

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Soter

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 22

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IN BRIEF

Saint Soter

Bishop of Rome in the second century, praised for his charity toward Christians in need.

Feast day	April 22
Died	c. 175, Rome, Italy
Era	2nd century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Soter for Generosity and Charity

Novena to Saint Soter

Credits and sources

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LIFE

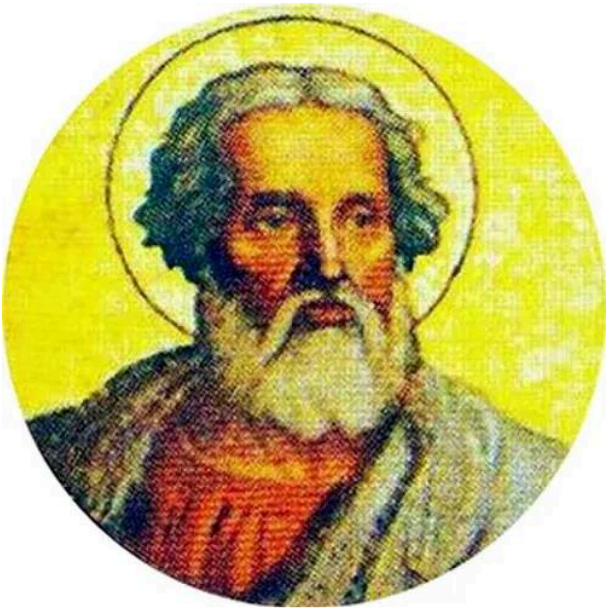
Saint Soter

Saint Soter was, according to Catholic tradition, the twelfth Bishop of Rome, in the 160s and 170s, during the reign of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Little is known about him, but one witness from his own time has come down to us: the Bishop of Corinth, who praised the generosity of the Church of Rome and its pastor toward Christians in need. The Roman Martyrology remembers him on April 22.

Who was Saint Soter?

His Greek name means "savior." It was probably his baptismal name, since the custom of popes taking a new name only appeared much later. The *Liber Pontificalis*, the ancient book of the lives of the popes, says he came from Fondi, in Lazio, south of Rome, where his cult is still alive; others have suggested he was of Greek origin. He succeeded Saint Anicetus around 162 or 168 and died around 170 or 177. The *Annuario Pontificio*, the Vatican's own yearbook, admits that these dates are uncertain.

The Church of Rome at that time was still a discreet community, largely Greek-speaking, and shaken by lively debates. Gnostic teachers and the followers of Marcion spread their own doctrines in the city, and the Montanist movement, which came from Phrygia in Asia Minor, preached a very rigorist form of Christianity. It was in this setting that Soter guided the Roman community, in the generation after the apostles and in the age of the apologists, when Saint Justin taught and died as a martyr in Rome.



Saint Soter, medallion in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

Key dates

- **c. 162-168**: Succeeds Anicetus as Bishop of Rome.
- **160s-170s**: Collection for the Church of Corinth and exchange of letters with Bishop Dionysius of Corinth.
- **c. 170-177**: Dies in Rome; Eleutherius succeeds him.
- **9th century**: Under Pope Sergius II, his remains are moved to the Basilica of San Martino ai Monti in Rome.
- **1969**: The revision of the Roman calendar notes that there is no ground for calling him a martyr.

The "pope of charity"

The best attested fact of his pontificate is a collection organized for the Church of Corinth and for Christians in hardship. Soter sent it with a letter, now lost. The reply of Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, has partly survived, thanks to the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who copied it into his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book IV, chapter 23). Dionysius wrote to the Romans:

> *"For from the beginning it has been your practice to do good to all the brethren in various ways, and to send contributions to many churches in every city. Thus relieving the want of the needy, and making provision for the brethren in the mines by the gifts which you have sent from the beginning, you Romans keep up the hereditary customs of the Romans, which your blessed bishop Soter has not only maintained, but also added to, furnishing an abundance of supplies to the saints, and encouraging the brethren from abroad with blessed words, as a loving father his children."*

The "brethren in the mines" were Christians condemned to forced labor in the imperial mines, one of the harshest punishments of the time. Dionysius also tells us that Soter's letter was read aloud on Sunday in the assembly at Corinth, just as the earlier letter of Saint Clement of Rome had been. It is a precious glimpse of the bonds between the early Churches, and of the place already given to the Church of Rome.

The Roman Martyrology has kept this testimony: it presents Soter as the pope praised by Dionysius of Corinth for his outstanding charity toward exiled Christians and those condemned to the mines. This is why he is sometimes called the "pope of charity."

What tradition attributes to him

Later sources credit him with other decisions, with uneven reliability. He is said to have taught that marriage should be blessed by a priest, to have recalled certain liturgical rules and to have taken a firm position on the reconciliation of repentant sinners. A writing against Montanism has also been attributed to him, probably wrongly. According to some historians, it was in his time that Rome began to celebrate Easter on a Sunday once a year, unlike the Churches of Asia Minor, which kept it on the 14th of Nisan, the date of the Jewish Passover. All these attributions should be read with caution.

Death and burial

For a long time Soter was counted among the martyrs, but no ancient source establishes this, and the 1969 revision of the Roman calendar stated that there was no reason to give him that title. He may have been buried in the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus or, according to another tradition, near the tomb of Saint Peter. In the ninth century his remains were moved to the Basilica of San Martino ai Monti, then to San Sisto Vecchio. The town of Fondi, which claims him as one of its sons, still honors him.

Why is Saint Soter remembered for charity?

Saint Soter has no traditional patronage. What history has kept of him is a gesture: money sent to distant brothers and sisters, prisoners supported, travelers welcomed. It is little, and it is a great deal. His example reminds us that communion between Churches also means material solidarity, and that from the second century charity was one of the marks of the Church of Rome. He can be invoked by all who give to the poor, by those who organize collections for Christians in need, and by those who visit prisoners.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Soter in art

Very few images of Saint Soter exist. He usually appears in series of papal portraits, such as the mosaic medallions of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls. He is shown in papal vestments, sometimes wearing the tiara, which is an anachronism for a second-century bishop. In Fondi, which honors him as its own, he is represented in papal vestments.

Where to pray to Saint Soter

- **Rome**: the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus on the Appian Way, and the Basilica of San Sisto Vecchio.
- **Fondi** (Lazio, Italy): the town that tradition names as his birthplace.

You can also pray with him using the prayer to Saint Soter or the novena to Saint Soter.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Soter for Generosity and Charity

No prayer written by Saint Soter has come down to us, and no traditional prayer to him is in common use. What we know of him is his charity: the collection he sent to the Church of Corinth, his care for Christians condemned to the mines, his fatherly welcome to travelers. The prayer below draws on that witness.

Prayer to Saint Soter for generosity and charity

Saint Soter, shepherd of the Church of Rome in difficult times, you were praised by your brothers for your generosity toward the poor, the exiled and those condemned to the mines.

Teach me to give without counting and without looking for praise. Open my eyes to the needs of Christians far away and of the poor who live close to me.

Pray for prisoners and for those who work in hard and dangerous conditions. Pray for migrants and travelers who knock at our doors, that they may be welcomed like children by a loving father.

Pray for the Church, that she may remain one family where those who have more share with those who have less.

I entrust to you today: (name your intention in silence).

Through Christ our Lord, who made himself poor to make us rich. 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 22**, which he shares with Saint Caius in the Roman Martyrology.
- Before giving to a parish collection, a second collection or a charity, especially one that supports Christians in other countries.
- When you volunteer with prisoners, migrants or the homeless.
- When you feel tempted to close your heart or your wallet to someone in need.

A word from the early Church

The letter of Dionysius of Corinth, preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea, can itself become a meditation. Dionysius thanks the Romans because their bishop Soter encouraged "the brethren from abroad with blessed words, as a loving father his children." Read these words slowly, then ask yourself: who, today, is the brother or sister from abroad I can encourage?

A short invocation

> *Saint Soter, father of the poor and friend of prisoners, pray for us.*

To know him better, read the life of Saint Soter, or pray the novena to Saint Soter from April 13 to April 21.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Soter

This novena to Saint Soter is an original composition by Saintspedia. Since little is known of his life, it is built around the one witness history has kept: his charity toward Christians in need, praised by Bishop Dionysius of Corinth. To end on the eve of his feast, April 22, begin it on April 13. It is well suited to anyone who wants to grow in generosity, or who is praying for prisoners, exiles and the poor.

How to pray this novena

Each day, take a few quiet minutes. Make the Sign of the Cross, read the meditation of the day, then say its prayer. Add an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small concrete act proposed for the day: Saint Soter's holiness was shown in deeds, and this novena invites you to do the same.

Day 1: A name that means "savior"

Soter's Greek name means "savior." It points beyond him to the only Savior, Jesus Christ. A pastor's whole task is to lead others to him.

Prayer: Saint Soter, your name proclaimed the Savior. Help me to bear the name of Christian with honor, and to let others meet Jesus through my words and actions. Amen.

Today: Remember the day of your baptism and thank God for it.

Day 2: A shepherd in a divided city

In Soter's time, Rome was full of competing teachers and doctrines. He had to guide a small community and keep it faithful to the faith received from the apostles.

Prayer: Saint Soter, pray for the Pope and the bishops, that they may guard the faith with wisdom and gentleness. Keep me faithful to the teaching of the Church when voices around me are confused. Amen.

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

Day 3: A collection for distant brothers

Soter organized a collection for the Church of Corinth, far away across the sea. The Christians of Rome gave for brothers and sisters they would never meet.

Prayer: Saint Soter, widen my heart beyond my own circle. Teach me to care for Christians in other countries, especially those who are poor or persecuted. Amen.

Today: Give something, however small, to support the Church in a poor country.

Day 4: The brethren in the mines

Christians condemned to the imperial mines lived in terrible conditions. The Church of Rome did not forget them and sent them help.

Prayer: Saint Soter, pray for all prisoners, for those condemned to hard labor and for those who work in dangerous and degrading conditions. May they never feel forgotten by God or by us. Amen.

Today: Pray for a prisoner, or learn about a prison ministry in your diocese.

Day 5: Welcoming the stranger

Dionysius says that Soter welcomed Christians from abroad "as a loving father his children." Hospitality was one of the signs of the early Church.

Prayer: Saint Soter, teach me to welcome migrants, newcomers and strangers with kindness. Make our parishes homes where no one feels a foreigner. Amen.

Today: Greet and talk with someone new at church, at work or in your neighborhood.

Day 6: Words that encourage

Soter's help did not stop at money: he wrote a letter, and it was read on Sunday in Corinth. A word of encouragement can carry someone through a hard time.

Prayer: Saint Soter, help me to speak words that build up and not words that wound. Show me who needs to hear a word of hope from me today. Amen.

Today: Write a message or a card to someone who is going through a difficult time.

Day 7: Communion between the Churches

Rome and Corinth were bound by letters, gifts and prayer. The Church is a communion of local Churches that care for one another.

Prayer: Saint Soter, pray for the unity of the Church. Heal our divisions and help Christians of every land and every tradition to love one another as one family. Amen.

Today: Pray for Christian unity, and for a Christian community different from your own.

Day 8: Giving without seeking praise

We know of Soter's charity only through the thanks of others. He did not write about his own good works. True generosity is humble.

Prayer: Saint Soter, free me from the desire to be seen and praised. Let my left hand not know what my right hand is doing, and let my Father who sees in secret be enough for me. Amen.

Today: Do a good deed in secret, without telling anyone.

Day 9: A small life, a great witness

History has kept very little of Saint Soter, but what it has kept is charity. In the end, that is what lasts: "faith, hope and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Prayer: Saint Soter, you are remembered for your love. Help me to measure my life not by success or fame but by the love I give. Present to the Lord all the intentions of this novena. Amen.

Today: Look back on these nine days and choose one act of charity you will continue.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Soter, Bishop of Rome and father of the poor, thank you for accompanying me during this novena. Obtain for me a generous heart, attentive to prisoners, exiles and all who suffer. Pray for the Church, that she may always be recognized by her charity. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To continue, pray the prayer to Saint Soter or read his life.

CREDITS

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