BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter the Athonite

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: June 12

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IN BRIEF

Saint Peter the Athonite

Hermit honored as the first monk of Mount Athos (8th or 9th century).

Feast day	June 12
Died	Mount Athos (Greece)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	8th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Peter the Athonite for Prisoners and Promises Kept

Novena to Saint Peter the Athonite

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter the Athonite

Saint Peter the Athonite is honored as the first hermit to settle on Mount Athos, the peninsula of northern Greece that would become the "Holy Mountain" of Eastern monks. He is said to have lived in the 8th or 9th century, for about fifty years in a cave, but his life is known only through legendary accounts written much later. His feast day is June 12.

Who was Saint Peter the Athonite?

Peter is a figure of the origins of Athonite monasticism. Before the great monasteries of Athos were founded, from the 10th century onward, hermits were already living in the solitude of the mountain. Tradition has kept Peter's name as that of the first of them. What we know of him comes mainly from a Life written by an Athonite monk named Nicholas, around the end of the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century, and from another composed later in Slavonic by a monk of the monastery of Hilandar. These accounts are full of wonders and cannot be read as a biography. Even the dates of his life are uncertain: some place his death in the 8th century, others before the end of the 9th. This entry therefore keeps to what tradition reports, presented as such.

Key dates in the life of Peter

- **8th or 9th century**: According to tradition, Peter is a soldier in the Byzantine army.
- **During his military career**: Taken prisoner, he is held in Syria, in Muslim territory.
- **In captivity**: According to his Life, he is miraculously freed through the intercession of Saint Nicholas and Saint Simeon the Righteous, after promising to become a monk.

- **After his release**: He goes to Rome to fulfill his vow; tradition reports that he receives the monastic habit there from the hands of the pope.
- **Shortly afterward**: According to the account, the Virgin Mary appears to him and points to Mount Athos as the place for his life of prayer.
- **For about fifty years**: He lives as a hermit in a cave on the Holy Mountain.
- **Before the end of the 9th century**: He dies in his cave; his relics are later carried to the monastery of Clement, on the site of the present monastery of Iviron.
- **Late 10th or early 11th century**: The monk Nicholas writes his Life.

From soldier to monk

The Life tells that Peter was a Byzantine soldier, captured during a war and thrown into prison in Syria. In his distress, he called on Saint Nicholas, greatly venerated throughout the Christian East, and promised to consecrate his life to God if he was set free. According to the account, Saint Nicholas and Saint Simeon, the old man who received the Child Jesus in the Temple, intervened to free him. Faithful to his promise, Peter set out for Rome, where he received the monastic habit and was trained in the monk's life. The details of this journey belong to legend, but they keep the memory of a time when the Christian East and West were not yet separated.

The hermit of the Holy Mountain

After a vision of the Virgin Mary, Peter reached the peninsula of Athos. He settled in a cave and lived there in prayer, fasting and spiritual combat. Tradition credits him with about fifty years of solitude. The Life reports that at the end of his life, a hunter discovered him by chance and was struck by the holiness of the old hermit. It was through this witness that his memory is said

to have been handed down. After his death, his relics were carried to a monastery on Athos, that of Clement, on the site of which the monastery of Iviron stands today.

Devotion and art

Saint Peter the Athonite is celebrated on June 12 by the Orthodox Churches and by the Eastern Catholic Churches, and he is also commemorated in the Latin Catholic Church. For the monks of Athos, he is the patriarch of the hermits of the Holy Mountain. He is shown as an old, emaciated hermit, with a very long white beard, often beside other great solitaries such as Saint Onuphrius or Saint Macarius.

What can we learn from Saint Peter the Athonite?

Even wrapped in legends, the figure of Peter says something essential: a man kept his promise to God and gave his whole life to prayer. He opened a path that thousands of monks have followed after him on the Holy Mountain. You can pray to him for prisoners and soldiers, for those who have made a promise to God, and for monks and hermits.

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

Where to pray to Saint Peter the Athonite

- No known Catholic shrine is dedicated to him: you can pray to him in any church, especially on June 12.
- **Mount Athos** (Greece): the Holy Mountain, where tradition places his cave; access is reserved for men and requires a permit.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter the Athonite for Prisoners and Promises Kept

Saint Peter the Athonite is honored as the first hermit of Mount Athos. According to tradition, this soldier, freed from prison, kept his promise to become a monk and lived for about fifty years in a cave on the Holy Mountain. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him prisoners, those who have made a promise to God and those who seek silence.

Prayer to Saint Peter the Athonite

Saint Peter,
soldier who became a monk,
in your prison you cried out to God
and promised him your life.
Watch over prisoners and captives,
and over soldiers far from their loved ones.

Once freed, you kept your word
and followed the call to the Holy Mountain.
Teach me faithfulness to my promises,
and trust in the Mother of God
who guides those who seek her Son.

In the silence of your cave,
you prayed for long years for the world.
Grant me to love hidden prayer,
bless monks and hermits,
and lead me to the peace of God.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Peter the Athonite

- On his feast day, June 12.
- For prisoners, hostages and prisoners of war.
- For soldiers and their families.
- When you have made a promise to God and want to remain faithful to it.
- For monks, nuns and those who seek a life of prayer.

A prayer for captives

> *Lord, you who set captives free,*
> *look upon those who are imprisoned and without hope.*
> *Saint Peter the Athonite, pray for them. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Peter the Athonite from June 4 to 12, and read the life of Saint Peter the Athonite.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter the Athonite

This novena is inspired by the tradition of Saint Peter the Athonite, honored as the first hermit of Mount Athos. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, June 12, begin on June 4. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Saint Peter the Athonite, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come from ancient accounts that mix history and legend.

Day 1: A soldier

According to tradition, Peter was a soldier. God calls men and women from every state of life, including those who bear arms.

Prayer: Lord, bless soldiers and those who protect others. Keep them in justice and peace.

Act of the day: Pray for soldiers and police officers, and for their families.

Day 2: Prison

Taken prisoner, Peter was held far from his own people. In the night of captivity, he turned to God.

Prayer: Lord, be close to prisoners and hostages. Do not leave them without hope.

Act of the day: Pray for a person in detention, or support a prison chaplaincy.

Day 3: Crying out to God

Peter called on Saint Nicholas and Saint Simeon. The prayer of the saints accompanies our own prayer.

Prayer: Lord, hear me when I cry out to you, and may your saints pray with me.

Act of the day: Entrust a difficult intention to a saint you love.

Day 4: Deliverance

Tradition tells that Peter was miraculously set free. God opens doors, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the deliverances you have granted me. Teach me not to forget them.

Act of the day: Thank God for a trial you have come through.

Day 5: Keeping one's promise

Once free, Peter did not forget his promise. He set out for Rome and became a monk. Faithfulness is proven once the danger has passed.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to be faithful to my commitments to you and to others.

Act of the day: Fulfill a promise you have made and not yet kept.

Day 6: Guided by Mary

According to the account, the Virgin Mary pointed Peter to Mount Athos. For the monks of the Holy Mountain, Mary is the guardian of their life.

Prayer: Holy Mary, Mother of God, guide my steps toward your Son.

Act of the day: Pray a decade of the rosary, asking Mary to guide you.

Day 7: The cave

Peter lived for years in a cave, in silence and prayer. His poverty left all the room for God.

Prayer: Lord, simplify my life so that I may have more room for you.

Act of the day: Give away something you do not need.

Day 8: Spiritual combat

The hermit's solitude is also a struggle against discouragement and temptation. Peter persevered through prayer.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen me in temptation and raise me up when I fall.

Act of the day: Choose one small temptation in your daily life and resist it today.

Day 9: An open path

After Peter, thousands of monks came to pray on the Holy Mountain. A life given to God opens a path for many others.

Prayer: Lord, may my life open a path to you for others. Through the intercession of Saint Peter the Athonite, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Pray for monks and nuns, and attend Mass if possible.

Living the novena with Saint Peter the Athonite

Saint Peter the Athonite is surrounded by legends, but he is also the face of a promise kept and a life given to prayer. During these nine days, you can carry prisoners, soldiers, the monks of Athos and everywhere, and all who need to be set free. Take a moment of silence each day, in the manner of the hermits.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Peter the Athonite,*
> *first hermit of the Holy Mountain,*
> *you kept your promise and gave everything to God.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Watch over prisoners and monks,*
> *and teach me the silence of prayer.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Peter the Athonite at any time, and read the life of Saint Peter the Athonite.

Credits and sources

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