

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Victor I

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 28

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IN BRIEF

Saint Victor I

Bishop of Rome at the end of the 2nd century, first Latin-speaking pope, known for the controversy over the date of Easter.

Feast day	July 28
Born	Roman province of Africa
Died	198 or 199, Rome
Era	2nd century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Victor I for the Unity of the Church

Novena to Saint Victor I

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Victor I

Saint Victor I was bishop of Rome at the end of the second century, most probably from 189 to 198 or 199. A native of the Roman province of Africa, he was the first bishop of Rome whose language was Latin. His name remains tied to the controversy over the date of Easter, in which he tried to impose the Roman practice on the Churches of Asia Minor: an episode historians see as one of the first assertions of the authority of Rome. The Catholic Church celebrates him on July 28.

Who was Saint Victor I?

The sources about Victor are few. The *Liber Pontificalis*, the book of the popes compiled much later, says he was the son of a man named Felix and a native of Africa. Almost all the ancient lists give him ten years as bishop, after Eleutherius and before Zephyrinus.

Saint Jerome reports that he was the first bishop of Rome to write in Latin, and that he left a few short writings on the celebration of Easter and on other subjects, which are now lost. Until then, the Church of Rome had mostly spoken and written in Greek. With Victor, a North African, Latin Christianity begins to appear at the head of the Roman Church.



Saint Victor I, imaginary portrait.

Key dates

- **c. 189**: Succeeds Eleutherius as bishop of Rome.
- **190s**: Excommunicates Theodotus of Byzantium and deposes the Gnostic priest Florinus.
- **190s**: Crisis over the date of Easter with the Churches of Asia Minor.
- **198 or 199**: Dies in Rome; Zephyrinus succeeds him.

The controversy over the date of Easter

Two traditions

At the end of the second century, Christians did not all celebrate Easter on the same day. The Churches of the province of Asia, around Ephesus, kept a very ancient tradition: they celebrated Easter on the 14th of the Jewish month of Nisan, whatever the day of the week. For this reason they were called

"Quartodecimans," from the Latin word for fourteenth. Rome and most other Churches celebrated Easter on the following Sunday, the day of the Resurrection.

A generation earlier, Pope Anicetus and Polycarp of Smyrna had discussed the question and remained at peace, each keeping his own custom.

Victor's firm hand

Under Victor, the disagreement hardened. In a letter now lost, he asked the bishops of Asia to fall into line. Their spokesman, Polycrates of Ephesus, replied that their custom went back to the apostles John and Philip. Victor probably gathered a synod in Rome and declared the communities of Asia cut off from his communion.

The voice of Irenaeus

Most bishops, even though they shared his practice, judged the measure excessive and told him so plainly. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, in particular, urged him to patience and charity, recalling that the diversity of customs had never broken the peace between the Churches. Victor changed his mind.

Although his move had no immediate effect, the question was later settled in the direction he had defended: Easter is celebrated on a Sunday throughout the Church. The episode remains a landmark in the history of the primacy of Rome, and also in the history of fraternal correction between bishops.

A firm pastor in a threatened Church

Victor also appears as the first bishop of Rome in contact with the imperial household. According to an ancient source, through the help of Marcia, the companion of the emperor Commodus, he obtained the release of Christians condemned to the mines of Sardinia. Among them was his future successor Callixtus.

He also defended the faith he had received. He put out of communion Theodotus, who taught that Jesus was only a man adopted by God, and he deposed the priest Florinus, who had been drawn to Gnostic ideas.

What we know, and what we do not

A late tradition presents him as a martyr and says he was buried near the apostle Peter at the Vatican, but historians accept neither claim. The Roman Martyrology lists him on July 28.

Victor leaves the image of an energetic bishop, sometimes too quick to cut a question short, but able to go back on his decision when his brothers asked him to. It is a lesson in leadership that keeps its value.

Why does Saint Victor matter today?

Victor has no traditional patronage. Yet his story speaks to anyone who carries responsibility in the Church or in a community. He cared deeply about unity and about a common celebration of the Resurrection. He also learned that unity cannot be imposed by force alone, and that listening to wise counsel is part of good government. He is a good intercessor for anyone who must hold firm on an important question while keeping peace with others, and for all who pray for the unity of Christians.

For Catholics of Africa, he is also a reminder that the Church of that continent gave Rome one of its early bishops, long before the great figures of Saint Augustine and Saint Cyprian.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Victor I in art

- **Papal dress**: he appears in imaginary portraits as a pope, with the tiara and pontifical vestments.

- **In series of popes**: like most early popes, he is above all represented in the series of papal portraits, such as the medallions of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome.

Where to pray to Saint Victor I

No tomb of Saint Victor is known with certainty. A late tradition placed his burial near the tomb of Saint Peter, in the Vatican necropolis beneath Saint Peter's Basilica. You can pray to him there, or anywhere, especially on his feast on July 28.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Victor I for the Unity of the Church

No ancient prayer to Saint Victor I has come into common use. Here is an original prayer, inspired by his life: a North African bishop of Rome who cared for the unity of the Church and the common celebration of Easter, defended the faith he had received, and knew how to listen when his brothers called him to patience.

Prayer to Saint Victor I for the unity of the Church

Saint Victor, bishop of Rome and shepherd of the early Church, you longed for all Christians to celebrate together the Resurrection of the Lord. Pray for the unity of the Church, that all who believe in Christ may one day share the same table and the same feast.

You defended the faith received from the apostles and confessed that Jesus is truly the Son of God. Strengthen my faith, and keep me faithful to the teaching of the Church.

You knew how to change your mind when your brothers called you to charity. Teach me humility in my convictions, the courage to speak the truth and the wisdom to listen to others.

You came from Africa to serve the Church of Rome. Pray for the Christians of Africa and for all who leave their homeland to serve God.

I entrust to you my own intention: (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- **On his feast day**, July 28.
- **During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**, from January 18 to 25.
- **Before Easter**, praying that all Christians may one day celebrate the Resurrection on the same day.
- **When you must make a firm decision**, at work, in your family or in a community, asking for both courage and humility.
- **For the Pope and the bishops**, that they may govern with firmness and charity.

A short invocation

> *Saint Victor, shepherd of the Church of Rome, pray for us and for the unity of all Christians.*

To go further, read the life of Saint Victor I or pray the novena to Saint Victor I.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Victor I

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what the ancient sources tell of Saint Victor I, bishop of Rome at the end of the second century. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, July 28, begin on July 20. You can also pray it at any time of year, for the unity of Christians, for the leaders of the Church, or when you face a difficult decision.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps carry the prayer into ordinary life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

The nine days follow what we know of Victor: his African roots, his care for the faith and for unity, and his ability to listen.

Day 1: A son of Africa

According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Victor was a native of Africa. He came to serve the Church of Rome, which welcomed him and made him its bishop. The Church has always been made of people from many lands.

Prayer: Saint Victor, you came from Africa to serve the Church of Rome. Pray for the Christians of Africa and for all who serve God far from their homeland. Amen.

Today: Welcome warmly someone in your parish or neighborhood who comes from another country.

Day 2: The first to write in Latin

Saint Jerome reports that Victor was the first bishop of Rome to write in Latin. He spoke the language of the people around him. The Gospel needs to be proclaimed in words that people understand.

Prayer: Saint Victor, you spoke the faith in the language of your people. Help me to speak of God simply and clearly to those around me. Amen.

Today: Share a Gospel verse that touches you with someone close to you.

Day 3: The feast of the Resurrection

Victor cared deeply that Easter be celebrated on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection. For him, the Resurrection was the center of Christian life, worthy of a common celebration.

Prayer: Saint Victor, you wanted all Christians to celebrate together the Resurrection of Christ. Help me to live each Sunday as a little Easter, with joy and gratitude. Amen.

Today: Prepare for next Sunday's Mass by reading its Gospel in advance.

Day 4: Longing for unity

The quarrel over the date of Easter divided the Churches. Victor longed for unity, even if he sometimes pursued it too hastily. Today, Christians still celebrate Easter on different dates, and the wound of division remains.

Prayer: Saint Victor, pray for the unity of all Christians. May the day come when we celebrate together the Resurrection of the Lord. Amen.

Today: Pray for Christians of another Church or tradition, especially those you know.

Day 5: Defending the faith

Victor put out of communion Theodotus, who taught that Jesus was only a man adopted by God. He held firm to the faith received from the apostles: Jesus is truly the Son of God.

Prayer: Saint Victor, defender of the faith, strengthen my belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and help me to grow in the knowledge of the faith of the Church. Amen.

Today: Pray the Creed slowly, pausing on each article.

Day 6: Listening to counsel

When Victor cut off the Churches of Asia, many bishops, including Saint Irenaeus, urged him to patience and charity. Victor listened and changed his mind. It takes humility to recognize that we have gone too far.

Prayer: Saint Victor, you listened to the counsel of your brothers. Give me the humility to accept correction and to change my mind when I am wrong. Amen.

Today: Ask someone you trust for their honest opinion on a decision you are facing.

Day 7: Firmness and charity

Victor was firm, and the Church needed firmness. But Irenaeus reminded him that diversity of customs had never broken the peace between Churches. True leadership holds together truth and charity.

Prayer: Saint Victor, teach me to hold together firmness and gentleness, conviction and charity, in my family, my work and my community. Amen.

Today: Accept a difference of opinion or of habit without trying to win the argument.

Day 8: Freedom for prisoners

According to an ancient source, Victor obtained the release of Christians condemned to the mines of Sardinia, among them his future successor Callixtus. He used his contacts to help those who suffered.

Prayer: Saint Victor, you worked for the release of Christians condemned to the mines. Pray for prisoners, for those persecuted for their faith, and for all who work for their freedom. Amen.

Today: Pray for a prisoner, or support a work that visits people in prison.

Day 9: A shepherd for today

Victor leaves the image of an energetic bishop who could go back on his decisions. The Church still needs shepherds who are both courageous and humble, who lead and who listen.

Prayer: Saint Victor, pray for the Pope, for our bishop and for all who carry responsibility in the Church. May they lead with courage, listen with humility and serve with love. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Pope and for your bishop by name.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God, you gave your Church Saint Victor as a shepherd who cared for the faith and for the common celebration of your Son's Resurrection. Through his intercession, guard your Church in the truth, gather all Christians in unity, and give to those who lead us firmness joined to charity. Hear the intention I have carried during these nine days, if it is according to your will. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Saint Victor, pray for us.

CREDITS

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