BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Pionius

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 11

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IN BRIEF

Saint Pionius

Priest of Smyrna, martyr burned alive in 250 during the persecution of Decius.

Feast day	March 11
Born	late 2nd or early 3rd century, probably Smyrna (today Izmir, Turkey)
Died	March 12, 250, Smyrna (today Izmir, Turkey)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	3rd century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Pionius, Priest and Martyr of Smyrna

Novena to Saint Pionius

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Pionius

Saint Pionius (Pionios in Greek) was a priest of Smyrna, today Izmir in Turkey, burned alive in 250 during the persecution of Emperor Decius. The account of his martyrdom, written shortly after the events, is one of the most vivid documents we have on the life of a Christian community in the 3rd century. His feast day is March 11.

Who was Saint Pionius?

Pionius was a priest of the Church of Smyrna, the community governed a century earlier by the great martyr bishop Saint Polycarp. We know him through the *Martyrdom of Pionius*, an ancient text that relates his arrest, his speeches and his death. The historian Louis Robert, a great specialist of ancient Asia Minor, stressed its historical value: the places, institutions and officials it mentions match what is known of Smyrna at that time. Pionius appears in it as a cultured, eloquent man, able to quote Homer to the pagans and Scripture to the Jews, and deeply attached to the memory of Polycarp.

Key dates in the life of Pionius

- **Late 2nd or early 3rd century**: Born, probably in Smyrna or its region.
- **First half of the 3rd century**: A priest of the Church of Smyrna, he becomes known for his preaching.
- **Early 250**: Emperor Decius orders all inhabitants of the Empire to sacrifice to the gods.
- **February 23, 250**: On the anniversary of the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp, he is arrested with Sabina and Asclepiades.
- **February and March 250**: Public interrogations, speeches in the agora, imprisonment.

- **March 12, 250**: According to the account of his martyrdom, he is burned alive at Smyrna on the order of the proconsul Quintilian.
- **20th century**: Louis Robert studies and comments on the account of his martyrdom, published after his death in 1994.

Smyrna in the time of Decius

In 250, Emperor Decius required every inhabitant of the Empire to offer a sacrifice to the gods and to receive a certificate proving it. This was not only a persecution: it was a general test of loyalty. Many Christians gave in out of fear; they would be called the *lapsi*, those who had fallen. The account of the martyrdom of Pionius suggests that even the bishop of Smyrna had agreed to sacrifice. In this climate of failure, the priest's firmness stands out all the more.

The arrest and the speeches

On February 23, the day the Church of Smyrna remembered Polycarp, Pionius, Sabina and Asclepiades were keeping the anniversary of the martyr. According to their account, they knew they would be arrested and prepared for it. The temple warden, Polemon, came to fetch them and led them to the agora, where the crowd gathered. Pionius then spoke. To the pagans, he recalled a line of Homer: one must not rejoice at the misfortune of those who die. To the Jews present, he quoted Proverbs: "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls." He refused to sacrifice, despite the pleas of those who admired him and wanted to save him.

During the interrogations, he was asked what God he worshiped. He answered: the one who made heaven and earth, and who sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save mankind. In prison, the companions shared what remained of their blessed bread and went on praying. They comforted the Christians who came to see them, including those who had given in.

The martyrdom

The proconsul Quintilian, back in Smyrna, questioned Pionius and sentenced him to be burned alive. The account says that at the place of execution he undressed himself, lay down on the wood and let himself be nailed to it. As the fire rose, he closed his eyes, prayed, said "Amen", then: "Lord, receive my soul." Witnesses said that after death his body seemed intact and his face shone. According to the same account, a priest of the Marcionite sect, Metrodorus, was executed the same day.

Pionius and the memory of Polycarp

The name of Pionius is linked to that of Polycarp. An ancient tradition credits him with preserving the account of Polycarp's martyrdom and with a *Life of Polycarp*. Historians remain cautious: the *Life* seems much later, and it is not certain that the Pionius mentioned in the manuscripts is the martyr of 250. What is sure is that the Church of Smyrna saw in him a faithful heir of its great bishop.

What can we learn from Saint Pionius?

Pionius lived in a wounded Church, where many had given in to fear, including some of its leaders. He did not judge the weak: he comforted them. But he did not give in himself. His words in the agora, nourished by culture and Scripture, show that one can bear witness to Christ with intelligence and without hatred. You can pray to him for priests, for those who must stay faithful when others give up, and for Christians who must give an account of their faith in public.

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

Where to pray to Saint Pionius

- **Izmir** (Turkey): ancient Smyrna, the city of his martyrdom, where the remains of the Roman agora can still be seen.
- In any church on March 11, the day the Roman Martyrology remembers him.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Pionius, Priest and Martyr of Smyrna

Saint Pionius, a priest of Smyrna, was burned alive in 250, during the persecution of Decius, at a time when many Christians had given in to fear. He comforted the weak without denying his faith, and bore witness to Christ before the crowd with gentleness and intelligence. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text.

Prayer to Saint Pionius

Saint Pionius, priest and martyr of Smyrna,
heir to the faith of Saint Polycarp,
you refused to sacrifice to idols
when so many others gave in to fear.
Give me a heart that stays faithful in trial.

You spoke to the crowd without hatred,
with the words of the wise and those of Scripture.
Teach me to give an account of my faith
with gentleness and respect,
without judging those who have fallen.

You who said in the flames:
"Lord, receive my soul,"
help me to place my life in the hands of God.
Watch over priests and persecuted Christians.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Pionius

- On his feast day, March 11.
- For priests, especially those who serve in difficult conditions.
- When you must stay faithful while others around you give up.
- Before speaking about your faith in public, in a debate or a testimony.
- For Christians who gave in under pressure and are trying to come back.

A short invocation

> *Lord, receive my soul.*
> *Saint Pionius, pray for us. Amen.*

The first words repeat the prayer that the account of his martyrdom places on his lips at the moment of death. To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Pionius from March 3 to March 11, and read the life of Saint Pionius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Pionius

This novena accompanies Saint Pionius, priest of Smyrna and martyr in 250. To finish it on his feast day, March 11, begin on March 3. It often falls during Lent, which suits this witness to faithfulness well. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text.

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 Pionius, pray for us." The episodes recalled come from the ancient account of his martyrdom.

Day 1: An heir Church

Pionius belonged to the Church of Smyrna, the Church of Saint Polycarp. He lived by the memory of this martyr, as a treasure received.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who handed on the faith to me. Make me worthy of this inheritance.

Act of the day: Pray for the person who first made Christ known to you.

Day 2: A time of fear

In 250, Emperor Decius required everyone to sacrifice to the gods. Many Christians gave in. Fear reached even the leaders of the Church.

Prayer: Lord, when fear overwhelms me, remind me that you are stronger than all that threatens me.

Act of the day: Name before God a fear that paralyzes you, and entrust it to him.

Day 3: Preparing for the trial

On February 23, the anniversary of Polycarp, Pionius and his companions prayed, knowing they would be arrested. They did not flee.

Prayer: Lord, prepare my heart for the trials I do not yet know. Give me peace.

Act of the day: Take a time of silence and prayer longer than usual.

Day 4: Companions on the road

Pionius was not alone: Sabina and Asclepiades shared his struggle. In faith, we move forward together.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for my brothers and sisters in the faith. Make us stand together in difficulty.

Act of the day: Send a word of encouragement to a Christian friend going through a trial.

Day 5: Speaking in the agora

Before the crowd, Pionius quoted Homer and Proverbs. He spoke to pagans and Jews in words they could understand.

Prayer: Lord, give me the right words to speak of you to those who do not know you.

Act of the day: Truly listen, without trying to convince, to someone who does not share your faith.

Day 6: Not rejoicing at misfortune

Pionius rebuked the crowd for rejoicing at the death of Christians. He reminded them that one does not mock those who fall.

Prayer: Lord, purify my heart of any wicked joy at the failure of others.

Act of the day: Refuse today any mockery, even light, toward anyone.

Day 7: Comforting those who fell

In prison, Pionius received Christians who had sacrificed. He did not crush them: he comforted them and invited them to come back.

Prayer: Lord, make me a witness of your mercy for those who have drifted away from you.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who has left the Church, and show them friendship.

Day 8: Confessing Christ

He was asked what God he worshiped. He answered: the one who made heaven and earth, and who sent his Son Jesus Christ to save mankind.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God who came to save us. Increase my faith.

Act of the day: Slowly recite the Creed, weighing each sentence.

Day 9: "Lord, receive my soul"

On the pyre, Pionius closed his eyes, prayed and gave his soul to God. His death was a peaceful offering.

Prayer: Lord, I place my life in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Pionius, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and pray for Christians persecuted today.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Pionius,*
> *faithful priest in the midst of a Church in trial,*
> *you comforted the weak and confessed Christ unto the fire.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Obtain for me constancy in faith*
> *and gentleness toward those who waver.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

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