

BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Peter Damian

*Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage*

Feast day: February 21

**Saintspedia** · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

## Saint Peter Damian

*Hermit monk of Fonte Avellana, cardinal bishop of Ostia and Doctor of the Church, a leading voice of the eleventh-century reform.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Feast day** | February 21 |
| **Born** | 1007, Ravenna, Italy |
| **Died** | February 22, 1072, Faenza, Italy |
| **Canonized** | Venerated as a saint since his death, never formally canonized; proclaimed Doctor of the Church in 1828 by Pope Leo XII |
| **Era** | 11th century |

## In this booklet


Life

Prayer to Saint Peter Damian for Prayer, Study and the Church

Novena to Saint Peter Damian

Chapel of Saint Peter Damian, Faenza Cathedral

Credits and sources



Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

# Saint Peter Damian

Saint Peter Damian was an eleventh-century Italian hermit who became, against his own wishes, cardinal bishop of Ostia. Prior of the monastery of Fonte Avellana, a fiery preacher and a tireless writer, he was one of the great voices of Church reform in his time, fighting the buying and selling of Church offices and the laxity of the clergy. He died in Faenza in 1072, was venerated as a saint from the moment of his death, and was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1828. His feast day is February 21.

## Who was Saint Peter Damian?

Peter was born in Ravenna in 1007, into a noble but impoverished family. Orphaned very young, he was first placed with one of his brothers, who treated him harshly and sent him out to tend pigs. Another brother, Damian, archpriest of Ravenna, took him in and sent him to school. Out of gratitude, Peter added his benefactor's name to his own: from then on he was Peter "Damian."

Gifted and hardworking, he studied in Ravenna, Faenza and Parma, and became a teacher of rhetoric himself. A brilliant career lay ahead of him, but he chose another road. Around 1035 he entered the hermitage of Fonte Avellana, at the foot of Monte Catria in the Marche region of central Italy, a community living in the spirit of Saint Romuald, founder of the Camaldolese.



*The monastery of Fonte Avellana, in the Marche, where Peter Damian lived.*

## Key dates in the life of Saint Peter Damian

- **1007**: Born in Ravenna.
- **Around 1035**: Enters the hermitage of Fonte Avellana.
- **1042**: Writes a Life of Saint Romuald.
- **1043**: Becomes prior of Fonte Avellana.
- **1057 or 1058**: Named cardinal bishop of Ostia by Pope Stephen IX.
- **1059**: Papal legate in Milan, sent to fight simony.
- **1063**: Legate in France; at the Council of Chalon he rules in favor of the abbey of Cluny.
- **1069**: At the synod of Frankfurt, he persuades King Henry IV not to repudiate his wife, Bertha of Turin.
- **Night of February 21-22, 1072**: Dies in Faenza, on his way back from a mission to Ravenna.

- **1823**: Pope Leo XII extends his feast to the whole Church.
- **September 27, 1828**: Proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.

## The hermit of Fonte Avellana

At Fonte Avellana, Peter Damian lived a very strict life of prayer, fasting and penance. He took a growing part in the life of the community and became its prior in 1043. He also founded other hermitages, such as the one at Gamogna in the Apennines.

For him, solitude was never an escape. The hermit who prays alone carries the whole Church in his prayer. He explained this in a short treatise, showing why a monk alone in his cell may still say "The Lord be with you": the entire Church is present in each of its members.

Dante gave him a place in the *Divine Comedy*. In Canto XXI of the *Paradiso*, Peter Damian describes his hermitage on Monte Catria and his contemplative life, sustained by the simplest of food.

## A reformer in the service of the popes

The eleventh century was marked by serious disorders in the Church. Church offices were bought and sold (simony), many clerics lived with women in spite of Church discipline (a practice then called Nicolaitism), and lay princes interfered in the appointment of bishops. Peter Damian put his pen and his voice at the service of the reforming popes, from Saint Leo IX to Alexander II, alongside the future Pope Gregory VII.

His writings are often vigorous and sometimes very harsh. Around 1050 he sent Leo IX a severe treatise on the moral failings of the clergy; the pope accepted some of his demands but softened the penalties. In his *Liber*

*gratissimus*, on the other hand, he defended the validity of ordinations performed by simoniac bishops and proposed a path of reconciliation for those who repented.

## Cardinal and papal legate

Named cardinal bishop of Ostia, he accepted the office reluctantly. He carried out delicate missions: in Milan in 1059, where he obtained the submission of the clergy; in France in 1063, where he visited Limoges, Souvigny and Besançon and settled the dispute between Cluny and the bishop of Mâcon; and in Germany in 1069. Between missions, he always returned to his cell at Fonte Avellana.



*Saint Peter Damian, cardinal and Doctor of the Church.*

## A large body of writings

Peter Damian left about one hundred and sixty letters, more than seventy sermons, lives of saints and several treatises. In his letter *On Divine Omnipotence*, he reflects on what God can do and on the place of reason. Wary of logic whenever it claims to sit in judgment over faith, he wanted it to remain the servant of theology. His spiritual writings nourished monastic life for centuries.

## What can we learn from his holiness?

Peter Damian united two callings that are often thought to be opposed: the solitude of prayer and active commitment to the Church. Demanding of himself, he longed for a pure and free Church. His uncompromising temperament sometimes made him severe, yet he also knew how to offer paths of forgiveness.

He was never canonized through a formal process. He was honored as a saint from the time of his death, in Faenza, at Monte Cassino, at Cluny and at Fonte Avellana, and his cult was later extended to the whole Church.

## Why is Saint Peter Damian invoked against headaches?

Popular devotion invokes Saint Peter Damian against headaches and mental fatigue. It is a fitting patronage for a man who spent his life studying, teaching, writing and traveling on difficult missions, while keeping the discipline of a hermit. Students, teachers and all who work hard with their minds can turn to him.

## Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter Damian in art

In paintings, Saint Peter Damian is usually shown as a cardinal, dressed in red, often holding a book that recalls his many writings. He is sometimes depicted in prayer before a crucifix, a reminder of his life as a hermit and penitent.

## Where to pray to Saint Peter Damian

- **Faenza** (Emilia-Romagna): the chapel of the cathedral where his remains have rested since 1898, and the church of Santa Maria Vecchia, the former monastery where he died.
- **Fonte Avellana** (Marche): the monastery where he lived and served as prior.
- **Ravenna**: his hometown.

To pray with him, you can use the prayer to Saint Peter Damian or the novena to Saint Peter Damian.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Peter Damian for Prayer, Study and the Church

There is no widely known traditional prayer to Saint Peter Damian, but his own writings contain beautiful pages on prayer. Below you will find a passage from one of his treatises, with its source, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia.

## A page from Peter Damian to meditate on

> *"If those who believe in Christ are one, then wherever one of them is physically present, the whole Body of the Church is there through the sacramental mystery. [...] The solitude of one does not harm the plurality, and the multitude of the faithful does not destroy the unity."*

Source: Peter Damian, the short work *Dominus vobiscum* ("The Lord be with you"), eleventh century, written to explain why a hermit praying alone may use the words of the Church's common prayer.

## Prayer to Saint Peter Damian

*Saint Peter Damian, you left behind the honors of teaching for the solitude of Fonte Avellana: teach me to be silent so that I may listen to God.*

*You knew that the whole Church is present in the prayer of a single person: help me never to pray alone, even when I am alone. May my prayer carry those I love and those I forget.*

*You worked tirelessly for a more faithful and freer Church: pray for our pastors and for all who serve the Church. Obtain for them integrity and mercy.*

*You are invoked in tiredness of mind and in headaches: support those who study, teach and work hard. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).*

*Help me, as you did, to unite the love of prayer with the service of my brothers and sisters. Amen.*

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

## When to pray this prayer

Saint Peter Damian is celebrated on February 21, the day of his death in Faenza in 1072. This prayer is especially suited to that day, but also:

- before a retreat or a time of silence;
- before an exam, a period of study or demanding intellectual work;
- when you suffer from headaches or mental exhaustion;
- when you pray for priests, bishops and the renewal of the Church.

To pray with him over nine days, follow the novena to Saint Peter Damian. To know him better, read the life of Saint Peter Damian.

NOVENA

# Novena to Saint Peter Damian

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and writings of Saint Peter Damian. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on February 21, begin on February 12; it ends on February 20. It can also be prayed at any time of the year, before a retreat, a period of study, or for the renewal of the Church.

## How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before 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 daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off: faithfulness of heart matters more than perfection.

## Day 1: A wounded childhood

Peter lost his parents very young and was treated harshly by one of his brothers, who sent him to tend pigs. His story did not end there. God placed another brother, Damian, on his path, who welcomed him and sent him to school. No wound is beyond the reach of God's providence.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, you knew neglect and hardship as a child. Pray for all children who are abandoned or mistreated, and help me to entrust my own wounds to the Lord. Amen.

**Today:** Pray by name for a child or young person who is going through a hard time.

## Day 2: Gratitude

Out of gratitude to the brother who rescued him, Peter took his name and became Peter "Damian." All his life he carried the memory of the one who had shown him kindness. Gratitude is the memory of the heart.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, teach me to remember the good I have received and to give thanks to God and to those he has used to help me. Amen.

**Today:** Thank, in person or in writing, someone who once helped you.

## Day 3: The love of study

Peter studied in Ravenna, Faenza and Parma and became a teacher of rhetoric. He never despised learning, but he wanted it to serve the truth of faith rather than claim to judge it.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, pray for students and teachers. May our intelligence seek the truth humbly and lead us closer to God. Amen.

**Today:** Spend fifteen minutes reading a page of Scripture or a spiritual book with attention.

## Day 4: Choosing God over a career

Around 1035, at the threshold of a brilliant career, Peter chose the hermitage of Fonte Avellana. He did not flee the world out of fear but answered a call. Sometimes following Christ means letting go of what the world admires.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, give me the freedom to put God first in my choices, and the courage to let go of what keeps me from him. Amen.

**Today:** Give up one small comfort or distraction and offer that time to God.

## Day 5: Solitude that carries the Church

For Peter Damian, the hermit who prays alone carries the whole Church. In his short work *Dominus vobiscum*, he explained that the solitude of one does not harm the unity of all. Our hidden prayer also reaches far beyond us.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, teach me that I never pray alone. May my prayer carry those who cannot or do not pray. Amen.

**Today:** Spend ten minutes in silent prayer, entrusting to God someone who has drifted away from faith.

## Day 6: Discipline and penance

At Fonte Avellana, Peter lived a life of fasting, prayer and penance. These practices were not an end in themselves but a way of making room for God. A little self-denial frees the heart.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, help me to discipline my desires so that my heart may be freer for God and for others. Amen.

**Today:** Fast from something small (a snack, a screen, a complaint) and give what you save to someone in need.

## Day 7: Love for a purer Church

Peter Damian fought simony and the laxity of the clergy with all his strength. He loved the Church too much to accept its being disfigured. Yet he also proposed paths of reconciliation for those who repented.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, pray for our bishops, priests and deacons. Obtain for the Church holiness, truth and mercy. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for your parish priest and your bishop by name.

## Day 8: Obedience in service

Named cardinal bishop of Ostia, Peter accepted reluctantly. He traveled to Milan, France and Germany on difficult missions, then always returned to his cell. He served where he was sent without losing his inner silence.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, help me to accept the tasks entrusted to me with generosity, and to remain united to God in the midst of activity. Amen.

**Today:** Do a task you have been putting off, offering it to God.

## Day 9: A holy death

Returning from a mission to Ravenna, Peter fell ill and died in Faenza during the night of February 21-22, 1072. His whole life had been a preparation for meeting the Lord. He was venerated as a saint from the moment of his death.

**Prayer:** Saint Peter Damian, accompany me on my journey to God. Obtain for me the grace of persevering to the end in faith, hope and charity. Amen.

**Today:** Pray for the dying and for those who will die today.

## Closing prayer

> *Lord our God, you gave Saint Peter Damian the love of solitude and zeal for your Church. Through his intercession, grant that we may seek you in silence and serve you generously among our brothers and sisters. Strengthen those who study and those who are weary in mind, renew your Church in holiness, and hear the intention I entrust to you during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To continue praying with him, use the prayer to Saint Peter Damian, or read the life of Saint Peter Damian.

PILGRIMAGE

# Chapel of Saint Peter Damian, Faenza Cathedral

Saint Peter Damian rests in Faenza, in Emilia-Romagna, in a chapel of the cathedral dedicated to him. It was in this city, on the way back from a mission to Ravenna, that the hermit turned cardinal died in February 1072. Faenza is thus the main place where one can pray near his remains.

## A burial place moved several times

Struck by a high fever, Peter Damian stopped in Faenza and was welcomed by the Benedictine monks of the monastery of Santa Maria, located outside the walls; the church still exists under the name Santa Maria Vecchia. He died there on the night of February 21-22, 1072. The monks buried him at once, fearing that someone would dispute possession of his body. His remains were later moved six times before being placed, in 1898, in a chapel of Faenza Cathedral dedicated to him.



*Faenza Cathedral.*

## Visiting Faenza Cathedral

The Cathedral of Saint Peter the Apostle in Faenza is a large Renaissance church, built from the late 15th century in the heart of the city. Its brick facade was left unfinished. Inside, the chapel of Saint Peter Damian welcomes the faithful who come to pray to him, especially around his feast on February 21. The visit can continue to the Church of Santa Maria Vecchia, the place of his death.

## Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Peter Damian. In front of his chapel, you can recall his conviction that one person's prayer carries the whole Church: entrust to him those who do not pray, those who study, or those who serve the Church, then say the prayer to Saint Peter Damian. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

## Other places of Saint Peter Damian

- **Fonte Avellana** (Marche): the monastery at the foot of Monte Catria where he lived as a hermit and of which he was prior from 1043.
- **Ravenna**: his birthplace, where he did his early studies.
- **Gamogna** (Apennines of Tuscany and Romagna): one of the hermitages he founded, toward which he was headed when he fell ill.
- **Ostia**: the diocese of which he was cardinal bishop.

## Practical information

Faenza is between Bologna and Rimini, on the Adriatic coast railway line, and the cathedral is in the historic center, a few minutes' walk from the train station. Modest dress is requested, and visits are not possible during services. For opening hours and Mass times, check the website of the Diocese of Faenza-Modigliana or the cathedral before you come.

CREDITS

# Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

**Images**

- Cover: Andrea Barbiani, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The monastery of Fonte Avellana, in the Marche, where Peter Damian lived.: Image: Accurimbono, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Peter Damian, cardinal and Doctor of the Church.: Image: Andrea Barbiani, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Faenza Cathedral.: Image: Matt.giocoliere, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



## More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

**saintspedia.com**