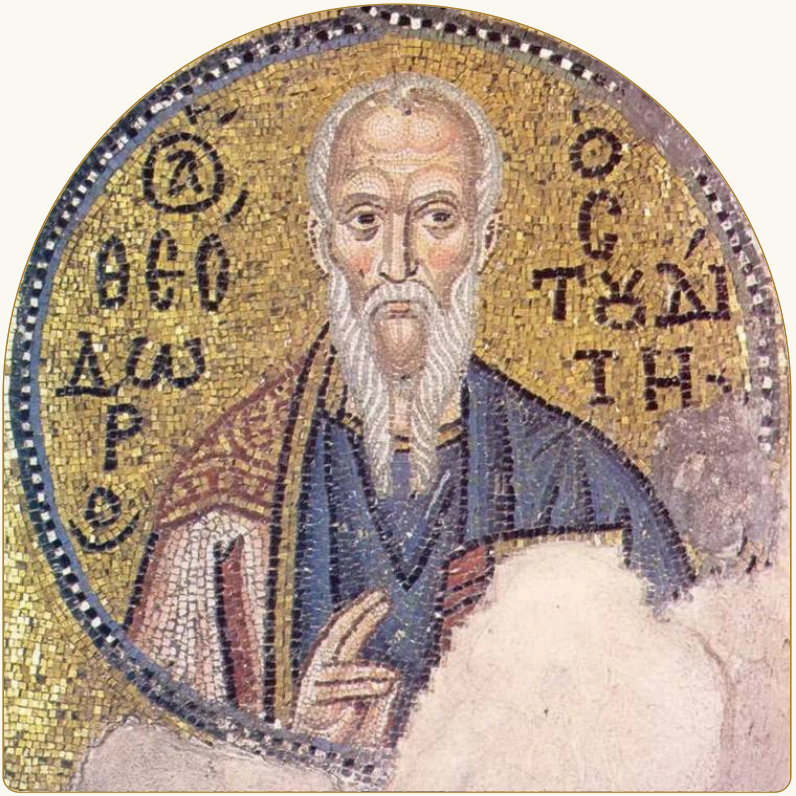


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Theodore the Studite

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 11

IN BRIEF

Saint Theodore the Studite

Byzantine monk, abbot of the Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople, monastic reformer and defender of holy icons.

Feast day	November 11, November 12 (Eastern Churches)
Born	759, Constantinople
Died	November 11, 826, Monastery of Saint Tryphon, Gulf of Nicomedia (Bithynia)
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	9th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Theodore the Studite for the Courage of Truth

Novena to Saint Theodore the Studite

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Theodore the Studite

Saint Theodore the Studite was a Byzantine monk who lived at the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries and served as hegumen, that is, abbot, of the great Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople. A reformer of monastic life, he was also one of the most ardent defenders of holy icons during the iconoclast crisis, which earned him three exiles, prison and the lash. He died in 826. Venerated in both East and West, he is commemorated in the Roman Martyrology on November 11.

Who was Saint Theodore the Studite?

Theodore was a man of one piece. He put all his energy at the service of three causes: a fervent and well-ordered monastic life, the freedom of the Church from imperial power, and the veneration of icons, which he saw as a direct consequence of the Incarnation.

We know him through several *Lives* written after his death, but above all through his own writings, including more than five hundred letters and the catecheses he addressed to his monks. Pope Benedict XVI devoted one of his Wednesday catecheses to him in 2009.

Key dates in the life of Saint Theodore the Studite

- **759**: Born in Constantinople into a family of high-ranking officials.
- **Around 780**: With his father, his brothers and his uncle Saint Plato, he becomes a monk at the monastery of Sakkoudion in Bithynia.
- **787**: The Second Council of Nicaea restores the veneration of images; Theodore is ordained a priest by Patriarch Tarasius.
- **794**: He becomes hegumen of Sakkoudion.

- **797**: Exiled to Thessalonica for condemning the unlawful remarriage of Emperor Constantine VI.
- **Around 798-799**: He settles with his monks at the Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople and restores it.
- **809-811**: Second exile, to the Princes' Islands.
- **815-821**: Emperor Leo V restores iconoclasm; Theodore, imprisoned and flogged, leads the resistance through his letters.
- **November 11, 826**: Dies at the monastery of Saint Tryphon on the Gulf of Nicomedia.
- **844**: His remains are brought back to Stoudios after the final restoration of icons.

A whole family enters the monastery

Theodore was born in 759 into a wealthy, cultured family of Constantinople and received an excellent education in grammar, rhetoric and philosophy. Around 780, his uncle Plato, a former senior official who had become a monk, persuaded the whole family to embrace religious life.

The father, brothers and uncles went off to found the monastery of Sakkoudion in Bithynia, while his mother, Theoktiste, and his sister entered a women's monastery. Theodore became Plato's right hand, then succeeded him as hegumen in 794.

Defender of marriage

In 795, Emperor Constantine VI put away his wife in order to marry a lady of the court. The patriarch eventually gave in. Theodore refused: he publicly denounced the marriage as contrary to the law of the Church and broke communion with the priest who had blessed it. The emperor had the monastery closed; Theodore was flogged and exiled to Thessalonica.

He was recalled a few months later, when the emperor was overthrown. Later, under another emperor, he opposed the rehabilitation of that same priest in the same way, which cost him a new exile.

The reform of Stoudios

Around 798, Empress Irene entrusted Theodore and his monks with the old monastery of Saint John of Stoudios in Constantinople, which was almost deserted. Within a few years he made it the most important monastery of the capital, home to several hundred monks.

He organized a carefully ordered common life there: prayer at the canonical hours, work required of everyone, complete sharing of goods, silence, and obedience to the hegumen, regarded as each monk's spiritual father.

Work held a great place. There were gardeners, carpenters, weavers, infirmarians and above all copyists, whose *scriptorium* helped spread minuscule script in Byzantine manuscripts. Theodore forbade his monks to own slaves, because the human person is made in the image of God. He also composed liturgical hymns, especially for Lent. The rules of Stoudios would later inspire the monasteries of Mount Athos and of early Russia.

The battle for icons

In 815, Emperor Leo V the Armenian restored iconoclasm, the doctrine that forbade images of Christ and the saints. On Palm Sunday, Theodore had his monks walk in procession through the monastery garden, icons in hand, in full view of everyone. He was arrested and imprisoned in fortresses in Asia Minor, then in Smyrna.

Even so, he kept writing to his monks and supporters, and he appealed to Pope Saint Paschal I and the patriarchs of the East to defend the images. He was cruelly flogged.

For Theodore, refusing to depict Christ amounted to denying that he had truly become man. Since the Son of God took on a human face, he can be painted, and the honor given to the image passes to the one it represents. Freed in 821, he did not see the end of the crisis. He died on November 11, 826, while dictating his last instructions to his disciple Naukratios. The veneration of images was definitively restored in 843, and his remains were brought back to Stoudios the following year.

A friend of Rome

In his struggles Theodore often sought the support of the See of Rome, and he spoke of it with great respect. He always refused to let the emperor alone decide the affairs of the Church. At a time when people hesitated, he also defended a striking position: asked about the death penalty for heretics, he answered that they should be converted, not killed. These traits make him a saint dear to Catholics and Orthodox alike.

Who can ask for Saint Theodore's intercession?

Saint Theodore the Studite has no official patronage, but his life points to those who can turn to him: monks and nuns, artists and iconographers, those who defend marriage and life, those who suffer for their conscience, and all who work for the unity of Eastern and Western Christians. He joined a demanding life of prayer to fearless engagement in the debates of his time, and showed that faithfulness to Christ can require saying no to the powerful, even at the cost of suffering.

His defense of icons reminds us that Christian faith does not despise matter or the human face, since God became flesh. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Theodore the Studite or the novena.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Theodore the Studite in art

In icons and mosaics, Theodore appears as a Byzantine monk in a dark habit, with a beard and often a high forehead, holding an unrolled scroll or a book, a reminder of his many letters, catecheses and hymns. He is sometimes shown holding an icon, recalling his defense of sacred images.

Where to pray to Saint Theodore the Studite

- **Istanbul**: the ruins of the church of the Stoudios Monastery, in the Samatya district, where he lived and was buried.
- In Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches, which celebrate him on November 11 or 12.
- In monasteries that live from the Byzantine monastic tradition.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Theodore the Studite for the Courage of Truth

Saint Theodore the Studite left catecheses, liturgical hymns and more than five hundred letters. This page offers one of his strongest instructions, addressed to the superiors of monasteries, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia.

A saying of Saint Theodore the Studite to meditate on

> *"You shall not acquire as a slave, neither for your own use, nor for the monastery entrusted to you, nor for your fields, the human being made in the image of God."*

Source: Saint Theodore the Studite, instructions to a hegumen known as his "Testament," collected in his *Letters* (I, 10); translation by Saintspedia.

Theodore defended icons because he believed that the Son of God truly took on a human face. The same conviction made him refuse to treat any person as a thing: every human being bears the image of God.

Prayer to Saint Theodore the Studite for the courage of truth

Saint Theodore, you left a brilliant career to follow Christ in monastic life: teach me to give God the first place.

You ordered the life of your brothers in prayer, work and sharing: help me to bring order to my days and to make my work an offering.

You defended the holy icons at the cost of prison and the lash: open my eyes to the face of Christ, present in the images that depict him and in every human person created in his image.

You knew how to say no to the powerful in order to stay faithful to the Gospel: give me the courage of truth. Pray for those who suffer for their conscience, for married couples, for monks and nuns, and for the unity of Christians of East and West. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may my life also become an icon of Christ. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

The Roman Martyrology commemorates Saint Theodore the Studite on November 11, the day of his death in 826; the Eastern Churches celebrate him on November 11 or 12. You can also pray to him on the First Sunday of Lent, which the Byzantine Churches dedicate to the restoration of icons as the Sunday of Orthodoxy. It is a fitting prayer before an icon, before speaking an uncomfortable truth, or when praying for Christian unity.

Learn more about the life of Saint Theodore the Studite, or pray the novena to Saint Theodore the Studite.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Theodore the Studite

This novena to Saint Theodore the Studite is an original composition by Saintspedia. For nine days, it follows the Byzantine monk through the great moments of his life: his family's conversion, his monastic reform, his defense of marriage and his long struggle for the holy icons. To end it on the eve of his feast, begin on November 2 and finish on November 10, since the Roman Martyrology commemorates him on November 11. You can also pray it during Lent, before the Sunday of Orthodoxy, or at any time you need courage to stay faithful.

How to pray this novena

Choose a quiet moment each day, ideally before an icon of Christ or of the Mother of God. Make the Sign of the Cross, read the meditation of the day, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Each day ends with a small concrete act. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

Day 1: Leaving everything for Christ

Theodore was born into a wealthy, educated family and could have had a brilliant career at the imperial court. Around 780, he chose instead to follow Christ as a monk. God does not ask everyone to leave the world, but he asks everyone to put him first.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, you preferred Christ to honors and wealth. Help me to see what holds me back from God and give me the freedom to put him first in my life. Amen.

Today: Give up one small comfort or distraction and offer that time to God.

Day 2: A family turned toward God

Theodore's uncle Plato persuaded the whole family to embrace religious life: father, brothers, uncles, mother and sister. Faith is often passed on through family ties, and a family can help each of its members to grow in holiness.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, you followed God together with your family. I entrust to you all the members of my family, especially those who are far from the faith. May we help one another on the way to heaven. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for each member of your family.

Day 3: Prayer and work

At Stoudios, Theodore organized a common life in which prayer at fixed hours and daily work went hand in hand. Gardeners, weavers, carpenters and copyists all served God with their hands. Ordinary work, offered to God, becomes a path to holiness.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, reformer of monastic life, help me to give my days a rhythm of prayer, and to do my work carefully as an offering to God. Amen.

Today: Set a fixed time for prayer in your day and keep it.

Day 4: Every person is made in God's image

Theodore forbade his monks to own slaves, because the human being is made in the image of God. In every age there are people treated as things: the poor, migrants, the unborn, the elderly, workers exploited for profit. Theodore invites us to see the face of God in each one.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, you respected the dignity of every human person. Open my eyes to those around me who are despised or used, and make me their defender. Amen.

Today: Treat with special respect someone whose work usually goes unnoticed.

Day 5: Defender of marriage

When Emperor Constantine VI put away his wife to marry another woman, Theodore refused to keep silent, even though the patriarch had given in. He was flogged and exiled. Marriage is a covenant that deserves to be protected, and couples need support and prayer.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, you defended the holiness of marriage at the cost of exile. I entrust to you married couples, especially those going through difficulty. Strengthen their faithfulness and their love. Amen.

Today: Pray for a couple you know, or do something kind for your spouse.

Day 6: The courage to say no

Three times Theodore was sent into exile because he would not give in to the emperor in matters of faith. Faithfulness to Christ sometimes requires us to say no: to pressure, to compromise, to what everyone else accepts. That no can be said calmly, without hatred.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, you stood firm before the powerful of your time. Give me the courage of truth, joined with charity, and the strength to stay faithful when it costs me something. Amen.

Today: Speak or act according to your conscience in a situation where you would usually keep quiet.

Day 7: God has a human face

For Theodore, refusing to depict Christ amounted to denying that he truly became man. Because the Son of God took on a human face, we can paint him, and the honor given to the image passes to the one it represents. Icons help us

pray with our eyes as well as our hearts.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, defender of the holy icons, help me to contemplate the face of Christ, in sacred images, in the Eucharist and in my neighbor. Amen.

Today: Spend five minutes in silence before an image of Christ.

Day 8: Faithful in prison

Imprisoned and cruelly flogged under Leo V, Theodore did not stop writing to his monks and friends to encourage them. Even in chains he remained a father and a guide. Suffering did not close him in on himself.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, you encouraged others while you yourself were suffering. I entrust to you all Christians persecuted for their faith and all prisoners. Give them strength and hope. Amen.

Today: Write a few words of encouragement to someone who is struggling.

Day 9: For the unity of Christians

Theodore turned to the See of Rome and wrote to Pope Paschal I during the persecution. He is venerated by Catholics and Orthodox alike. His life reminds us that East and West share one faith and one tradition of holiness, and that division wounds the Body of Christ.

Prayer: Saint Theodore, saint of East and West, pray for the unity of all Christians. May we one day gather around the same altar, as Christ desires. Amen.

Today: Pray the Our Father slowly for Christian unity, or learn something about an Eastern Catholic Church.

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, you gave Saint Theodore the Studite a burning love for you, for his brothers and for the truth. Through his intercession, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena (name your intention), if it is according to your will. Make me faithful in prayer, courageous in truth and attentive to your face in every person. Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Saint Theodore the Studite, pray for us.

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