BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Telemachus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 1

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IN BRIEF

Saint Telemachus

Monk from the East, martyred in Rome in 404 for trying to stop a gladiatorial fight.

Feast day	January 1
Born	the East
Died	January 1, 404, Rome
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	5th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Telemachus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Telemachus

Saint Telemachus, also called Almachius, was a monk from the East who died in Rome at the beginning of the 5th century, in 404 according to the date most often given. He was killed for trying to separate gladiators who were fighting in the arena. His act has remained a symbol of the Christian refusal of bloody games. The Church celebrates him on January 1.

Who was Saint Telemachus?

Almost nothing is known of Telemachus before the day of his death. The sources present him as an anchorite, a monk living in seclusion in the East, in prayer and penance. His name has come down in two forms: Telemachus, in the Greek authors, and Almachius, in the Latin tradition. The oldest account of his martyrdom is found in the Church historian Theodoret of Cyrrhus, in the 5th century. Later collections of saints' lives, such as the French Petits Bollandistes, repeated it, adding a few details. The versions do not agree on everything: some place the scene in the Colosseum, others simply in an amphitheater in Rome; some say he was killed by the gladiators, others by the spectators. What is certain is that he is honored as a martyr by both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

Key dates in the life of Telemachus

- **4th century**: He lives as a hermit in the East, in prayer and asceticism.
- **End of 403**: According to tradition, he leaves his solitude and sets out for Rome, wishing to put an end to gladiatorial combat.
- **January 1, 404**: Having reached Rome, he enters the arena during a fight and tries to separate the gladiators.

- **The same day**: He is killed, on the order of the prefect Alypius according to one version, stoned by the crowd according to another.
- **Shortly after**: According to Theodoret, Emperor Honorius, moved by this act, bans gladiatorial combat.
- **5th century**: Theodoret of Cyrrhus records his martyrdom in his Ecclesiastical History.
- **Today**: He is listed in the Roman Martyrology on January 1.

A hermit who leaves his solitude

The story begins with a departure. Telemachus lived far from the world, but he learned that, despite the conversion of the Empire to Christianity, gladiatorial combat was still going on in Rome. Men were killing one another to entertain the crowd. The monk decided to make the long journey to the capital to oppose it. We do not know exactly where he came from, nor how he travelled: the sources simply say that he came from the East.

Martyrdom in the arena

Telemachus arrived in Rome on January 1, 404, a day of games. He entered the amphitheater, went down into the arena and stood between the fighters to separate them. The Petits Bollandistes give him these words: "Today is the octave of the Lord's birth; put an end to your superstitions and sacrifice no more to idols." The reaction was violent. According to one version, the gladiators struck him down on the order of the city prefect, Alypius; according to another, it was the spectators, furious at being deprived of their show, who stoned him.

Theodoret adds that his death had an unexpected effect: Emperor Honorius, on learning what had happened, is said to have counted him among the martyrs and banned gladiatorial combat. Historians debate how exact this link

is, since the disappearance of these games was probably more gradual. But the memory of Telemachus has remained tied to their end.

His cult and his memory

The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on January 1, under the name of Almachius. He is also venerated in the Eastern Churches. No known shrine keeps his relics. His story has nonetheless inspired many preachers and writers, who saw in it the example of a lone man, without weapon or power, who gave his life to stop violence. He is sometimes shown as a monk, standing between two gladiators.

What can we learn from Saint Telemachus?

Telemachus wrote no book and founded no monastery. His single act is enough to make him known: he refused to let human life become a spectacle. He reminds us that faith in Christ, born at Christmas, obliges us to defend the dignity of every person, even at the cost of one's own life. You can pray to him for peace, for victims of violence and for those who have the courage to step in.

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

Where to pray to Saint Telemachus

- **Rome**: the city of his martyrdom; the Colosseum, which some traditions link to his death, is a place of remembrance of the martyrs.
- **In any church**, on January 1, the day the Church also prays for peace in the world.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Telemachus for Peace and Against Violence

Saint Telemachus, a monk from the East, died in Rome on January 1, 404, for trying to stop a gladiatorial fight. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him peace, victims of violence and those who dare to step in.

Prayer to Saint Telemachus

Saint Telemachus,
you left the silence of your solitude
to stand in the middle of the arena:
give me the courage not to look away
when human life is despised.

You stood unarmed between those who were fighting,
and gave your life so that the shedding of blood might cease.
Obtain peace for our world,
the conversion of violent hearts
and comfort for those who suffer.

Teach us to see in every life
not a spectacle, but a brother or sister to protect,
in the light of Christ born for us.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Telemachus

- On January 1, his feast day and the World Day of Prayer for Peace.

- For victims of war, violence and public humiliation.
- When you hesitate to defend someone who is attacked or mocked.
- For those who work for peace and reconciliation.

An invocation for peace

> *Lord, Prince of Peace, disarm hearts and hands.*
> *Saint Telemachus, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Telemachus from December 24 to January 1, and read the life of Saint Telemachus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Telemachus

This novena is inspired by the martyrdom of Saint Telemachus, a monk from the East killed in Rome on January 1, 404, for trying to stop a gladiatorial fight. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, January 1, begin on December 24: it then accompanies the octave of Christmas. You can also pray it at any other time.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Saint Telemachus, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come from ancient accounts, which differ on some details.

Day 1: The silence of the desert

Telemachus lived as a hermit, far from the world. In silence he learned to listen to God and to look at people with God's eyes.

Prayer: Lord, give me a time of silence each day to listen to you.

Act of the day: Take ten minutes of silence, without screens, to pray.

Day 2: Hearing the cry of the world

In his solitude, Telemachus learned that men were dying in Rome to amuse the crowd. He could not remain indifferent.

Prayer: Lord, open my ears to the cry of those who suffer.

Act of the day: Pray for a country at war, naming it.

Day 3: Setting out

The monk left his hermitage and undertook a long journey. Prayer had led him to act.

Prayer: Lord, may my prayer become action, and help me to rise when you call me.

Act of the day: Take a concrete step you have long been putting off.

Day 4: Christmas, life given

Telemachus reached Rome during the octave of Christmas. God became a little child: since then, every human life bears his dignity.

Prayer: Child Jesus, teach me to recognize your face in every person.

Act of the day: Pray before a Nativity scene for children who are in danger.

Day 5: Entering the arena

Telemachus went down into the arena. He did not remain a spectator: he went where violence was raging.

Prayer: Lord, free me from indifference and give me the courage to act.

Act of the day: Refuse today to watch or share an image that humiliates someone.

Day 6: Standing between the fighters

Unarmed, the monk placed himself between the gladiators to separate them. He made his own body a shield for peace.

Prayer: Lord, make me a peacemaker in my family, my work, my neighborhood.

Act of the day: Take a step toward reconciliation with someone.

Day 7: A word of truth

According to tradition, Telemachus called on the crowd to give up idols. He dared to say what no one wanted to hear.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me words that are right and gentle to defend the truth.

Act of the day: Stand up for an absent person who is being spoken ill of.

Day 8: Giving his life

Telemachus was killed in the arena. He died like Christ, rejected by those he wanted to save.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to love to the end, even when love is costly.

Act of the day: Pray for persecuted Christians and for their persecutors.

Day 9: The end of the games

According to Theodoret, Emperor Honorius then banned gladiatorial combat. The sacrifice of one lone man bore fruit.

Prayer: Lord, make our efforts for peace bear fruit. Through the intercession of Saint Telemachus, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass on January 1 and pray for peace in the world.

Closing prayer

Saint Telemachus,
monk of the desert and martyr of Rome,
you stood unarmed in the midst of violence.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Obtain peace for our world
and courage for those who protect the weakest.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Telemachus at any time, and read the life of Saint Telemachus.

Credits and sources

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