

Saint John I

SAINT OF THE DAY

18_05_2026



Pope John I died for love of Christ and the Church, his death caused by the harsh privations he suffered in prison. The personal ordeal of St. John I (†526) took place near the end of the life of the Ostrogoth king Theodoric, a follower of the Arian heresy.

A native of Tuscany, John had ascended the papal throne on 13 August 523. He succeeded St. Hormisdas, the pope who four years earlier had succeeded in recomposing the Acacian schism (named after the Patriarch Acacius, supporter of the *Henotikon*

) thanks to the decisive collaboration of the new patriarch of Constantinople, John II of Cappadocia, and the new Eastern Roman emperor, Justin I.

Justin himself promulgated an edict against the Eastern Arians in 523. The emperor ordered the heretics to return to the Catholics the churches they had occupied, and the abjuration of Arianism, on pain of exclusion from public office. The Arian Theodoric, the second of Italy's barbarian kings, suspected that the pontiff, the Roman senators, and the Byzantine emperor were conspiring against him. And he reacted violently. In 524, on the basis of unjust accusations, he imprisoned one of his most illustrious collaborators, the philosopher Severinus Boethius, who then suffered martyrdom in prison. More or less in the same period Quintus Aurelius Memmius Symmachus, a fervent Christian, father-in-law of Boethius, was also executed. In 525 Theodoric ordered Pope John to go to the East to convince Justin to withdraw his measures against the Arians, threatening a reprisal against Catholics in the West.

When the Holy Father arrived in Constantinople he received a triumphal welcome. Fifteen thousand faithful crowded the streets with crosses and candles to greet his arrival in the city. At the first meeting with the Pope, Justin prostrated himself and was later crowned by him. All the Eastern patriarchs - with the exception of Timothy IV of Alexandria, who was against the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon - openly expressed their communion in faith with John. On 19 April 526 it was the Pontiff who solemnly celebrated, according to the Latin rite, the Easter Mass in the Basilica of Saint Sophia. The sources are not very clear about the exact agreement between John and Justin regarding the Arians. What is certain is that Theodoric was not satisfied with the outcome and, when the Pope returned to Italy, had him imprisoned in Ravenna. Here John was mistreated and on 18 May, now exhausted with fatigue, he took his last earthly breath. Four years later his body was transferred to St. Peter's Basilica.