

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Alban

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: June 22

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Alban

Citizen of Verulamium, honored as the first martyr of Britain.

Feast day	June 22
Born	3rd century, Verulamium (St Albans), Roman Britain
Died	3rd or early 4th century (date debated), Verulamium (St Albans)
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	converts, refugees

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Alban for Refugees and Those Who Welcome Them

Novena to Saint Alban

St Albans Cathedral and the Shrine of Saint Alban

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Alban

Saint Alban is honored as the first martyr of Britain. A citizen of the Roman town of Verulamium, today St Albans, north of London, he is said to have sheltered a hunted Christian priest, been converted through him, and then taken his place before the judges. He was beheaded on a hill overlooking the town, at a date historians place between the early 3rd and the early 4th century. He is celebrated on June 22.

Who was Saint Alban?

In the days of the Roman Empire, Britain, roughly today's England, was a distant province where Christianity was still a small minority. Verulamium, on the River Ver, was one of its main towns. Alban lived there, a pagan, perhaps a man of some standing.

The main account of his life comes from Saint Bede the Venerable, who wrote it in the 8th century in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, drawing on older texts. But the saint was already mentioned at the end of the 5th century in the *Life of Saint Germanus of Auxerre*, and then by Saint Gildas in the 6th century. Gildas names him alongside two other British martyrs, Julius and Aaron of the "City of the Legions."

Key dates in the life of Saint Alban

- **3rd or early 4th century**: Martyrdom of Alban at Verulamium; the exact date is debated (c. 209, c. 251-259 or c. 304, depending on the hypothesis).
- **c. 429**: According to his *Life*, Saint Germanus of Auxerre comes to pray at his tomb.
- **6th century**: Gildas mentions his martyrdom.

- **731**: Bede completes his *Ecclesiastical History*, which sets down the account of Alban's passion.
- **Late 8th century**: According to tradition, King Offa of Mercia founds an abbey on the site of his martyrdom.

The host who took the priest's place

According to Bede, Alban welcomed into his home a Christian cleric who was fleeing the persecutors. Seeing him pray day and night, Alban was moved, asked to be taught, and received the faith. When soldiers came to search the house, Alban put on his guest's cloak and gave himself up in his place.

A later tradition, going back to Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century, gives the priest the name Amphibalus. In reality, *amphibalus* is the Latin word for a kind of cloak.

"I worship the true and living God"

Brought before the magistrate, who was about to offer sacrifice to the gods, Alban refused to take part. Asked about his family, he answered that he was a Christian. Bede gives him a profession of faith that the liturgy of St Albans still uses: "I worship and adore the true and living God, who created all things." He was scourged, then condemned to death.

Martyrdom on the hill

Bede's account mixes history and wonder. To reach the place of execution, on the other side of the river, the crowd blocked the bridge; Alban prayed, and the waters parted to let him pass. The appointed executioner, deeply moved, threw down his sword and asked to die with him. At the top of the hill, a spring burst forth at the saint's prayer. Alban was beheaded, together with the converted soldier; the legend adds that the eyes of the executioner fell out at the same moment as the martyr's head fell.

These details belong to the hagiographical tradition. The central fact, on the other hand, is very probably historical: a Christian of Verulamium gave his life for having protected a priest and confessed Christ, and his tomb was venerated very early.



The shrine of Saint Alban in St Albans Cathedral.

A disputed date

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* places his death in 283. Bede places it at the time of Diocletian's edicts, around 303-305. In 1968, the historian John Morris proposed the year 209, under Septimius Severus, on the basis of a manuscript kept in Turin that mentions a "Caesar Severus": Gildas, he argued, had taken the name for a simple adjective. Other scholars lean toward the persecutions of Decius or Valerian, between 251 and 259. None of these hypotheses has prevailed definitively.

Why is Saint Alban the patron saint of refugees and converts?

Saint Alban is the saint of hospitality carried to the end: he opened his door to a stranger in danger, then gave his life to protect him. That is why he is invoked for **refugees** and for all who welcome them. His faith was born from an encounter and from the example of a man at prayer, which makes him a patron of **converts**. He also bears witness to the very ancient roots of Christianity in the British Isles, long before the mission of Saint Augustine of Canterbury. He is prayed to for the courage to confess one's faith.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Alban in art

Saint Alban is often shown as a young man in a cloak, recalling the garment he took from the priest. He holds a cross and the palm of martyrdom, and sometimes a sword, the instrument of his death. In some medieval images, he is shown kneeling at the moment of his execution, or with the executioner whose eyes fall out. Stained glass windows in many English churches depict him in this way.



Saint Alban, stained glass window in an English church.

Where to pray to Saint Alban

The heart of his cult is St Albans Cathedral, in Hertfordshire, about twenty miles north of London. This former Benedictine abbey church, now a cathedral of the Church of England, stands on the hill where tradition places his martyrdom and holds his medieval shrine, whose carved base was pieced back together from fragments in the 19th century. Each year, around his feast in June, the town holds a pilgrimage in his honor. The remains of the Roman town where he lived can be seen nearby in Verulamium Park.

In France, several parishes bear his name, such as Saint-Alban (Côtes-d'Armor), Inguiniel (Morbihan) and Saint-Alban (Haute-Garonne).

To pray with him, you can use the prayer to Saint Alban or the novena to Saint Alban.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Alban for Refugees and Those Who Welcome Them

Saint Alban left no writings, but the account of his passion, handed down by Saint Bede the Venerable, has preserved a sentence that sums up his faith. The liturgy of St Albans still uses it today. You will find it below, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia.

The profession of faith of Saint Alban

> *"I worship and adore the true and living God, who created all things."*

Source: Bede the Venerable, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book I, chapter 7 (completed in 731). Translation by Saintspedia. According to Bede, these were the words Alban spoke to the magistrate who ordered him to sacrifice to the gods.

Prayer to Saint Alban for refugees and those who welcome them

Saint Alban, you opened your house to a hunted priest: teach me not to close my door to the one who knocks, even when welcoming him costs me something.

You discovered Christ by watching your guest pray: help me to be a silent and faithful witness for others.

You put on another man's cloak to save him: make me able to take on myself a share of the burdens of my brothers and sisters.

I entrust to you refugees, people persecuted for their faith, those who welcome them, and my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me the grace to say each day with you: I worship the true and living God, who created all things. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Alban is celebrated on June 22. You can pray to him for refugees and migrants, for families who host people in need, for Christians persecuted for their faith, or for someone preparing to be received into the Church. It is also a fitting prayer for pilgrims on their way to St Albans Cathedral, where his shrine stands on the hill of his martyrdom.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Alban, and discover the life of Saint Alban.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Alban

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the account of the passion of Saint Alban told by Saint Bede the Venerable. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on June 13; it ends on June 21, the day before the feast of Saint Alban on June 22. It can also be prayed at any time of year, for refugees, for those who welcome them, or for someone on the way to the faith.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps you live the prayer during the day. You may end each day by repeating Alban's profession of faith: "I worship and adore the true and living God, who created all things."

The nine days follow the story of Alban as Bede tells it, from the knock on his door to his death on the hill above Verulamium. If you can, pray one of these days at St Albans Cathedral, before his shrine, or in a church dedicated to him. Otherwise, a simple corner of prayer at home, with a cross and a lit candle, is enough to keep company with the martyr during these nine days.

Day 1: A knock at the door

A hunted Christian priest knocked at Alban's door. Alban was not yet a Christian, and he knew the danger. Yet he opened. Everything began with that act of hospitality.

Prayer: Lord, open my heart and my door to those who need shelter. Give me a generous heart, even when it costs me.

Today: Pray for refugees, or support an organization that welcomes them.

Day 2: Watching a man pray

Alban watched his guest pray day and night. No sermon converted him, but the sight of a man speaking with God. Our prayer, too, can be a witness for others.

Prayer: Lord, make my prayer true and faithful, so that it may draw others to you.

Today: Pray in a place where others can see you, simply and without show.

Day 3: Asking to be taught

Moved by what he saw, Alban asked to be instructed in the faith. He had the humility to learn and the courage to change his life.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me a teachable heart. I entrust to you all those preparing for baptism or for reception into the Church.

Today: Pray for a catechumen or for someone searching for God.

Day 4: The borrowed cloak

When the soldiers arrived, Alban put on the priest's cloak and gave himself up in his place. He offered his life so that another might live.

Prayer: Jesus, you gave your life for me. Teach me to take on myself a share of the burdens of others.

Today: Do a service for someone in their place, without being asked.

Day 5: "I am a Christian"

Asked about his family, Alban answered simply that he was a Christian. His new identity in Christ had become the most important thing about him.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage not to hide my faith, and the joy of being called a Christian.

Today: Make the sign of the cross before a meal, even in public.

Day 6: Worshiping the living God

Alban refused to sacrifice to idols and confessed "the true and living God, who created all things." Today, our idols are often money, success or comfort.

Prayer: Lord, you alone are God. Free me from the idols that take your place in my heart.

Today: Identify one thing that takes too much room in your life and give that time to God.

Day 7: The converted executioner

On the way to the hill, the man chosen to kill Alban threw down his sword and asked to die with him. A faithful witness can touch even the hardest hearts.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those who seem far from you, and those who do harm. Touch their hearts.

Today: Pray for someone who has hurt you.

Day 8: Persecuted brothers and sisters

Alban died during a persecution of Christians. In many countries today, believers still risk their lives for their faith.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen persecuted Christians. Give them courage, protect their families, and change the hearts of their persecutors.

Today: Learn about a persecuted Christian community and pray for it.

Day 9: The first martyr of Britain

Alban's tomb was venerated very early, and the hill of his death became a place of prayer for centuries. His witness reminds us that the faith in Britain has very ancient roots.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Alban, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Make me faithful, welcoming and brave. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Church in Britain and Ireland, and for the unity of Christians.

Closing prayer

Saint Alban, first martyr of Britain, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. You opened your home to a stranger, you received the faith through his prayer, and you gave your life in his place. Pray for refugees and for those who welcome them, for converts and for all who are persecuted for Christ. Obtain for us a generous heart and the courage to confess the true and living God. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Alban and the prayer to Saint Alban.

PILGRIMAGE

St Albans Cathedral and the Shrine of Saint Alban

St Albans Cathedral, in Hertfordshire about twenty miles north of London, stands on the hill where, according to tradition, Saint Alban was beheaded. Once the church of a great Benedictine abbey, it is now a cathedral of the Church of England and houses the medieval shrine of Britain's first martyr. Christians of every denomination come here on pilgrimage.

From martyrdom to abbey

The Roman town of Verulamium lay below, on the other side of the River Ver. According to the account of the Venerable Bede, Christians built a church on the site of the martyrdom as soon as the persecutions ended. Tradition credits King Offa of Mercia, in the late 8th century, with founding a Benedictine monastery around the tomb. After the Norman Conquest, the abbey was largely rebuilt with bricks and tiles salvaged from the ruins of Verulamium, which gives the building its distinctive color.

In the Middle Ages, St Albans Abbey became one of the most powerful in England and a renowned center of learning. Closed during the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, its church was bought by the townspeople to serve as their parish church, and it became a cathedral in 1877.



St Albans Cathedral, exterior view.

The shrine of Saint Alban

Behind the high altar, the shrine of Saint Alban stands at the heart of the cathedral. Its carved marble base, dating from the 14th century, was smashed to pieces after the Reformation; the fragments, rediscovered in the 19th century, were patiently pieced back together. Nearby you can still see the wooden watching loft from which a monk once guarded the shrine and its offerings. Farther along, in the nave, medieval wall paintings have been uncovered on the pillars.

Visiting the cathedral

The cathedral is open to visitors and worshippers outside of services. Its nave is one of the longest in England. Around the saint's feast day in June, the town holds an annual pilgrimage in his honor. The modern town of St Albans also

preserves, in Verulamium Park, remains of the Roman city where the martyr lived.



The shrine of Saint Alban inside the cathedral.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Alban. In front of the shrine, you can renew the profession of faith recorded by Bede, then entrust to the saint those who are exiled or persecuted, with the prayer to Saint Alban. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Alban

- **Verulamium Park** (St Albans): the remains of the Roman town, below the cathedral.
- **France**: parishes under his patronage, such as Saint-Alban (Côtes-d'Armor), Inguiniel (Morbihan) and Saint-Alban (Haute-Garonne).

Practical information

St Albans is about twenty minutes by train from London. The cathedral is a living church, with services every day: check the cathedral's official website for opening hours, any closures and visiting conditions before you come.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: Jules & Jenny from Lincoln, UK, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The shrine of Saint Alban in St Albans Cathedral.: Image: Robert Lamb, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Alban, stained glass window in an English church.: Image: Przemysław Sakrajda, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- St Albans Cathedral, exterior view.: Image: Rob Farrow, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The shrine of Saint Alban inside the cathedral.: Image: Richard Croft, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com