

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Victor Maurus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 8

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IN BRIEF

Saint Victor Maurus

Christian soldier from Mauretania, martyred in Milan under Maximian around 303, patron saint of Varese.

Feast day	May 8
Born	3rd century, Mauretania, North Africa
Died	c. 303, Milan, Italy
Canonized	Venerated since ancient times
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Varese, Ceriano Laghetto, prisoners, exiles

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Victor Maurus, Soldier of Christ

Novena to Saint Victor Maurus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Victor Maurus

Saint Victor Maurus, also called Victor the Moor or Victor of Milan, was a Christian soldier from Mauretania, in North Africa, put to death in Milan around 303 during the persecution of Emperor Maximian. Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan in the fourth century, celebrated him among the martyrs who protect his city. His burial chapel, the *sacello* of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, holds one of the finest early Christian mosaics in Italy. The Church celebrates him on May 8.

Who was Saint Victor Maurus?

Victor is one of the oldest martyrs of the Church of Milan. His nickname "the Moor" (*Maurus*) does not point to an Arab origin, which would be impossible at that time, but to his homeland: Roman Mauretania, which corresponds roughly to northern Morocco and western Algeria today. Like many Africans, he served in the Roman army, and his legion was stationed in northern Italy, where Milan was then an imperial residence.

What we know about him comes from two kinds of sources. The most reliable are the writings of Saint Ambrose, who names him several times together with two other Moorish soldiers martyred at the same period, Nabor and Felix, and who buried his own brother Satyrus next to Victor's tomb. The detailed account of his martyrdom, the *Passion of Saint Victor*, is later: it contains legendary elements and should be read with caution. Still, the cult of Victor is attested in Milan from the fourth century, a solid sign that his memory is very old.



Saint Victor in the golden dome of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan.

Key dates

- **Second half of the 3rd century**: Born in Mauretania, North Africa.
- **Late 3rd century**: A soldier of the Roman army in northern Italy, Christian since his youth.
- **c. 303**: Arrested during the persecution of Diocletian and Maximian, he refuses to sacrifice to the gods and dies a martyr in Milan.
- **Early 4th century**: According to tradition, Bishop Maternus of Milan recovers and buries his body.
- **c. 378**: Saint Ambrose buries his brother Satyrus next to the martyr's tomb.
- **5th century**: The burial chapel receives the gold-ground mosaic that gives it the name "San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro" (Saint Victor in the Golden Sky).

An African soldier in the army of Rome

At the end of the third century, the Roman Empire was ruled by four emperors, the Tetrarchy. Maximian, Diocletian's colleague, often resided in Milan. The army included many soldiers from the African provinces, and Victor was one of them. Tradition says he was already old when he was arrested and had long been a Christian: his faith was not a passing enthusiasm of youth but the fidelity of a lifetime.

In 303, Diocletian launched the harshest of all persecutions against Christians. Soldiers were closely watched, because they were required to offer incense to the gods and to the emperor. Several Christian soldiers refused, like Saint Sebastian in Rome or the soldiers of the Theban Legion around Saint Maurice of Agaunum.

His martyrdom according to tradition

The *Passion of Saint Victor* says that the soldier, summoned before the imperial authorities, refused to sacrifice. He was scourged and thrown into prison, and the account adds that molten lead was poured over him without harming him. Taking advantage of a moment when his guards were not watching, he is said to have escaped, then been caught in a wood near Milan and beheaded. His body, left unburied, was spared by wild animals until Bishop Maternus came to bury it.

Some of these details belong to the genre of martyrs' passions, which dwell on wonders. The heart of the story, however, is credible and fits what we know of the persecution: a Christian soldier refused to worship the gods, was condemned and was executed near Milan at the beginning of the fourth century.

The martyr celebrated by Saint Ambrose

Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374 to 397, did much to foster the cult of the martyrs. He mentions Victor together with Nabor and Felix, all three from Africa, and says that they were foreigners who became the protectors of the city. A hymn attributed to Ambrose begins with the words *Victor, Nabor, Felix pii* ("Victor, Nabor, Felix, the holy ones"). It celebrates these soldiers who shed their blood far from their homeland and gave Milan its glory.

Ambrose also had a very personal bond with Victor. When his beloved brother Satyrus died, around 378, he buried him beside the martyr's tomb, in the chapel that would become the *sacello* of San Vittore. The epitaph written for Satyrus recalls that he rests at the martyr's left. For Ambrose, burying a loved one near a saint meant entrusting the dead to the saint's intercession.

A cult across the centuries

Victor's burial chapel, now part of the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, received in the fifth century a dome covered with gold tesserae, with the bust of the martyr at its center. On the walls, mosaics show Saint Ambrose, the Milanese martyrs Gervasius and Protasius, as well as Nabor, Felix and Bishop Maternus. It is one of the most precious ensembles of early Christian art in the West.

In Milan, the church of San Vittore al Corpo, served for centuries by Olivetan Benedictine monks, recalls by its name the tradition that links it to the martyr's body. Outside Milan, many churches in Lombardy are dedicated to him.

Why is Saint Victor the patron saint of Varese, prisoners and exiles?

Victor is the patron of the city of Varese, whose Basilica of San Vittore dominates the historic center, and of several towns such as Ceriano Laghetto. Popular tradition also invokes him for prisoners and exiles, in memory of his captivity and of his life far from his native land.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Victor in art

- **Roman soldier's armor**, often on horseback.
- **The palm of martyrdom**.
- **A banner or a sword**, in some images.

He should not be confused with Saint Victor of Marseille, another soldier martyr of the early fourth century, celebrated on July 21.



The Basilica of San Vittore in Varese, the city of which Saint Victor is patron.

What can we learn from Saint Victor?

Victor came from elsewhere: a foreigner who became, in Ambrose's words, a protector of the city that saw him die. His story reminds us that the Church, from its beginnings, was made up of very different peoples, and that Africa gave Italy some of its first martyrs. He is also a witness of long fidelity: a

Christian from his youth, he did not deny his faith when it became dangerous. We can pray to him for soldiers, for prisoners, for exiles and migrants, and for all who must remain faithful to Christ in a hostile setting.

Where to pray to Saint Victor Maurus

- **Milan**: the *sacello* of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, inside the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, his original burial chapel.
- **Milan**: the church of San Vittore al Corpo, which bears his name and keeps the memory of his body.
- **Varese** (Lombardy): the Basilica of San Vittore, the main church of the city he protects.
- **Ceriano Laghetto** (Lombardy): the parish church of the town that honors him as patron.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Victor Maurus or the novena to Saint Victor, which ends on May 8.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Victor Maurus, Soldier of Christ

Saint Victor Maurus, an African soldier martyred in Milan around 303, is one of the ancient protectors of the Church of Milan. As far as we know, there is no widely used traditional prayer in his honor apart from local liturgical texts. This page therefore recalls the Ambrosian hymn that celebrates him, then offers an original prayer by Saintspedia for soldiers, prisoners, exiles and all who must stay faithful to Christ.

The hymn of Saint Ambrose

A hymn attributed to Saint Ambrose, *Victor, Nabor, Felix pii*, celebrates the three Moorish soldiers martyred near Milan. It presents them as foreigners from Africa whose blood became the glory of the city. You can draw on it to begin your prayer, simply saying: "Saints Victor, Nabor and Felix, martyrs of Christ and protectors of Milan, pray for us."

Prayer to Saint Victor Maurus

Saint Victor, soldier of Christ, you left your African homeland and served far from your own people: watch over those who live in exile, over migrants and over all who have had to leave everything behind.

You kept the faith from your youth to your old age: obtain for me faithfulness in small things as in great trials, and the strength never to deny the Lord.

You knew chains and prison: remember prisoners, those who are unjustly detained, and those who are locked in fear or despair. Give them hope and peace of heart.

Protect soldiers and all who bear arms to defend their country: may they remain just, respectful of life and of conscience. I also entrust to you my intention (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may Christ, for whom you gave your life, keep me in his love, today and to the end. Amen.

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

Intentions to entrust to Saint Victor

- For prisoners and their families.
- For exiles, refugees and migrants, especially those who have come from Africa.
- For Christians serving in the armed forces and for military chaplains.
- For the people of Varese and Milan, who honor him as a protector.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Victor is celebrated on May 8. You can pray to him before leaving to live abroad, for a loved one in prison, or to ask for perseverance in the faith. To get to know him better, read the life of Saint Victor Maurus, or pray the novena to Saint Victor Maurus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Victor Maurus

This novena to Saint Victor Maurus is an original composition by Saintspedia. For nine days, it follows the African soldier martyred in Milan around 303: his long fidelity, his courage before persecution and his life far from his homeland. To end on his feast day, May 8, begin on April 30. You can also pray it at any time for a prisoner, an exile or someone serving in the armed forces.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and read the short meditation. Then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Close with the invocation "Saint Victor, pray for us," and try to carry out the small act suggested. Keep the same intention throughout the nine days.

If you are praying for a prisoner, a migrant or a soldier, you may say their name each day after the prayer. A family or a prayer group can also pray this novena together, one person reading the meditation and everyone saying the prayer aloud. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off: what matters is perseverance, which is precisely the grace Saint Victor shows us.

Day 1: A man from far away

Victor was born in Mauretania, in North Africa, and served in Italy, far from his family. He knew what it means to live as a foreigner. In Christ, no one is a stranger.

Prayer: Saint Victor, you lived far from your native land. Watch over all who have left their country, and help me to welcome those who come from elsewhere. Amen.

Today: Greet with kindness someone in your parish or neighborhood who has come from another country.

Day 2: A lifelong faith

Tradition says Victor had been a Christian since his youth and was already old when he was arrested. His witness was not a single heroic moment, but the fruit of years of faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Victor, give me a faith that lasts, nourished day after day by prayer and the sacraments. Amen.

Today: Keep a fixed time of prayer, even a short one, and be faithful to it.

Day 3: A soldier of Christ

Victor served the emperor honestly, but he knew that his first loyalty belonged to God. When the two came into conflict, he chose Christ.

Prayer: Saint Victor, help me to do my work well and serve others faithfully, while always putting God first. Amen.

Today: Pray for those who serve in the armed forces and for military chaplains.

Day 4: Refusing the idols

Soldiers were ordered to offer incense to the gods and the emperor. Victor refused. Our idols today are often money, success or the opinion of others.

Prayer: Lord, show me the idols in my life that take your place, and give me the courage to set them aside. Amen.

Today: Give up something that takes too much room in your day, such as an hour of screens.

Day 5: In chains

Victor was scourged and imprisoned. He knew the fear and loneliness of a cell. Christ himself said: "I was in prison and you came to me."

Prayer: Saint Victor, remember all prisoners, those unjustly detained and those who have done wrong. Give them hope, and comfort their families. Amen.

Today: Pray for a prisoner by name, or learn about a prison ministry near you.

Day 6: Strength in trial

The account of his passion says he came through torments unharmed. Whatever the details, the story tells us that God's strength can sustain us when our own fails.

Prayer: Lord, when I am weak and afraid, be my strength. Through Saint Victor, teach me to trust you in every trial. Amen.

Today: Entrust to God, in a few words, the trial that weighs on you most.

Day 7: Giving his life

Victor was beheaded near Milan. He did not seek death, but he would not buy his life with a denial. His blood became a seed of faith for the Church of Milan.

Prayer: Saint Victor, pray for the Christians who are persecuted today. May they be strong, and may their witness bear fruit. Amen.

Today: Learn about a country where Christians suffer for their faith, and pray for them.

Day 8: A friend of Saint Ambrose

Saint Ambrose loved Victor so much that he buried his own brother Satyrus beside him. The saints are friends to whom we can entrust our dead.

Prayer: Saint Victor, I entrust to you my loved ones who have died. With Saint Ambrose, pray that they may rest in the peace of Christ. Amen.

Today: Pray for a deceased family member, or visit their grave.

Day 9: A protector of the city

Ambrose called the African martyrs the protectors of Milan. Victor, a foreigner, became the patron of cities such as Varese. God makes a blessing out of those the world sees as outsiders.

Prayer: Saint Victor, protect my city, my parish and my family. Help us to build a community where everyone has a place. Amen.

Today: Do a concrete service for your neighborhood or your parish.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Victor Maurus, soldier of Christ and martyr of Milan, you remained faithful from your youth to your death, far from your homeland and in the face of persecution. During these nine days I have entrusted to you (name your intention). Present it to the Lord, if it is his will. Watch over prisoners, exiles, migrants and soldiers, and help me to stay faithful to Christ in every circumstance, so that one day I may share your joy in heaven. Amen.*

On his feast day, May 8, you can also say the prayer to Saint Victor Maurus.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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