

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Theodore Stratelates

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: February 7

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IN BRIEF

Saint Theodore Stratelates

Roman general martyred at Heraclea Pontica according to tradition, great soldier saint of the Christian East.

Feast day	February 7, February 8 (Byzantine rite), June 8 (Byzantine rite)
Born	c. 281, Euchaita, Asia Minor
Died	c. 319, Heraclea Pontica, Asia Minor
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial cult)
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	soldiers

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Theodore Stratelates

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Theodore Stratelates

Saint Theodore Stratelates, whose surname means "the general," is a soldier saint deeply venerated in the Christian East, where he is honored as a "great martyr." According to his Passion, written in the ninth century, he was an army commander from Euchaita, in Asia Minor, put to death at Heraclea Pontica under Emperor Licinius around 319. Many historians think he is a legendary double of Saint Theodore the Recruit (Theodore Tyro). The Roman Martyrology lists him on February 7, and the Byzantine Churches celebrate him on February 8 and June 8.

Who was Saint Theodore Stratelates?

Early Christianity loved its soldier saints: Maurice, Demetrius, George, Procopius, Sergius and Bacchus. Among them, Theodore holds a special place.

A first Theodore, called the Recruit (*Tyro*, the conscript), is well attested from the fourth century. Saint Gregory of Nyssa preached a sermon in his praise, and his shrine at Euchaita, in the north of Asia Minor, drew pilgrims. The second Theodore, the Stratelates, appears in the texts only in the ninth century.

Since the Bollandist scholar Hippolyte Delehaye, many specialists have held that both were originally one and the same martyr, whose legend split in two: the simple recruit would have become, in another tradition, a brilliant general. Other scholars show that the two figures were already distinguished in the seventh or eighth century. The question remains open. What is certain is the devotion that surrounds Theodore Stratelates in the Churches of the East, Eastern Catholic and Orthodox alike.

Key dates according to tradition

- **Around 281**: Birth at Euchaita, according to his Passion.
- **Early fourth century**: He distinguishes himself as a soldier, and the legend credits him with slaying a dragon.
- **Under Licinius**: Military commander at Heraclea Pontica.
- **Around 319**: Martyrdom at Heraclea; he is buried at Euchaita, on his family estate.
- **Ninth century**: Writing of the Passion that tells his life, attributed to his servant Abgar.

The story of his Passion

The dragon of Euchaita

According to the Passion, Theodore became famous by delivering the region of Euchaita from a dragon that terrorized it. Like the better-known story of Saint George, this episode expresses in an image the victory of faith over evil.

The general who broke the idols

Appointed to command the troops of Heraclea Pontica, on the Black Sea, he served under Emperor Licinius, who was persecuting Christians. Theodore arranged for the gold and silver statues of the city's gods to be gathered at his house. He smashed them, then gave the pieces to the poor.

Cross and sword

Arrested, he was tortured and then crucified. The account, attributed to his servant Abgar, says that in the morning the soldiers found him still alive. Refusing to flee martyrdom, Theodore gave himself up again, asked Abgar to bury him on the family estate at Euchaita, and offered his neck to the executioner, who beheaded him. The Passion places his death on a Saturday in the first week of Lent.

This detail is telling. In the Byzantine calendar, the first Saturday of Lent is already dedicated to Theodore the Recruit. The overlap is one of the reasons scholars see the two Theodores as closely intertwined, if not as a single martyr remembered in two ways.

This account, written several centuries after the events it describes, follows the pattern of the epic Passions of the Byzantine period. It should be read as a meditation in images on the courage of the martyr rather than as a chronicle.

Why is Saint Theodore Stratelates the patron saint of soldiers?

As a general who, according to tradition, remained faithful to Christ while holding high military command, Theodore naturally became a protector of soldiers. Byzantine armies and the peoples of Eastern Europe invoked the soldier saints in time of war, and Theodore was among the most popular. Today, Christians pray to him for members of the armed forces and their families, and for all who carry authority and responsibility for others.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Theodore Stratelates in art

Theodore Stratelates is one of the most frequently depicted saints in Byzantine, Georgian and Slavic art. Look for these signs:

- **Armor, spear and shield**: he is shown as a warrior in Roman military dress.
- **On horseback, striking a serpent**: a reminder of the dragon of Euchaita.
- **Beside another Theodore**: he is sometimes painted next to Theodore the Recruit, the two soldier saints side by side.
- **The cross**: some icons show him holding a cross, the sign of his martyrdom.

A fresco from 1096 in the church of Iprari, in Georgia, is one of his oldest dated images, and the painter Manuel Panselinos depicted him on Mount Athos.

What can we learn from Saint Theodore Stratelates?

Behind the legend, the message is clear: a man entrusted with great power refuses to serve idols and puts what he has at the service of the poor. Breaking the precious statues to give their value to the poor says that God, and the little ones, come before riches.

We can pray to him for soldiers and their families, for those who exercise authority, and for unity between the Christians of East and West, who venerate him together.

Where to pray to Saint Theodore Stratelates

- **Byzantine-rite churches**: Greek Catholic and Orthodox communities, which celebrate him on February 8 and June 8.
- **Georgia**: the churches of Svaneti, where he was painted as early as the eleventh century.
- **Mount Athos**: the monasteries that keep frescoes and icons of him.

In English-speaking countries, Ukrainian, Ruthenian and Melkite Catholic parishes, as well as Orthodox churches, keep his feast in their calendars.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Theodore Stratelates for Soldiers

Saint Theodore Stratelates, "the general," is honored in the Christian East as a great martyr and a protector of soldiers. According to his Passion, he used his command to serve Christ and gave the gold of the idols to the poor. This prayer entrusts to him those who serve in the armed forces, their families, and all who hold authority. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Theodore Stratelates for Soldiers

Saint Theodore, great martyr and faithful soldier of Christ,
you held command among men,
yet you knew that your first Lord was the King of heaven.

Watch over all who serve in the armed forces today.
Keep them from hatred and from needless violence,
give them courage in danger and wisdom in decision,
and bring them home safely to those who love them.

Comfort the families who wait and worry,
the wounded in body and in mind,
and receive into God's mercy those who have fallen.

Teach those who exercise authority to use it as you did,
for the good of others and especially of the poor.
Help me, too, to break the idols in my own heart,
money, pride or fear,
and to give generously what I have received.

With you and all the holy martyrs,
may we glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever. Amen.

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast days: February 7 in the Roman Martyrology, February 8 and June 8 in the Byzantine calendar.
- When a family member or friend is deployed or serving in the military.
- On days of remembrance for those who died in war, such as Memorial Day or Remembrance Day.
- Before taking on a position of leadership or responsibility.

A short invocation

In the Eastern tradition, the saints are often invoked with short, repeated prayers. You can use this one during the day:

> *Holy great martyr Theodore, pray to God for us.*

For a longer devotion over nine days, see the Novena to Saint Theodore Stratelates.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Theodore Stratelates

This novena to Saint Theodore Stratelates is an original composition by Saintspedia. It draws on the story of his Passion as handed down by the Byzantine tradition, read as a meditation on courage, generosity and faithfulness. To end on his feast in the Roman Martyrology, February 7, begin on January 30. If you follow the Byzantine calendar, begin on January 31 to end on February 8, or on May 31 to end on June 8.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross. Read the meditation slowly, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the invocation: "Holy great martyr Theodore, pray to God for us." The small act suggested for each day helps turn prayer into life. This novena is especially suited for soldiers, veterans and their families.

Day 1: A soldier of Christ

The early Church honored many soldier saints. Theodore reminds us that every Christian is called to a spiritual combat: against sin, discouragement and indifference. Saint Paul speaks of putting on "the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11).

Prayer: Saint Theodore, help me to put on the armor of God: truth, justice, faith and the word of God. Make me a faithful soldier of Christ in the battles of my daily life. Amen.

Today: Read Ephesians 6:10-18 slowly.

Day 2: Victory over the dragon

The legend says that Theodore delivered Euchaita from a dragon. In the language of images, the dragon is the evil that frightens and enslaves. Christ has already won the victory, and he gives us the strength to resist.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, you are shown striking down the serpent. Help me to face the fears and temptations that oppress me, trusting in the victory of Christ. Amen.

Today: Name one fear or temptation and entrust it to God in a short prayer.

Day 3: Authority as service

Theodore was given command over troops. In his Passion, he used his position not for himself but for God and for others. Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant" (Matthew 20:26).

Prayer: Saint Theodore, bless all who exercise authority: parents, teachers, employers, officers and leaders. Teach them, and teach me, to serve rather than dominate. Amen.

Today: In a place where you have some responsibility, do one thing purely for the good of those around you.

Day 4: Breaking the idols

Theodore gathered the gold and silver statues of the false gods and smashed them. Our idols are less visible: money, success, comfort, the opinion of others. Anything we put in the place of God can become an idol.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, show me the idols in my heart and give me the courage to break them. May God alone have the first place in my life. Amen.

Today: Give up one small comfort or distraction and spend that time with God.

Day 5: Gold for the poor

After breaking the idols, Theodore gave the pieces to the poor. What was used for false worship became a gift of charity. This is the true use of riches: to serve those in need.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, make me generous. Help me to share what I have with those who lack the necessities of life, without calculating or seeking thanks. Amen.

Today: Give something to a person in need or to a charity that serves the poor.

Day 6: Faithful under torture

Theodore was arrested, tortured and crucified. He did not deny his faith. Most of us will never face such trials, but we know the pressure to be silent about Christ, to hide our faith in order to fit in.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, give me courage when it is hard to show that I am a Christian. Strengthen all who suffer for their faith today. Amen.

Today: Make the Sign of the Cross before a meal in a public place, or speak simply of your faith to someone.

Day 7: Refusing to flee

According to his Passion, Theodore was found alive in the morning and could have escaped. Instead, he gave himself up again. He had already chosen Christ, and he did not take back his gift.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, help me to keep my commitments to God and to others, even when it would be easier to run away. Give me a steady and faithful heart. Amen.

Today: Renew a commitment you have made: your baptismal promises, your marriage vows, or a resolution.

Day 8: For soldiers and their families

Theodore is invoked as the protector of soldiers. Many men and women today serve far from home, face danger, and carry wounds that are not always visible. Their families wait and pray.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, protect all who serve in the armed forces. Bring them home safely, heal the wounded, comfort the grieving, and grant eternal rest to the fallen. Amen.

Today: Pray for a soldier or veteran you know by name, or write a message of thanks to one.

Day 9: One faith in East and West

Theodore is honored by Catholics and Orthodox, in the Latin West and the Byzantine East. His feast reminds us of Christ's prayer: "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

Prayer: Saint Theodore, you are venerated by Christians of East and West. Pray for the unity of all the disciples of Christ, so that the world may believe. Amen.

Today: Pray for Christian unity, and if you can, look at an icon and spend a moment in silence before it.

Closing prayer

> *Lord Jesus Christ, King of heaven and earth, you gave your servant Theodore the strength to remain faithful to you in command, in suffering and in death. Through his prayers, give us courage in our struggles, generosity toward the poor, and fidelity to the end. Protect those who serve and defend others, and lead us all into your peace. To you be glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.*

You can also pray the Prayer to Saint Theodore Stratelates or read his life.

Credits and sources

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