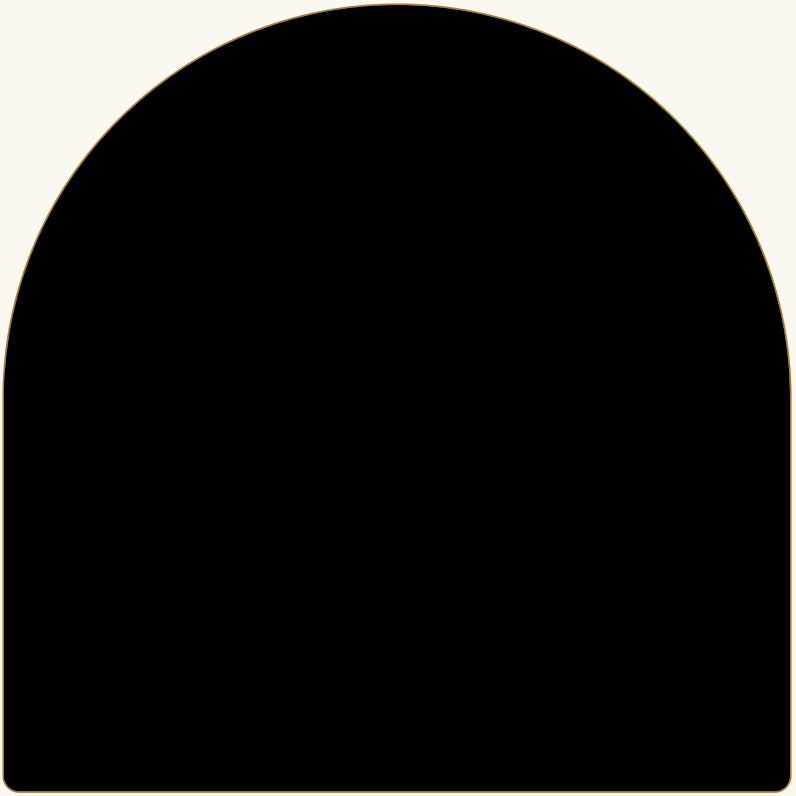


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Stephen IX

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 29

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IN BRIEF

Saint Stephen IX

Monk from Lorraine and abbot of Monte Cassino, reforming pope from 1057 to 1058.

Feast day	March 29
Born	c. 1020, Lorraine, probably Dun-sur-Meuse
Died	March 1058, Florence, Italy
Era	11th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Stephen IX for the Church and Unity

Novena to Saint Stephen IX

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Stephen IX

Saint Stephen IX, born Frederick of Lorraine, was pope for only eight months, from August 1057 to March 1058. A monk, abbot of Monte Cassino and a close collaborator of Pope Leo IX, he belonged to the generation of great 11th-century reformers who wanted a Church that was freer and more faithful to the Gospel. He died in Florence and is honored as a saint on March 29, although his cult has always remained discreet.

Who was Saint Stephen IX?

Frederick was born around 1020, probably at Dun-sur-Meuse, into a family of the highest nobility: he was the brother of Godfrey, Duke of Lower Lorraine. Destined for the Church, he became a canon and then archdeacon of Liège, one of the great intellectual centers of the time. There he discovered the spirit of reform that was then sweeping through Lorraine.

When Bruno, Bishop of Toul, became pope under the name of Leo IX in 1049, he called several trusted men from Lorraine to Rome. Frederick became his chancellor. He shared the pope's struggles, up to the unhappy campaign of 1053 against the Normans of southern Italy.

A note on his name: in some lists he is called Stephen X. The difference comes from an earlier Stephen, elected in 752, who died before being consecrated and is not always counted among the popes. Most references today call Frederick of Lorraine Stephen IX.



The Abbey of Monte Cassino, where Frederick of Lorraine was abbot.

Key dates in the life of Saint Stephen IX

- **Around 1020**: Born in Lorraine, probably at Dun-sur-Meuse.
- **Around 1050**: Chancellor of Pope Leo IX.
- **1054**: Papal legate to Constantinople with Humbert of Moyenmoutier.
- **1057**: Abbot of Monte Cassino.
- **August 1057**: Elected pope after the death of Victor II, he takes the name Stephen.
- **March 1058**: Dies in Florence, after eight months as pope.

The legate of 1054

Early in 1054, Leo IX sent three legates to Constantinople, Frederick among them, to try to settle a conflict with Patriarch Michael Cerularius, who had closed the Latin churches of the city. The patriarch refused to receive them. In

July 1054, the legates laid on the altar of Hagia Sophia a sentence of excommunication against him, even though the pope who had sent them was already dead. The patriarch replied with an anathema against the legates.

A symbolic date

This episode has remained in textbooks as the symbolic date of the separation between the Christian East and West, often called the Great Schism. Historians today point out that its immediate impact was more limited, and that relations between Rome and Constantinople continued for a long time afterward. In 1965, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras together lifted these mutual excommunications, a gesture of reconciliation that still marks Catholic and Orthodox relations.

Abbot of Monte Cassino, then pope

Back in Italy, Frederick became a monk at Monte Cassino, the abbey founded by Saint Benedict, and was elected its abbot in 1057. A few weeks later, when Pope Victor II died, the clergy and people of Rome elected him as successor. They did so without waiting for the approval of the German imperial court, then governed by Empress Agnes in the name of the young Henry IV. This choice was a turning point: the papacy was beginning to free itself from the control of the emperors.

A short but decisive pontificate

His pontificate was very brief, but it shaped the future. He named Peter Damian, a great ascetic and ardent reformer, cardinal bishop of Ostia. He surrounded himself with men who would mark the rest of the century, such as the monk Hildebrand, the future Gregory VII, who gave his name to the Gregorian Reform.

That reform aimed at a few simple goals: priests who live chastely, Church offices that are not bought and sold, and bishops and popes chosen by the Church rather than imposed by princes. Stephen IX did not have time to carry it out, but he put the right people in place.

A mysterious death in Florence

While staying in Tuscany, Stephen IX died in Florence at the end of March 1058. The ancient chronicles speak of illness; several more recent historians consider the possibility of poisoning, against the background of rivalries among the Roman aristocracy.

After the episode of the antipope Benedict X, the reformers had Nicholas II elected. In 1059, Nicholas reserved the election of the pope to the cardinals, a development Stephen IX had hoped for. This rule, refined over the centuries, is still the basis of the conclave today.

Why is Stephen IX honored as a saint?

Little is known of the inner life of Stephen IX, and the sources report neither miracles nor spiritual writings by him. His cult was never the subject of a formal canonization: it was handed down mainly in calendars linked to the Benedictine tradition. He has no traditional patronage.

What history remembers is a monk who became pope and placed his brief authority at the service of the freedom of the Church and the reform of the clergy. His life is a reminder that a person can bear fruit far beyond the length of his days. He can be invoked for the unity of Christians, for the pope and for those who serve the Church in positions of responsibility.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Stephen IX and the novena to Saint Stephen IX.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Stephen IX in art

Images of Stephen IX are rare and imaginary. He appears as a pope wearing the tiara in the woodcuts of the Nuremberg Chronicle (1493), and in a mosaic medallion in the series of papal portraits of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, made in the 19th century. A Benedictine habit or a reference to Monte Cassino can recall his monastic life.

Where to pray to Saint Stephen IX

- **Monte Cassino** (Italy): the abbey of Saint Benedict, where he lived as a monk and served as abbot.
- **Florence** (Italy): the city where he died in 1058.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, where his portrait appears among those of the popes.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Stephen IX for the Church and Unity

No prayer written by Saint Stephen IX has come down to us, and the sources say little about his inner life. But his story speaks for itself: a monk of Monte Cassino called to lead the Church, a witness of the painful division between East and West, a reformer who served for only eight months. Here is an original prayer inspired by his life, for the Church, for its unity and for those who govern it.



Monte Cassino, the abbey of Saint Benedict, where Stephen IX was abbot.

Prayer to Saint Stephen IX for the Church

Saint Stephen, monk and pope, you left the peace of the cloister to serve the Church of Christ: pray for our Holy Father the pope, for the bishops and for all who carry the weight of responsibility in the Church. May they seek the Gospel before their own interests.

You saw with your own eyes the wound that divided the Christians of East and West: obtain for us the grace of unity. Heal what history has broken, and give us patience, humility and love in dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters.

You wanted a Church that was free, pure and faithful: help me to purify my own heart, to reject what is false in my life, and to serve God without compromise.

Your time as pope was short, yet it bore fruit long after you: teach me not to measure my life by its length, but to use each day well for God. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

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

The feast of Saint Stephen IX is March 29, the date of his death in Florence in 1058. This prayer is also suitable:

- during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, from January 18 to 25;
- during a conclave or at the beginning of a new pontificate;
- for someone who has just received a new responsibility in the Church;
- when a task seems too short or too small to bear fruit.

A prayer for Christian unity

Christ himself prayed for the unity of his disciples on the night before he died (John 17:21). We can make his words our own:

> *Lord Jesus, who prayed that all may be one, as you and the Father are one, look upon your divided Church. Give us the grace to love one another and to walk together toward the unity you desire. Saint Stephen, pray for us. Amen.*

Continue with the novena to Saint Stephen IX, or read the life of Saint Stephen IX.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Stephen IX

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Stephen IX, monk of Monte Cassino and reforming pope. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, March 29, begin on March 21. It is especially suited to praying for the Church, for the pope and for the unity of Christians, and it can be prayed at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into daily life.

You can pray it alone, with your family or in a parish group. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

Day 1: A call to serve

Frederick was born into one of the great noble families of Lorraine. He could have pursued power and wealth. Instead he gave himself to the Church, first as a canon and archdeacon of Liège. Every vocation begins with a choice: to place one's gifts at God's service.

Prayer: Lord, show me how to put my gifts at the service of your Church.

Today: Offer an hour of your time to your parish or to someone in need.

Day 2: Learning from a master

As chancellor, Frederick worked beside Pope Leo IX and shared his struggles. He learned from him what it means to love and reform the Church. We all need guides and companions on the road to holiness.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who have guided me in the faith. Give me wise companions.

Today: Pray for a priest or teacher who has helped you grow.

Day 3: The wound of division

In 1054, Frederick was sent as a legate to Constantinople. He witnessed the mutual condemnations that became the symbol of the separation between East and West. Division among Christians is a wound in the Body of Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you prayed that all may be one. Heal the divisions among your disciples.

Today: Learn something about the Eastern Churches, or pray for an Orthodox Christian you know.

Day 4: Reconciliation is possible

More than nine centuries later, in 1965, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras lifted the excommunications of 1054. What seemed final was not. God can heal even the oldest wounds, in the Church as in our families.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to take the first step toward reconciliation.

Today: Reach out to someone from whom you have grown distant.

Day 5: The school of the cloister

Back in Italy, Frederick became a monk at Monte Cassino, the abbey of Saint Benedict, and then its abbot. In silence, prayer and work, he prepared, without knowing it, for the greatest task of his life.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to find you in silence, and prepare me for what you will ask of me.

Today: Spend fifteen minutes in silent prayer.

Day 6: Accepting the unexpected

A few weeks after becoming abbot, Frederick was elected pope. He had not sought it. Sometimes God asks us to leave a peaceful place to take on a burden we did not choose.

Prayer: Lord, when you ask more of me than I expected, give me the strength to say yes.

Today: Accept a task you have been avoiding.

Day 7: A free Church

Stephen IX was elected without waiting for the approval of the imperial court. He wanted a Church free to choose its pastors and faithful to the Gospel, not subject to the powerful. Freedom of conscience begins in our own hearts.

Prayer: Lord, free me from all that makes me a slave: fear, ambition, the opinion of others.

Today: Make one decision based only on what is right before God.

Day 8: Surrounding oneself with saints

Stephen IX called Peter Damian and Hildebrand, the future Gregory VII, to his side. He knew that the reform of the Church would be the work of many. No one becomes holy alone, and no one renews the Church alone.

Prayer: Lord, raise up holy men and women in your Church today, and make me one of them.

Today: Read a few pages of the life of a saint.

Day 9: A short life that bears fruit

Stephen IX was pope for only eight months and died in Florence in March 1058. Yet the reform he supported continued after him, and in 1059 the election of the pope was entrusted to the cardinals. God does not measure our lives by their length, but by the love we put into them.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live each day as a gift, and to leave the fruit of my work in your hands.

Today: Pray for the pope and for all who will one day elect his successor.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Stephen IX, monk of Monte Cassino and servant of the Church, you loved the Bride of Christ and wanted her free, pure and united. Watch over our Holy Father the pope and over all pastors. Obtain for Christians the grace of unity, and for me the grace I ask in this novena (name it in silence), if it is God's will. Help me to serve faithfully, whether my time is long or short, until the day I see the Lord face to face. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Stephen IX or read the life of Saint Stephen IX.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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