

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Andrew Svorad

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 17

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IN BRIEF

Saint Andrew Svorad

Hermit monk of Polish origin at Zobor and Skalka, patron saint of the Dioceses of Nitra and Tarnów.

Feast day	July 17, July 13
Born	c. 980, Lesser Poland
Died	c. 1030-1034, Skalka, near Trenčín, Slovakia
Canonized	1083, with the approval of Pope Gregory VII
Era	11th century
Patron saint of	Diocese of Nitra, Diocese of Tarnów

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Andrew Svorad

Saint Andrew Svorad, also known as Andrew Zorard (Svorad in Slovak, Swierad in Polish), was a hermit monk of Polish origin who lived in the eleventh century in what is now Slovakia. He became a monk at the abbey of Zobor near Nitra, then withdrew to a life of solitude at Skalka, above the Váh River. Canonized in 1083 together with his disciple Saint Benedict, he is the patron saint of the Diocese of Nitra in Slovakia and the Diocese of Tarnów in Poland. His feast day is July 17 (July 13 in Poland).

Who was Saint Andrew Svorad?

Svorad is one of the first saints of Central Europe. What we know of his life comes from a short *Legend of Saints Zoerard and Benedict*, written around 1064 by Maurus, bishop of Pécs in Hungary. Maurus wrote about thirty years after the events and could rely on witnesses, so the source is close in time, even if it focuses mostly on examples of penance and on miracles. The exact dates of his life remain uncertain: he is usually said to have been born around 980 and to have died around 1030-1034, though some authors suggest an earlier date.

His baptismal name was Svorad, or Zoerardus in Latin; he took the name Andrew when he became a monk. Together with his disciple Benedict, he embodies the hermit ideal that spread across Europe around the year 1000, and the spiritual bond between Poland, Slovakia and Hungary.



Saint Andrew Svorad, sculpture in the church of Muszyna, Poland.

Key dates

- **c. 980**: Born in Poland, in the region of Lesser Poland according to tradition.
- **Early 11th century**: According to a Polish tradition, he lives a first hermit life at Tropie, on the Dunajec River.
- **Reign of Saint Stephen of Hungary (1000-1038)**: He moves to the Kingdom of Hungary and enters the Benedictine monastery of Saint Hippolytus at Zobor, near Nitra.
- **c. 1020-1030**: With the permission of Abbot Philip, he withdraws as a hermit to Skalka, near the Váh River.
- **c. 1030-1034**: Dies in his hermitage; his body is brought back to Nitra.
- **A few years later**: His disciple Benedict is killed by robbers.

- **1083**: Canonization of Svorad and Benedict, together with King Stephen, his son Emeric and Bishop Gerard, at the initiative of King Saint Ladislaus.

From Poland to Mount Zobor

According to the legend written by Maurus, Svorad came from Poland and from a humble background. Drawn to religious life, he went to the Kingdom of Hungary, then ruled by King Saint Stephen, who encouraged the founding of monasteries. He presented himself at the monastery of Saint Hippolytus on Mount Zobor, which overlooks the town of Nitra and was one of the oldest Benedictine houses in the region. Abbot Philip welcomed him and gave him the monastic habit under the name Andrew.

A Polish tradition, recorded later, places before this departure a first period of hermit life at Tropie, on the banks of the Dunajec, where a Romanesque church and a shrine are dedicated to him.

The hermit of Skalka

After some years of community life, Andrew obtained his abbot's permission to live alone in the forest, on a rock above the Váh, at the place called Skalka, near present-day Trenčín. There he led a life of prayer and penance of extreme austerity. The legend reports that during Lent he ate only forty walnuts in all, that he slept sitting on a kind of seat set with sharp points so as not to give in to sleep, and that he wore an iron chain around his body that he never took off.

A young man named Benedict (called Stojislav in a later tradition) became his disciple and shared his life. When Andrew died, those who prepared his body discovered the chain, pulled so tight that it had grown into his flesh. His body was taken back to the monastery of Zobor, then venerated in Nitra.

The martyrdom of Benedict

After his master's death, Benedict went back to live at Skalka. A few years later, robbers who thought they would find treasure in the hermitage killed him and threw his body into the Váh. According to the legend, an eagle watched over his body for a whole year, until it was found intact. Benedict is honored as a martyr, and the two saints are always celebrated together.

Canonization and devotion

The reputation for holiness of the two hermits spread throughout the kingdom. In 1083, at the initiative of King Saint Ladislaus and with the approval of Pope Saint Gregory VII, their relics were solemnly raised, at the same time as those of King Stephen, his son Emeric and the martyr bishop Gerard. This was the equivalent of a canonization. The relics of Svorad and Benedict are venerated today in Saint Emmeram's Cathedral at Nitra Castle.

Their cult is still very much alive in Slovakia, where a large pilgrimage takes place every summer at Skalka, and in southern Poland. Many churches are dedicated to them. In the United States, Slovak American Benedictine monks founded Saint Andrew Svorad Abbey in Cleveland, Ohio, a sign of how Slovak immigrants carried this devotion with them.

Why is Saint Andrew Svorad the patron saint of Nitra and Tarnów?

Andrew Svorad is the patron of the Diocese of Nitra because he became a monk at Zobor, just above the town, and because his relics have rested there since his death. He is also the patron of the Diocese of Tarnów in Poland, the region of his birth according to tradition, where Tropie on the Dunajec keeps the memory of his first life as a hermit. In both countries, he is a reminder of the shared Christian roots of Central Europe.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Andrew Svorad in art

Saint Andrew is usually shown as a bearded hermit in a monk's habit, often with the iron chain of his penance. When he appears with his disciple, Saint Benedict is recognized by the eagle that, according to the legend, guarded his body after his martyrdom.

What can we learn from Saint Andrew Svorad?

Svorad sought God in silence, work and penance. His austerity is astonishing and is not meant to be imitated literally, but it expresses a total love that keeps nothing back. He was also a spiritual father to Benedict, and their friendship in Christ outlasted death. He can be invoked for those who seek silence and prayer, for monks and hermits, for those who work the land, and for the bonds between the peoples of Central Europe.

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

Where to pray to Saint Andrew Svorad

- **Skalka pri Trenčíne** (Slovakia): the site of his hermitage and of Benedict's martyrdom, a major place of pilgrimage.
- **Nitra** (Slovakia): Saint Emmeram's Cathedral, in the castle, where his relics are venerated.
- **Mount Zobor** (Slovakia): the site of the former monastery of Saint Hippolytus, where he became a monk.
- **Tropie** (Poland): the shrine of Saints Swierad and Benedict, on the banks of the Dunajec.
- **Tarnów** (Poland): the cathedral of the diocese of which he is patron.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Andrew Svorad and Saint Benedict

Saint Andrew Svorad and his disciple Saint Benedict are invoked together in Slovakia and Poland, especially during the summer pilgrimage to Skalka. The prayers used in those countries are mostly in Slovak and Polish, so this page offers an original prayer inspired by their life as hermits.

Prayer to Saint Andrew Svorad and Saint Benedict

Saint Andrew Svorad, you left your homeland of Poland to seek God: teach us to give him everything, keeping nothing back for ourselves.

You lived in the silence of the forest, above the Váh River: obtain for us a love of prayer and recollection in the midst of the noise of our lives.

You carried the weight of penance with perseverance: help us to fight our weaknesses with courage and without discouragement, relying on the grace of God.

Saint Benedict, his faithful disciple, killed by robbers, pray for those who suffer violence and for those who commit it, that they may be converted.

Holy hermits of Skalka, watch over Slovakia and Poland, over the Dioceses of Nitra and Tarnów, over monks and nuns, and over all who seek God in silence. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Amen.

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

A short invocation

> *Saint Andrew Svorad and Saint Benedict, friends of God in solitude, pray for us. Amen.*

This invocation is an original text by Saintspedia.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Andrew Svorad

- For those who are looking for silence and a deeper life of prayer.
- For monks, nuns and hermits.
- For those who struggle with an addiction or a stubborn fault.
- For Slovakia, Poland and friendship between the peoples of Central Europe.
- For victims of violence and theft.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Andrew Svorad is celebrated with Saint Benedict on July 17 in Slovakia and in the Roman Martyrology; in Poland, their feast is kept on July 13. You can also pray to him during Lent, the season of penance he lived so intensely, or whenever you need help to persevere in prayer. To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Andrew Svorad, and to know him better, read the life of Saint Andrew Svorad.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Andrew Svorad

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Andrew Svorad and his disciple Saint Benedict as told by Bishop Maurus of Pécs around 1064. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on their feast day, July 17, begin it on July 9 (in Poland, where the feast is kept on July 13, begin on July 5). It can also be prayed at any time of the year, especially during Lent or before a retreat.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a few minutes of quiet. Place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps you live something of the hermit's spirit in an ordinary life. You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group.

Day 1: Leaving everything to seek God

Svorad left his homeland of Poland, without wealth or rank, to look for a place where he could give himself entirely to God. Following Christ always begins with a departure: leaving behind something that holds us, even if we do not move an inch on a map.

Prayer: Saint Andrew Svorad, you left your country to seek God alone: help me to let go of what keeps me from following Christ freely.

Today: Name one attachment that takes too much place in your life, and offer it to God in a short prayer.

Day 2: Receiving a new name

At the monastery of Zobor, Abbot Philip gave Svorad the habit and the name Andrew. A new name is a sign of a new life given by God. Through baptism, each of us has also been called by name and made a child of God.

Prayer: Lord, you call each of us by name. Through the intercession of Saint Andrew, renew in me the grace of my baptism.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism, or thank God for it by making the sign of the cross slowly with holy water.

Day 3: Learning in community

Before living alone, Andrew spent years in community, learning obedience, common prayer and work under the Rule of Saint Benedict. Solitude with God is not an escape from others: it grows out of a life where we have learned to love and to obey.

Prayer: Saint Andrew, you learned holiness among your brothers: help me to grow in patience and humility with those I live and work with.

Today: Accept a small request or correction from someone without arguing.

Day 4: The silence of Skalka

On his rock above the Váh River, Andrew lived in the silence of the forest. Silence was not empty for him: it was the place where he listened to God. Our lives are full of noise, screens and words, and we often fear silence.

Prayer: Saint Andrew Svorad, obtain for me a love of silence, so that I may hear the voice of God in my heart.

Today: Spend ten minutes in complete silence, without phone or music, simply in God's presence.

Day 5: Fasting with love

The legend says that during Lent Andrew ate only forty walnuts in all. His austerity astonishes us and is not meant to be copied, but it shows a heart that wanted to depend on God alone. Fasting, lived with measure, frees us to be more attentive to God and to others.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to fast from what weighs me down, so that I may hunger for you and share with those who are hungry.

Today: Give up one small comfort today, and offer what you save to someone in need.

Day 6: Watching in prayer

Andrew slept sitting on a seat set with sharp points so as not to sink into sleep, and he wore an iron chain he never took off. Behind these harsh practices lies the Gospel call to stay awake and pray. Vigilance today may simply mean being faithful to prayer when we are tired or distracted.

Prayer: Saint Andrew, you kept watch with the Lord: help me to persevere in prayer even when it feels dry or hard.

Today: Choose a fixed time for daily prayer and keep it today, even briefly.

Day 7: A spiritual father

The young Benedict came to Andrew and shared his life. Andrew became a father to him in the faith, and their friendship in Christ lasted beyond death. We all need guides, and we are all called to help others along the way.

Prayer: Saints Andrew and Benedict, bless spiritual fathers and mothers, teachers and mentors, and those who are looking for a guide.

Today: Thank, in person or in prayer, someone who has helped you grow in faith.

Day 8: Benedict, faithful to the end

After his master's death, Benedict returned to Skalka. Robbers who hoped to find treasure killed him and threw his body into the river. The only treasure of the hermitage was its prayer. Benedict reminds us of those who suffer violence today, and calls us to pray also for those who commit it.

Prayer: Saint Benedict, martyr of Skalka, pray for all victims of violence and theft, and obtain the conversion of those who hurt others.

Today: Pray by name for someone who has hurt you, asking God to bless them.

Day 9: Saints of Central Europe

In 1083, Andrew and Benedict were raised to the altars with King Stephen, Prince Emeric and Bishop Gerard. A humble hermit stood beside a king. Holiness is not measured by rank but by love. Andrew still watches over Slovakia and Poland, and over all who seek God in silence.

Prayer: Saint Andrew Svorad and Saint Benedict, watch over Slovakia, Poland and all the peoples of Central Europe, and over every family that prays to you.

Today: Pray for peace and faith in Central Europe, and for a country you love.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God, you led Saint Andrew Svorad and Saint Benedict into the solitude of Skalka, where they served you in prayer and penance. Through their intercession, give us a heart that seeks you above all things, the courage to fight our weaknesses and the joy of finding you in silence. I entrust to you my intention: (name it). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To know these saints better, read the life of Saint Andrew Svorad or pray the prayer to Saint Andrew Svorad.

Credits and sources

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