

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter Thomas

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 6

IN BRIEF

Saint Peter Thomas

Fourteenth-century Carmelite friar from Périgord, papal legate in the East and Latin Patriarch of Constantinople.

Feast day	January 6, January 8 (Carmelite Order and Diocese of Périgueux)
Born	c. 1305, Périgord, France
Died	January 6, 1366, Famagusta, Cyprus
Canonized	Cult confirmed in 1609 by Pope Paul V
Era	14th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Peter Thomas for Christian Unity and Peace

Novena to Saint Peter Thomas

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter Thomas

Saint Peter Thomas was a French Carmelite friar of the fourteenth century (c. 1305-1366). The son of a serf from Périgord, he became a master of theology in Paris, a preacher at the papal court of Avignon, a bishop, papal legate in the East and finally Latin Patriarch of Constantinople. He gave his life to peace among Christians and to the unity of the Church. He died at Famagusta, on the island of Cyprus, in January 1366. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on January 6; the Carmelite Order and the Diocese of Périgueux celebrate him on January 8.

Who was Saint Peter Thomas?

Peter Thomas is a remarkable figure of the late Middle Ages: a man of very poor origins who moved among popes, kings and emperors without ever ceasing to live as a simple, prayerful Carmelite friar. He is known through a biography written in the months after his death by his friend and disciple Philip of Mézières, chancellor of the Kingdom of Cyprus, an eyewitness of his last years.

His life is inseparable from the great projects of his time: bringing the Latin Church and the Eastern Churches closer, defending Christians threatened by Ottoman expansion and, in the spirit of the age, reviving the crusade. This last aspect, with the violence that came with it, belongs to a historical context that must be looked at honestly. His holiness lies in his prayer, his poverty, his love for the Virgin Mary and his boundless dedication.



Saint Peter Thomas, Carmelite and patriarch.

Key dates in the life of Saint Peter Thomas

- **c. 1305**: Born into a very poor family of serfs in southern Périgord, in the former Diocese of Sarlat, perhaps at Salles-de-Belvès.
- **c. 1317-1325**: A schoolboy at Monpazier, then a student at Agen, living on alms; he discovers the Carmelites.
- **c. 1325-1329**: Enters the Carmelites, takes the habit and makes his vows, probably at Bergerac; ordained a priest at Agen.
- **1335-1350**: Studies and teaches in Paris, Cahors and elsewhere; becomes a master of theology in Paris.
- **1345**: Procurator general of his order at the papal court in Avignon.
- **1354**: Bishop of Patti and Lipari in Sicily; missions as legate to Serbia, Hungary and Venice.
- **1359**: Bishop of Coron in Greece and papal legate for the whole East.

- **1360**: Crowns Peter I of Lusignan King of Jerusalem at Famagusta.
- **1363-1364**: Archbishop of Candia in Crete, then Latin Patriarch of Constantinople.
- **1365**: Accompanies the expedition known as the Alexandrian Crusade.
- **January 6, 1366**: Dies at Famagusta during the night of January 6 to 7 and is buried in the Carmelite church.
- **1609**: His cult is confirmed by Pope Paul V.

The serf's son who became a master

Peter was born around 1305 into a family so poor that at twelve he left home so as not to be a burden. At Monpazier he attended school, living on alms and teaching younger children. At Agen he met the Carmelites, friars who had come from Mount Carmel in the Holy Land, who looked to the prophet Elijah and lived under the protection of the Virgin Mary. He entered the order around 1325.

His superiors, struck by his intelligence, sent him to study and teach at Bordeaux, Albi, Agen, Cahors and then Paris, where he earned the degree of master of theology. His contemporaries admired his virtue as much as his learning. His love for the Virgin Mary was so ardent that her name was constantly on his lips.

Preacher in Avignon

In 1345 Peter was sent to Avignon, then the residence of the popes, as procurator of his order. He was noticed for his preaching, direct and burning. He dared to tell the truth before the cardinals and the pope, and he moved his listeners deeply.

Yet he went on living as a simple friar, rising at night to sing Matins and celebrating Mass each day very early. He said he received more light in celebrating the Eucharist than in all his studies.

Legate of peace and unity

From 1353, Popes Innocent VI and then Urban V entrusted him with ever more delicate missions, from Venice to Genoa, from Serbia to Hungary. In 1357 he went to Constantinople and received the Catholic profession of faith of Emperor John V Palaiologos, who hoped for help from the West against the Turks. Many of these efforts failed, but Peter never lost heart. On a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he refused honors: "I come neither as nuncio nor as legate, but as a poor pilgrim friar."

Named legate for the East in 1359, he crossed the Mediterranean again and again: Smyrna, Rhodes, Cyprus, Crete. His idea of unity, marked by his time, sometimes led him to harsh methods toward dissenting Eastern Christians, which history cannot pass over in silence. In Cyprus, during an outbreak of plague in 1362, he organized Masses, processions and prayers of supplication, which, according to his biographer, Muslims and Jews frightened by the epidemic also joined.

Patriarch and last journey

With King Peter I of Cyprus and Philip of Mézières, he prepared an expedition intended to retake Jerusalem. Named Latin Patriarch of Constantinople in 1364, he organized the departure from Venice in 1365. The expedition took Alexandria in October, but the city was sacked, its people massacred, and then abandoned a few days later. Peter Thomas, who wanted to press on toward Jerusalem, was deeply saddened.

Back in Cyprus, he fell ill shortly after Christmas 1365. On his deathbed he asked his Carmelite brothers for forgiveness: "I have not helped you as I should have. Forgive me." He also said: "Life and death are the same to me: may the will of Jesus Christ my God be done." He died at Famagusta in the night of January 6 to 7, 1366. His body, laid out for six days in the Carmelite church, drew immense crowds, and healings were soon attributed to him.

Cult and relics

A process for his canonization opened as early as 1366 but did not reach a conclusion in the Middle Ages. In 1609 Pope Paul V confirmed his cult, and Urban VIII extended it to the Carmelites and to the Dioceses of Sarlat and Périgueux. His relics have been lost: Famagusta was taken by the Ottomans in 1571, and searches in the ruins of the Carmelite church in the early twentieth century found nothing. A relic of the True Cross that he left to Philip of Mézières is still kept in Venice, at the *Scuola Grande* of San Giovanni Evangelista.

Why is Saint Peter Thomas a patron of Christian unity?

Saint Peter Thomas has no official patronage. But his whole life as a legate was spent trying to reconcile the Churches of East and West, so he is naturally invoked for Christian unity, for peace in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and for diplomats and peacemakers. A preacher and theologian himself, and once a poor student living on alms, he can also be prayed to for preachers and for students without means.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter Thomas in art

He is shown in the Carmelite habit, often with the insignia of a patriarch, and sometimes praying before the Virgin Mary, a sign of his great Marian devotion.

Where to pray to Saint Peter Thomas

- **Salles-de-Belvès** (Dordogne, France): the traditional place of his birth and center of his cult in Périgord.
- **Carmelite communities**: his memorial is celebrated on January 8 throughout the Carmelite family.
- **Venice**: the *Scuola Grande* of San Giovanni Evangelista, which keeps his relic of the True Cross.
- **Famagusta** (Cyprus): the ruins of the Carmelite church where he was buried.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter Thomas for Christian Unity and Peace

Saint Peter Thomas, Carmelite, papal legate and Latin Patriarch of Constantinople, is celebrated by the Carmelite Order and by the Diocese of Périgueux. The proper texts of his memorial in the Carmelite liturgy are not reproduced here. This page offers an original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by his life and by the words his biographer Philip of Mézières reports from him.

Prayer to Saint Peter Thomas

Saint Peter Thomas, child of the poor who became a servant of popes, you studied while begging for your bread. Watch over young people who want to learn and lack the means. Keep me from looking down on the little ones, and remind me where I come from.

You loved the Virgin Mary so ardently that her name never left your lips. Teach me to entrust myself to her in joy and in trial.

You crossed seas and kingdoms for peace among Christians and the unity of the Church. Inspire today all who work for reconciliation. Help us to seek unity in truth, respect and charity. Watch over the Christians of the East, over Cyprus and over the peoples of the Mediterranean.

At the hour of your death you said: "May the will of Jesus Christ my God be done." Obtain for me a trusting surrender into the hands of the Lord, and the grace to ask forgiveness of those I have hurt. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may I remain, in the midst of my busy days, a simple and prayerful brother or sister. Amen.

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

Intentions to entrust to Saint Peter Thomas

- The unity of Christians and dialogue with the Eastern Churches.
- Peace in Cyprus, the Middle East and the Mediterranean.
- Diplomats and peacemakers.
- Preachers and theologians.
- Poor students and those returning to their studies.

- The Carmelite family and the Diocese of Périgueux.

When to pray this prayer

The Roman Martyrology commemorates Saint Peter Thomas on January 6; the Carmelite Order and the Diocese of Périgueux celebrate his memorial on January 8. You can also pray to him during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, from January 18 to 25, or whenever you pray for peace in the Middle East.

To pray with him over nine days, see the novena to Saint Peter Thomas, and discover the life of Saint Peter Thomas.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter Thomas

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Peter Thomas, Carmelite and Latin Patriarch of Constantinople, as told by his friend Philip of Mézières. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on January 6, the day the Roman Martyrology commemorates him, begin it on December 29. If you follow the Carmelite calendar, which celebrates him on January 8, begin it on December 31.

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 live in the spirit of the Carmelite friar who worked for peace and unity. You can pray it alone, as a family, with a parish group or in a Carmelite community. It also fits well before the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which begins on January 18, or at any time you carry in prayer the peace of the Middle East and the reconciliation of divided Christians.

Day 1: Born poor

Peter Thomas was born into a family of serfs so poor that at twelve he left home so as not to be a burden. God often chooses the little ones. Poverty did not close the road to holiness for him; it opened it.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayer of Saint Peter Thomas, keep me close to the poor and grateful for all I have received.

Today: Give something to a person or family in need.

Day 2: Learning on alms

The young Peter attended school while living on alms and teaching younger children. Many young people today still lack the means to study. Education is a door to freedom and dignity.

Prayer: Lord, bless poor students and those who help them, and give them perseverance.

Today: Support a student or an educational charity with your time or a gift.

Day 3: Under Mary's mantle

At Agen, Peter discovered the Carmelites, who lived under the protection of the Virgin Mary. His love for her was so ardent that her name was always on his lips. Mary leads us gently to her Son.

Prayer: Holy Mary, Mother of Carmel, take me under your protection and lead me to Jesus.

Today: Pray a decade of the Rosary, or the whole Rosary if you can.

Day 4: Light from the Eucharist

Peter said he received more light in celebrating Mass than in all his studies. Learning is precious, but the deepest wisdom comes from meeting Christ in the Eucharist.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, enlighten my mind and warm my heart.

Today: Attend a weekday Mass or spend time before the Blessed Sacrament.

Day 5: Speaking the truth to the powerful

In Avignon, Peter preached directly to cardinals and the pope, and his words moved them. Yet he went on rising at night to pray like any other friar. Courage in speaking and humility in living go together.

Prayer: Lord, give preachers the courage of truth and keep them humble.

Today: Pray for your parish priest and for those who preach the Gospel.

Day 6: A poor pilgrim friar

On his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Peter refused honors: "I come neither as nuncio nor as legate, but as a poor pilgrim friar." Titles and offices pass. What remains is who we are before God.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the love of honors, and make me simple before you.

Today: Do a hidden service without seeking thanks.

Day 7: Working for unity

Peter spent years trying to reconcile the Churches of East and West. Many of his efforts failed. His methods, marked by his time, were not always gentle. Today we know that unity requires patience, humility and respect.

Prayer: Lord, as you prayed that all may be one, make us artisans of unity in truth and charity.

Today: Pray for Christians of another Church, or learn something about an Eastern Church.

Day 8: In time of epidemic

When plague struck Cyprus in 1362, Peter organized Masses, processions and prayers, and according to his biographer, Muslims and Jews joined them. In times of fear, prayer can bring people together.

Prayer: Lord, protect us in times of epidemic and fear, and comfort the sick and the dying.

Today: Pray for peace in Cyprus, the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

Day 9: Thy will be done

On his deathbed, Peter asked his brothers to forgive him, and said: "Life and death are the same to me: may the will of Jesus Christ my God be done." He died in peace, surrendered to God.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayer of Saint Peter Thomas, give me a heart that asks forgiveness and trusts in your will.

Today: Ask forgiveness of someone you have hurt, and if you can, go to confession.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Peter Thomas, son of the poor and friend of Mary, preacher, legate and patriarch, you crossed the seas for peace and for the unity of the Church. Pray for Christians divided among themselves, for peace in the lands you loved, for preachers, diplomats and poor students. Teach us humility, trust and surrender to the will of God. Present to Christ the intentions we have carried during these nine days. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Peter Thomas and the prayer to Saint Peter Thomas.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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