

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Bertin

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 5

IN BRIEF

Saint Bertin

Monk of Luxeuil, companion of Saint Omer, abbot of the monastery of Sithiu at Saint-Omer.

Feast day	September 5
Born	early 7th century, region of Constance or Coutances, according to the sources
Died	September 5, c. 700-709, monastery of Sithiu (Saint-Omer, France)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Bertin for Communities and Builders

Novena to Saint Bertin

Ruins of the Abbey of Saint-Bertin, Saint-Omer

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Bertin

Saint Bertin was a monk trained at Luxeuil, in the tradition of Saint Columbanus, who came in the 7th century to help Saint Omer evangelize the Morini country, today's Pas-de-Calais in northern France. As abbot of the monastery of Sithiu for several decades, he made it one of the great religious centers of northern Gaul. He died at a great age at the beginning of the 8th century and gave his name to the abbey of Saint-Bertin, in Saint-Omer. His feast day is September 5.

Who was Saint Bertin?

Bertin was one of the monks of Luxeuil who carried the Gospel into the north of the Frankish kingdom. His life is known to us through *Lives* written in his abbey from the 9th century onward, which hand down the memory of the monastery without always separating history from tradition.

Even his birthplace is debated: some sources say he was born in the region of Constance, others at Coutances, in the Cotentin, like his fellow countryman Saint Omer. What is certain is that he led the community of Sithiu for a long time and was venerated there from the time of his death.

Key dates

- **Early 7th century**: Born in the region of Constance or at Coutances, according to the sources.
- **Youth**: He becomes a monk at Luxeuil, the great monastery founded by Saint Columbanus.
- **c. 639**: With Mommolinus and Bertrand, he joins Saint Omer, bishop of Therouanne, to help him in his mission.

- **After 651**: The three monks settle at Sithiu, on the Aa River, where a monastery is born; Mommolinus is its first abbot.
- **c. 659**: Mommolinus becomes bishop of Noyon; Bertin succeeds him as abbot of Sithiu.
- **c. 667**: Death of Saint Omer; Bertin has his body laid in the church of Notre-Dame at Sithiu.
- **Late 7th century**: He welcomes Saint Winnoc and his companions from Brittany, and sends them to found a monastery at Wormhout.
- **September 5, c. 700-709**: Dies at Sithiu, at a very great age.

A monk of Luxeuil in the marshes of the Aa

In the 7th century, Luxeuil, in the Vosges, was the great monastic school of the Frankish kingdom. Founded by the Irish monk Columbanus, it formed men of prayer and mission. Bertin received this demanding training there. When Omer, himself a former monk of Luxeuil, became bishop of Therouanne, he called on three of his former brothers for help: Mommolinus, Bertin and Bertrand.

The region was then poor, marshy and had largely returned to paganism. The three monks first settled on a hill, then, thanks to land given by a lord named Adroald, on the island of Sithiu, in the middle of the marshes of the Aa. Tradition says that they arrived there by boat, singing the psalms, and made their home where the boat came to a stop. They cleared the land, drained it, built and prayed. Around their monastery and the church of Notre-Dame founded by Omer, the town of Saint-Omer would grow.

Abbot of Sithiu

Around 659, Mommolinus was called to Noyon to succeed Saint Eligius as bishop. Bertin then became abbot of Sithiu, and he remained so for a very long time. Under his leadership the community grew until, according to tradition,

it numbered several hundred monks. He had a church built in honor of Saint Peter, the heart of the future abbey. He also remained the faithful companion of Omer, who went blind in his old age, and when Omer died, around 667, Bertin had his body carried into the church of Notre-Dame, as Omer had wished.

Bertin also welcomed monks from elsewhere. Among them were Saint Winnoc and three companions, who had come from Brittany. He sent them to found a small monastery at Wormhout, in Flanders, to evangelize the region. In this way the influence of Sithiu spread toward the North Sea.

The great abbey of Saint-Bertin

After Bertin's death, the monastery took his name. The abbey of Saint-Bertin became one of the most powerful in northern Europe. Its library and its scriptorium were famous: in the 9th century the *Annals of Saint-Bertin*, a major chronicle of the Carolingian era, were written there. During the Viking raids, around 846, Bishop Folcuin of Therouanne had the saint's relics hidden; according to tradition, they were found again around 1050. A great Gothic church was built from the 14th to the 16th century. The abbey was suppressed during the French Revolution, and the church, once sold, gradually fell into ruin.



The ruins of the abbey of Saint-Bertin, in Saint-Omer.

Devotion to Saint Bertin

Bertin was honored as a saint from the time of his death, and the Roman Martyrology mentions him on September 5. His cult has remained very much alive in the area around Saint-Omer, in Flanders and in Picardy. In 1234 his relics were solemnly transferred to a new reliquary by Abbot Jacques de Furnes.

Why pray to Saint Bertin?

Bertin is a saint of the long haul. He spent decades in the same place, praying, working and guiding his brothers. He did not found a town, but a town was born around his faithfulness. He knew how to work with others, Omer, Mommolinus, Winnoc, without trying to be first. Christians can pray to him:

- for communities;

- for those who are clearing difficult ground;
- for those who must persevere for a long time in the same task.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Bertin in art

He is shown as an abbot, with the crozier, often in a boat in memory of his arrival on the island of Sithiu, and sometimes with his companions.

Where to pray to Saint Bertin

- **Saint-Omer** (Pas-de-Calais, France): the ruins of the abbey of Saint-Bertin, on the site of his monastery.
- **Saint-Omer**: the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, which grew out of the church founded by Saint Omer, where his friend rests.
- **Wormhout** (Nord): the town where he sent Saint Winnoc to found a monastery.

To pray with him at home, you can use the prayer to Saint Bertin or the novena to Saint Bertin.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Bertin for Communities and Builders

Saint Bertin, a monk of Luxeuil, came in the 7th century to help Saint Omer evangelize the marshes of the Aa. As abbot of Sithiu for decades, he built a community so alive that a town was born around it. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him communities and all who persevere for a long time in a difficult task.

Prayer to Saint Bertin

Saint Bertin,
formed in the school of Saint Columbanus,
you left your monastery
to answer the call of your brother Omer.
In the marshes of the Aa,
you cleared the land and opened hearts.

For many long years,
you guided your monks with patience,
you welcomed brothers who came from afar,
and you watched over your friend when he went blind.

Pray for our communities,
families, parishes, monasteries,
that they may stay united in prayer and work.
Pray for those who clear difficult ground,
for those who begin without seeing the fruit of their labor,
and for those who must hold on for a long time.

Obtain for me the grace of perseverance.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Bertin

- On his feast day, September 5.
- For a religious community, a parish or a family going through difficulties.
- At the start of a long project that you may not see completed.
- For an elderly or sick friend you are caring for.
- When you are tempted to give up a task that has become heavy.

A short prayer for perseverance

> *Lord, help me to remain faithful where you have placed me,*
> *day after day, without growing weary.*
> *Saint Bertin, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Bertin from August 28 to September 5, and discover the life of Saint Bertin.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Bertin

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Bertin, monk of Luxeuil, companion of Saint Omer and abbot of Sithiu, at Saint-Omer. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, September 5, begin on August 28. It is suited to entrusting a community, a long project or a trial that drags on, 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 Bertin, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: The school of Luxeuil

Bertin was trained at Luxeuil, in the tradition of Saint Columbanus: prayer, work, penance, mission. A solid life is built on good formation.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who formed me. Give me the desire to know you better and better.

Today: Take time to read and ponder a passage from the Gospel.

Day 2: Answering a brother's call

When Omer, now a bishop, called his former brothers for help, Bertin answered. He left his monastery for a poor and unknown region.

Prayer: Lord, make me available when a brother or sister needs me.

Today: Answer right away a request for help you have been putting off.

Day 3: The boat in the marshes

According to tradition, the monks arrived at Sithiu by boat, singing the psalms, and settled where the boat came to a stop. They let God choose the place.

Prayer: Lord, guide my boat. Help me to recognize where you want me to settle and to serve.

Today: Entrust to God a decision you have to make.

Day 4: Clearing the land

At Sithiu, everything remained to be done: draining the marshes, building, farming, proclaiming the Gospel. The monks worked with their hands, without seeing the fruit of their labor right away.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who begin in difficulty. Give me the patience to sow without seeing the harvest.

Today: Do a thankless task with care.

Day 5: Taking over

When Mommolinus left for Noyon, Bertin became abbot. He received a charge prepared by someone else and carried it in his turn. In the Church, each of us receives and passes on.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who came before me. Help me to carry on their work with humility.

Today: Pray for the person who held your position or your mission before you.

Day 6: Watching over a friend

Bertin stayed faithful to Omer to the end, when Omer went blind. At his death, Bertin had his body carried into the church of Notre-Dame, as Omer had wished.

Prayer: Lord, bless the sick and the elderly. Make me a faithful friend in times of trial.

Today: Visit or call an elderly or sick person.

Day 7: Welcoming those from afar

Bertin welcomed Saint Winnoc and his companions, who came from Brittany, and entrusted them with a mission at Wormhout. He knew how to trust others and share the work.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to welcome and to trust. Bless those who arrive in our communities.

Today: Give a warm welcome to a newcomer in your parish or neighborhood.

Day 8: A lifetime of faithfulness

Bertin remained abbot for decades. His holiness was that of perseverance, day after day, in the same place, serving the same brothers.

Prayer: Lord, give me the grace of perseverance in my vocation and in my commitments.

Today: Renew before God a commitment you have made.

Day 9: A town around a monastery

Bertin died at a great age, at the beginning of the 8th century. His monastery took his name, and a town grew up around it. What is done for God bears fruit far beyond what we can imagine.

Prayer: Lord, make what I do for you bear fruit. Through the intercession of Saint Bertin, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for your town and for the people who live there.

Living the novena with Saint Bertin

Saint Bertin was no spectacular hero. He simply held on, for a long time, with his brothers. Perhaps you are praying this novena for a weary community, for a project that is moving slowly, or for a trial that drags on. Let yourself be carried by his patience. During these days you can also pray for monks and nuns, heirs of Luxeuil and Sithiu, and for the people of Saint-Omer and the surrounding area.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Bertin,*
> *monk of Luxeuil and abbot of Sithiu,*
> *you cleared the marshes and built a community of prayer,*
> *faithful to your brothers all your life.*
> *Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Keep our communities in unity,*
> *and obtain for me the grace to persevere to the end.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Ruins of the Abbey of Saint-Bertin, Saint-Omer

In Saint-Omer, in the Pas-de-Calais, stand the ruins of the abbey of Saint-Bertin, one of the largest abbeys of northern Europe in the Middle Ages. They mark the site of the monastery of Sithiu, which Saint Bertin led for decades in the 7th century and which took his name after his death. It is the place most closely tied to his memory.

More than a thousand years of history

The monastery was born in the middle of the 7th century, when the monks Mommolinus, Bertin and Bertrand settled on the island of Sithiu, in the middle of the marshes of the Aa, at the call of Saint Omer. While Bertin was abbot, a church dedicated to Saint Peter was built there. After his death, the abbey took the name of Saint-Bertin and became a great center of prayer, study and the copying of manuscripts.

A Romanesque church was built in the 11th century; capitals and fragments of mosaic from it are kept in the Hotel Sandelin museum in Saint-Omer. A great Gothic church later replaced it, built from the 14th to the early 16th century. Suppressed during the French Revolution, the abbey was sold and the church taken apart. Today arcades and sections of white stone walls remain; the great tower that still stood collapsed in the 20th century.



The ruins of the abbey of Saint-Bertin.

Visiting the ruins

The ruins are in the heart of the town, not far from the quays of the Aa. You can walk around them and imagine, from the remaining pillars and arches, the scale of the former abbey church. Your visit can continue at the nearby Cathedral of Notre-Dame, which keeps the tomb of Saint Omer, and at the Hotel Sandelin museum, which preserves remains of the abbey.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Bertin. Before these ruins, entrust to God communities that are running out of breath and works that take a long time, then recite the prayer to Saint Bertin. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Bertin

- **Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Saint-Omer**: the church founded by Saint Omer, where Bertin had his friend's body laid.
- **Wormhout** (Nord): where he sent Saint Winnoc and his companions to found a monastery.
- **Luxeuil-les-Bains** (Haute-Saone): the former abbey where he was trained.

Practical information

Saint-Omer can be reached by train and is easy to explore on foot. The ruins are a heritage site: access conditions may vary, especially during restoration work. Check with the Saint-Omer tourist office before you come, and with the parish for Mass times at the cathedral.

Credits and sources

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