

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Armel

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 16

IN BRIEF

Saint Armel

Monk from Wales who founded hermitages in Brittany in the 6th century.

Feast day	August 16
Born	late 5th century, c. 482 according to tradition, Glamorgan (Wales), according to tradition
Died	August 16, c. 552 or 570, Les Boschaux, Saint-Armel (Ille-et-Vilaine, France)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Armel to Overcome Evil and Keep Peace

Novena to Saint Armel

Church of Saint-Armel (Ille-et-Vilaine)

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 Armel

Saint Armel, in Breton Arzel or Armael, was one of the monks from the island of Britain, today's Great Britain, who brought the Gospel to Brittany in the sixth century. According to tradition, he was born in Wales, landed in the Léon region, stayed at the court of the Frankish king Childebert, and then founded several hermitages before dying at Les Boschaux, near Rennes, in the town that now bears his name. His feast day is August 16.

Who was Saint Armel?

Armel is one of the founding saints of Brittany, like Samson, Malo and Tudwal. His life is known only through late accounts, written after the 12th century, and then through the hagiographer Albert Le Grand, who published his *Lives of the Saints of Armorican Brittany* in 1636. These texts mix historical memories, local traditions and legends. What stands out above all is the mark he left on place names: Plouarzel, Ploërmel, Ergué-Armel, Plouharnel and Saint-Armel all bear his name.

His name, Arthmael in Old Breton and in Welsh, means "bear prince." It belongs to the same family as the name Arthur, and legends have sometimes linked the two figures.

Key dates

- **c. 482**: Born in Wales, in Glamorgan, according to tradition, into a noble family.
- **Youth**: Raised in a monastery, he becomes a monk.
- **c. 518**: According to Albert Le Grand, he crosses the sea and lands in the Léon, near the Aber-Benoît; he settles in Plouarzel.

- **Following years**: He stays at the court of the Frankish king Childebert I in Paris, where he is said to have remained as an adviser for several years.
- **Return to Brittany**: He founds hermitages, notably at Ploërmel.
- **Late in life**: The Breton king Judwal gives him land south of Rennes, at Les Boschaux, where he founds a monastery.
- **August 16, c. 552 or 570**: Dies at Les Boschaux, in today's town of Saint-Armel.

A monk who came from the sea

In the fifth and sixth centuries, many Britons from the island of Britain crossed the Channel and settled in Armorica, which would take their name and become Brittany. With them came monks, who founded hermitages and parishes. Armel was one of them. According to tradition, he landed with a few companions on the coast of the Léon and settled in Plouarzel, whose name means "parish of Armel."

Albert Le Grand tells that he was then called to Paris, to the court of King Childebert I, son of Clovis. He is said to have lived there for several years as an adviser and a man of prayer, and to have worked many healings. The king then reportedly gave him land in Brittany. On his way back, he is said to have stayed in Touraine, where several places still honor him.

The monk and the dragon

The best-known legend of Saint Armel is that of the dragon. A monster was terrorizing the area south of Rennes. Armel went to its cave, put his stole around the beast's neck, led it to the Seiche River and ordered it to throw itself in. The beast obeyed and drowned.

As with other saints of the period, this story is first of all an image: the dragon stands for evil, for paganism or for the forces that threaten human life, and the monk overcomes them not with weapons but with prayer and his stole, the sign of his ministry. Some historians also see in it the Christianizing of an old theme from the Celtic festivals of August.

Les Boschaux, his final home

Late in life, Armel received from the Breton king Judwal a piece of land south of Rennes, at Les Boschaux. He founded a monastery there and died there on an August 16, around the middle of the sixth century. The village that grew up around his tomb is now called Saint-Armel. His relics were also kept at Ploërmel in the Middle Ages.

Devotion and art

Saint Armel has been honored in Brittany since the early Middle Ages, and his feast day is August 16. Devotion to him spread beyond Brittany: he is found in Touraine, where he is patron saint of Beaumont-la-Ronce, in the Loiret, where the church of Saint-Étienne in Château-Renard keeps relics, and even in England. King Henry VII, who credited his intercession with protecting him during a storm off the coast of Brittany, had his statue placed in his chapel at Westminster Abbey.

He is shown as a monk or an abbot, often in armor beneath his chasuble in English images, and almost always with a dragon led on a leash by his stole.

What can we learn from Saint Armel?

Armel left his homeland to proclaim the Gospel across the sea. He spent time at the court of kings without becoming attached to it, and then returned to the simple life of the hermitages. The legend of the dragon says what matters most:

evil is not fought with violence, but with prayer and the strength of God. We can pray to him to fight whatever enslaves us, and to keep inner peace in the midst of our struggles.

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

Where to pray to Saint Armel

- **Saint-Armel** (Ille-et-Vilaine, France): the parish church, which keeps a sarcophagus said to be his tomb, and a relic.
- **Ploërmel** (Morbihan): the church of Saint-Armel, with its 16th-century stained glass windows.
- **Plouarzel** (Finistère): the parish that bears his name, on the coast where he is said to have landed.
- **Plouharnel** (Morbihan): the chapel of Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs, which keeps a statue of the saint.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Armel to Overcome Evil and Keep Peace

Saint Armel was a monk who came from Wales to Brittany in the sixth century. According to tradition, he founded hermitages, advised King Childebert and died at Les Boschaux, near Rennes. Legend tells that he overcame a dragon by leading it to the river with his stole. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him our struggle against evil and our longing for peace.

Prayer to Saint Armel

Saint Armel,
you left Wales
and crossed the sea to proclaim Christ.
You lived in hermitages,
and even at the court of kings
you remained a man of prayer.

Tradition says you overcame the dragon
without weapons and without violence,
with your stole and the strength of God.

Come to my help in my struggles.
Help me overcome what binds me:
anger, fear, bad habits,
all that lays waste my life and the lives of others.
Pray for Brittany and those who live there,
for sailors and for those who go far away.

Obtain for me peace of heart and trust in God.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Armel

- On his feast day, August 16.
- When you are struggling with an addiction or a habit that enslaves you.
- When a fear or an evil seems too big for you.
- Before a sea voyage, or for a loved one who has gone far away.
- For Brittany and its parishes.

A prayer in the struggle

> *Lord, you are stronger than any evil.*
> *Free me from what binds me and keep me in your peace.*
> *Saint Armel, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Armel from August 8 to 16, and read the life of Saint Armel.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Armel

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Armel, a monk who came from Wales to Brittany in the sixth century. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, August 16, begin on August 8. It passes through the feast of the Assumption on August 15. It is suited to entrusting an inner struggle, a departure or an intention for Brittany, 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 Armel, pray for us." The act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A prince who became a monk

According to tradition, Armel came from a noble family. Yet he chose the life of the monastery. His name means "bear prince," but he wanted to be a servant.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to prefer service to honors.

Today: Do a humble service without telling anyone.

Day 2: Crossing the sea

Armel left his homeland and crossed the sea to proclaim the Gospel in Armorica. Leaving requires trust.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who leave and those who welcome them. Give me the courage to go where you send me.

Today: Pray for migrants and for sailors.

Day 3: Founding a parish

At Plouarzel, the "parish of Armel," he gathered the first Christians. A parish is a family in faith.

Prayer: Lord, bless my parish, its pastor and all who keep it alive.

Today: Take part in the life of your parish through a concrete act.

Day 4: At the king's court

According to tradition, Armel lived for several years at the court of Childebert. He remained a man of God there, without letting power take hold of him.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who govern. Keep me from seeking power and from flattery.

Today: Pray for the political leaders of your country.

Day 5: Hands that heal

The accounts credit him with many healings. A saint's prayer is first of all compassion for those who suffer.

Prayer: Lord, bless the sick and those who care for them. Give me a compassionate heart.

Today: Check in on someone who is sick.

Day 6: Back to solitude

After the court, Armel returned to the hermitages. He needed silence to stay close to God.

Prayer: Lord, give me a love for silence and for hidden prayer.

Today: Take a silent walk while praying.

Day 7: Overcoming the dragon

According to legend, Armel put his stole around the dragon's neck and led it to the river. He overcame evil without violence, by the strength of God.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the evil that frightens me and the evil that lives in me. You alone can overcome it.

Today: Give up, for today, a habit that harms you, and if possible go to confession.

Day 8: With Mary

On the day before the feast of Saint Armel, the Church celebrates the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Like all the saints, Armel leads us to her and to her Son.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, taken up into heaven, lead me with Saint Armel on the path of your Son.

Today: Pray a rosary, or at least one decade.

Day 9: At rest at Les Boschaux

Armel died at Les Boschaux, near Rennes, in the monastery he had founded. A village grew up around his tomb, and people still pray there.

Prayer: Lord, grant that I may finish my journey in your peace. Through the intercession of Saint Armel, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for your departed loved ones and, if you can, visit their graves.

Living the novena with Saint Armel

Saint Armel is a saint of peaceful struggle. Perhaps you are praying this novena because a "dragon" has taken hold of your life: an addiction, anger, a fear, a trial that is crushing you. The saint's legend does not promise that the fight will be easy, but it reminds us that God is stronger. During these days of August, you can also pray for Brittany, its parishes and its chapels, and for all who, like Armel, have left their homeland.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Armel,*
> *monk who came from the sea and founder of hermitages,*
> *you overcame the dragon through prayer and the strength of God.*
> *Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Free me from what binds me,*
> *keep me in peace,*
> *and lead me to Christ.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Armel (Ille-et-Vilaine)

Saint-Armel is a town in the Ille-et-Vilaine department of France, southeast of Rennes, that grew up around the place called Les Boschaux where, according to tradition, Saint Armel founded his last monastery and died in the sixth century. Its parish church keeps a sarcophagus said to be the saint's tomb, and a venerated relic. It is the main place of pilgrimage to Saint Armel, especially around his feast on August 16.

The saint's village

According to tradition, the Breton king Judwal gave Armel land south of Rennes, at Les Boschaux, so that he could build a monastery there. Armel spent his last years there and was buried there. The legend of the dragon is also tied to this place: it was in the Seiche, the river that runs through the town, that the saint is said to have made the beast drown.

The parish church keeps an ancient sarcophagus that tradition identifies as his tomb, as well as a jawbone presented as a relic of the saint. The village has kept the name of the man to whom it owes its origin.



The church of Saint-Armel, near Rennes.

Visiting the church

The church is in the center of the village. Visitors come to see the saint's sarcophagus and his images, often accompanied by the dragon. The banks of the Seiche, close by, let you extend your visit with a walk through the landscape of the legend.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Armel. Near his tomb, entrust to him your inner struggles, your loved ones far away and Brittany, then recite the prayer to Saint Armel. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Armel

- **Ploërmel** (Morbihan): the church of Saint-Armel, where his relics were kept in the Middle Ages.
- **Plouarzel** (Finistère): the parish that bears his name, near the coast of the Léon.
- **Plouharnel** (Morbihan): the chapel of Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs and its statue of the saint.
- **Château-Renard** (Loiret): the church of Saint-Étienne, which keeps relics.

Practical information

Saint-Armel is about 9 miles southeast of Rennes. The church is a working place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested. Check opening hours, Mass times and the date of any pardon (the traditional Breton pilgrimage festival) around August 16 with the parish or the town hall before you come.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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