BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Ardain of Tournus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: February 11

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IN BRIEF

Saint Ardain of Tournus

Benedictine monk, abbot of Saint-Philibert of Tournus from 1028 to 1056.

Feast day	February 11
Born	late 10th or early 11th century
Died	c. 1056, Tournus (Saône-et-Loire)
Canonized	immemorial cult (translation of relics in 1140)

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Ardain for Those Who Lead and Those Who Build

Novena to Saint Ardain of Tournus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Ardain of Tournus

Saint Ardain was an 11th-century Benedictine monk, abbot of Saint-Philibert of Tournus, in Burgundy, from 1028 to 1056. He led the abbey while its great Romanesque church was rising, and it was during his abbacy that the famous narthex and the chapel of Saint Michael above it were begun. The only abbot of Tournus honored as a saint, he gave his name to the abbey's cloister. His feast day is February 11.

Who was Saint Ardain?

Ardain is known from very few documents. We know that he was the thirteenth abbot of Tournus, that he governed the community for nearly thirty years and that he was venerated after his death to the point that his relics were solemnly moved into the abbey church. The sources concerning him are essentially limited to the history of the abbey, studied in particular by Henri Curé at the beginning of the 20th century. His page will therefore be brief: it keeps to what is attested, and leaves the reader to discover the abbey that keeps his memory.

Key dates in the life of Ardain

- **Late 10th or early 11th century**: Born, on an unknown date and in an unknown place.
- **Before 1028**: He becomes a monk of the abbey of Saint-Philibert of Tournus.
- **1028**: He is elected thirteenth abbot of Tournus, succeeding Abbot Bernier.
- **During his abbacy**: He modifies the plan for rebuilding the abbey church and has the narthex and the upper chapel dedicated to Saint Michael

begun.

- **1056**: End of his abbacy; Abbot William I succeeds him.
- **1140**: Solemn translation of his relics into the abbey church.
- **16th century**: During the Wars of Religion, his relics are burned by the Huguenots.

The abbot of Tournus

When Ardain was elected abbot in 1028, the abbey of Tournus was already old and prestigious. It kept the relics of Saint Philibert, brought by the monks of Noirmoutier who had fled the Norman invasions in the 9th century. The community lived according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, following the rhythm of the office, work and the welcome of pilgrims. Like every abbot, Ardain was the father of his monks: he taught them, corrected them, looked after their needs and answered before God for the life of the community.

His abbacy lasted nearly thirty years, until 1056. It was a fruitful period for Burgundian monasticism: not far from Tournus, the abbey of Cluny was then shining across Europe under Abbot Saint Odilo. The sources do not tell us how Ardain governed day to day, but the length of his office and the veneration that followed his death suggest a respected abbot.

A builder of Romanesque art

Ardain's name remains linked to one of the finest Romanesque churches in France. His predecessor, Bernier, had launched the rebuilding of the abbey church. Ardain modified this plan and had the narthex begun at the west end of the church: a vast entrance structure with powerful stone pillars, topped by an upper chapel dedicated to Saint Michael, the archangel often placed at the entrance of sanctuaries to watch over them. Even today this narthex impresses

visitors with its simplicity and strength. It bears witness to a faith that wanted to give God a house worthy of him, and pilgrims a threshold where they could prepare for prayer.

Cult and memory

Ardain seems to have died at the end of his abbacy, around 1056. He was soon honored as a saint by the monks of Tournus. In 1140, his relics were solemnly moved into the abbey church, which at that time amounted to an official recognition of his cult. They remained there until the Wars of Religion, in the 16th century, when the Huguenots burned them. Yet his memory remains written in stone: the abbey cloister bears the name of the cloister of Saint Ardain, and a chapel in the transept is placed under his patronage. His feast day is February 11. He has no iconography of his own: when he is depicted, it is as a Benedictine abbot, with a crozier.

What can we learn from Saint Ardain?

Saint Ardain left neither writings nor accounts of miracles. He served his community for thirty years and helped build a place of prayer that has lasted for centuries. His example reminds us that holiness can take the form of a long and discreet faithfulness, in the service of others and of the beauty of the liturgy. We can pray to him for abbots and superiors of communities, for architects and craftsmen who build or restore churches, and for all who hold a responsibility over the long term.

Where to pray to Saint Ardain

- **Tournus** (Saône-et-Loire): the abbey church of Saint-Philibert, its narthex and the chapel of Saint Michael begun during his abbacy, the cloister of Saint Ardain and the transept chapel that bears his name.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Ardain for Those Who Lead and Those Who Build

Saint Ardain was abbot of Saint-Philibert of Tournus from 1028 to 1056. During his abbacy, the narthex and the chapel of Saint Michael of the abbey church, masterpieces of Romanesque art, were begun. He is the only abbot of Tournus honored as a saint. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him those who lead a community and those who build for God.

Prayer to Saint Ardain

Saint Ardain,
monk and father of your brothers,
you served your community for many years
according to the Rule of Saint Benedict.
Teach me everyday faithfulness,
the kind that seeks not brilliance but endurance.

You wanted for God a house beautiful and strong,
and you raised a threshold of stone
where pilgrims prepare to pray.
Bless those who build and restore our churches,
and make my heart a dwelling for the Lord.

Watch over abbots, abbesses
and all who lead a community.
Give them wisdom, patience and kindness,
so that they may lead their brothers and sisters to God.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Ardain

- On his feast day, February 11.
- For abbots, abbesses and superiors of religious communities.
- Before undertaking the building or restoration of a church.
- When a responsibility lasts a long time and weighs heavily.
- During a visit to the abbey of Tournus.

An invocation for those who build

> *Unless the Lord builds the house,*
> *those who build it labor in vain.*
> *Saint Ardain, pray for us. Amen.*

The first two lines are taken from Scripture (source: Psalm 127:1). To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Ardain from February 3 to 11, and discover the life of Saint Ardain.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Ardain of Tournus

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Ardain, abbot of Tournus from 1028 to 1056. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, February 11, begin on February 3. You can also pray it at any other time of the year, for example before a visit to Tournus.

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 Ardain, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The sources on his life are very brief: the meditations draw on his office as abbot and on the abbey he served.

Day 1: Entering the monastery

Ardain became a monk at Tournus. He chose a life of prayer, obedience and community, following Christ.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who knock today at the door of monasteries. Give them perseverance.

Act of the day: Pray for vocations to religious life.

Day 2: The Rule of Saint Benedict

At Tournus, the monks lived according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, which invites them to "prefer nothing to the love of Christ".

Prayer: Lord, teach me to prefer nothing to your love.

Act of the day: Read a chapter of the Rule of Saint Benedict, or a Gospel passage on humility.

Day 3: Chosen by his brothers

In 1028, the monks elected Ardain as abbot. He received the charge of leading them to God.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who have been given the charge of guiding others. Give them a father's heart.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who holds responsibility over you.

Day 4: Listening and correcting

The abbot, says the Rule, must adapt his manner to each one, encouraging some and correcting others. It is a demanding service.

Prayer: Lord, help me know how to listen, and to speak the truth gently.

Act of the day: Take time to truly listen to someone who needs to talk.

Day 5: Building for God

During his abbacy, the narthex and the chapel of Saint Michael of Tournus were begun. The monks wanted to offer God a house beautiful and strong.

Prayer: Lord, bless craftsmen, architects and all who take care of our churches.

Act of the day: Contribute, with a gift or a service, to the upkeep of your parish church.

Day 6: The threshold

The narthex is a threshold: one passes through it before entering the church. Every prayer begins with a passage, from noise to silence.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be silent before speaking to you, and to enter your presence.

Act of the day: When entering a church, pause for a moment on the threshold to recollect yourself.

Day 7: Saint Michael

The upper chapel of the narthex is dedicated to Saint Michael, the archangel who fights evil and protects the Church.

Prayer: Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Lord, keep me from all evil.

Act of the day: Pray the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel for the Church.

Day 8: Faithfulness over time

Ardain governed the abbey for nearly thirty years. He was not a man of a single day, but of a whole life given.

Prayer: Lord, give me perseverance in my commitments, even when enthusiasm fades.

Act of the day: Renew before God a commitment made long ago.

Day 9: A memory carved in stone

His relics were burned, but the cloister of Tournus still bears his name. What is done for God does not disappear.

Prayer: Lord, may my life leave behind something that praises you. Through the intercession of Saint Ardain, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if possible, and pray for monks and nuns.

Closing prayer

Saint Ardain,
faithful abbot and builder,
you led your brothers to God
and raised for him a house of stone.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me faithful over time,
and make my life a praise.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Ardain at any time, and discover the life of Saint Ardain.

Credits and sources

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