BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Usthazanes

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 16

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IN BRIEF

Saint Usthazanes

Dignitary of the Persian court, tutor of Shapur II, martyred in 341 after denying and then confessing his faith.

Feast day	April 16
Born	3rd century (date unknown), Persian Empire (place unknown)
Died	341, Persian Empire (Adiabene according to some sources)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Usthazanes for Those Who Want to Return to God

Novena to Saint Usthazanes

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Usthazanes

Saint Usthazanes (also written Usthazades) was a martyr of the Church of Persia in the 4th century. A high dignitary at the court of the Sassanid king Shapur II, whose tutor he had been, he first denied his faith out of fear; then, brought back to Christ by the bishop Saint Simeon Bar Sabbae, he confessed it publicly and was beheaded in 341. His feast day is April 16.

Who was Saint Usthazanes?

Usthazanes lived in the Persian Empire of the Sassanids, which stretched over present-day Iran and Iraq. Christians were numerous there, organized around the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the capital. Usthazanes was a eunuch of the royal court, entrusted with raising and teaching the young prince who would become King Shapur II. He thus held a position of trust with the sovereign. He was also a Christian. His story is known to us mainly through the Greek historian Sozomen, in the 5th century, and through the accounts of the martyrs of Persia. It is short, but very powerful: it is the story of a man who fell, and then rose again.

Key dates in the life of Usthazanes

- **Early 4th century**: A eunuch at the Sassanid court, he raises and teaches the future King Shapur II.
- **c. 309**: Beginning of the long reign of Shapur II.
- **330s**: The conversion of Emperor Constantine makes the Christians of Persia suspect in the eyes of the authorities.
- **c. 340**: At war with Rome, Shapur II launches a persecution of Christians; churches and monasteries are destroyed.
- **341**: Seized by fear, Usthazanes denies his faith.

- **341**: Moved by the bishop Simeon Bar Sabbae, he repents and publicly confesses Christ.
- **341**: Arrested and tortured, he is beheaded, the day before Simeon's martyrdom according to Sozomen.
- **April 16**: His feast day, according to the Roman Martyrology as given by Nominis.

The great persecution of Shapur II

For a long time, the Christians of Persia lived undisturbed. Everything changed when the Roman Empire became Christian under Constantine. For the king of Persia, at war with Rome, the Christians of his kingdom now looked like allies of the enemy. Shapur II imposed Zoroastrianism as the official religion and demanded heavy taxes from Christians to pay for the war. The bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Simeon Bar Sabbae, refused to levy this tax on his people. Persecution broke out: churches and altars were overturned, monasteries burned, clergy and faithful arrested by the hundreds. It would last for decades and make a great many martyrs.

The fall and the rising

Usthazanes, a man of the court, was afraid. So as not to lose his position or his life, he denied his Christian faith. But the bishop Simeon, who was then being led into captivity, brought him to go back on this denial. According to Sozomen, when the bishop passed before him, Usthazanes greeted him respectfully, but Simeon turned his face away: this silent reproach overwhelmed the old dignitary. Filled with remorse, he put off his court garments, dressed in mourning and publicly proclaimed that he was a Christian.

The king, who loved him, tried to make him change his mind. Usthazanes refused. According to Sozomen, he then asked for a single favor: that a herald should proclaim publicly that he was dying not for betraying the king, but because he was a Christian. He wanted his death to repair the scandal of his denial and to encourage other Christians. He was tortured and then beheaded in 341. Some sources place his execution in the palace of Ardashir, the king's brother, in Adiabene, in northern Mesopotamia; other accounts place it near Simeon, who learned of his death in prison and rejoiced at it.

Devotion and memory

Saint Usthazanes is venerated in the Catholic Church as well as in the Orthodox Church. He is honored on April 16, according to Nominis and the review Magnificat, which follow the Roman Martyrology; other calendars associate him with the commemoration of Saint Simeon Bar Sabbae and his companions on April 17. His name is transcribed in many ways: Usthazades, Usthazanes, Guhashtazad. No relic or known shrine is dedicated to him, which is not surprising for a martyr of the Church of Persia, whose places have almost all disappeared.

What can we learn from Saint Usthazanes?

Saint Usthazanes is the saint of those who have fallen and who rise again. Like Saint Peter after his denial, he wept over his fault and found again the courage to confess Christ. He reminds us that God's mercy is stronger than our cowardice, and that a brother in the faith can help us return. You can pray to him for those who have abandoned the faith out of fear or self-interest, for Christians persecuted today, especially in the Middle East, and for those who must stand by their faith in their workplace.

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

Where to pray to Saint Usthazanes

- Anywhere, on April 16, his feast day, in union with the Christians of Iraq and Iran.
- In the churches of the Eastern Christian communities, heirs of the Church of Persia.
- Before receiving the sacrament of reconciliation, entrusting to him the desire to return to God.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Usthazanes for Those Who Want to Return to God

Saint Usthazanes, a dignitary of the Persian court, denied his faith out of fear during the persecution of Shapur II, then, brought back to Christ by the bishop Saint Simeon, died a martyr in 341. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him those who have faltered in faith, those who want to return to God and persecuted Christians.

Prayer to Saint Usthazanes

Saint Usthazanes,
you who knew fear
and denied your faith to save your life,
you know how weak we are.
I entrust to you my cowardice and my denials,
small or great.

The gaze of the bishop Simeon
awakened your heart,
and you wept like Peter after the cock crowed.
Obtain for me the grace of true repentance
and trust in the mercy of God,
who never tires of forgiving.

You wanted everyone to know
that you were dying because you were a Christian.
Help me never to be ashamed of Christ,
and sustain persecuted Christians
in Iraq, in Iran and throughout the world.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Usthazanes

- On April 16, his feast day.
- Before receiving the sacrament of reconciliation.
- For a loved one who has abandoned the faith and whom you would like to see return.
- For persecuted Christians, especially in the Middle East.
- When it is hard to stand by your faith at work.

A short invocation

> *Lord, raise up those who have fallen.*
> *Saint Usthazanes, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Usthazanes from April 8 to 16, and read the life of Saint Usthazanes.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Usthazanes

This novena offers nine days of prayer with Saint Usthazanes, a martyr of Persia in 341, who denied his faith out of fear before confessing it unto martyrdom. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, April 16, begin on April 8. This period often falls in Lent or Eastertide; you can also pray it at any other time of the year.

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 Usthazanes, pray for us." The episodes mentioned come mainly from the historian Sozomen, in the 5th century.

Day 1: A Christian at court

Usthazanes lived at the heart of power, close to the king he had raised. He was a Christian in a setting that was not.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live my faith where I work, with simplicity and faithfulness.

Act of the day: Pray for your colleagues or the people you meet each day.

Day 2: Educating

Usthazanes taught the future King Shapur II. To educate is to give much without knowing what the other will become.

Prayer: Lord, bless parents, teachers and educators. Give them patience and hope.

Act of the day: Thank someone who educated or formed you.

Day 3: The time of trial

Persecution broke out: churches overturned, monasteries burned, Christians arrested. Nothing seemed able to stop the violence.

Prayer: Lord, sustain the Christians persecuted today. Give them strength and peace.

Act of the day: Learn about the situation of a persecuted Church and pray for it.

Day 4: Fear

Usthazanes was afraid, and he denied his faith. His story does not hide human weakness. We too know our small acts of cowardice.

Prayer: Lord, you know my fears. Do not leave me alone when trial comes.

Act of the day: Acknowledge before God a situation in which you were ashamed of your faith.

Day 5: The gaze that awakens

When the bishop Simeon turned away from him, Usthazanes understood what he had done. Sometimes a brother helps us see ourselves clearly.

Prayer: Lord, give me friends who help me stay faithful, and make me such a friend to others.

Act of the day: Accept with humility a fair remark someone has made to you.

Day 6: The tears of repentance

Usthazanes put off his court garments and dressed in mourning. Like Peter, he wept over his fault. These tears opened the way to forgiveness.

Prayer: Lord, give me a contrite heart. I believe that your mercy is greater than my sin.

Act of the day: Prepare for or receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

Day 7: Confessing Christ

Before the king he loved, Usthazanes refused to deny again. He said simply: I am a Christian.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to acknowledge you before others, without fear and without pride.

Act of the day: Make the Sign of the Cross before a meal taken in public.

Day 8: Repairing the scandal

According to Sozomen, he asked that it be announced that he was dying because he was a Christian. He wanted his final faithfulness to encourage those whom his denial had troubled.

Prayer: Lord, help me to repair the harm I may have done by my bad example.

Act of the day: Make a concrete act of amends toward someone you have hurt.

Day 9: Martyrdom

Usthazanes was beheaded in 341, the day before Simeon. The one who had fallen became a witness. Nothing is lost for those who return to God.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Usthazanes, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Pray for the Christians of Iraq and Iran and, if possible, attend Mass.

Closing prayer

Saint Usthazanes,
you who fell and rose again,
you who gave your life for Christ,
present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me trusting in his mercy,
and sustain all who suffer for their faith.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Credits and sources

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