

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Alto

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 9

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Alto

Monk from Ireland, hermit in Bavaria and founder of Altomünster in the 8th century.

Feast day	February 9
Born	8th century, Ireland
Died	c. 760-770, Altomünster, Bavaria, Germany
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	8th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Alto for Those Beginning a Work

Novena to Saint Alto

Church of Saint Alto in Altomünster

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 Alto

Saint Alto was a monk who came from Ireland to Bavaria in the 8th century. A hermit in a forest northwest of present-day Munich, he attracted disciples and founded a monastery around which grew the town of Altomünster, which bears his name. He died around 760 or shortly after. His feast day is February 9.

Who was Saint Alto?

Alto belongs to the generation of Irish monks who, following Saint Columbanus and Saint Gall, left their island to proclaim the Gospel on the continent. His life is known to us mainly through a Life written in the 11th century by the monk Otloh of Saint Emmeram, in Regensburg, at the request of the monastery of Altomünster. This late account reports many miracles.

But an authentic document of the diocese of Freising, dated around 763, bears the signature of an "Alto reclausus," Alto the recluse, which is very probably his own. It confirms that he really existed.

Key dates

- **8th century**: Born in Ireland; he becomes a monk in his homeland.
- **c. 743**: According to his Life, he sets out on pilgrimage for Christ and arrives in Bavaria.
- **Following years**: According to tradition, Pepin the Short gives him a forest, still called Alto's forest today; he lives there as a hermit.
- **c. 750**: Disciples join him; he founds a small monastery, the origin of Altomünster.

- **According to tradition**: The monastery church is consecrated by Saint Boniface.
- **c. 763**: A charter of the diocese of Freising bears the signature of "Alto reclausus."
- **c. 760-770**: Dies at Altomünster.

A pilgrim for Christ

The Irish monks of that time practiced a particular form of self-denial: the *peregrinatio pro Christo*, pilgrimage for Christ. They left their country forever, with no plan to return, in order to follow Jesus, who had "nowhere to lay his head."

According to his Life, Alto received the call to leave in a vision. He crossed the sea and the Frankish lands and arrived in Bavaria, which was then in the midst of its conversion to Christianity, at the time when Saint Boniface was organizing the dioceses of the region.

The hermit of the forest

According to tradition, the Frankish king Pepin the Short gave him a forest in the region of Dachau. Alto lived there as a hermit, in poverty and prayer. His reputation for holiness gradually attracted disciples, and the hermitage became a small monastery, the *monasterium Altonis*, "Alto's monastery," which gave its name to the town of Altomünster.

The wonders of the foundation

Otloh reports several marvelous stories connected with this foundation. Alto marked with his knife the trees to be cut down, and they fell by themselves; birds carried away the branches and helped with the building. When water ran

short for the work, he struck the ground with his staff and a spring gushed out, to which people later came seeking healing. Another story tells that while he was celebrating Mass, the Child Jesus appeared to him above the chalice.

These stories, written three centuries later, say in their own way who Alto was: a man of prayer who turned a wild forest into a place of life and praise.

A foundation that has lasted for centuries

The monastery founded by Alto had a long history. According to tradition, it was destroyed by the Hungarians in the 10th century, then restored by the Welf family. Benedictine monks lived there, then nuns. In 1497 it became an abbey of the Order of Saint Bridget, which remained there for more than five centuries.

The present church, a masterpiece of Bavarian Rococo, was built in the 18th century and dedicated to Saint Alto and Saint Bridget. The monastery closed in 2017, and the church became a parish church.

Devotion to Saint Alto

The feast of Saint Alto appears as early as the 10th century in a missal of Freising, and the Roman Martyrology mentions him on February 9. His cult is still alive in Altomünster, where a trail in the forest keeps his memory.

Why pray to Saint Alto?

Alto left everything for Christ, with no thought of returning. He did not set out to found a town: he wanted to pray. But his prayer attracted others, then gave birth to a community and a town. You can pray to him:

- when you are beginning a work;
- when you are looking for silence;
- when you are living far from home.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Alto and the novena to Saint Alto.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Alto in art

He is shown as an abbot, with a crozier or a staff, sometimes as a bishop. He often holds a knife, recalling the trees he marked, or a chalice with the Child Jesus above it.

Where to pray to Saint Alto

- **Altomünster** (Bavaria, Germany): the Church of Saint Alto and Saint Bridget, on the site of his monastery.
- **Alto's forest** (Altowald), near Altomünster: the trail that recalls his life as a hermit.
- **Freising** (Bavaria): the cathedral of the diocese to which his foundation belonged.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Alto for Those Beginning a Work

Saint Alto was a monk who came from Ireland to Bavaria in the 8th century. A hermit in a forest, he attracted disciples and founded the monastery of Altomünster. According to tradition, he brought forth a spring for the building of his church. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him those who are beginning a work, those who seek God in silence and those who live far from their homeland.

Prayer to Saint Alto

Saint Alto,
you left your native Ireland
to follow Christ with no thought of return.
In the forest of Bavaria,
you sought God in silence and poverty.

Your prayer drew brothers to you,
and from your hermitage a community was born.
When water ran short,
you trusted God, and the spring gushed out.

Pray for those who are beginning a work,
for those who are clearing difficult ground,
for those who live far from their homeland.
Pray for those who are thirsty,
for bread, for water, for peace or for God.

Teach me to make my life a place of prayer.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Alto

- On his feast day, February 9.
- At the beginning of a project, a foundation or a building work.
- When you are looking for silence and solitude to pray.
- For expatriates, missionaries and those who live far from home.
- When you lack what you need and must trust in God.

A prayer at the beginning of a work

> *Lord, I begin this work in your name.*
> *Make it grow if it comes from you.*
> *Saint Alto, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Alto from February 1 to 9, or read the life of Saint Alto.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Alto

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Alto, an Irish monk who became a hermit in Bavaria and founded Altomünster in the 8th century. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, February 9, begin on February 1. It suits the beginning of a work, or a time of searching or solitude, and you can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and 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. End with: "Saint Alto, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: The call

According to his Life, Alto received in a vision the call to leave Ireland. God calls each of us, often more quietly, but always personally.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to your calls. Speak, your servant is listening.

Today: Take ten minutes of silence to listen to what God is asking of you.

Day 2: Leaving for Christ

Alto set out as a pilgrim, with no plan to return, like many Irish monks. He wanted to follow Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head.

Prayer: Lord, free my heart from whatever keeps me far from you.

Today: Give away something you are too attached to.

Day 3: The forest

In Bavaria, Alto settled alone in a forest. There he found the silence and poverty that open the heart to God.

Prayer: Lord, give me a taste for silence. Make my heart a place where you can dwell.

Today: Take a walk in nature while praying.

Day 4: Poverty

The hermit lived on very little. He depended on God for what he needed. Poverty freely chosen sets us free to love.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to live simply and to share with those in need.

Today: Give up an unnecessary expense and give the amount to the poor.

Day 5: Brothers arrive

Alto was looking for solitude, but his holiness attracted disciples. He welcomed them and became their father. True prayer always shines outward.

Prayer: Lord, may my prayer make me more welcoming toward others.

Today: Welcome with patience someone who bothers you.

Day 6: Clearing the ground

According to legend, Alto marked the trees with his knife and they fell by themselves. God blesses the work of those who prepare a place for him.

Prayer: Lord, bless the work I am undertaking. May I do it for you.

Today: Start a task you have been putting off for a long time.

Day 7: The spring

When water ran short for the building work, Alto struck the ground with his staff and a spring gushed out. God provides what is lacking to those who trust him.

Prayer: Lord, you know what I lack. I entrust it to you with confidence.

Today: Give thanks for three things God has given you without your asking.

Day 8: The chalice

According to his Life, while he was celebrating Mass, Alto saw the Child Jesus above the chalice. The heart of his life as a hermit was the Eucharist.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, increase my faith and my love for you.

Today: Go to a weekday Mass, or spend some time in adoration.

Day 9: A town born of prayer

Alto died around 760 or shortly after. Around his monastery grew a town that bears his name. What is sown in prayer bears fruit for centuries.

Prayer: Lord, make fruitful what I sow for you. Through the intercession of Saint Alto, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for monks and nuns, and for those who have left their country for Christ.

Living the novena with Saint Alto

Saint Alto is a saint of beginnings. You may be praying this novena as you launch a project, settle into a new place, or because you feel the need for silence. Let yourself be inspired by his trust: he set out without knowing what

he would find, and God did the rest. During these days, you can also pray for Ireland, the land of so many missionaries, and for religious communities that are closing or being born.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Alto,*
> *pilgrim for Christ and hermit of the forest,*
> *you sought God in silence*
> *and from your prayer a community was born.*
> *Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Bless what I am beginning,*
> *provide for what I lack,*
> *and teach me to trust in God.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Alto at any time, or read the life of Saint Alto.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint Alto in Altomünster

The Church of Saint Alto and Saint Bridget in Altomünster, Bavaria, stands on the place where, according to tradition, Saint Alto founded around 750 a hermitage that became a monastery. The town, whose name means "Alto's monastery," grew up around it. It is the main place of devotion to the saint, whose feast is February 9.

From hermitage to abbey

A monk who came from Ireland, Alto first lived as a hermit in the nearby forest, then gathered disciples. According to tradition, Saint Boniface consecrated the church of his monastery. Destroyed in the 10th century, the monastery was rebuilt by the Welf family. It later housed Benedictine monks, then nuns, and in 1497 became an abbey of the Order of Saint Bridget, which remained there for more than five centuries, until it closed in 2017.

The present church was built in the 18th century to plans by the architect Johann Michael Fischer, one of the masters of the Bavarian Baroque. It is arranged on several levels, for the faithful, the monks and the nuns. Its ceiling frescoes tell the life of Saint Alto, including the miracle of the spring.

Visiting the church

The church is now a parish church. Visitors can admire the bright Rococo architecture and the altars and frescoes devoted to the holy founder and to Saint Bridget of Sweden. In Alto's forest, close by, a trail laid out by the town recalls his life as a hermit.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Alto. In the church, entrust to him your projects, the places where you live and those who are far from their homeland, then say the prayer to Saint Alto. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Alto

- **Alto's forest** (Altowald): the trail dedicated to the holy hermit.
- **Freising**: the cathedral of the diocese, which keeps the memory of the early days of the Church in Bavaria.

Practical information

Altomünster is in the district of Dachau, northwest of Munich, and is connected to the Munich area by commuter train. The church is an active place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the parish or the town of Altomünster 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: Joseph Magges, Augsburg, public domain, 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