



The Holy Orthodox Popes of Rome

In this present short work it is our aim to present a full list of the holy popes of Rome, a work which to our knowledge has never been carried out before in its Orthodox context. We feel that this task is particularly valuable at the present time for two reasons:

Firstly, Rome remains the historic centre of the Western Patriarchate and remains a holy place of Orthodox pilgrimage after that Patriarchate ceased to confess Orthodoxy. Indeed, the very word 'pope' is Greek, meaning 'father' and to this day the official title of the Patriarch of Alexandria remains 'Pope of Alexandria'. Some fifteen popes were Greek and another six Syrian and the first Latin pope was St Victor (+ 198).

Secondly, although Rome has not been an Orthodox centre for a thousand years and has often ferociously attacked the Orthodox Church since then, it has nevertheless conserved important vestiges of Orthodoxy. However, with the passing of time, it seems to be losing these vestiges, abandoning even its saints. Some Roman Catholics themselves today doubt the survival of what for us are vestiges of Orthodoxy much into the third millennium. It would seem to us therefore that the following list would be useful for all.

Let us ask the prayers of these holy Orthodox popes of Rome of the first millennium, asking that, through their prayers, Rome and all it once represented and all that remains there of Orthodoxy may, with the third millennium, yet return to the Orthodox Faith of the first millennium. Let us pray that papal supremacy may one day become again papal primacy in its Orthodox sense. In praying to the past, we pray for the future, in calling on these Western Patriarchs, we pray for the salvation of the West, we pray for a West with saints, not a West without saints. And who will pray, if not we Orthodox? **We would remind readers that St. Peter was never a pope of Rome, indeed he was not a bishop at all, but an Apostle.** This is the early tradition of the Church of Rome itself and therefore remains the tradition of the rest of the Orthodox Church today. Moreover St. Peter founded not the Church of Rome, but the Church of Antioch. The Church in Rome was founded by St. Paul. This is clear to any reader of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans. In the following list, popes who already appear in all Eastern Orthodox calendars are marked with an asterisk.

St. Linus (+ c. 78), first pope, Martyr. A disciple of the Apostle Paul, he was consecrated by him. One of the Seventy Apostles, he is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4,21. He was pope for about twelve years and may have been martyred. Feast: 23 September (In the East 4 January and 5 November). *

St. Anacletus (Cletus) (+ c. 91), by origin a Greek from Athens and possibly a

martyr. His name, correctly Anencletus, means 'blameless' (see Titus 1,7) and he may originally have been a slave. Feast: 26 April.

St. Clement of Rome (+ c. 101), martyr. One of the Seventy Apostles and a Church Father, he was consecrated by the Apostle Peter. He is mentioned in Philippians 4,3 and his letter to the Church of Corinth still exists. He was much venerated in the West in the early centuries and still today in the East. The church of San Clemente in Rome probably stands on the site of his house. According to tradition, he was banished to the Crimea and there martyred. Feast: 23 November (in the East 4 January, 22 April, 10 September and 25 November). *

St. Evaristus (+ c. 109), perhaps a martyr and almost certainly of Hellenic/Jewish origin. Feast: 26 October.

St. Alexander I (+ c. 116), the fifth pope and possibly a martyr and by tradition a Roman. Feast: 3 March (in the East 16 March).*

St. Sixtus (Xystus) I (+ c. 125), possibly a martyr. A Roman of Greek origin. Feast: 3 April. *

St. Telesphorus (+ c. 136), a martyr, Greek by origin. Feast: 5 January (in the East 22 February). *

St. Hyginus (+ c. 142), by origin a Greek philosopher from Athens. Also perhaps a martyr. Feast: 11 January.

St. Pius I (+ c. 155), from Aquileia, probably born a slave and perhaps the brother of Hermas who wrote 'The Shepherd'. He defended the Church against Gnosticism. Possibly a martyr. Feast: 11 July.

St. Anicetus (+ 166) the tenth pope and of Syrian origin, he fixed the date of Easter, opposed the Gnostics, perhaps martyred. Feast: 17 April.

St. Soter (+ 174), of Greek descent, he may have been martyred. Feast: 22 April.

St. Eleutherius (+ 189), Greek, possibly martyred. Feast: 26 May.

St. Victor (+ 198), an African and the first Latin pope. A forceful character, he fought for Orthodoxy and against Gnosticism. He may have been martyred. Feast: 28 July. *

St. Zephyrinus (+ 217), of Greek descent. Although not a strong character, he still fought for Orthodoxy against Adoptionism and Modalism and may have been martyred for it. Feast: 26 August.

St. Callistus I (+ 222), the fifteenth pope and originally a slave. Pope Callistus, with his Greek name, was known for his mercifulness and defended married clergy against fanatics. He condemned modalism. Probably martyred. Feast: 14 October.

St. Urban I (+ 230), Roman, possibly martyred. Feast: 25 May.

St. Pontian (+ 235), Roman, he was persecuted for the faith and deported to Sardinia, where he died as a confessor. Feast: 19 November.

St. Antherus (+ 236), Greek and perhaps martyred. Feast: 3 January (5 August in East). *

St. Fabian (+ 250), Roman martyr. Described as an incomparable man, 'his

death matched the purity and goodness of his life', he did much to help the poor. Feast: 20 January (5 August in the East). *

St. Cornelius (+ 253), the twentieth pope and a Roman, he was greatly helped by St Cyprian of Carthage in the struggle against novatian fanaticism. He was renowned for his mercifulness and died as a result of persecution. Feast: 16 September.

St. Lucius (+ 254), a Roman he was exiled as soon as he was elected in a persecution. Supported by St Cyprian, he was certainly a confessor and perhaps was martyred. Feast: 4 March.

St. Stephen I (+ 257), a Roman and a strong character, perhaps a martyr, he is well known for his argument with St Cyprian of Carthage about the baptism of heretics. St Stephen defended the view of economy, that invalid baptism outside the Church was made valid by entry into the Church, and there was no need to repeat the actual rite. Feast: 2 August. *

St. Sixtus II (+ 258), an Athenian. He was 'a good and peace-loving man' who was much helped by Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria. He was martyred by beheading, together with his seven deacons, one of whom was St Lawrence. He was and is greatly venerated in the Orthodox Church, West and also East. Feast: 7 August (10 August in the East). *

St. Dionysius (Denis) (+ 268), one of the most important Roman popes of the third century. He was a learned Greek, who opposed several heresies, helped the persecuted and also reorganized the Church in Rome. Feast: 26 December.

St. Felix I (+ 274), the twenty-fifth pope. A Roman, he opposed the adoptianist heresy. Feast: 30 May.

St. Eutychian (+ 283), a native of Tuscany. Feast: 7 December.

St. Gaius (+ 296), possibly from Dalmatia. It seems that he was martyred together with his brother, a priest, and his children. Feast: 22 April (11 August in the East). *

St. Marcellinus (+ 304), possibly a martyr, and certainly a penitent for previous errors and apostasy. Feast: 2 June (7 June in the East). *

St. Marcellus I (+ 309), a confessor who died as a result of persecution. Feast: 16 January (7 June in the East). *

St. Eusebius (+ 310), the thirtieth pope and a Greek by origin. He was deported to Sicily by the Emperor and died there as a confessor. Feast: 17 August.

St. Miltiades (+ 314), probably from Rome, although he had a Greek name. The Emperor Constantine gave him a palace on the Lateran as his residence. He condemned Donatism. Feast: 10 December.

St. Sylvester I (+ 335), Roman. Feast: 31 December (2 January in the East). *

St. Mark (+ 336), Roman. Feast: 7 October.

St. Julius I (+ 352), Roman. A defender of St. Athanasius, this most Orthodox Pope condemned arianism. Feast: 12 April.

St. Liberius (+ 366). The thirty-fifth pope, he was not of strong character and even compromised the Faith at one point in his life, confessing arianism. However, like St Marcellinus, he then repented, atoned and is recognised as a saint of God. Feast: 27 August. *

St. Damasus (+ 384). Of Spanish origin, he was born in Rome in c. 305, the son of a priest. He fought for Orthodoxy and opposed several heresies. He did much to establish the Latin text of the Bible, developed the liturgy and the veneration of the Roman martyrs. Although as a new pope, he made several arrogant errors, he repented for these and was recognized as a saint at the end. Feast: 11 December.

St. Siricius (+ 399), Roman. An imperious man like St Damasus, he nevertheless forbade the harsh treatment of heretics and supported ascetics. He received the support of St Ambrose of Milan and opposed those who slandered the Mother of God. Feast: 26 November.

St. Anastasius I (+ 401). A man of poverty and apostolic mind, he did much to stop the spread of origenism. Feast: 19 December.

St Innocent I (+ 417). The son of St Anastasius I, he had an imperious character and thirty-six letters of his survive. He supported St John Chrysostom and condemned pelagianism. Feast: 28 July.

St Zosimus (+ 418), the fortieth Pope, by origin a Greek. Although initially he made many errors of tact and judgement, he was anti-pelagian. Feast: 26 December.

St Boniface I (+ 422), a Roman and son of a priest. He was kind, humble and fought for Orthodoxy. Feast: 4 September.

St Celestine I (+ 432). A strong character, he was active against pelagianism, he sent St. Germanus of Auxerre to Britain and St. Palladius to Ireland. He also strongly opposed nestorianism and supported St Cyril of Alexandria. Feast: 6 April (8 April in the East). *

St Sixtus III (+ 440), Roman. He vigorously opposed the heresies of both Pelagius and Nestorius. Feast: 28 March.

St. Leo I, 'the Great' (+ 461). He was born in Rome at the end of the fourth century. He was very energetic, opposed many heresies and protected Rome from the barbarian Huns and Vandals. His teaching on Christ was acclaimed by all the Orthodox at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Feast: 11 April (In the East 18 February) *.

St. Hilary (+ 468), the forty-fifth pope and by origin Sardinian, he actively opposed many heresies. Feast: 28 February.

St. Simplicius (+ 483), he supported the Orthodox in the East against monophysitism. Feast: 10 March.

St. Felix II (+ 492), the son of a priest, he was also the grandfather of St. Gregory the Great. He sternly opposed monophysitism. Feast: 1 March.

St. Gelasius I (+ 496), African, but born in Rome. He helped the poor and was sternly opposed monophysitism. Of imperious character, he put the authority of the Pope on the same level as that of the Emperor. We have from him over a hundred letters or fragments and six theological works. He was the greatest Pope of the fifth century after St Leo. Feast: 21 November.

St. Anastasius II (+ 498), Roman and the son of a priest, he had a conciliatory character. Feast: 8 September/19 November.

St. Symmachus (+ 514), the fiftieth pope and by origin Sardinian, he was very active and a builder of churches. Feast: 19 July.

St. Hormisdas (+ 523), from Italy and father of St. Silverius (see below), he helped end the monophysite schism. Feast: 6 August.

St. John I (+ 526), Tuscan. A confessor, he suffered much from the Arian Goth Theodoric, King of Italy. He was immediately revered as a saint on his repose. Feast: 18 May.

St. Felix III (+ 530), the fifty-third pope and saint in succession, he was greatly loved for his simplicity and almsgiving. He was succeeded by Boniface II, who was the first pope of Germanic origin, and John II, neither of whom is considered a saint. John II was the first pope to change names on assuming that office. Feast: 22 September.

St. Agapitus I (+ 536), the son of a priest, he opposed monophysitism and reposed in Constantinople. Feast: 22 April and 20 September (In the East 17 April). *

St. Silverius (+ 537), he was exiled to Asia Minor as a result of political intrigues. He later died in exile from starvation and various hardships and injustices. He was venerated as a martyr for Orthodoxy. He was succeeded by five popes who are not saints. Feast: 20 June.

St. Gregory I, 'the Great' (in the East 'the Dialogist') (+ 604). One of only two popes to be called 'the Great' (with St. Leo), this able and energetic saint was possibly the greatest of all Roman popes. Known as 'the Apostle of the English', he also did much to convert the Lombards and the Goths. A true monk and ascetic, he wrote much about the monastic life, and was greatly concerned for liturgical life and the poor. Some 850 of his letters survive as well as other extremely important patristic and pastoral works, especially his Dialogues. Notably, he condemned as 'antichrist' any bishop who claimed universal jurisdiction and supremacy. Feast: 12 March. *

Boniface IV (+ 615). A follower of St Gregory the Great, he was also a true monk. Preceded by two popes who are not saints. Feast: 25 May.

Deusdedit I (+ 618), Roman. 'Simple, devout, wise and shrewd', he loved ordinary priests and did much for those then suffering from the plague. He was succeeded by five popes who are not saints. Feast: 8 November.

St. Martin I (+ 655), from Umbria. Condemning the monothelite heresy, he was arrested in Constantinople and starved to death. He was the last Pope of Rome to be martyred. He is widely venerated in the East. Feast: 12 November (In the East 14 April). *

St. Eugene I (+ 657), Roman. Famed for his mildness and kindness to the poor, this saintly man resisted threats to his life from the Emperor in Constantinople. Feast: 2 June.

St. Vitalian (+ 672), opposed monothelitism and appointed the first Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, St Theodore. Feast: 27 January (In the East 23 July). *

St. Agatho (+ 681), Sicilian of Greek origin. Preceded by two popes who are not saints, he was a kindly and generous man, who also helped call the Sixth Oecumenical Council and helped end monothelism. Feast: 10 January (20 February in the East). *

St. Leo II (+ 683), Sicilian, possibly of Greek descent. He confirmed the condemnation of a predecessor, the heretical Pope Honorius I (+ 638), who had

fallen into the monothelite heresy. He loved the poor and was also much concerned with church music. Feast: 3 July.

St. Benedict II (+ 685), Roman. He loved the poor and was humble-minded and gentle. Feast: 7 May.

St. Sergius I (+ 701), born in Palermo, he was a Syrian. Able and energetic, he did much for missionary work in England and northern Europe. He loved the liturgy and church singing and introduced the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross into the West. He was preceded by two popes who are not saints and succeeded by four other non-saints, two Greeks and two Syrians. Feast: 8 September.

St. Gregory II (+ 731), the most outstanding Roman pope of the eighth century. An able leader, he condemned iconoclasm as a heresy and did much to encourage missionary work, like that of St Boniface among the German tribes. He restored churches and fostered the monastic life. Feast: 11 February.

St. Gregory III (+ 741), Syrian. He was acclaimed Pope by the crowds at his predecessor's funeral. He vigorously opposed iconoclasm, built churches and had them adorned with frescos, and also encouraged the monastic life and fostered missionary work in northern Europe. Feast: 28 November.

St Zacharias (+ 752), a Greek and the last Orthodox saint in this see, he opposed iconoclasm, adorned churches with frescos, and did much for missionary work and peace all over western Europe. Feast: 15 March.

Readers will notice that information on many of the early popes is lacking. Many of these are also traditionally held to be martyrs, but there is some uncertainty about this. It should be added that many of the popes were opposed by antipopes, often heretics. This became more and more the case in the Middle Ages when the Orthodox period of the papacy is over and the institution becomes more political and worldly than religious and spiritual.

The reader will no doubt be struck by the fact so many of the early popes are revered as saints, indeed, the first fifty-three in continuous succession. If we take the period up till St Zacharias inclusive, of 90 popes, 68 are revered as saints. Perhaps even more striking is the fact that since St Zacharias, the last Orthodox Roman pope to be a saint, there have been no fewer than 173 popes. Of these only seven are today considered to be saints by the Vatican: one of these was Nicholas I, the notorious filioquist who condemned St Photius of Constantinople, another was Leo IX, the pope ultimately responsible for excommunicating Patriarch Michael of Constantinople in 1054.

Thus with our thoughts on the holy Orthodox popes of Rome, let us pray with one mind and one soul for the salvation of the once Orthodox lands of the West and their salvation in this new millennium.

Holy Orthodox Popes of Rome, pray to God for us!

Fr Andrew, 1999, revised and expanded 2005.

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