

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Botvid

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 28

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IN BRIEF

Saint Botvid

Swedish lay missionary of Södermanland, killed around 1120, honored as a martyr.

Feast day	July 28
Born	second half of the 11th century, Södermanland, Sweden
Died	c. 1120, Södermanland archipelago, Sweden
Canonized	pre-congregation saint (local immemorial cult)
Era	12th century
Patron saint of	Södermanland

In this booklet

Life

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Botvid

Saint Botvid was a Swedish lay missionary of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. A native of Södermanland, he discovered Christianity on a trading voyage to England, then returned to proclaim the Gospel in his home region, around Lake Mälaren. According to tradition, he was killed with an axe around 1120 by a slave he had freed and baptized. Patron of Södermanland with Saint Eskil, he gave his name to the municipality of Botkyrka, south of Stockholm. His feast day is July 28.

Who was Saint Botvid?

Botvid lived at the time when Sweden was slowly passing from Norse paganism to Christianity. The first missions, that of Saint Ansgar in the ninth century, then those from England and Germany in the eleventh century, had not yet swept away the old cults. The pagan temple at Uppsala still stood, and Christian kings had to reckon with strong opposition.

What we know of Botvid comes from a Latin legend written in the Middle Ages, probably in the twelfth or thirteenth century, and preserved in Swedish liturgical books. It contains a plausible core, but its details cannot be verified, so a certain caution is needed.

Key dates

- **Second half of the 11th century**: Born in Södermanland, into a family of free farmers.
- **Late 11th century**: On a trading voyage to England, he discovers the Christian faith and is baptized.
- **Early 12th century**: Back in Sweden, he proclaims the Gospel in Södermanland and Västmanland, following in the footsteps of missionaries

from England.

- **c. 1120**: Killed on an island of the Södermanland archipelago by a slave he had ransomed and baptized.
- **After his death**: Buried in a church that tradition says his family founded, which becomes a place of pilgrimage; this is the origin of the name Botkyrka, "Botvid's church."

A merchant who became a missionary

Like many Scandinavians of his time, Botvid traded by sea. In England he came into contact with Christians and asked for baptism. Back home, he did not keep his faith to himself.

According to tradition, he was associated with the English missionaries sent to Sweden at that time, in particular Saint Sigfrid, apostle of Värmland and Västergötland, and Saint Eskil, the martyred bishop of Strängnäs. Botvid traveled through the villages around Lake Mälaren, spoke of Christ to his neighbors and brought many of them to baptism.

He was a layman, not a priest, which makes him an unusual figure among the Scandinavian saints. For English-speaking Catholics, his story is also a reminder of the role England played in bringing the faith to Sweden.

The death of Botvid

The legend tells that Botvid had ransomed a slave from the far shore of the Baltic, perhaps a Finn or a Wend. He instructed him in the faith and had him baptized. Then he decided to set him free and take him home by boat, with a companion, in the hope that the freed man would proclaim the Gospel to his own people.

During the voyage, while they had stopped on an island of the archipelago, the man killed Botvid and his companion with an axe, seized the boat and fled.

According to the story, birds guided those searching for the missing men to the bodies. Botvid was then buried in the church of his region, which took his name. Local tradition also says that a spring gushed forth at the place where his coffin was set down near Lake Bornsjön while it was being carried: this is Saint Botvid's spring, still known today.

Reading the legend today

The story of Botvid does not end with a triumph. The man he freed and baptized betrayed him. Yet the medieval Church did not see his death as a failure: it honored him as a martyr, a witness who had given everything for the Gospel. His trust may seem naive, but it reflects the trust of Christ, who chose Judas among the Twelve and still loved him.

The legend also shows the faith spreading through ordinary people: a merchant, his neighbors, a freed slave. Long before Sweden had parishes and dioceses everywhere, the Gospel traveled along trade routes and through personal friendships.

Devotion to Saint Botvid

Botvid was venerated in Södermanland from the twelfth century. His cult was local but lively, and the medieval Swedish liturgical calendars kept his feast on July 28. After the Lutheran Reformation, his memory survived mostly in place names.

Why is Saint Botvid the patron of Södermanland?

Botvid is honored as patron of Södermanland, his home province, where he preached and where his tomb drew pilgrims, together with Saint Eskil. Beyond this local patronage, he is a fitting intercessor for lay people involved in spreading the Gospel, for merchants and travelers, and for Sweden and the unity of Christians in Scandinavia.

Botvid is a layman who received the faith far away and brought it back home. He reminds us that evangelization is not only the work of priests but of every baptized person. His act toward the slave, whom he set free and wanted to send home as a messenger of Christ, shows a daring charity, even though it cost him his life.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Botvid in art

The coat of arms of the municipality of Botkyrka shows him with an axe, the instrument of his death, and a fish, a reminder of his sea voyages. These are his two attributes.

Where to pray to Saint Botvid

- **Botkyrka** (Stockholm County, Sweden): the medieval church that bears his name and keeps his memory.
- **Salem** (Stockholm County): Saint Botvid's spring, near Lake Bornsjön.
- **Stockholm**: the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Eric, where you can entrust the Church in Sweden to God.

You can also pray with our prayer to Saint Botvid or the novena to Saint Botvid, which ends on his feast day.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Botvid, Lay Missionary

Saint Botvid, a Swedish merchant baptized in England, brought the faith back to his native Södermanland and died around 1120 at the hands of a slave he had set free. Honored as a martyr, he is a model for lay people who share the Gospel in daily life. This page offers an original prayer to Saint Botvid, to be prayed on his feast day, July 28, or at any time.

Prayer to Saint Botvid

Saint Botvid, merchant of the northern seas,
you found Christ in a foreign land
and brought him home to your own people:
help me to recognize the gift of faith I have received
and to share it with those around me.

You were a layman, not a priest,
yet you spoke of Christ to your neighbors
and led many of them to baptism:
give all lay Christians the courage to bear witness
in their families, their work and their towns.

You ransomed a slave, taught him the faith and set him free,
hoping he would carry the Gospel to his people:
teach me a generous and daring charity,
that sets others free and trusts in them.

You were betrayed by the one you had helped:
when my kindness is met with ingratitude,
keep me from bitterness and help me to forgive.

Pray for travelers and those who work at sea,
for the people of Sweden and of all Scandinavia,
and for the unity of all Christians.
I entrust to you my intention (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

- On July 28, the feast of Saint Botvid, or during the novena to Saint Botvid that ends that day.
- Before a journey, especially by sea, or a business trip.
- When you want the courage to speak about your faith at work or with friends.
- When you have been hurt by someone you helped.
- For the Church in Sweden and the Nordic countries.

A short prayer for lay missionaries

> *Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Saint Botvid, bless all lay people who share your Gospel in daily life. Make their words simple, their lives consistent and their charity bold. Amen.*

Original prayer by Saintspedia. To learn more, read the life of Saint Botvid.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Botvid

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Botvid, lay missionary and martyr of Södermanland, as it is told in his medieval legend. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, July 28, begin on July 20. You can also pray it at any time of year, for the courage to share your faith, before a journey, or for the Church in Scandinavia.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

This novena is especially suited to lay people involved in their parish or in evangelization, to those who travel for work, and to all who pray for Sweden and the Nordic countries, where Catholics are a small minority. Since it falls in summer, it can also accompany a holiday journey.

Day 1: A land between two worlds

Botvid was born in Södermanland at a time when Sweden was slowly passing from the old Norse gods to Christ. Faith had not yet won hearts; it had to be proposed one person at a time.

Prayer: Lord, look upon our world, where many do not know you. Make me a humble witness of your love. Amen.

Today: Pray for a friend or relative who does not believe.

Day 2: Faith found far away

On a trading voyage to England, Botvid met Christians and asked for baptism. God can meet us anywhere, even on a business trip far from home.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the people through whom I came to know you. Bless those who gave me the faith. Amen.

Today: Remember your baptism and give thanks for it, perhaps by finding its date.

Day 3: Bringing Christ home

Back in Sweden, Botvid did not keep his faith private. He went from village to village and spoke of Christ to his neighbors. The Gospel is a treasure meant to be shared.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak of you simply to those I meet, without fear and without pressure. Amen.

Today: Share with someone why your faith matters to you.

Day 4: A layman on mission

Botvid was not a priest, but a lay merchant. Every baptized person is called to be a missionary in his or her own place: family, work, neighborhood.

Prayer: Lord, bless all lay people who serve your Church. Help me see my daily life as a place of mission. Amen.

Today: Do your work today with special care, offering it to God.

Day 5: Working with others

Tradition links Botvid to the English missionaries of his time, such as Saint Sigfrid and Saint Eskil. Mission is never a solo work: it is done in communion.

Prayer: Lord, bless missionaries, priests and lay people who work together to spread the Gospel. Keep them united. Amen.

Today: Encourage someone who serves in your parish.

Day 6: Setting a captive free

Botvid ransomed a slave, taught him the faith, had him baptized and decided to set him free. His charity went beyond what was expected.

Prayer: Lord, protect all victims of trafficking and modern slavery, and give me a heart that works for the freedom of others. Amen.

Today: Learn about modern slavery or support an organization that fights it.

Day 7: Trusting others

Botvid hoped the freed man would carry the Gospel to his own people. He trusted him and set out with him by boat. Trust is a risk that love accepts. Botvid did not know how the journey would end, but he chose to believe in the man he had set free.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to trust as you trust us, with wisdom but without fear. Amen.

Today: Give someone a chance or a responsibility.

Day 8: Betrayed by the one he helped

On an island of the archipelago, the man killed Botvid with an axe and fled. Jesus too was betrayed by one he had chosen. Ingratitude is a deep wound. Yet the Church remembers Botvid not as a victim, but as a witness whose love was stronger than betrayal.

Prayer: Lord, heal the wounds left by betrayal and ingratitude in my life, and give me the grace to forgive. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who has hurt you.

Day 9: A witness remembered

Botvid was buried in the church that took his name, Botkyrka, and pilgrims came to his tomb. His memory has lasted for nine centuries. On his feast, we give thanks for his witness.

Prayer: Saint Botvid, lay missionary and martyr, pray for the Church in Sweden and for all who share the Gospel, and present to the Lord the intention I have carried during this novena. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Catholics of Scandinavia and for Christian unity.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God, you called Saint Botvid to know you in a distant land and to bring your Gospel back to his people. Through his intercession, make us bold witnesses in daily life, generous toward those who are not free, and ready to forgive. Bless the Church in Sweden and in all the Nordic lands. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Botvid or read his life on the page Saint Botvid.

CREDITS

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