

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Peter the Apostle

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: June 29

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IN BRIEF

Saint Peter the Apostle

Fisherman from Galilee, leader of the twelve apostles and first bishop of Rome, martyred under Nero.

Feast day	June 29, February 22
Born	early first century, Bethsaida, Galilee
Died	c. 64-67, Vatican Hill, Rome
Canonized	Pre-congregation (venerated since the apostolic age)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	popes, fishermen, Rome, locksmiths

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Peter the Apostle

Saint Peter is the first of the twelve apostles of Jesus. A simple fisherman from the Sea of Galilee, impulsive and generous, he received from Jesus a new name, Peter, and the mission to strengthen his brothers. He denied his master on the night of the Passion, wept, then became a bold witness to the Resurrection. The first bishop of Rome, he died a martyr there under Nero, and the Catholic Church sees in him the first pope. He is celebrated on June 29 together with Saint Paul.

Who was Saint Peter?

His first name was Simon, son of Jonah. Born in Bethsaida, he lived in Capernaum, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where he worked as a fisherman with his brother Andrew. He was married: the Gospel tells how Jesus healed his mother-in-law. Nothing marked him out to become the leader of a Church that would spread across the world.

Jesus gave him the Aramaic nickname Kepha, "rock," translated into Greek as Petros, Peter. The name speaks both of his mission and of the trust Jesus placed in a man who was, in many ways, fragile.



The Miraculous Draught of Fishes, tapestry cartoon by Raphael (1515-1516).

Key dates in the life of Saint Peter

- **Early first century**: Simon is born in Bethsaida, in Galilee.
- **c. 28**: His brother Andrew brings him to Jesus, who names him Kepha (John 1:41-42).
- **c. 28-30**: Called by the lake: "I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17).
- **c. 29**: At Caesarea Philippi, he recognizes Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16).
- **c. 30**: He denies Jesus three times during the Passion, then sees him risen.
- **c. 30**: At Pentecost, he preaches in Jerusalem and three thousand people are baptized (Acts 2).
- **c. 49**: At the Council of Jerusalem, he speaks in favor of Christians from a pagan background (Acts 15).

- **c. 64-67**: Martyred in Rome under Emperor Nero, crucified upside down according to tradition.
- **c. 324**: Constantine has a basilica built over his tomb on the Vatican Hill.
- **1968**: Pope Paul VI announces that bones found near the tomb can be attributed to the apostle.

"You are Peter": the calling of a fisherman

One morning, after a night of catching nothing, Jesus asked Simon to put out into deep water and let down his nets again. The nets filled until they were close to breaking. Simon fell to his knees: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Jesus answered: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5).

With James and John, Peter was one of the three disciples closest to Jesus. He was present at the Transfiguration, at the raising of Jairus's daughter and at the agony in Gethsemane. He often spoke first, on behalf of the others. When many walked away from Jesus, it was Peter who said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked: "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then said to him: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." This is why Saint Peter is always shown holding two keys.

The fall and the forgiveness

Peter was no flawless hero. He wanted to walk on the water toward Jesus, then grew afraid and began to sink. He promised to follow his master to death, then, on the night of the arrest, in the high priest's courtyard, he swore three times that he did not know him. The cock crowed, Jesus turned and looked at him, and Peter went out and wept bitterly.

After the Resurrection, by the same lake, Jesus asked him three times: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" With each answer, he gave him a mission: "Feed my sheep" (John 21). Three denials, three declarations of love. This dialogue is one of the most beautiful stories of forgiveness in the Gospel, and for twenty centuries it has comforted those who have fallen.



The Denial of Saint Peter, by Caravaggio (1610).

Leader of the early Church

The Acts of the Apostles show Peter transformed by the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, he spoke to the crowd in Jerusalem. He healed a lame man at the gate of the Temple, faced the council that forbade him to speak about Jesus, and replied: "We must obey God rather than men."

He also opened the Church to non-Jews: in Caesarea he baptized the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household. Thrown into prison by King Herod Agrippa, he was freed during the night by an angel (Acts 12). He then left

Jerusalem, passed through Antioch and, according to a very ancient tradition, reached Rome. Two letters of the New Testament bear his name.

Martyrdom in Rome

Peter died in Rome during Nero's persecution, between 64 and 67, probably in the circus on the Vatican Hill. According to a tradition reported by Origen, he asked to be crucified upside down, not considering himself worthy to die as his master had. An ancient story, the source of the novel *Quo Vadis*, tells that as he was fleeing Rome he met Jesus on the Appian Way and turned back.

Christians buried him nearby, on the Vatican Hill. Excavations beneath the basilica between 1939 and 1950 uncovered a necropolis and a small second-century monument, the "trophy of Gaius," that already marked his tomb.

Why is Saint Peter the patron saint of popes, fishermen and locksmiths?

Peter is the patron of popes because the Catholic Church regards each bishop of Rome as his successor, entrusted like him with strengthening his brothers in the faith. He is the patron of fishermen because that was his trade on the Sea of Galilee before Jesus called him. Locksmiths claim him because of the keys of the kingdom of heaven entrusted to him. He is also the patron of the city of Rome, where he died and is buried.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Peter in art

- **Two keys**, often one gold and one silver, the keys of the kingdom of heaven.
- **An upside-down cross**, recalling the tradition of his crucifixion.
- **A rooster**, a reminder of his denial and his tears.
- **A boat, nets or fish**, for his first trade and the miraculous catch.

- **A book or scroll**, for the two New Testament letters that bear his name.
- He is usually shown as an older man with short, curly gray hair and a short beard.

Where to pray to Saint Peter

The great place of pilgrimage is Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, built over his tomb. In Rome, you can also visit San Pietro in Vincoli (Saint Peter in Chains), where the chains of his captivity are venerated. In the Holy Land, pilgrims visit the remains of his house at Capernaum and, at Tabgha, the Church of the Primacy of Saint Peter, on the shore of the lake.

People pray to Saint Peter for a solid faith, for the courage to get up again after a sin, and for faithfulness to the Church. They also pray to him for the pope, his successor. His feasts are June 29, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, and February 22, the Chair of Saint Peter. The novena to Saint Peter begins on June 20.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Peter the Apostle

There is no prayer to Saint Peter as famous as those addressed to some other saints. The prayer below asks the fisherman who became the rock of the Church for a steady faith, the courage to rise after a fall, and protection for the Church and the pope. It is inspired by the Gospel accounts of his life. The liturgy, for its part, has sung for centuries the antiphon *Tu es Petrus*, taken from the words of Jesus.

Prayer to Saint Peter the Apostle

Saint Peter, fisherman of Galilee,
whom Jesus called by the shore of the lake,
teach me to leave my nets when he calls me.

You who walked on the water and then were afraid,
help me keep my eyes fixed on the Lord
when the wind rises in my life.

You who denied your master and wept,
obtain for me the grace to get up after I fall,
and to believe that his gaze is stronger than my sins.

You to whom Jesus entrusted his sheep,
watch over the Church and over the pope, your successor.
Keep us in unity and in the faith.

Saint Peter, pray for us. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia. It should not be attributed to the apostle.

"Tu es Petrus": the word of the Gospel

> *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19)*

These words are written in giant letters, in Latin, around the inside of the dome of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome: *Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum*. Praying them slowly is a way of giving thanks for the Church and for the ministry of the pope.

A short prayer after a fall

Peter's answer to the risen Jesus by the lake can become a prayer for anyone who has failed and wants to begin again:

> *"Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." (John 21:17)*

When to pray this prayer

You can pray to Saint Peter at any time, especially on June 29, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, and on February 22, the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, which celebrates his mission as shepherd. Many of the faithful turn to him after a sin or in times of doubt, remembering how his denial was forgiven. It is also a fitting prayer for the pope, during a conclave or on the anniversary of a pope's election, and for fishermen and all who work on the sea.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Peter, from June 20 to June 28, the eve of his feast.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Peter

This novena to Saint Peter is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the passages of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles in which Peter appears. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on June 20: it ends on June 28, the day before the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially after a fall, in a time of doubt, or for the pope and the Church.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. The small act suggested for the day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. Peter himself knew that following Jesus means starting over many times.

Each day of this novena follows a step in Peter's life, from the boat on the Sea of Galilee to his death in Rome. If you can, read the Gospel passage behind each meditation: Luke 5 for the miraculous catch, Matthew 14 for the walk on the water, Matthew 16 for his profession of faith, Luke 22 for the denial and John 21 for the dialogue by the lake.



Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, built over the apostle's tomb.

Day 1: Putting out into the deep

After a night of catching nothing, Jesus asked Simon to let down his nets once more. Simon obeyed without understanding. Faith often begins as an act of trust before it becomes a certainty.

Prayer: Lord, when I am tired and discouraged, give me the courage to let down my nets again at your word.

Today: Take up again something you abandoned out of discouragement.

Day 2: "I am a sinful man"

Faced with the miraculous catch, Peter fell to his knees and felt unworthy. Jesus did not push him away: he gave him a mission. God calls people who know they are fragile.

Prayer: Lord, I am not worthy, yet you call me. Make my poverty a place where you can act.

Today: Accept a compliment or a kindness without brushing it aside.

Day 3: Leaving the nets

Peter and Andrew left their nets at once to follow Jesus. Following Christ means agreeing to let go of what holds us back, even what reassures us.

Prayer: Lord, show me what I need to leave behind to follow you more freely.

Today: Give up, for one day, a habit that takes up too much room in your life.

Day 4: Walking on the water

Peter stepped out of the boat and walked toward Jesus. Then he looked at the wind, grew afraid and began to sink. Jesus reached out his hand: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Prayer: Lord, when I am afraid and going under, reach out your hand to me as you did to Peter.

Today: Write down the fear that weighs on you most right now and entrust it to God.

Day 5: "You are the Christ"

To Jesus's question, "Who do you say that I am?", Peter answered for all of them. Faith is not only knowing things about Jesus; it is telling him who he is for us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Strengthen my faith.

Today: Tell someone, simply, what faith changes in your life.

Day 6: The denial

In the high priest's courtyard, Peter denied his master three times. The cock crowed, Jesus looked at him, and Peter wept. His tears were already the beginning of his return.

Prayer: Lord, I too have denied you through my fears and my silences. Look at me as you looked at Peter.

Today: Prepare for or receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

Day 7: "Do you love me?"

By the lake, the risen Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loved him, and three times entrusted his sheep to him. Forgiveness does not simply erase: it gives a mission back.

Prayer: Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you. Entrust to me whatever you wish.

Today: Do something kind for a person who depends on you.

Day 8: Witness at Pentecost

The man who had been afraid of a servant girl now spoke before the crowd in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had turned the fearful fisherman into a courageous witness.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the courage to bear witness to my faith without shame and without aggressiveness.

Today: Pray for someone who is searching for God.

Day 9: All the way to Rome

Peter finished his journey in Rome, where he gave his life for Christ. He did not consider himself worthy to die as his master had. His tomb has become the heart of the Church.

Prayer: Saint Peter, watch over the Church and over the pope. Obtain for me the grace to be faithful to the end. Amen.

Today: Pray for the pope and, if you can, attend Mass on June 29.

Closing prayer

Saint Peter, apostle and rock of the Church, at the end of these nine days I place my intention in your hands. You who knew fear, failure and forgiveness, teach me to get up again and to love the Lord more than all else. Watch over the pope, your successor, and keep the whole Church in unity and in faith. Amen.

After the novena

On June 29, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, the Church celebrates the two pillars of the Church of Rome. If you can, attend Mass that day and pray for the pope. You can also return to this novena on February 22, the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, or whenever you have fallen and need to hear again the question Jesus asked Peter: "Do you love me?"

PILGRIMAGE

Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, Tomb of the Apostle

Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, in Vatican City, is built over the tomb of the apostle Peter. It is the largest church in the Catholic world and the heart of the Church's life: the pope celebrates the great feasts of the year there, and millions of pilgrims come every year to pray at the tomb of the first of the apostles.



Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, at the Vatican.

A basilica over a tomb

Saint Peter died a martyr around 64-67, near Nero's circus, at the foot of the Vatican Hill. Christians buried him in a neighboring necropolis. Around 324, Emperor Constantine had the hill leveled to build an immense basilica whose altar stood exactly over his tomb.

In the early 16th century, the old basilica was in danger of collapse. In 1506, Pope Julius II laid the first stone of a new church. Bramante, Raphael, Michelangelo, who designed the dome, and then Maderno followed one another on the building site, which ended with the consecration of 1626.

What to see in the basilica

- **Michelangelo's Pietà**, on the right as you enter, sculpted when the artist was twenty-four.
- **The bronze statue of Saint Peter**, whose foot is worn smooth by the kisses of pilgrims.
- **Bernini's baldachin**, above the papal altar and the confession, which marks the tomb.
- **The Chair of Saint Peter**, Bernini's monument at the back of the apse, built around an ancient wooden seat.
- **The dome**, where you can read in Latin "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church." You can climb it for the view of Rome.

The excavations and Peter's tomb

Between 1939 and 1950, under the pontificate of Pius XII, excavations beneath the basilica uncovered a Roman necropolis and a small 2nd-century shrine, the "Trophy of Gaius," mentioned by a Roman priest around the year 200. In 1968, Paul VI announced that bones found in a neighboring wall could be attributed to the apostle. The necropolis is visited in small groups, by reservation with the Excavations Office.

Tips for your pilgrimage

Entry to the basilica is free. Dress covering the shoulders and knees is required. Plan for a security check, with a wait that is often long in the middle of the day: coming early in the morning is simplest. On Wednesday mornings, the

pope's general audience is usually held in Saint Peter's Square, and on Sundays at noon the pope recites the Angelus from his window.

On June 29, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, patrons of Rome, the pope celebrates a solemn Mass and blesses the palliums of the new archbishops. The bronze statue of Saint Peter is then dressed in pontifical vestments.

Other places associated with Saint Peter

In Rome, the church of San Pietro in Vincoli keeps the chains of his captivity, and Michelangelo's Moses. In Galilee, at Capernaum, archaeologists have identified beneath a modern church a house venerated since the 1st century as Peter's. Nearby, at Tabgha, the Church of the Primacy of Peter recalls the dialogue between the risen Jesus and the apostle beside the lake.

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