

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Silverius

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: June 20

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IN BRIEF

Saint Silverius

Pope from 536 to 537, deposed under pressure from Byzantium and died in exile, patron saint of Ponza.

Feast day	June 20
Born	c. 480, probably Ceccano, Lazio, Italy
Died	537, Pontine Islands (Palmarola), Italy
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Ponza, Frosinone, fishermen, sailors

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Silverius for Exiles and the Unjustly Accused

Novena to Saint Silverius

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Silverius

Saint Silverius was pope from 536 to 537, in one of the most troubled periods in the history of Rome, caught between the Ostrogoths and the Byzantine army. The son of a pope, elected under pressure from a Gothic king, he refused to give in to Empress Theodora on a question of faith. Deposed on the basis of a forged letter and exiled to a deserted island in the Tyrrhenian Sea, he died there of privation. Venerated as a martyr and patron of the island of Ponza, he is celebrated on June 20.

Who was Saint Silverius?

Silverius was born around 480, probably in Ceccano, in Lazio. His case is unique in the history of the papacy: he was the legitimate son of Pope Saint Hormisdas, who had married before entering the clergy and who governed the Church from 514 to 523. Silverius served the Church of Rome as a subdeacon. In 536, when Pope Agapetus I died in Constantinople, he was chosen to succeed him. It was the first time a mere subdeacon became pope.



Saint Silverius, portrait from the series of popes.

Key dates

- **c. 480**: Born, probably in Ceccano.
- **April 22, 536**: Pope Agapetus I dies in Constantinople.
- **June 8, 536**: Silverius is consecrated Bishop of Rome.
- **December 9, 536**: The Byzantine general Belisarius enters Rome.
- **March 11, 537**: Silverius is deposed and sent into exile; Vigilius is consecrated in his place on March 29.
- **537**: Exiled to the Pontine Islands, he dies there of hunger and exhaustion.

A pope between the Goths and Byzantium

When Silverius was elected, Italy was ruled by the Ostrogoths, a people who followed Arian Christianity. The Byzantine emperor Justinian had decided to win back the old lands of the Empire and had sent his general Belisarius. The

Gothic king Theodahad wanted a pope who would favor him, and it was under his pressure that the Roman clergy accepted Silverius. The *Liber Pontificalis*, the ancient book of the popes, even accuses Silverius of having bought his election from the king. Historians remain cautious about this hostile account.

Silverius nevertheless showed realism. He advised the Senate not to resist the Byzantines, and Belisarius entered Rome without a fight on December 9, 536. The city was immediately besieged by the Gothic king Vitiges and endured a year of famine.

Faithful before the empress

The real conflict was religious. Empress Theodora supported the Monophysites, who recognized only one nature in Christ. She wanted to restore to the see of Constantinople the patriarch Anthimus, whom Agapetus I had deposed for heresy. Silverius refused. Theodora then turned to the Roman deacon Vigilius, an ambitious man ready to serve her, and won the support of Belisarius and his wife Antonina.

A forged letter accused the pope of offering to open a city gate to the Goths. On March 11, 537, Silverius was summoned to the palace on the Pincian Hill, stripped of his insignia, dressed in a monk's habit and sent into exile at Patara, in Lycia, in what is now Turkey. Vigilius was consecrated in his place.

The bishop of Patara pleaded his case before Justinian, who ordered a fair trial. But when Silverius returned to Italy, he was handed over to Vigilius, who had him deported to the Pontine Islands. He died of hunger a few months later, in 537, most likely on the islet of Palmarola. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, he was buried there and his remains never left the island.



The island of Palmarola, place of the exile and death of Saint Silverius.

The saint of the fishermen of Ponza

Silverius was never canonized through a formal procedure. He was recognized as a saint by popular veneration, and his name appears in lists of saints from the eleventh century onward. His tomb became a place of devotion, and the people of Ponza took him as their patron. According to a local legend, fishermen caught in a storm off Palmarola called on him; the saint appeared to them and guided them safely to shore.

Every June 20, Ponza celebrates its patron for three days. His statue is carried in procession on a float shaped like a fishing boat and covered with red carnations. Emigrants from the island carried this devotion all the way to New York. Silverius is also patron of Frosinone, together with his father Hormisdas.

Why is Saint Silverius the patron saint of Ponza?

Ponza and its neighboring islet of Palmarola are where Silverius spent his last months and where he died, alone and starving. The islanders, most of them fishermen and sailors, adopted the exiled pope as their own, and the legend of the storm off Palmarola made him their protector at sea. Beyond Ponza, he is invoked for exiles and people unjustly condemned, for those under pressure to act against their conscience, and for sailors and fishermen.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Silverius in art

- **Papal vestments and tiara**, as a pope.
- **A palm**, sign of the martyrdom he is honored for, though he died of hunger rather than by violence.
- **The sea, a boat or an island**, recalling his exile and his protection of the fishermen of Ponza.
- **A boat-shaped float covered in red carnations**, at his feast in Ponza.

What his holiness teaches us

The election of Silverius was clouded by suspicion, and his pontificate lasted less than a year. But at the decisive moment he refused to sacrifice the faith to the demands of an empress, and he died for it, alone on a deserted island. His holiness was played out in a single refusal.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Silverius and the novena to Saint Silverius, prayed from June 11 to 19.

Where to pray to Saint Silverius

- **Ponza** (Pontine Islands): the main church of the island and its statue of the saint, at the heart of the June 20 feast.
- **Palmarola**: the islet of his exile, where a small chapel keeps his memory.

- **Frosinone** (Lazio): the city of which he is patron with Saint Hormisdas.

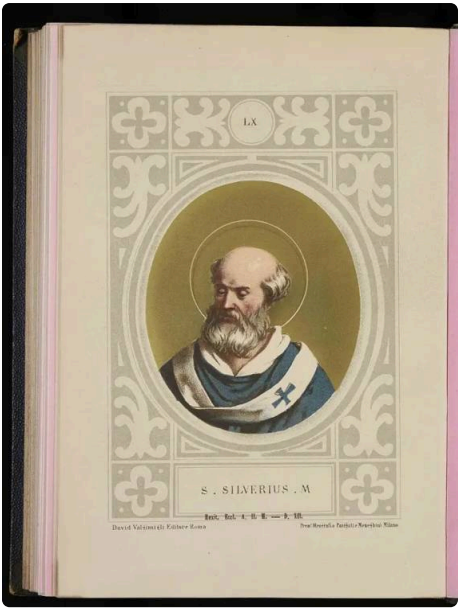
PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Silverius for Exiles and the Unjustly Accused

None of Saint Silverius's writings have come down to us, and the prayers addressed to him on Ponza belong to local tradition. Here you will find an original prayer inspired by his faithfulness and his death in exile, for anyone who is suffering injustice, loneliness or danger.

Praying with an exiled pope

Silverius died alone on an island in the Tyrrhenian Sea for refusing to give way on a question of faith. The fishermen of Ponza call on him in storms. He can accompany all who pass through isolation, injustice or danger: refugees and exiles, prisoners, people falsely accused, and those who work at sea.



Saint Silverius, pope and martyr, at prayer.

Prayer to Saint Silverius for exiles and the unjustly accused

Saint Silverius, you who refused to betray the faith of the Church under pressure from the powerful, give me the courage to stay faithful to my conscience, even when it costs me.

You who were accused by false witnesses and condemned without trial, pray for those who are slandered, unjustly imprisoned or driven from their homes.

You who died of hunger and loneliness on a deserted island, watch over exiles, refugees and people who are alone. Let no one be abandoned.

Protector of the fishermen of Ponza, guard sailors and all who work at sea, and bring us safely to harbor through the storms of life. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Pray for the pope and for the pastors of the Church, that they may serve the truth in freedom. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Silverius is celebrated on June 20, the day Ponza honors its patron with a procession on land and at sea. You can also pray to him:

- when you face pressure to act against your conscience at work or in public life;
- for a person who is in prison, especially if they have been wrongly convicted;
- for migrants, refugees and anyone living far from home;
- before a journey by sea, or for fishermen and sailors in your family.

A short invocation for those at sea

> *Saint Silverius, who guided the fishermen of Ponza through the storm, pray for all who are on the water tonight, and bring them home in peace.*

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Silverius, and read the life of Saint Silverius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Silverius

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and exile of Saint Silverius, pope from 536 to 537. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin it on June 11 and pray the last day on June 19, so that you reach his feast on June 20, the great day of Ponza. You can also pray it at any time for someone who is suffering injustice, exile or danger at sea.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. The small act suggested for the day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: "Lord, through the intercession of Saint Silverius, who stayed faithful to the faith of the Church even unto exile and death, I place before you this intention. Make me faithful, courageous and free. Amen."

Day 1: A faith received in the family

Silverius was the son of Pope Hormisdas, who had married before entering the clergy. He grew up in a home where the Church was at the center of life.

Prayer: Lord, bless the families who hand on the faith, and make our homes places where you are loved. Saint Silverius, pray for us.

Today: Pray for the person in your family who first spoke to you of God.

Day 2: A humble servant

Before he was chosen as pope, Silverius served the Church of Rome as a subdeacon, a modest ministry. Holiness often grows in hidden service.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve faithfully in small things, without seeking recognition. Saint Silverius, pray for us.

Today: Do one hidden service for your parish or your household.

Day 3: A burden he did not choose

Silverius was elected in a dangerous time, under pressure from a Gothic king, and his election was clouded by suspicion. He did not choose the circumstances, but he had to live them before God.

Prayer: Lord, when I must carry responsibilities in difficult conditions, give me wisdom and a pure intention. Saint Silverius, pray for us.

Today: Offer to God a responsibility that weighs on you.

Day 4: Seeking peace for the city

Silverius advised the Senate not to resist the Byzantine army, and Rome was spared a battle. He sought the good of the city and its people.

Prayer: God of peace, inspire those who govern to spare lives and seek the common good. Saint Silverius, pray for us.

Today: Pray for a country or a city at war.

Day 5: A city in famine

Besieged by the Goths, Rome suffered a year of hunger. Silverius shared the trials of his people, and later he himself would die of hunger.

Prayer: Lord, have mercy on all who are hungry today, and open our hands to share. Saint Silverius, pray for us.

Today: Give food or money to a food bank or a family in need.

Day 6: Saying no to the powerful

Empress Theodora demanded that he restore a patriarch deposed for heresy. Silverius refused. Faithfulness to the truth sometimes requires the courage to say no.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the strength to stay faithful to my conscience when it would be easier to give in. Saint Silverius, pray for us.

Today: In one concrete situation, choose honesty even if it costs you something.

Day 7: Falsely accused

A forged letter accused him of treason. He was stripped of his insignia, dressed as a monk and sent away. Like Christ before his judges, he was condemned on false evidence.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, falsely accused, stand by all who are slandered or wrongly condemned, and let the truth come to light. Saint Silverius, pray for us.

Today: Pray for a prisoner, or support an organization that defends the wrongly convicted.

Day 8: Exile and loneliness

Deported to a deserted island, Silverius died there of hunger and exhaustion, far from his people. Yet even there, God did not abandon him.

Prayer: Lord, be close to exiles, refugees and all who are alone. Let them find welcome and friendship. Saint Silverius, pray for us.

Today: Visit, call or write to someone who lives alone or far from home.

Day 9: Protector in the storm

The fishermen of Ponza, according to their tradition, called on Silverius in a storm, and he guided them to shore. The exiled pope became a protector of those who work at sea.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Silverius, guide me through the storms of life and bring me safely to harbor. Amen.

Today: Pray for sailors and fishermen, and for all who travel today.

Closing prayer

Saint Silverius, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for those who are unjustly accused, for exiles and for all who work at sea. Pray for the pope and the pastors of the Church, that they may serve the truth in freedom. Obtain for us the grace to remain faithful to Christ, whatever it may cost. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Silverius and pray the prayer to Saint Silverius.

Credits and sources

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