

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Pope Saint Siricius

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 26

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IN BRIEF

Pope Saint Siricius

Pope from 384 to 399, author of the oldest known papal decretal.

Feast day	November 26
Born	c. 334, Rome
Died	November 26, 399, Rome
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Pope Saint Siricius for the Shepherds of the Church

Novena to Pope Saint Siricius

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Pope Saint Siricius

Saint Siricius was bishop of Rome from 384 to 399. His name remains linked to a text that seems modest but proved decisive: the letter he sent in 385 to the bishop of Tarragona, regarded as the oldest authentic papal decretal, that is, the first papal reply with the force of law for other Churches. A contemporary of Ambrose and Jerome, he consecrated the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls. His feast day is November 26.

Who was Saint Siricius?

According to tradition, Siricius was a Roman, the son of a man named Tiburtius. His epitaph says that he was a lector, then a deacon under Pope Liberius. When Saint Damasus died in December 384, he was elected unanimously, as a letter from Emperor Valentinian II to the prefect of Rome points out, and he was consecrated on December 11.

He led the Church of Rome for fifteen years, at the time when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire under Theodosius. It was a period of growth, but also of fierce debates on doctrine and discipline, in which the bishop of Rome was increasingly asked to settle questions for the whole West.

Key dates

- **c. 334**: Born in Rome, according to tradition.
- **December 11, 384**: Consecrated bishop of Rome, succeeding Damasus.
- **February 10, 385**: Letter to Himerius of Tarragona, the first known decretal.
- **386**: Roman council on the discipline of the clergy.
- **391**: Consecration of the new Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

- **c. 392**: Condemnation of the monk Jovinian in Rome; the case of Bonosus at the Council of Capua.
- **November 26, 399**: Dies in Rome and is buried in the Catacomb of Priscilla.

The first decretal

Himerius, bishop of Tarragona in Spain, had sent Damasus a list of fifteen questions on baptism, penance, the ordination of clerics and marriage. The letter arrived after the pope's death, and it was Siricius who answered, on February 10, 385.

He restated rules already set by the councils of Nicaea and Serdica, but added sanctions and spoke as the one who bears the care of all the faithful. The bishop of Rome no longer merely gave advice: he settled matters for other Churches. Legal historians see in this text the starting point of papal legislation, the long tradition of decretals that would later shape canon law.

Facing the controversies of his time

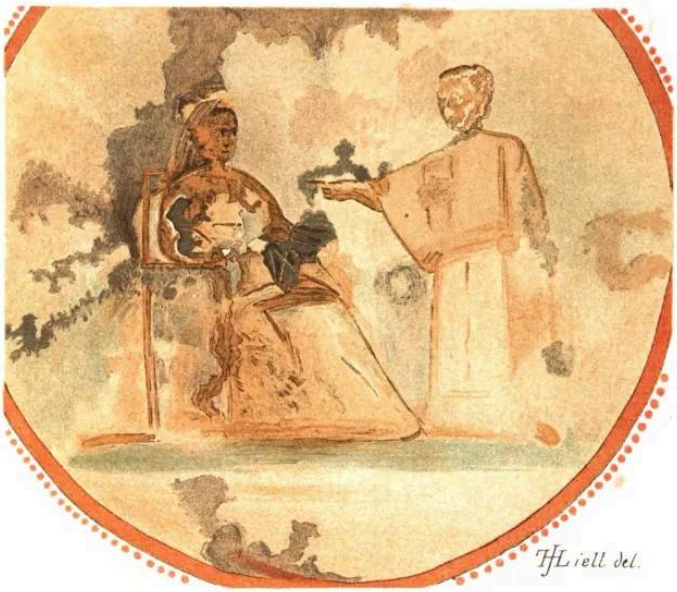
With Saint Ambrose of Milan, Siricius fought doctrines judged contrary to the faith. A Roman council condemned the monk Jovinian, who denied the perpetual virginity of Mary and refused to recognize any special value in consecrated life. Ambrose and a synod in Milan joined in this decision. The case of Bonosus, a bishop accused of the same error, was examined at the Council of Capua, Siricius leaving it to the bishops of the region to judge.

In the affair of Priscillian, a Spanish ascetic executed by the emperor Maximus on the accusation of other bishops, Siricius disowned those who had handed him over to the civil power, such as Ithacius of Ossonoba, and Felix of Trier who supported them. He then allowed the followers of Priscillian who wished it to return to the Church.

In this he showed both firmness on doctrine and a refusal to let the sword of the State settle questions of faith, a position close to that of Ambrose and of Saint Martin of Tours, who had also protested against the execution.

A debated pope

His contemporaries were divided about him. Saint Jerome, who left Rome in 385 at the beginning of his pontificate, criticized him in a letter for a lack of discernment, in particular for having granted a certificate of orthodoxy to Rufinus of Aquileia. Ambrose, on the contrary, praised his vigilance, and Isidore of Seville would later call him a "most illustrious pontiff." His name, removed for a time from the Roman Martyrology, was restored to it in the 18th century by Benedict XIV after a detailed study.



The Catacomb of Priscilla, where Siricius was first buried.

Why is Saint Siricius honored?

Siricius does not shine as brightly as his great contemporaries, and no particular patronage is attached to his name. His holiness is that of a shepherd who took seriously the duty of answering: answering a distant bishop who asked for advice, Churches that needed clear rules, and lost Christians whom he agreed to welcome back.

He is also remembered for completing one of the great shrines of Rome, over the tomb of Saint Paul. His name appeared on a column that survived the fire of 1823. He can be prayed to for the pope and the bishops, for canon lawyers and those who serve justice in the Church, and for all who must give a clear answer with charity.

What his holiness teaches us

Siricius reminds us that holiness is not measured by fame. Many popes of the early centuries are known to us only through a few letters, an epitaph and a short notice. Behind these scant traces lies a life given to the service of the Church: listening to questions, settling disputes, consecrating churches, welcoming back those who had strayed. His example speaks to all who carry out hidden responsibilities with care, in a parish office as much as in a diocese.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Siricius in art

No ancient portrait of Siricius has survived. He appears, like all the popes, in the series of mosaic medallions of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, an imaginary portrait made in the 19th century. In other works he is simply shown in papal vestments, sometimes blessing, without a personal attribute.

Where to pray to Saint Siricius

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, which he consecrated in 391; the Catacomb of Priscilla, on the Via Salaria, his first burial place.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Siricius and the novena to Saint Siricius, from November 17 to 25.

PRAYER

Prayer to Pope Saint Siricius for the Shepherds of the Church

Pope Saint Siricius left no prayer of his own, and no ancient prayer to him is in common use. His life, however, offers a clear thread: a shepherd who answered those who asked for help, who defended the faith firmly and who opened the door to those who wanted to return. The original prayer below is inspired by this example.

Prayer to Saint Siricius for shepherds of the Church

Saint Siricius, bishop of Rome, you who answered with care the questions of a distant bishop, pray for all who must guide, teach and decide in the Church. May they speak with clarity, justice and charity.

You who defended the faith of the Church and the honor of the Virgin Mary, help me to hold fast to the truth I have received, without harshness toward those who doubt.

You who refused to hand believers over to the sword and opened the way back to those who had strayed, teach me to correct with gentleness and to welcome with joy those who return.

You who consecrated the basilica built over the tomb of Saint Paul, obtain for me something of the Apostle's zeal for the Gospel. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Pray for our Holy Father the pope and for our bishops, that the Church may remain one in faith and in love. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Siricius is celebrated on November 26, the anniversary of his death in 399. You can pray to him:

- for the pope, the bishops and all who govern the Church;
- for canon lawyers, judges of Church tribunals and those who must apply rules with mercy;
- when you have to give a difficult answer or make a decision for others;
- for those who wish to return to the Church after a time away.

A traditional prayer to conclude

As Siricius defended the perpetual virginity of Mary, you can end with the Hail Mary, or with this ancient Marian prayer, the *Sub tuum praesidium*, known from a papyrus of the early centuries: "We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin."

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

NOVENA

Novena to Pope Saint Siricius

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Pope Saint Siricius (384-399). It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast day, November 26, begin on November 17. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially for the pope and the bishops, or when you must make a decision for others.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Siricius is not one of the famous saints. He lived in the shadow of giants such as Ambrose and Jerome. Yet his quiet faithfulness as a shepherd shaped the Church for centuries. This novena invites you to discover the holiness of everyday responsibility, day after day, through the main steps of his long service as deacon and as bishop of Rome.

Day 1: Small ministries

Siricius was first a lector, then a deacon. He served for years in humble roles before being called to lead. Every service in the Church, even the smallest, is a way of following Christ the Servant.

Prayer: Lord, bless readers, servers, deacons and all who serve in the liturgy. Make me faithful in small things. Saint Siricius, pray for me. Amen.

Today: Offer to help in your parish with a simple task.

Day 2: Chosen by all

On the death of Damasus, Siricius was elected unanimously. Unity around a shepherd is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and a responsibility for everyone.

Prayer: Lord, keep our communities united around their pastors. Free us from the spirit of division. Amen.

Today: Pray for your parish priest and your bishop by name.

Day 3: Answering a request

A bishop from far-off Spain sent questions to Rome, and Siricius took the time to answer each one. Answering someone who asks for help is already an act of charity.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to those who ask me for help or advice. Amen.

Today: Reply to a message or request you have been putting off.

Day 4: Clear rules for the good of all

The first decretal set rules on baptism, penance and the life of the clergy. Good rules protect the weak and help everyone know the path. They are at the service of persons, not the other way around.

Prayer: Lord, give wisdom to those who make laws, in the Church and in society. Amen.

Today: Pray for canon lawyers and judges of Church tribunals.

Day 5: Defending the faith

With Saint Ambrose, Siricius defended the perpetual virginity of Mary and the value of consecrated life. Holding to the faith of the Church sometimes requires courage.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen my faith, and give me the courage to bear witness to it with gentleness. Holy Mary, pray for me. Amen.

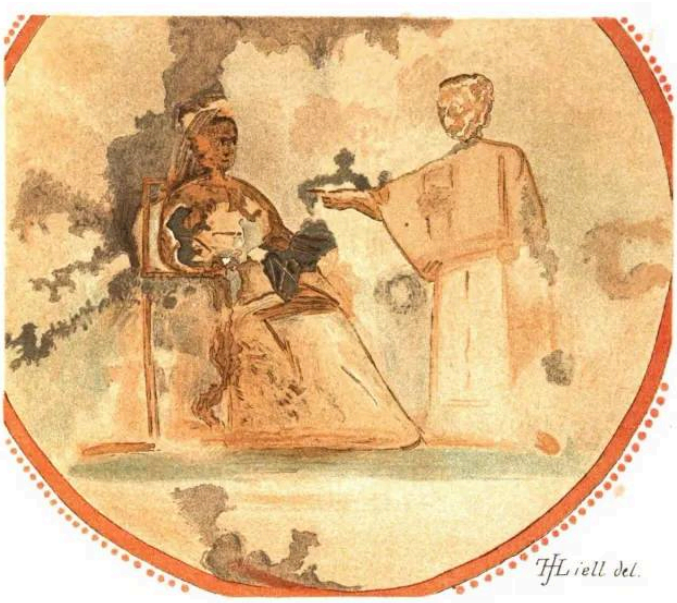
Today: Pray a decade of the Rosary.

Day 6: No to violence in the name of faith

When Priscillian was executed on the accusation of other bishops, Siricius disowned those who had handed him over to the emperor. Faith is never defended by the sword.

Prayer: Lord, keep your Church from every temptation to use force or fear. Teach us to convince by truth and love. Amen.

Today: Pray for those who suffer violence because of their religion.



The Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome.

Day 7: Opening the door

Siricius allowed the followers of Priscillian who wished it to return to the Church. Firmness on doctrine went hand in hand with mercy toward persons.

Prayer: Lord, welcome back all who have left your Church, and make our communities welcoming to them. Amen.

Today: Reach out to someone who has drifted away from the faith.

Day 8: Accepting criticism

Saint Jerome judged Siricius harshly. Even the saints did not please everyone. Criticism can wound, but it can also help us grow, and it never prevents God's grace from working.

Prayer: Lord, give me humility when I am criticized, and fairness when I judge others. Amen.

Today: Listen calmly to a criticism and ask yourself what is true in it.

Day 9: Building on the Apostle

Siricius consecrated the great basilica over the tomb of Saint Paul. He built on the witness of the Apostle who gave his life for the Gospel. After fifteen years of service, he was laid to rest among the martyrs in the Catacomb of Priscilla.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Siricius and Saint Paul, make me a faithful servant of your Gospel. Amen.

Today: Read a chapter of one of Saint Paul's letters.

Closing prayer

Saint Siricius, faithful shepherd of the Church of Rome, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have brought before God. Pray for the pope and the bishops, for the unity of the Church and for all who must decide for others. Obtain for us firmness in the faith, mercy toward those who return and humility in every service. May we, like you, answer with care those who turn to us, and build on the faith of the apostles a Church where everyone can find a home. Amen.

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

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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