 176 of his sermons into a collection.
- **1729**: Pope Benedict XIII declares him a Doctor of the Church.
- **1969**: His feast is set on July 30 in the General Roman Calendar.

Bishop of the imperial city

A tradition recorded in the ninth century by Agnellus, historian of the Church of Ravenna, holds that the pope chose Peter after a vision of Saint Peter and of Saint Apollinaris, the first bishop of the city. Whatever the truth of this story, choosing a bishop for the imperial residence was a matter of great importance. Peter exercised his ministry close to the court, especially to the Empress Galla Placidia, who then governed in the name of her young son Valentinian III.

He kept up ties with other great bishops of his day. His influence reached political authorities and several bishops, among them Saint Germanus of Auxerre, who came to Ravenna and died there in 448. Peter appears as a pastor close to power without being a courtier: his sermons were addressed first of all to the Christian people of his city.

The golden word

The sermons of Peter Chrysologus are brief, because he was afraid of tiring his listeners. They comment on the Gospel, the parables, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Several deal with the prodigal son, others with Lent, the Incarnation, the Virgin Mary or John the Baptist. In them he defends the perpetual virginity of Mary, whom he sees as a figure of the Church, and he recommends receiving the Eucharist every day as the true "daily bread." For him, prayer, fasting and mercy form one inseparable whole.

His nickname Chrysologus did not exist in his lifetime. It appears in the ninth century, perhaps to give Ravenna a Latin counterpart to the great preacher of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, the "golden mouth."



The mosaics of Ravenna, the imperial city where he served as bishop.

Guardian of unity

The fifth century was shaken by debates about the person of Christ. In 448 or 449 the monk Eutyches, condemned at Constantinople for confusing the human and divine natures in Jesus, looked for support in the West. Peter answered him in a letter that has survived. He urged him to submit to the judgment of Pope Leo the Great, because, he wrote, if the peace of the Church gladdens heaven, its divisions ought to cause grief. The letter shows his attachment to the primacy of the bishop of Rome.

What is Saint Peter Chrysologus invoked for?

Peter Chrysologus is not the official patron of a country or a profession, but popular devotion has long called on him against fever and rabies. Because he spent his life breaking open the Word of God for ordinary people, he is also a natural intercessor for preachers, homilists and catechists. His teaching on prayer, fasting and mercy makes him a fitting companion for Lent.

What his holiness teaches

He was first of all a pastor who fed his people with the Word of God, using simple and precise words. He reminds preachers that a short homily can be deep, that faith is lived in concrete acts of prayer, fasting and sharing, and that the unity of the Church is worth defending.

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

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter Chrysologus in art

He is usually shown as a bishop, wearing a miter and holding a crosier. A book often appears in his hands, a reminder of his sermons and of his title as Doctor of the Church. Images of him are found mainly in Italy, especially in Imola and Ravenna.

Where to pray to Saint Peter Chrysologus

- **Imola**: the Cathedral of Saint Cassian, where his relics are venerated.
- **Ravenna**: the city where he was bishop, rich in basilicas and mosaics from the fifth and sixth centuries.

Wherever you are, his sermons remain the best way to meet him. Several of them are read in the Liturgy of the Hours, notably his sermon on prayer, fasting and mercy during Lent.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter Chrysologus for Preachers

Saint Peter Chrysologus did not leave a prayer that became traditional, but his sermons, several of which are read in the Liturgy of the Hours, contain famous passages. Below you will find two of his sayings with their sources, followed by an original prayer to Saint Peter Chrysologus.

Two sayings of Peter Chrysologus to meditate on

> *"There are three things, brethren, by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures: prayer, fasting, mercy."*

Source: Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon* 43, on prayer, fasting and almsgiving; this text is read in the Liturgy of the Hours during Lent (free translation).

> *"Abstinence is the first medicine of man; but for the healing to be complete, it requires the expense of mercy."*

Source: Peter Chrysologus, sermon on the Lenten fast (from the collection of his 176 sermons gathered by Bishop Felix of Ravenna in the eighth century; free translation).



Saint Peter Chrysologus in prayer.

Prayer to Saint Peter Chrysologus for preachers

Saint Peter Chrysologus, you fed the people of Ravenna with the Word of God in simple and luminous words. Grant to preachers and catechists the gift of saying what matters most, with clarity and with love.

You taught that prayer, fasting and mercy belong together. Teach me not to separate them: may my prayer lead me to share, and may my fasting make my heart more attentive to others.

You suffered from the divisions of the Church and called for peace. Pray for the unity of Christians and for those who are charged with guarding it.

I entrust to you the sick, those who suffer from fever, and my own intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me the grace to receive Christ each day as the true bread of my life. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Peter Chrysologus is celebrated on July 30, close to the probable anniversary of his death. His words on prayer, fasting and mercy also make him a valuable companion during Lent, especially on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent. You can pray to him before preparing a homily, a catechism class or a talk, and for anyone suffering from fever.

For nine days of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Peter Chrysologus, and read the life of Saint Peter Chrysologus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter Chrysologus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and sermons of Saint Peter Chrysologus, bishop of Ravenna and Doctor of the Church. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on July 30, begin on July 21; it ends on July 29. It can also be prayed during Lent, since his best-known sermon is about prayer, fasting and mercy.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps you carry the prayer into your day. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. This novena suits anyone who preaches or teaches the faith, but also anyone who wants to pray more simply and live more generously.

Day 1: A father in the faith

In Imola, the young Peter was ordained a deacon by Bishop Cornelius, whom he always regarded as his father in the faith. No one becomes a Christian alone: faith is handed on by people who take the time to form us.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who passed on the faith to me. Through the intercession of Saint Peter Chrysologus, bless them and reward them. Amen.

Today: Write a short note of thanks to a person who helped you grow in faith, or pray for them by name.

Day 2: A pastor in troubled times

Peter became bishop of Ravenna while the Western Empire was faltering, a few decades after the sack of Rome. He did not flee the uncertainty of his age; he served his people within it.

Prayer: Lord, in the uncertainties of my time, keep me faithful to the task you have given me. Amen.

Today: Do one ordinary duty with special care, offering it to God.

Day 3: Close to the powerful, faithful to the poor

He ministered near the imperial court and the Empress Galla Placidia, yet his sermons were addressed above all to the ordinary Christians of his city. He did not let rank decide whom he served.

Prayer: Lord, free me from seeking the approval of the powerful, and turn my heart toward the little ones. Amen.

Today: Give some real attention to a person who is usually overlooked.

Day 4: The gift of a short word

Peter kept his sermons brief so as not to tire his listeners. A few well-chosen words, spoken with love, can go further than long speeches.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give preachers and catechists words that are simple, true and full of life. Teach me to say only what builds up. Amen.

Today: Pray for your parish priest and for those who will preach next Sunday.

Day 5: Prayer, the door of the heart

For Peter Chrysologus, prayer is the first of three things by which faith stands firm. Prayer knocks, and God opens. Without it, fasting and mercy lose their source.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray with trust and perseverance, as a child speaks to his father. Amen.

Today: Set aside ten minutes of silent prayer, without your phone.

Day 6: Fasting that opens the hand

He called abstinence the first medicine of man, but added that the healing is complete only when it leads to mercy. Fasting is not a performance; it makes room in us for God and for others.

Prayer: Lord, let every sacrifice I make free my heart and open my hands. Amen.

Today: Give up a small pleasure and give what it would have cost to someone in need.

Day 7: Mercy, the crown of the rest

Prayer, fasting and mercy, he taught, form one whole. Whoever wants God to hear his prayer must hear the poor; whoever hopes for mercy must show it.

Prayer: Merciful Father, make me merciful as you are merciful. Through the intercession of Saint Peter Chrysologus, soften what is hard in me. Amen.

Today: Perform one concrete work of mercy: a visit, a meal, a call, a pardon.

Day 8: The true daily bread

Peter urged his people to receive the Eucharist every day, seeing in it the true "daily bread" of the Lord's Prayer. Christ wants to be the food of each of our days.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, true bread from heaven, give me a hunger for you and the joy of receiving you. Amen.

Today: Attend Mass on a weekday if you can, or spend a few minutes before the Blessed Sacrament.

Day 9: Keeping the unity of the Church

When the monk Eutyches sought his support, Peter sent him back to the judgment of Pope Leo the Great. The peace of the Church, he wrote, gladdens heaven, and its divisions ought to grieve us.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Peter Chrysologus, make me a builder of peace and unity in the Church and in my family. Amen.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation with someone from whom you are estranged.

Closing prayer

Saint Peter Chrysologus, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have placed before God. You fed your people with the golden word of the Gospel; help me to receive it and to live it. Teach me to join prayer, fasting and mercy, to love the Eucharist, and to serve the unity of the Church. Pray for preachers and catechists, for the sick, and for me. Amen.

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

Credits and sources

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