

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter Orseolo

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: January 10

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IN BRIEF

Saint Peter Orseolo

Doge of Venice from 976 to 978 who gave up power to end his life as a monk at the abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa.

Feast day	January 10
Born	928
Died	c. 987, Abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa, France
Canonized	1731, by Pope Clement XII
Era	10th century

In this booklet

Life

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Abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter Orseolo

Saint Peter Orseolo (Pietro I Orseolo in Italian) was the twenty-third doge of Venice. Elected in 976 in a city devastated by a revolt and a great fire, he rebuilt it in two years. Then, one night in September 978, he vanished to become a monk at the abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa, at the foot of Mount Canigou in the Pyrenees. He lived there in penance and prayer until his death around 987. Canonized in 1731, he is celebrated on January 10.

Who was Saint Peter Orseolo?

Pietro Orseolo was born in 928 into one of the great families of Venice. He married Felicia, possibly a member of the Malipiero family, and they had a son, the future doge Pietro II Orseolo. His family belonged to the small circle of houses that dominated the political life of the lagoon at the time.

In 976, a riot broke out against Doge Pietro IV Candiano, who was seen as authoritarian. The ducal palace was set on fire, the flames spread to a large part of the city, and Candiano was killed. The popular assembly, gathered at San Pietro di Castello, then elected Pietro Orseolo, aged 48. A few decades later, the monk Peter Damian accused him of having taken part in the plot. That suspicion has never been settled.

Key dates in the life of Peter Orseolo

- **928**: Born into a noble Venetian family.
- **August 976**: Elected doge after the revolt that cost Pietro IV Candiano his life.
- **976-978**: Rebuilds the city, the ducal palace and Saint Mark's Basilica; founds two hospitals.

- **October 12, 977**: Renews Venice's agreements with the town of Koper (Capodistria).
- **Night of September 1, 978**: Secretly leaves Venice for the abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa.
- **c. 987**: Dies at Cuxa and is buried in the cloister.
- **1027**: His body is moved into the abbey church.
- **1731**: Canonized under Pope Clement XII.

A doge who rebuilt his city

His two years in office were remarkably fruitful. Pietro Orseolo restored civil peace and rebuilt the ruined districts, the ducal palace and Saint Mark's Basilica, which had been damaged by the fire. According to tradition, he had the relics of Saint Mark the Evangelist, patron of the city, hidden in a secret place. He also had two hospitals built.

Abroad, the situation was delicate. His predecessor had been close to Emperor Otto II, and Venice risked losing a powerful ally. The new doge chose the path of appeasement and allowed Candiano's widow, a relative of the emperor, to keep the use of her property.



Peter Orseolo, church of the Madonna dell'Orto, Venice.

The flight to Cuxa

During these years, Guarin (Garin), abbot of Saint-Michel de Cuxa in the Conflent region, came to Venice several times to venerate the relics of Saint Mark. He met the doge, who may have confided to him his desire to leave the world. On the night of September 1, 978, Pietro Orseolo disappeared without warning anyone except, it seems, his wife, who accepted his departure.

He made his way to the Pyrenean abbey with a few companions. According to the *Life of Saint Romuald* written by Peter Damian, one of them was the young hermit Romuald, the future founder of the Camaldolese.

From doge to simple monk

At Cuxa, the former ruler of one of the great sea powers of the Mediterranean became a simple monk under the Rule of Saint Benedict. He lived in humility, penance and prayer, then withdrew to a hermitage near the abbey, of which

some remains still survive. He died around 987; the exact date is unknown. He was buried in the cloister.



The abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa, at the foot of Mount Canigou.

A cult between Venice and Roussillon

Peter Orseolo was venerated as a saint very early. In 1027, his body was carried into the church of Cuxa. His bones were moved several times and placed in 1644 in a gilded wooden reliquary. His canonization in 1731 revived the fervor of Venice, which asked for a relic: three fragments of bone arrived in the lagoon and were placed in Saint Mark's Basilica in 1733, during a solemn celebration. In 1790, during the French Revolution, the last abbot of Cuxa took the rest of the relics to the nearby church of Saint-Pierre in Prades to keep them safe.

Why is Saint Peter Orseolo a patron saint?

Peter Orseolo has no official patronage. Yet his story makes him a natural intercessor for those who hold public office, for those who carry the weight of an old fault, and for those who are thinking about changing their lives. He shows that one can serve the common good with skill and then recognize that what matters most lies elsewhere.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter Orseolo in art

In Venice, he is depicted in the church of the Madonna dell'Orto, on the facade of San Rocco, and in a medieval mosaic in the baptistery of Saint Mark's, where he wears a monk's habit and holds the ducal cap in his hand. That cap, the *corno* of the doges, set aside or held in the hand, is his clearest sign: power laid down for Christ. In the gallery of doges' portraits in the Doge's Palace, a halo was added to his portrait after his canonization.



Saint Peter Orseolo, facade of San Rocco, Venice.

What can we learn from his holiness?

Peter Orseolo is one of the few people in power who gave up everything at the height of their careers. He reminds us that leaving honors behind is not a failure but can be a free answer to God's call. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Peter Orseolo or the novena to Saint Peter Orseolo.

Where to pray to Saint Peter Orseolo

- **Codalet** (Pyrénées-Orientales, France): the abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa, where he lived and died, still home to a monastic community. Part of its Romanesque cloister is now at The Cloisters museum in New York.
- **Prades**: the church of Saint-Pierre, which has kept his relics since 1790.
- **Venice**: Saint Mark's Basilica, which he rebuilt and where a relic has been venerated since 1733.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter Orseolo for Those Who Govern

Saint Peter Orseolo left no writings and no known prayer. His life speaks for him: a doge who rebuilt his city, then gave up power to become a monk. The Roman Martyrology remembers him on January 10 as a doge of Venice who left his office, embraced monastic life at Saint-Michel de Cuxa and lived there in humility and penance. Saint Peter Damian, who tells the story of his conversion in the *Life of Saint Romuald*, remembered above all this renunciation: a man who had everything and chose to keep nothing for himself. The prayer below is inspired by his journey. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Peter Orseolo for Those Who Govern

Saint Peter Orseolo,
you took charge of your city in a time of violence and fire,
and you raised it up again.
Pray for those who govern our countries and our towns today:
may they serve the common good before their own glory,
and never forget the poor.

You left honors and wealth by night
to follow Christ in a distant monastery:
teach me not to cling to what passes away.
Give me the courage to change what must change in my life.

You lived long years in penance:
obtain for me a heart that recognizes its faults
without being crushed by them,
and that trusts in the mercy of God.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).
Through your intercession, may I seek first the Kingdom of God,
in prayer and in the service of my brothers and sisters. Amen.

This original text by Saintspedia may be freely used for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

- On January 10, the feast of Saint Peter Orseolo.
- When taking on a new responsibility, at work, in public life or in the Church.
- Before an election, for candidates and for those who will be elected.

- Before an important life choice, or when you feel called to leave something behind.
- When an old fault weighs on your conscience.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Peter Orseolo or pray the novena to Saint Peter Orseolo, from January 2 to January 10.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter Orseolo

This novena to Saint Peter Orseolo is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the doge of Venice who rebuilt his city after a revolt and a fire, then left everything one night in 978 to become a monk at the abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa, in the Pyrenees. To end on January 10, his feast day, begin it on January 2. It is a good way to start the new year by asking what God wants us to keep and what he invites us to let go. You can also pray it before a major decision or when taking on a responsibility.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act proposed for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: A man of the world

Pietro Orseolo was born in 928 into one of the great families of Venice. He married Felicia and had a son. For most of his life, he was a man of politics, business and family, like many of us.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, teach me that holiness is possible in every state of life, and that God can call us at any age. Amen.

Today: Thank God for your family and for the place where you live and work.

Day 2: Called in a time of crisis

In 976, Venice was in chaos: a riot, a doge killed, the ducal palace and much of the city in flames. In that moment, the assembly turned to Pietro Orseolo and elected him doge.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, pray for countries and cities torn by violence, and for those who must restore peace. Amen.

Today: Pray for a country at war or in political crisis.

Day 3: Rebuilding

In two years, the new doge rebuilt the ruined districts, the ducal palace and Saint Mark's Basilica. He did not let the ruins have the last word.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, help me to rebuild what is broken in my life, my family and my community. Amen.

Today: Repair something, a relationship or an object, that you have neglected.

Day 4: Caring for the sick and the poor

Among his first works, Pietro Orseolo had two hospitals built. Power, for him, was also a way to serve the weakest.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, pray for those who govern, that they may never forget the sick and the poor. Amen.

Today: Give time or money to a work that cares for the sick or the poor.

Day 5: Choosing peace

Faced with tensions with the emperor, the doge chose appeasement and allowed his predecessor's widow to keep the use of her property. Sometimes wisdom means giving up a victory.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, teach me to seek peace rather than to win at all costs. Amen.

Today: Let go of a quarrel in which you wanted to have the last word.

Day 6: A meeting that changes everything

Guarin, abbot of Cuxa, came to Venice to venerate the relics of Saint Mark. In speaking with him, the doge may have discovered that his heart was longing for something else.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, put on my path people who will help me listen to God's call. Amen.

Today: Take time for a real conversation with someone about faith, or make an appointment with a priest.

Day 7: Leaving everything

On the night of September 1, 978, Pietro Orseolo left Venice in secret, with only a few companions, among them the young Romuald. He gave up power, wealth and honors to follow Christ.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, free me from what I cling to, and give me the courage to follow Christ more closely. Amen.

Today: Give away something you are attached to but do not need.

Day 8: A simple monk

At Cuxa, the former doge lived as a simple monk, in humility, penance and prayer, then withdrew to a hermitage near the abbey. He no longer gave orders; he obeyed and prayed.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, teach me humility and the joy of serving without being noticed. Amen.

Today: Spend fifteen minutes in silence before God, or visit a church.

Day 9: Remembered by two lands

Peter Orseolo died around 987 at Cuxa. His relics rest in Prades, and a fragment was given to Venice in 1733, after his canonization. He unites the city he served and the abbey where he found God.

Prayer: Saint Peter Orseolo, obtain for me the grace of a good end, and help me to seek first the Kingdom of God. Amen.

Today: Make a resolution for the year ahead that brings you closer to God.

Closing prayer

On the last day, or on January 10 itself, you may end the novena with this prayer.

> *Lord God, you called Saint Peter Orseolo*
> *from the honors of Venice to the silence of the cloister.*
> *Through his intercession, grant to those who govern*
> *a sincere love of the common good,*
> *and grant to me a free heart, ready to leave what keeps me from you.*
> *Hear the intention I have entrusted to you in this novena,*
> *if it is according to your will.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Return to the life of Saint Peter Orseolo or pray the prayer to Saint Peter Orseolo.

PILGRIMAGE

Abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa

The Abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa stands in the municipality of Codalet, near Prades, in the Pyrénées-Orientales, at the foot of the Canigou massif. It was here that Peter Orseolo, Doge of Venice, came in 978 to become a monk and where he died around 987. A high place of Romanesque art, the abbey is still inhabited today by a monastic community and open to visitors.

A great abbey of the 10th century

Founded in the 9th century by Benedictine monks, the abbey flourished in the 10th century under Abbot Guarinus, the very man who drew the Doge of Venice. The abbey church, consecrated in 974, is one of the great pre-Romanesque buildings of the region. In the following century, Abbot Oliba enlarged it and gave it bell towers; only one of its two great towers survives. Cuxa then radiated influence across all of Catalonia and attracted figures such as Peter Orseolo and Romuald of Ravenna.



The Abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa and its bell tower.

In the footsteps of Peter Orseolo

The doge, now a monk, was first buried in the cloister, then moved into the church in 1027. South of the abbey, the remains of a small Chapel of Saint Peter survive, identified as his hermitage. His relics left the abbey during the Revolution: in 1790, the last abbot took them to the Church of Saint-Pierre in Prades, a few miles away, where they are still kept.

After the Revolution, the abbey was sold and stripped. Part of its Romanesque cloister was scattered, and several of its elements are now in The Cloisters museum in New York. The rest was restored in the 20th century, and monastic life has resumed there.

Visiting the abbey

The visit takes in the pre-Romanesque church, its circular crypt of the Virgin of the Manger, the bell tower and the restored galleries of the cloister. Since the site is inhabited by monks, silence and modest dress are expected, particularly in the church. It is often possible to join in the community's prayer.



The cloister of Saint-Michel de Cuxa.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Peter Orseolo. In the church, take time to entrust to God those who hold power, then say the prayer to Saint Peter Orseolo. The cloister is a fine place for a moment of silence about what you are ready to leave behind in order to follow Christ. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Peter Orseolo

- **Prades**: the Church of Saint-Pierre, which has housed his relics since 1790.
- **Venice**: Saint Mark's Basilica, which he had rebuilt, and where a relic has been kept since 1733.
- **Venice**: the Church of Madonna dell'Orto and the facade of San Rocco, where he is depicted.

Practical information

The abbey is about two miles south of Prades, reachable by car on a small mountain road. Visits are offered at certain hours and may be suspended during services: check the abbey's official website or the Prades tourist office before you come. In summer, the abbey hosts the concerts of the Pablo Casals Festival.

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