BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Theodore Tiro

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint Theodore Tiro

Young Roman soldier of Amasea, martyred c. 306, honored as a great martyr in the East and first patron of Venice.

Feast day	November 9
Born	late 3rd century, Amasea, in Pontus (Amasya, Turkey)
Died	c. 306 (February 17 according to the Eastern tradition), Euchaita, in Pontus (near Mecitözü, Turkey), according to tradition
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Venice (first patron), soldiers

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Theodore Tiro

Church of San Salvador, Venice

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Theodore Tiro

Saint Theodore Tiro, also called Theodore the Recruit or Theodore of Amasea, was a young Roman soldier from Amasea in Pontus (present-day Amasya, in Turkey), burned alive for his faith around 306, during the Great Persecution. Honored as a "great martyr" in the East, he was the first patron of Venice, where his body is venerated in the church of San Salvador. The Latin Church celebrates him on November 9; the Eastern Churches on February 17.

Who was Saint Theodore Tiro?

His nickname comes from the Latin *tiro*, "recruit": Theodore was a conscript, a young soldier recently enlisted. He belongs to the family of military saints, like Saint George or Saint Mercurius, who were much loved in the Byzantine world. His record is more solid than that of many other martyrs of the period: a panegyric very probably delivered by Saint Gregory of Nyssa at the end of the 4th century, and a eulogy followed by twelve miracles, written in the 5th century by the priest Chrysippus of Jerusalem, preserve his memory. Later accounts added legendary episodes, such as the fight against a dragon. Historians also think that Saint Theodore Stratelates, "the general," may be no more than a doubling of his figure.

Key dates in the life of Theodore

- **Late 3rd century**: Born at Amasea, in Pontus, according to tradition.
- **Early 4th century**: He is enlisted as a young recruit in a unit stationed in his town.
- **c. 306**: He refuses to sacrifice to the gods, sets fire to a temple of Cybele, is imprisoned, then burned alive; the date kept is February 17.

- **Late 4th century**: Saint Gregory of Nyssa very probably delivers his panegyric; his shrine at Euchaita draws pilgrims.
- **5th century**: The priest Chrysippus of Jerusalem, who died in 479, writes his eulogy and an account of twelve miracles.
- **6th century (perhaps)**: The oldest Passion, which already tells of the fight against the dragon.
- **1257**: The Venetian Jacopo Dauro carries the urn containing his body from Mesembria to Constantinople.
- **1267**: His brother Marco brings it to Venice and gives it to the church of San Salvador.

The recruit of Amasea

According to the oldest testimonies, Theodore was serving in an army quartered at Amasea at the time when the emperor required soldiers to offer sacrifices to the gods. He refused and, according to Chrysippus's eulogy, set fire to the temple of the "Mother of the Gods," Cybele. Arrested, he was thrown into prison, where heavenly visions came to console him. He was finally condemned to be burned alive. The ancient texts stress his calm and his joy at the moment of death: for them, this young soldier fought the true battle, that of faithfulness to Christ.

His body was laid at Euchaita, in Pontus, near the present village of Avkat (Beyözü), in the province of Çorum. His shrine became an important place of pilgrimage, and it was there, no doubt, that Gregory of Nyssa delivered his eulogy.

The dragon and the kollyva

Tradition enriched his life with wondrous stories. A dragon, it is said, was terrorizing the people living near Theodore's camp; the young soldier went looking for it and killed it with a blow of his spear to the head. He understood

this victory as a sign that God found him ready for martyrdom. This episode, present from the earliest Passions, did much to shape the image of the holy horseman overcoming evil.

Another account, wrongly attributed to Patriarch Nectarius of Constantinople, tells of the "miracle of the kollyva." Under Julian the Apostate, Theodore is said to have appeared to warn Christians that the food sold in the market had been defiled with the blood of pagan sacrifices, and to have advised them to eat boiled wheat instead. The Eastern Churches still commemorate this on the first Saturday of Great Lent.

Devotion and art

In the West, the feast of November 9 seems to correspond to the dedication of the church built in his honor in Rome, at the foot of the Palatine. Venice took him as its patron very early, before the arrival of the relics of Saint Mark: his statue, standing on a dragon, still crowns one of the two columns of the Piazzetta, facing the lagoon. In the 13th century, his body was brought to the city and laid in the church of San Salvador, near the Rialto, where it rests in the right-hand chapel of the choir.

He is shown as a soldier, armed with spear and shield, sometimes on horseback, often overcoming a dragon. He is frequently associated with Saint Theodore Stratelates and Saint George.

What can we learn from Saint Theodore Tiro?

Theodore was only a young recruit, with no rank or power. Yet he stood firm before the authority that asked him to deny his faith. His example speaks to young people, to soldiers and to all who must remain faithful in a setting where faith has no place. He also reminds us that the true Christian battle is the one fought against evil, beginning with the evil within us.

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

Where to pray to Saint Theodore Tiro

- **The church of San Salvador** (Venice): the chapel that keeps his body, near the Rialto Bridge.
- **The Piazzetta San Marco** (Venice): the column crowned by his statue, a reminder of his former patronage.
- **The church of San Teodoro**, at the foot of the Palatine (Rome): the church whose dedication gave rise to his feast of November 9.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Theodore Tiro to Remain Faithful in Trials

Saint Theodore Tiro, a young soldier from Amasea, refused to sacrifice to idols and was burned alive for Christ around 306. The first patron of Venice, he is venerated in the church of San Salvador, which keeps his body. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him young people, soldiers and all who need strength to remain faithful.

Prayer to Saint Theodore Tiro

Saint Theodore,
young soldier of Christ,
you had neither rank nor power,
but you stood firm in the faith
before those who wanted you to deny your Lord.

You whom tradition shows as victor over the dragon,
help me to fight the evil
that threatens the world and my own heart.
Watch over soldiers and over those who protect others,
over young people beginning their adult lives,
and over all who are pressed to betray their conscience.

Obtain for me the peace and the courage
that you kept even in the flames,
and present to the Lord the grace I ask of him [intention].
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Theodore Tiro

- On his feast day, November 9, or on February 17, when the East honors him.
- For soldiers, service members on mission and their families.
- When a young person enters a new environment where their faith will be tested.
- When facing pressure to act against one's conscience.
- At the beginning of Lent, in memory of the miracle of the kollyva.

A short invocation

> *Saint Theodore, faithful soldier,*
> *keep us firm in faith and strong against evil.*
> *Pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Theodore Tiro from November 1 to November 9, and read the life of Saint Theodore Tiro.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Theodore Tiro

This novena offers nine days of prayer with Saint Theodore Tiro, a young soldier martyr of Amasea who died around 306. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition; it is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day in the Latin Church, November 9, begin on November 1, the Solemnity of All Saints. You can also pray it from February 9 to February 17, or 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 Theodore, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. Some episodes come from ancient accounts in which history mingles with legend.

Day 1: With all the saints

Beginning this novena on All Saints' Day reminds us that Theodore belongs to the immense crowd of witnesses who have gone before us. He is not an isolated hero, but a member of God's family.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all the saints, known and unknown. Grant me to walk in their footsteps.

Act of the day: Pray for a departed member of your family and entrust their memory to the saints.

Day 2: A simple recruit

Theodore was only a conscript, with no rank or power. God often chooses what is small to show his strength.

Prayer: Lord, when I feel small and unimportant, remind me that you are counting on me.

Act of the day: Do carefully a humble task that no one will notice.

Day 3: Serving without denying

Theodore served in the army, but he refused to sacrifice to idols. One can serve one's country loyally without denying one's conscience.

Prayer: Lord, bless soldiers and all who serve their country. Keep them upright and faithful.

Act of the day: Pray for service members on mission far from their families.

Day 4: Refusing idols

Today's idols are no longer statues, but money, power or self-image. Theodore invites us to serve God alone.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the idols that take your place in my life.

Act of the day: Identify something that enslaves you, and take one step toward freedom from it.

Day 5: Consoled in prison

In prison, the ancient texts say, Theodore was consoled by heavenly visions. God does not abandon those who suffer for him.

Prayer: Lord, console those in prison, especially Christians persecuted for their faith.

Act of the day: Pray for prisoners, or support a ministry that visits them.

Day 6: Overcoming the dragon

Tradition tells that he killed a dragon that was terrorizing the region. This story expresses the true battle of the Christian: the struggle against evil, with the strength of God.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to fight evil, within me and around me.

Act of the day: Make an examination of conscience and, if possible, receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

Day 7: In the flames

Theodore was burned alive. Those who told of his death remembered his peace: faith gave him a joy that fire could not put out.

Prayer: Lord, in my trials, keep me in peace and trust.

Act of the day: Light a candle before an image of Christ and pray for someone who is suffering.

Day 8: A friend who watches over us

According to the story of the kollyva, Theodore appeared to Christians to protect them from defiled food. The saints continue to watch over us.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the friendship of the saints. May their intercession protect me on my way.

Act of the day: Share a simple meal with someone, giving thanks to God.

Day 9: Patron of a city

Venice took him as its patron and still keeps his body. A whole city entrusted itself to this faithful young soldier.

Prayer: Lord, bless my city and those who live in it. Through the intercession of Saint Theodore, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and pray for the people of your town or neighborhood.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Theodore,*
> *young soldier who became a witness to Christ,*
> *present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Give me your courage in trials,*
> *your faithfulness under pressure,*
> *and your peace to the end.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of San Salvador, Venice

The church of San Salvador, "Holy Savior," stands in the heart of Venice, on the campo of the same name in the San Marco district, a few steps from the Rialto Bridge. This great Renaissance church keeps, in the right-hand chapel of the choir, the body of Saint Theodore Tiro, the young soldier martyr who was the city's first patron, before Saint Mark.

A church in the center of Venice

A tradition traces the first church on the site back to the 7th century: Christ is said to have appeared in a dream to a bishop to show him where to build a church dedicated to the Savior. In the 12th century, a community of canons regular settled there, and the church was consecrated in 1177 by Pope Alexander III. The present building was constructed between 1507 and 1534, to a design attributed to Tullio Lombardo and completed with the help of Jacopo Sansovino; the facade was added in the 17th century.

The body of Saint Theodore

According to Venetian accounts, the urn containing the saint's body was carried in 1257 by Jacopo Dauro from the church of Mesembria to Constantinople. Ten years later, his brother Marco brought it to Venice and gave it to San Salvador. The right-hand apse chapel is dedicated to him. His body can be seen there, along with a painting from the school of Bonifacio de' Pitati showing his martyrdom. The organ shutters, painted by Francesco Vecellio, Titian's brother, also bear his portrait.

What to see

The high altar holds a 14th-century silver altarpiece, usually hidden behind a large *Transfiguration* by Titian and uncovered only on certain feasts. The church also keeps an *Annunciation* by the same painter, the funeral monument of Caterina Cornaro, Queen of Cyprus, and those of several doges. The polychrome marble floor and the statues by Sansovino and Alessandro Vittoria complete a remarkable whole.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Theodore Tiro. In his chapel, entrust to him young people, soldiers and those who must remain faithful despite pressure, then say the prayer to Saint Theodore Tiro. Afterwards, you can walk to the Piazzetta San Marco, where his statue tops one of the two columns facing the lagoon. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

The church is on Campo San Salvador, between Saint Mark's Square and the Rialto, on one of the busiest pedestrian routes in Venice; the Rialto vaporetto stop is close by. It is a place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the parish before your visit.

Credits and sources

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