

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Pius V

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 30

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IN BRIEF

Saint Pius V

Dominican pope from 1566 to 1572, who put the Council of Trent into practice.

Feast day	April 30
Born	January 17, 1504, Bosco (now Bosco Marengo), Piedmont, Italy
Died	May 1, 1572, Rome
Canonized	May 22, 1712, by Pope Clement XI
Era	16th century

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Novena to Saint Pius V

Tomb of Saint Pius V in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, Rome

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Pius V

Saint Pius V, born Antonio Ghislieri, is the pope who put the decisions of the Council of Trent into practice. The son of peasants from Piedmont and an austere Dominican friar, he governed the Church from 1566 to 1572. We owe him the *Roman Catechism* and the reformed Roman Breviary and Missal, which remained in use for four centuries. His name is also linked to the victory of Lepanto in 1571 and to the spread of the Rosary. He died on May 1, 1572, and his feast day is April 30.

Who was Saint Pius V?

Antonio Ghislieri was born on January 17, 1504, in Bosco, Piedmont, today Bosco Marengo, near Alessandria. His family was poor, and as a boy he tended sheep. At fourteen he joined the Dominicans at Voghera, where he received the name Brother Michele. He studied in Bologna, was ordained a priest in 1528 and taught philosophy and theology for several years. He then served as prior of several convents, known for his personal poverty and his strictness.

His career next unfolded in the service of the Inquisition, the institution charged with combating doctrines judged heretical, in the context of the Protestant Reformation. After serving as inquisitor in Como and Bergamo, he was called to Rome by Cardinal Carafa, the future Pope Paul IV, who made him a bishop, a cardinal and then Grand Inquisitor. He was later Bishop of Mondovì, in his native Piedmont.



Portrait of Pius V attributed to Bartolomeo Passarotti (16th century).

Key dates

- **January 17, 1504**: Born in Bosco, Piedmont.
- **c. 1518**: Enters the Dominicans at Voghera.
- **1528**: Ordained a priest.
- **1556**: Bishop of Sutri and Nepi.
- **1557**: Created a cardinal by Paul IV; the following year he becomes Grand Inquisitor.
- **1560**: Bishop of Mondovì.
- **January 7, 1566**: Elected pope, taking the name Pius V.
- **1566**: Publication of the *Roman Catechism*, requested by the Council of Trent.
- **1567**: Proclaims Saint Thomas Aquinas a Doctor of the Church.
- **1568**: Publication of the reformed Roman Breviary.

- **1570**: Publication of the Roman Missal (bull *Quo primum*, July 14); excommunication of Queen Elizabeth I of England.
- **October 7, 1571**: Victory of the Holy League at Lepanto.
- **May 1, 1572**: Dies in Rome.
- **1672**: Beatified by Clement X.
- **May 22, 1712**: Canonized by Clement XI.

The pope of the Council of Trent

When Cardinal Ghislieri was elected pope in January 1566, the Council of Trent had ended two years earlier. Its decisions still had to be brought into the life of the Church, and Pius V devoted himself to that task with remarkable energy.

In 1566 he published the *Roman Catechism*, intended for parish priests, which sets out the Catholic faith clearly. The revised Roman Breviary appeared in 1568, and in 1570 the Roman Missal, which all Latin dioceses were asked to adopt, except those with their own tradition more than two centuries old. This liturgy, often called the "Mass of Saint Pius V" or the Tridentine Mass, remained the norm until the reform that followed the Second Vatican Council.

He also reformed the papal court: he cut expenses, required bishops to reside in their dioceses, and watched over the training of the clergy and the discipline of religious houses. He himself kept wearing the white Dominican habit beneath his papal vestments and lived very simply. It is often said that the popes' custom of wearing a white cassock comes from him, but this origin is debated.

A pontificate of struggle

The pontificate of Pius V was also marked by great severity. He strengthened the Roman Inquisition, took harsh measures against the Jews of the Papal States, expelling many of them, and rigorously pursued those suspected of heresy.

In 1570, with the bull *Regnans in excelsis*, he excommunicated Queen Elizabeth I and released her subjects from their obedience, a decision that worsened the situation of English Catholics. These aspects, which historians judge severely, are part of his story and must be read in the climate of religious conflict of the 16th century.



Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto, by Veronese (c. 1572, Venice).

Lepanto and the Rosary

Faced with the Ottoman advance in the Mediterranean, Pius V worked for years to unite the Christian powers. In 1571 he concluded the Holy League with the Spain of Philip II and the Republic of Venice. On October 7, 1571, the fleet of the League, commanded by Don John of Austria, won the Battle of Lepanto in the Gulf of Patras.

The pope had asked the faithful to pray the Rosary for the success of the enterprise. According to a tradition recorded as early as his canonization process, he knew of the victory before the messengers arrived.

In thanksgiving, he instituted a feast of Our Lady of Victory, which later became Our Lady of the Rosary, still celebrated by the Church on October 7. As a Dominican, he had already encouraged the Rosary and set out its traditional form in a bull of 1569. He died on May 1, 1572, a few months after Lepanto, and rests in Rome, in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major.

Why pray to Saint Pius V?

Saint Pius V has no widely recognized patronage. He was canonized for his life of prayer and poverty and for the zeal with which he served the renewal of the Church after the Council of Trent, not for each of his political decisions. He reminds us of the importance of a clear faith, taught and celebrated with dignity, and of the power of the Rosary. Catholics pray to him for the Church, for the popes and for peace among nations.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Pius V in art

Pius V is easy to recognize: an old man with a gaunt face and a long white beard, often in a red mozzetta and skullcap, as in his contemporary portraits. Later images show him in white, holding a crucifix or a rosary, and sometimes in prayer, with the Battle of Lepanto in the background.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Pius V, or follow the novena to Saint Pius V, from April 21 to 29, ending on the eve of his feast.

Where to pray to Saint Pius V

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, where his body rests in the Sistine Chapel (not to be confused with the Vatican's Sistine Chapel).
- **Bosco Marengo** (Piedmont): the Church of Santa Croce, which he had built in his native village.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, a Dominican church linked to his order.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Pius V, Pope of the Rosary

Saint Pius V issued many official texts, bulls and liturgical documents, but no personal prayer can be reliably attributed to him. His most living spiritual legacy is the Rosary, which he encouraged and whose traditional form he set down. This page offers an original prayer to Saint Pius V, followed by some guidance for praying with him.

The pope of the Rosary

As a Dominican friar, Pius V was devoted to the Rosary, a prayer that the tradition of his order links to Saint Dominic. In the bull *Consueverunt Romani Pontifices* of 1569, he described its form: one hundred and fifty Hail Marys divided into decades, each preceded by the Our Father, while meditating on the mysteries of the life of Christ.

In 1571 he asked the faithful to pray the Rosary for the Holy League, and after the victory of Lepanto on October 7, he instituted a feast of thanksgiving to Our Lady, which became the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

Prayer to Saint Pius V, Pope of the Rosary

Saint Pius V, amid the honors of your office you kept the poverty of the young shepherd of Bosco and the simplicity of the Dominican friar: pray for us.

You wanted the faith to be taught clearly and celebrated with dignity: help us to know, to love and to pass on the faith of the Church. Give priests and catechists a love for teaching, and give all of us the desire to learn.

You entrusted the Church and the world to the prayer of the Rosary: teach us to pray with Mary, contemplating the mysteries of the life of her Son. Obtain peace for nations at war, and keep our hearts from all harshness toward those who do not think as we do.

I entrust to you the pope and the bishops, the unity of the Church, and my own intention (name it in silence).

With you, I turn to Our Lady of the Rosary: may she lead us to Jesus, our only victory. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, April 30, the eve of the anniversary of his death.
- On October 7, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, which he instituted after the victory of Lepanto, and throughout October, the month of the Rosary.
- Before praying the Rosary for peace, especially in times of war.
- For the pope and the bishops, and for the unity of the Church.
- For catechists, teachers of the faith and those who prepare the liturgy.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Pius V, and discover the life of Saint Pius V.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Pius V

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Pius V. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast of April 30, begin on April 21; it ends on April 29. In memory of the saint's love for the Rosary, each day can be accompanied by a decade of the Rosary. You can also pray it in October, the month of the Rosary, or at any time of year.

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, ten Hail Marys and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. You may choose the mysteries of the Rosary that fit each day, or simply follow the usual order of the week. What matters is to pray with Mary, as Pius V asked the whole Church to do.



Saint Pius V, church window or statue.

Day 1: The little shepherd

Antonio Ghislieri grew up poor, tending sheep in the hills of Piedmont. Once he became pope, he never forgot where he came from. The simplicity of his childhood stayed with him to the end.

Prayer: Lord, keep me humble, and never let me forget all that I have received from you.

Today: Thank God for your roots, your family and those who raised you.

Day 2: God's call

At fourteen he entered the Dominicans. He answered early the call he heard and remained faithful to it all his life, through study, teaching and responsibilities he had not sought.

Prayer: Lord, call young people to follow you, and give them the generosity to answer.

Today: Pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

Day 3: Studying the faith

Brother Michele spent many years studying and teaching theology. Knowing our faith helps us love it more and give an account of it to others.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the desire to know the faith of the Church more deeply.

Today: Read a paragraph of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Day 4: Poor amid honors

As cardinal and then as pope, he kept his Dominican habit and a very simple way of life. Honors did not change him. He knew that every office in the Church is a service, and that a servant does not need luxury to do his work well.

Prayer: Lord, free me from attachment to possessions and reputation. Teach me simplicity.

Today: Skip an unnecessary purchase and give the money to a charity.

Day 5: Teaching the faith

The *Roman Catechism* was meant to help parish priests explain the faith to their people. Pius V wanted everyone, learned or not, to be able to know what the Church believes and why.

Prayer: Lord, bless the catechists, parents and priests who pass on the faith.

Today: Thank a catechist, or offer your help to your parish.

Day 6: The beauty of the liturgy

By publishing the Missal and the Breviary, Pius V wanted the Church to pray with one heart and with dignity. The liturgy is not our private property; it is the prayer of the whole Church.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love the prayer of the Church and to take part in the Mass with all my heart.

Today: Go to a weekday Mass, or pray one hour of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Day 7: Praying for peace

Before Lepanto, Pius V asked all of Christendom to pray the Rosary. He believed that prayer can change the course of history. The Church still remembers this every October 7, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

Prayer: Our Lady of the Rosary, I entrust to you the nations at war. Obtain peace for them.

Today: Pray a full Rosary for peace in the world.

Day 8: Firmness and mercy

Pius V was a very firm pope, at times to the point of harshness. His life invites us to defend the truth, but always with the charity of Christ. Truth without love wounds; love without truth misleads.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be faithful to the truth without ever hurting or despising anyone.

Today: Pray for someone whose ideas you do not share.

Day 9: A life given to the Church

Worn out, Pius V died a few months after Lepanto. He gave his strength to the very end for the Church entrusted to him. His reign lasted only six years, yet its fruits shaped Catholic life for centuries. God can do much with a life that is given without holding back.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Pius V, keep your Church in faith and in peace. Amen.

Today: Pray for the pope.

Closing prayer

Saint Pius V, son of Saint Dominic and servant of the Church, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for the pope, for the bishops and for peace among nations. Teach us to pray with Mary and to remain faithful to Christ. May we know our faith, love it, celebrate it with dignity and share it with gentleness, so that the Gospel may reach every heart. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Pius V and the prayer to Saint Pius V.

PILGRIMAGE

Tomb of Saint Pius V in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, Rome

The body of Saint Pius V rests in Rome, in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, one of the four major basilicas of the city. His tomb is in the basilica's Sistine Chapel, not to be confused with the famous Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. It is the main place where people come to pray to the pope of Lepanto.

From the Vatican to Saint Mary Major

When he died on May 1, 1572, Pius V was first buried at Saint Peter's. A few years later, Pope Sixtus V, a former Franciscan who owed his career to him, had a vast chapel built at Saint Mary Major to house the Blessed Sacrament and his own tomb. He also had a monument to Pius V erected there, to which Pius's body was transferred in 1588. The two popes face each other across the chapel.



The Basilica of Saint Mary Major, in Rome.

The monument of Saint Pius V

The funerary monument, in colored marbles, takes the form of a large arch decorated with bas-reliefs evoking the main events of the pontificate, including the Battle of Lepanto. In the center, a statue shows the pope seated, giving a blessing. Below, the saint's body rests in an urn that lets it be seen, dressed in pontifical vestments, the face covered with a mask.

Praying at the tomb of Saint Pius V

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Pius V. On site, a time of silence before his tomb lets you entrust an intention for the Church or for peace. Since Pius V did so much to encourage the rosary, a decade of the rosary is a natural way to pray with him. Do not miss, in the Pauline Chapel opposite,

the icon of the Virgin venerated under the title *Salus Populi Romani*. The prayer to Saint Pius V can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Pius V

- **Bosco Marengo** (Piedmont): the church and former Dominican convent of Santa Croce, which he had built in his native village and where he had first planned his burial.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the city's main Dominican church.
- **Venice**: the Gallerie dell'Accademia, which hold works commemorating the victory at Lepanto.

Practical information

The Basilica of Saint Mary Major is on the Esquiline, a few minutes' walk from Termini station. It is open every day, and modest dress is requested. The Sistine Chapel is in the right aisle, as you walk toward the choir. Check Mass times and visiting hours on the Vatican's official website for the basilica, or on site.

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