

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter To Rot

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 7

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IN BRIEF

Saint Peter To Rot

Lay catechist, husband and father, martyr in New Britain and first saint of Papua New Guinea.

Feast day	July 7
Born	March 5, 1912, Rakunai, New Britain, Papua New Guinea
Died	July 7, 1945, Vunaiara camp, near Rakunai, Papua New Guinea
Canonized	October 19, 2025, by Pope Leo XIV
Era	20th century

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter To Rot

Saint Peter To Rot was a lay catechist from Papua New Guinea, a husband and father, born in 1912 in Rakunai on the island of New Britain. He died a martyr in 1945 in a prison camp of the Japanese occupying forces. During the Second World War, he kept the life of his Christian community going in secret and defended Christian marriage to the point of giving his life. Beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1995, he was canonized by Pope Leo XIV on October 19, 2025. He is the first saint of Papua New Guinea, and his feast day is July 7.

Who was Saint Peter To Rot?

Peter To Rot belonged to the Tolai people of the Gazelle Peninsula, in northeastern New Britain, where the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart had preached the Gospel since the late nineteenth century. His parents, Angelo Tu Puia, a respected chief of the village of Rakunai, and Maria Ia Tumul, were among the first baptized Catholics of the area.

He was neither a priest nor a religious. He was a catechist, a layman entrusted by the Church with teaching the faith, preparing people for the sacraments, leading prayer and visiting the sick. When the missionaries were interned by the Japanese army, he became in practice the shepherd of his community.

His martyrdom is tied to two kinds of faithfulness: to the Eucharist and the prayer of the Church, which he refused to abandon, and to Christian marriage, which he defended against the polygamy encouraged by the occupiers.

Key dates in the life of Peter To Rot

- **March 5, 1912**: Born in Rakunai, New Britain, then part of the German colony of New Guinea.

- **1919**: Enters the Catholic mission school in his village.
- **1930**: Begins his training at Saint Paul's College in Taliligap, run by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.
- **1933**: Receives the catechist's cross from the bishop and returns to serve the parish of Rakunai.
- **November 11, 1936**: Marries Paula Ia Varpit; the couple will have three children.
- **1942**: The Japanese army occupies New Britain, and the missionaries are interned.
- **1943-1944**: Public worship is restricted, then banned; he continues to gather the faithful in secret.
- **Late 1944**: Arrested and imprisoned in the Vunaiara camp.
- **July 7, 1945**: Killed in the camp by a lethal injection and blows.
- **January 17, 1995**: Beatified by Pope John Paul II during his visit to Papua New Guinea.
- **October 19, 2025**: Canonized in Rome by Pope Leo XIV.

A catechist serving his village

A lively and helpful boy, Peter To Rot received his first lessons in the catechism from his father. Around 1930, the parish priest of Rakunai, Father Laufer, suggested that he prepare for the priesthood. His father felt the time was not right but agreed that he should become a catechist.

After three years of training, Peter returned to the village in 1933. He taught, organized prayer, prepared people for baptism and marriage, and accompanied the sick and the dying. He was always seen with a Bible.

In 1936, he married Paula Ia Varpit in church. Their home became a model for the village: a Christian marriage lived in faithfulness, shared prayer and mutual respect.

A shepherd in hiding

In 1942, the Japanese army occupied Rabaul and New Britain. The foreign missionaries were interned. Before he was taken away, Father Laufer entrusted the parish to the young catechist. Peter To Rot gathered the faithful for prayer, baptized children, presided at marriages before witnesses, visited the sick and kept the parish registers carefully.

From late 1943, the authorities restricted and then banned all worship. The church was destroyed. Peter To Rot then built a "bush church" in the forest and continued his ministry in secret, despite the fear of those around him.

Martyr for Christian marriage

To win the support of some local chiefs, the occupiers allowed and encouraged a return to polygamy. Peter To Rot opposed it publicly: for him, Christian marriage was the union of one man and one woman for life. He stood up in particular to a policeman working for the Japanese who wanted to take a second wife by force. Denounced, he was arrested around Christmas 1944, beaten and sentenced to prison in the Vunaiara camp.

Faithful to the end

His wife came to see him and begged him to give up his role as catechist to save his life. He refused: he could not abandon his people. He told his mother he was ready to die for Christ.

On July 7, 1945, he was told that a Japanese doctor would come to give him "medicine," though he was not sick. He understood what awaited him and asked for his catechist's cross and good clothes, so as to go to God with dignity. That evening he was given an injection, then suffocated and beaten. He was thirty-three years old. His body was buried in Rakunai.

Beatification and canonization

His cause was opened in the 1980s. Pope John Paul II recognized his martyrdom and beatified him on January 17, 1995, during his journey to Papua New Guinea. In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI invited married couples to look to the "example of courage" of this catechist. On March 31, 2025, Pope Francis approved his canonization, and Pope Leo XIV proclaimed him a saint on October 19, 2025, in Saint Peter's Square.

Why is Saint Peter To Rot a patron for families and catechists?

Saint Peter To Rot has no official patronage yet, but Catholics naturally turn to him for married couples and families, since he gave his life for the faithfulness of Christian marriage. He is also a model for catechists and lay ministers, who in many parts of the world, as in wartime New Britain, keep communities alive where priests are few. As the first saint of Papua New Guinea, he is dear to the Church throughout Oceania.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter To Rot in art

Saint Peter To Rot is usually shown as a young Papuan man wearing the catechist's cross on his chest, often holding a Bible. These two signs sum up his life: the mission received from the Church and his love for the Word of God. For his canonization, a large tapestry of him hung on the facade of Saint Peter's Basilica.

What can we learn from Saint Peter To Rot?

Peter To Rot shows what a baptized layperson can do: without ordination, he kept a whole community alive. He also reminds us that Christian marriage deserves witness, even at the cost of one's life.

We can pray to him for catechists, couples and families, for the Christians of Oceania and for persecuted Churches. See the prayer to Saint Peter To Rot and the novena to Saint Peter To Rot.

Where to pray to Saint Peter To Rot

- **Rakunai** (East New Britain, Papua New Guinea): his tomb, near the village church.
- **Rabaul and Kokopo**: the churches of the Archdiocese of Rabaul, cradle of the Church in Papua New Guinea.
- **Issoudun** (France): the Basilica of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, cradle of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the religious family that formed him.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter To Rot

Saint Peter To Rot, catechist of Rakunai, husband and father, died a martyr in 1945 for remaining faithful to his mission and to Christian marriage. Canonized in 2025, he is the first saint of Papua New Guinea. We know of no widely used traditional prayer to him in English, so here are two original prayers by Saintspedia, one for families and one for catechists.

Prayer to Saint Peter To Rot for couples and families

> *Saint Peter To Rot, you loved your wife Paula and your children with a faithful love, and you defended Christian marriage to the point of giving your life. Look upon our homes.*
>
> *Keep husbands and wives in faithfulness and tenderness. Support those going through crises, those tempted to give up, and those who suffer from separation. Teach young people to prepare for marriage seriously and with trust.*
>
> *You prayed with your family and your village: make our homes places of prayer and peace. I entrust to you especially (name your intention). Through your intercession, may Christ, present in every family gathered in his name, keep us in his love. Amen.*

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

Prayer for catechists

> *Lord Jesus, you gave your servant Peter To Rot the joy of teaching your Word and the courage to keep your people together when their pastors were absent. Bless catechists throughout the world, especially those who serve in isolated or persecuted communities. Give them a love for the Bible, patience with the little ones and the strength to remain faithful. Through the intercession of Saint Peter To Rot, make each of us a witness to your Gospel. Amen.*

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Peter To Rot

- Married couples, engaged couples and families in difficulty.
- Catechists, religious education teachers and lay ministers in parishes.
- The Church in Papua New Guinea and throughout Oceania.
- Persecuted Christians and prisoners.

When to pray this prayer

His feast day is July 7, the day of his death. You can pray to him on a wedding anniversary, during marriage or baptism preparation, at the start of a year of religious education, or whenever your family is going through a hard time. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Peter To Rot, and read the life of Saint Peter To Rot.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter To Rot

This novena to Saint Peter To Rot is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of the catechist and martyr of Papua New Guinea. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast day, July 7, begin on June 29. It can also be prayed at any time, especially by a couple or a family together.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The small act suggested carries the prayer into daily life. If you pray as a couple, share a few words with each other after the meditation.

Day 1: A believing family

Peter received the faith from his parents, who were among the first baptized Catholics of their region. His father, a respected village chief, taught him his first lessons in the catechism. Faith is often first learned at home, in the words and example of parents. What we receive as children can carry us through the hardest trials of adult life.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Peter To Rot, bless parents who pass on the faith to their children. Amen.

Today: Thank your parents, or pray for them, living or deceased.

Day 2: Accepting the path offered

His parish priest suggested he become a priest, but his father preferred that he become a catechist. Peter accepted and served with all his heart. God's call sometimes comes through circumstances we did not choose.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve you wherever you have placed me, with a generous heart. Amen.

Today: Do cheerfully a task you did not choose.

Day 3: Love for the Word

Peter always carried a Bible. He taught children and adults with patience and helped them discover the Word of God. A catechist first lets himself be taught by Scripture. Before speaking about God, Peter listened to him, and his words carried the weight of a life shaped by the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, give me a hunger for your Word, and help me to share it simply with others. Amen.

Today: Read a chapter of one of the Gospels.

Day 4: Christian marriage

In 1936, Peter married Paula in church. Their home became a witness for the whole village: faithful love, shared prayer and mutual respect. A Christian marriage is a quiet sermon.

Prayer: Lord, keep husbands and wives in faithfulness and tenderness, and strengthen marriages that are struggling. Amen.

Today: Pray for a couple you know, or show a gesture of care to your spouse.

Day 5: Keeping the flock

When the missionaries were interned in 1942, Peter gathered the community, baptized children, visited the sick and kept the registers. He did not wait for someone else to act. He knew that the Church is not only the clergy, but every baptized person who takes responsibility for others.

Prayer: Lord, make me responsible for my brothers and sisters in the faith. Amen.

Today: Call someone in your parish who is alone or has stopped coming.

Day 6: The bush church

When his church was destroyed and worship was banned, Peter built another one hidden in the forest. Nothing could stop his people from praying. Where the faithful gather in Christ's name, he is present, even under the trees, even in danger.

Prayer: Lord, when obstacles rise up, help me to find a way to pray to you. Amen.

Today: Spend ten minutes in prayer in an unusual place: outdoors, at work or on the road.

Day 7: Speaking the truth

Peter opposed the polygamy encouraged by the occupiers, knowing that he was risking his life. He spoke the truth about marriage not out of harshness, but out of love for the families of his village.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the courage to stand up for what is right, with charity. Amen.

Today: Refuse today any compromise with your conscience.

Day 8: Faithful in prison

In the Vunaiara camp, his wife begged him to give up his mission. He refused to abandon his people, while loving her deeply. His faithfulness to God and to his family went together. He did not love Paula less by staying faithful to his

mission; he loved her as a Christian husband, entrusting her and their children to God.

Prayer: Lord, support prisoners and those who suffer for their faith, and comfort their families. Amen.

Today: Pray for persecuted Christians, or support a prison ministry.

Day 9: Going to God with dignity

On July 7, 1945, the day of his death, Peter asked for his catechist's cross and good clothes so as to go to God. He knew who was waiting for him. His death was not a defeat but a meeting: the faithful servant going to the Master he had served all his life.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I entrust my intention to you. Through the intercession of Saint Peter To Rot, help me to be faithful to the end and to walk toward you with confidence. Amen.

Today: Wear a cross, or place one in your home.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Peter To Rot, catechist, husband and martyr, I place in your hands the intention of these nine days. Pray for our families, for catechists and for the Church in Oceania. Obtain for us a courageous faith and a faithful love. Amen.*

To continue, read the life of Saint Peter To Rot and pray the prayer to Saint Peter To Rot.

Credits and sources

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