

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Pope Saint Simplicius

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 10

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IN BRIEF

Pope Saint Simplicius

Pope from 468 to 483, witness to the end of the Western Roman Empire.

Feast day	March 10
Born	c. 420, Tivoli, Italy
Died	March 10, 483, Rome, Italy
Era	5th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Simplicius for Faithfulness in Hard Times

Novena to Pope Saint Simplicius

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Pope Saint Simplicius

Pope Saint Simplicius was bishop of Rome from 468 to 483. His fifteen-year pontificate coincided with the disappearance of the Western Roman Empire: in 476 the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed and the Germanic chieftain Odoacer took control of Italy. In this collapsing world, Simplicius tried to defend the faith of the Council of Chalcedon against an East drawn toward other paths. The Catholic Church celebrates him on March 10.

Who was Saint Simplicius?

According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, the ancient book of the lives of the popes, Simplicius was born in Tivoli, near Rome, around 420, the son of a man named Castinus. Nothing is known of his career before his election on March 3, 468, ten days after the death of Pope Saint Hilarius.

What we know of him comes almost entirely from his letters: disciplinary decisions for the West, and an abundant correspondence, often unanswered, with the emperor and the patriarchs of the East. Historians point out that no source links him directly to the great military and political events of his time. He was not a political actor in the fall of the Empire; he was a pastor who kept watch over the faith while the world around him changed.

Key dates in the life of Simplicius

- **c. 420**: Born in Tivoli.
- **March 3, 468**: Elected bishop of Rome.
- **472**: Siege and sack of Rome by the general Ricimer.
- **476**: Romulus Augustulus is deposed and Odoacer takes power in Italy. Simplicius writes to the usurper Basiliscus.

- **479**: He must accept the installation of Peter the Fuller, a Monophysite, in Antioch.
- **March 483**: The *Henoticon*, a compromise edict of Emperor Zeno, is published in the East.
- **March 10, 483**: Dies in Rome; buried in Saint Peter's Basilica, near Leo the Great.

Defending Chalcedon without being heard

In 451 the Council of Chalcedon declared that Christ is one person in two natures, divine and human. This is the faith Catholics still profess: Jesus is truly God and truly man, without confusion and without separation. Part of the East, attached to the formula of a single nature (known as Monophysitism), rejected the council's teaching.

Simplicius followed the line of Saint Leo the Great, whose *Tome* had shaped the council's definition. He first rejected the claim of Patriarch Acacius of Constantinople to equal Rome in honor. He then wrote to the usurper Basiliscus, who was placing Monophysite bishops in the great sees and had condemned Leo's *Tome*.

The return of Emperor Zeno settled nothing. With Acacius, he sought a compromise that would satisfy both sides. Simplicius protested against the appointment of Peter Mongus in Alexandria and supported a candidate faithful to Chalcedon, John Talaia, but his letters had no effect.

Shortly before his death, the *Henoticon* prepared the break between Rome and Constantinople known as the Acacian Schism, which his successor Saint Felix III would have to face.

These debates may seem distant, but they touched the heart of the faith. If Christ were not fully human, he would not have truly shared our life and our death; if he were not fully God, he could not save us. By holding to Chalcedon,

Simplicius was defending the very Christ whom Christians meet in the Gospel and in the Eucharist.



The church of Santo Stefano Rotondo, built during the pontificate of Simplicius.

Governing the Church in the West

In Italy, Simplicius called bishops back to their duties. He withdrew from the bishop of Altinum the right to ordain, asked the bishops of Picenum not to keep more than a quarter of the Church's revenues for themselves, and threatened the bishop of Ravenna, who had imposed a bishop on Modena against his will.

For Spain, he was the first pope to appoint a vicar of the Roman see, Zeno of Seville.

In Rome itself, he ordained many priests and organized the service of the three great basilicas outside the walls for baptisms and funerals, so that the faithful would always find a priest there.

The churches of his pontificate

It was under Simplicius that the church of Santo Stefano Rotondo was built on the Caelian Hill, dedicated to Saint Stephen, the first martyr. It is one of the oldest circular Christian buildings in Rome.

For the first time, a civil building, the basilica of Junius Bassus on the Esquiline Hill, was turned into a church, dedicated to Saint Andrew. The *Liber Pontificalis* also credits him with the church of Santa Bibiana.

Why is Saint Simplicius remembered today?

No particular patronage is attached to Saint Simplicius. He did not obtain what he wanted: the East did not listen to him, and the West was breaking apart before his eyes. His life is a reminder that faithfulness is not measured by success.

For fifteen years he kept writing, recalling the common faith and serving his diocese amid the ruins of an empire. Many Christians today, in parishes that are shrinking or in societies where faith seems to fade, can recognize themselves in this patient pope who kept going without seeing the results.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Simplicius in art

- **The papal tiara**, as in the woodcut of the Nuremberg Chronicle (1493).
- **Papal vestments** and a book or letter, recalling the correspondence through which he is known.
- **The mosaic medallion** in the series of papal portraits at Saint Paul Outside the Walls, where the popes appear in order.

Where to pray to Saint Simplicius

In Rome, Saint Peter's Basilica is where he was buried, near Leo the Great, in the old basilica. The church of Santo Stefano Rotondo, built during his pontificate, still welcomes visitors on the Caelian Hill. In Tivoli, his hometown, you can also remember him. Wherever you are, you can pray with him using the prayer to Saint Simplicius and the novena to Saint Simplicius.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Simplicius for Faithfulness in Hard Times

No traditional prayer to Pope Saint Simplicius has come down to us, and his memory survives mainly through his letters and the brief notice of the *Liber Pontificalis*. Here is an original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of this pope who remained faithful while the Western Roman Empire was collapsing around him.



Santo Stefano Rotondo, Rome, built under Pope Simplicius.

Prayer to Saint Simplicius for faithfulness in hard times

Saint Simplicius, shepherd of the Church of Rome when an empire was falling, you did not lose heart when the world you knew was passing away. Obtain for us a calm and steady faith in times of upheaval.

You defended the faith of the Church in Christ, true God and true man, even when your letters went unanswered. Help us to hold fast to the truth with patience and charity, without bitterness when we are not heard.

You called bishops to serve their people and not themselves, and you made sure the faithful of Rome would find priests for baptism and for the burial of their dead. Pray for our bishops and priests, that they may be generous shepherds.

Pray also for the unity of Christians, for which you labored without seeing it. May all the disciples of Christ one day be one.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Present it to the Lord, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Simplicius is celebrated on March 10, the anniversary of his death in Rome in 483. His feast usually falls during Lent, a fitting season to ask for perseverance. This prayer is especially suited:

- in times of social or personal upheaval, when familiar landmarks are disappearing;
- when your efforts seem fruitless and no one seems to listen;
- for the Pope, the bishops and the priests of your diocese;

- during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, for the healing of divisions between Churches.

To pray with him over nine days, see the novena to Saint Simplicius, and discover the life of Saint Simplicius.

NOVENA

Novena to Pope Saint Simplicius

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Pope Saint Simplicius, who led the Church of Rome from 468 to 483, as the Western Roman Empire came to an end. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast of March 10, begin on March 2, usually during Lent. It can also be prayed at any time of upheaval or discouragement.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. You may end with the Creed, the profession of faith that Simplicius worked to defend. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life.

You may begin each day with this prayer: *Lord, you gave your Church a faithful shepherd in Saint Simplicius in a time of great change. Through his intercession, keep me steady in faith, and hear the prayer I bring you today. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply continue where you stopped. What matters is perseverance and trust.

Simplicius lived through the end of a world and kept serving without seeing the fruit of his work. This novena is a good companion for anyone going through a time of loss, change or discouragement: a move, the closing of a parish, a job that ends, or simply the sense that the familiar world is slipping away.

Day 1: A quiet beginning

Simplicius was born in Tivoli, near Rome, around 420. Nothing is known of his life before he became pope. Most of our lives, too, unfold in hidden places, known only to God. That hidden life is where holiness begins.

Prayer: Lord, help me to serve you faithfully in the ordinary and unseen moments of my life.

Today: Do a good deed without telling anyone.

Day 2: Called to serve

On March 3, 468, he was elected bishop of Rome. He accepted a heavy burden at a dangerous time. Every call from God comes with the grace to answer it.

Prayer: Lord, bless the Pope and all who carry responsibility in your Church.

Today: Pray for the Pope and for your bishop by name.

Day 3: When the world is shaken

In 472 Rome was besieged and sacked; in 476 the last Western emperor was deposed. Simplicius saw the end of a world. In times of upheaval, the Church remains a house built on rock.

Prayer: Lord, when everything around me is shaken, be my rock and my refuge.

Today: Name one fear you carry, and entrust it to God in a few words.

Day 4: True God and true man

Simplicius defended the faith of the Council of Chalcedon: Christ is one person, truly God and truly man. This is not an abstract formula. It means that God has shared our human life all the way, and that this same Jesus can save us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, true God and true man, I believe in you; increase my faith.

Today: Pray the Creed slowly, pausing on the words about Christ.

Day 5: Letters without an answer

Many of his letters to the emperor and the patriarchs of the East went unanswered. He kept writing anyway. Faithfulness does not depend on being heard.

Prayer: Lord, give me patience when my efforts seem useless, and help me persevere in doing good.

Today: Take up again a good effort you had abandoned.

Day 6: Shepherds, not owners

Simplicius asked the bishops of Picenum not to keep more than a quarter of the Church's revenues for themselves. Goods given to the Church belong to God and to the poor.

Prayer: Lord, keep the shepherds of your Church humble, honest and generous.

Today: Give something to your parish or to a charity that serves the poor.

Day 7: Priests for the people

In Rome, he ordained many priests and organized the service of the great basilicas outside the walls for baptisms and funerals. He wanted the faithful to find the sacraments at the beginning and the end of life.

Prayer: Lord, send workers into your harvest, and bless the priests who serve us.

Today: Thank a priest, or pray for vocations in your diocese.

Day 8: Building for God

Under his pontificate, the round church of Santo Stefano Rotondo was built, and a civil hall was turned into a church dedicated to Saint Andrew. Even as an empire fell, he built houses of prayer.

Prayer: Lord, make my life a dwelling place for you, and help me build up your Church.

Today: Visit a church and spend a few minutes in silent prayer.

Day 9: Faithful to the end

Simplicius died in Rome on March 10, 483, and was buried in Saint Peter's Basilica near Leo the Great. He did not see the end of the divisions he fought. He left the outcome to God.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands what I cannot finish. Bring to completion the good you have begun in me.

Today: Pray for the unity of all Christians.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Simplicius, faithful shepherd in a time of collapse, you held fast to the true faith in Christ and served your people without seeing the fruit of your labors. Obtain for me steady faith in times of change, patience when I am not heard, and love for the Church and its unity. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Continue with the prayer to Saint Simplicius or read the life of Saint Simplicius.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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