

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saints Cyril and Methodius

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 14

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IN BRIEF

Saints Cyril and Methodius

Brothers from Thessalonica, Apostles to the Slavs and co-patrons of Europe.

Feast day	February 14
Born	c. 826-827 (Cyril); c. 815 (Methodius), Thessalonica, Byzantine Empire
Died	February 14, 869 (Cyril); April 6, 885 (Methodius), Rome (Cyril); Great Moravia (Methodius)
Canonized	Venerated since ancient times; proclaimed co-patrons of Europe in 1980
Patron saint of	Europe, Slavic peoples, Christian unity

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saints Cyril and Methodius for Europe and Christian Unity

Novena to Saints Cyril and Methodius

Basilica of San Clemente in Rome, Tomb of Saint Cyril

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saints Cyril and Methodius

Saints Cyril and Methodius were two brothers born in Thessalonica, in the Byzantine Empire, in the 9th century. Sent to Great Moravia, they preached the Gospel to the Slavs in their own language, creating an alphabet for it and translating the Scriptures and the liturgy. They are known as the "Apostles to the Slavs." In 1980 Pope John Paul II proclaimed them co-patrons of Europe with Saint Benedict. They share a feast day on February 14, the anniversary of Cyril's death in Rome.

Who were Saints Cyril and Methodius?

Methodius, the elder, was born around 815; his brother Constantine, who took the name Cyril only at the end of his life, was born around 826 or 827. Their father, Leo, was an imperial official in Thessalonica, a Greek city surrounded by Slavic-speaking peoples. The two boys very likely grew up hearing that language around them.

Methodius first made a career in public administration, then became a monk on Mount Olympus in Bithynia. Constantine, a brilliant mind, studied in Constantinople, where he taught philosophy, which earned him the nickname "Constantine the Philosopher."

Most of what we know about them comes from two early accounts written in Slavonic by their disciples, the *Lives* of Constantine and of Methodius, and from papal letters of the period.

Key dates

- **c. 815**: Birth of Methodius in Thessalonica.
- **c. 826-827**: Birth of Constantine (Cyril).

- **c. 860-861**: Mission of the two brothers to the Khazars; in Crimea they recover relics attributed to Pope Saint Clement.
- **862**: Prince Rastislav of Great Moravia asks the Byzantine emperor for missionaries who speak his people's language.
- **863**: Arrival in Moravia, with the Glagolitic alphabet and the first translations.
- **867-868**: Journey to Rome; Pope Adrian II approves the Slavonic liturgical books.
- **February 14, 869**: Death of Cyril in Rome, shortly after becoming a monk; he is buried in the Basilica of San Clemente.
- **c. 870**: Methodius, now Archbishop of Sirmium, is imprisoned by Frankish bishops, then freed through the intervention of Pope John VIII.
- **880**: John VIII confirms the use of Slavonic in the liturgy.
- **April 6, 885**: Death of Methodius in Moravia.
- **1880**: Pope Leo XIII extends their feast to the whole Church.
- **December 31, 1980**: John Paul II proclaims them co-patrons of Europe.

An alphabet for the Gospel

When Prince Rastislav asked Constantinople for preachers able to teach his people in their own tongue, Emperor Michael III and Patriarch Photius thought of the two brothers. But the Slavic language had no written form. Constantine therefore designed an alphabet suited to its sounds, known today as Glagolitic. According to his *Life*, the first text he translated was the opening of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word."

The brothers did more than preach. They translated the Gospels, the Psalms and the texts of the Mass, and they trained disciples. For the first time, a Slavic people could pray to God in its own language.

The Cyrillic alphabet, used today in Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Serbia, is a later creation, developed by their disciples in Bulgaria. It bears Cyril's name in his honor.

Rome and the defense of the Slavonic liturgy

Using a language other than Latin, Greek or Hebrew for the liturgy met with opposition from Frankish clergy present in Moravia. Around 867 the brothers set out for Rome, bringing with them the relics of Saint Clement they had found in Crimea. Pope Adrian II received them with honor and approved their liturgical books.

In Rome, Constantine fell ill. He became a monk, taking the name Cyril, and died on February 14, 869. He was buried in the Basilica of San Clemente, near the relics he had brought back.

Methodius, archbishop and witness

After his brother's death, Methodius was ordained a bishop and named Archbishop of Sirmium, with authority over Moravia and Pannonia. His work was not welcome to everyone. Frankish bishops had him arrested and held captive for more than two years, until Pope John VIII obtained his release.

Accused again, he traveled to Rome, where John VIII confirmed in 880 the use of the Slavic language in the liturgy. Methodius continued translating the Scriptures until his death on April 6, 885. His burial place is not known with certainty.

Shortly afterward, his disciples were driven out of Moravia. Several of them, such as Clement of Ohrid and Naum, carried on their work in Bulgaria, from where Christian Slavic culture spread far and wide.

Why are Saints Cyril and Methodius the patron saints of Europe?

Cyril and Methodius chose to meet a people in its own language and culture, without giving up anything of the faith or of unity with both Rome and Constantinople. They are venerated by Catholics and Orthodox alike. Saint John Paul II, the first Slavic pope, proclaimed them co-patrons of Europe in 1980, alongside Saint Benedict, and devoted the encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* to them in 1985. He liked to say that Christian Europe breathes "with its two lungs," East and West, and the two brothers embody that conviction.

They are also the patron saints of the Slavic peoples. Catholics pray to them for Christian unity, for Europe and for all who translate, teach and proclaim the Gospel.

Symbols and how to recognize Saints Cyril and Methodius in art

The brothers are almost always shown together. Cyril usually wears a monk's habit, Methodius the vestments of a bishop. They often hold a book, a scroll or a tablet bearing letters of the Slavic alphabet, the sign of the writing they gave to the Slavs. In Eastern icons they may hold a church between them, the image of the Church they helped build among the Slavic nations.



Saints Cyril and Methodius, statue.

When is their feast day?

In the Roman calendar, Saints Cyril and Methodius are celebrated together on February 14, the anniversary of Cyril's death. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, their feast is kept on July 5; the Orthodox Churches honor them on May 11.

To pray with them, read the prayer to Saints Cyril and Methodius, or follow the novena to Saints Cyril and Methodius, from February 5 to 13.

Where to pray to Saints Cyril and Methodius

- **Rome**: the Basilica of San Clemente, where Saint Cyril is buried.
- **Velehrad** (Czech Republic): the Basilica of the Assumption and Saints Cyril and Methodius, site of a great national pilgrimage on July 5.

- **Thessalonica** (Greece): their hometown, where several churches honor them.
- **Ohrid** (North Macedonia): the city of their disciple Saint Clement of Ohrid.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saints Cyril and Methodius for Europe and Christian Unity

No prayer composed by Cyril or Methodius has come down to us in a form that can be quoted with certainty. Their legacy is first of all the Scriptures they translated for the Slavs. This page therefore offers the verses with which, according to tradition, Constantine-Cyril began his translation, followed by an original prayer to the two brothers.

"In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1-5)

According to the *Life of Constantine*, written by his disciples, the first text set down in the new Slavic alphabet was the prologue of the Gospel of John:

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
>
> *He was in the beginning with God.*
>
> *All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made.*
>
> *In him was life, and the life was the light of men; and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Source: Gospel according to Saint John, chapter 1, verses 1 to 5.

Prayer to Saints Cyril and Methodius for Europe and Christian unity

> *Saints Cyril and Methodius, brothers united by blood and by faith, you left your homeland to bring the Gospel to peoples who had not yet heard it: pray for us.*
>
> *You gave the Slavs a written language so they could read the Word of God and pray in their own tongue: teach us to speak of God with words that everyone can understand.*
>
> *You remained faithful to the unity of the Church in spite of opposition and prison: obtain for Christians of East and West the grace to recognize one another as brothers and sisters. Watch over Europe, over its peoples, its languages and its cultures.*
>
> *I also entrust to you my intention (name it in silence). Through your prayer, may the Word who enlightens every person find a home in my life. Amen.*

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

A verse to meditate on

> *"Praise the Lord, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples!"*

Source: Psalm 117:1. This short psalm sums up the brothers' intuition: every people, in its own language, is called to praise God.

When to pray this prayer

- On their feast day, February 14, or on July 5 if you have Czech or Slovak roots.
- During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, in January.
- For Europe, for peace between its nations, and for countries at war.
- For translators, teachers, catechists and missionaries.
- When you need to find the right words to share your faith with someone.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saints Cyril and Methodius, and discover the life of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saints Cyril and Methodius

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of their feast, begin on February 5; it ends on February 13, the day before the feast of February 14. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially for Christian unity, for Europe, or for someone who is far from home.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into ordinary life, especially in the service of unity among Christians and peace among peoples. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.



Saints Cyril and Methodius, statue.

Day 1: Two brothers

Methodius and Constantine carried out their mission together. Born of the same parents in Thessalonica, they let their bond of blood become a bond of faith and service. Neither tried to outshine the other; each brought his gifts to a shared work. Families, friendships and communities can also become places where God's work is done.

Prayer: Lord, bless my brothers and sisters, my family and my friends. Make the ties that bind us a path that leads to you.

Today: Get in touch with a brother, a sister or someone close to you you have not spoken to in a while.

Day 2: A love of learning

Constantine was nicknamed "the Philosopher." He studied and taught in Constantinople, and his intelligence and culture were placed entirely at the service of the Gospel. Faith does not fear the mind; it asks to be understood, studied and loved more deeply.

Prayer: Lord, may my talents and my knowledge serve your glory and the good of my neighbor. Give me a mind that seeks you and a heart that does not tire of learning.

Today: Set aside fifteen minutes to deepen your faith with a good book or a page of Scripture.

Day 3: Answering a call

When the prince of Moravia asked for missionaries, the two brothers agreed to leave everything for a distant land. They did not know what awaited them. They went because the Church asked it of them and because a people was waiting to hear the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, make me open to your calls, even when they draw me out of my habits and my comfort.

Today: Pray for missionaries and for all who have left their homeland to serve others.

Day 4: Speaking the language of others

To bring the Gospel to the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius took up their language and invented a script for it. Love begins with the effort to understand. Before speaking, they listened; before teaching, they learned.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to listen to others and to speak to them with words they can receive. Free me from the pride that expects everyone to come to me.

Today: Really listen to someone today, without interrupting and without preparing your answer.

Day 5: In the beginning was the Word

According to tradition, the first text translated into the new alphabet was the prologue of the Gospel of John. Everything the brothers did was in the service of the Word of God, the eternal Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Word of God, light of all people, shine on my life and make me love your Word. May it become my daily bread.

Today: Read slowly John 1:1-14, and stay a moment with the verse that touches you most.

Day 6: The unity of the Church

Sent from Constantinople, the two brothers went to Rome to seek the pope's approval. In their own lives they held together the Christian East and West. Today Catholics and Orthodox both venerate them as saints.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you prayed that all may be one. Draw together Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians, and heal the wounds of our divisions.

Today: Pray for Christian unity, or discover a prayer from another Christian tradition.

Day 7: Dying far from home

Cyril died in Rome at about forty-two years of age, after taking the monastic habit. He never saw Thessalonica again. Before dying, he entrusted the continuation of their work to his brother.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you all those who live far from their country, exiles and migrants. Be their home and their consolation.

Today: Do a kindness for a foreigner or someone who has recently arrived in your community.

Day 8: Holding firm in trials

Methodius was accused, arrested and held in prison for more than two years. He did not give up his mission. He remained faithful to the Church and to the people entrusted to him, and he went on translating the Scriptures to the end of his life.

Prayer: Lord, give me patience and courage when I meet opposition, and keep my heart free of bitterness.

Today: Pray for persecuted Christians and for all who suffer for their faith.

Day 9: Europe and its peoples

As co-patrons of Europe, Cyril and Methodius remind us that its peoples, with their languages and cultures, were shaped by the Gospel. They show that unity does not erase differences: it welcomes them.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I entrust my intention to you. Through the intercession of Saints Cyril and Methodius, watch over Europe and grant it peace. Amen.

Today: Pray for a European country that is suffering or at war.

Closing prayer

Saints Cyril and Methodius, Apostles to the Slavs, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for those who proclaim the Gospel, for those who translate and teach, for the unity of Christians and for peace among nations. May the Word you served so faithfully dwell in my heart and in my words. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saints Cyril and Methodius and the prayer to Saints Cyril and Methodius.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of San Clemente in Rome, Tomb of Saint Cyril

The Basilica of San Clemente in Rome, between the Colosseum and the Lateran, is the place where Saint Cyril was buried in 869. It is the great site of remembrance in the West for the apostles of the Slavs, visited every year by pilgrims from all over Central and Eastern Europe, especially around February 14.

Why Saint Cyril rests at San Clemente

During their mission to the Khazars, around 860-861, Constantine and Methodius found in Crimea relics attributed to Pope Saint Clement, who according to tradition died in exile. They took them along and brought them to Rome in 867-868, which earned them a warm welcome from Pope Adrian II. When Constantine, who had become the monk Cyril, died in Rome on February 14, 869, he was buried in the church of San Clemente, beside these relics.

Three churches, one above the other

San Clemente is famous for its successive levels. The present basilica, from the 12th century, is known for its apse mosaic showing the Cross as a tree of life. Below it lies the early Christian basilica, where Cyril was buried, rediscovered in the 19th century; medieval frescoes there recall the memory of Saint Clement and his relics. Deeper still survive Roman structures, including a sanctuary of Mithras. Since the 17th century the basilica has been entrusted to the Irish Dominicans.

In the lower basilica, a place of remembrance honors Saint Cyril; many plaques given by the Slavic peoples testify to their gratitude.

Praying at San Clemente

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saints Cyril and Methodius. On site, a time of silence in the lower basilica is a good moment to entrust an intention, especially for Christian unity and peace in Europe. The prayer to Saints Cyril and Methodius suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The apse mosaic of San Clemente (12th century).

Other places associated with Cyril and Methodius

- **Velehrad** (Czech Republic): the Basilica of the Assumption and of Saints Cyril and Methodius, a great national pilgrimage around July 5; tradition places Methodius's seat here.

- **Thessaloniki** (Greece): their native city.
- **Ohrid** (North Macedonia): the city of Saint Clement of Ohrid, one of their disciples.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, where, according to the *Life of Methodius*, Pope Adrian II placed the Slavic liturgical books on the altar.

Practical information

The Basilica of San Clemente is a few minutes' walk from the Colosseum, on Via di San Giovanni in Laterano. The upper basilica can be visited freely outside services; access to the lower levels generally requires a fee. Check the times of Masses and visits with the basilica before you come.

CREDITS

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