

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Brioc (Brieuc)

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 1

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IN BRIEF

Saint Brioc (Brieuc)

Monk from Britain, founder of Saint-Brieuc, one of the seven founding saints of Brittany.

Feast day	May 1
Born	c. 409 (according to tradition), Ceredigion, Wales
Died	c. 502 (according to tradition), Saint-Brieuc, Brittany, France
Canonized	Pre-congregation (immemorial cult)
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Diocese of Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier, purse makers (in the past)

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Brioc, Pilgrim of the Sea

Novena to Saint Brioc

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Brioc (Brieuc)

Saint Brioc, known in French as Saint Brieuc, was a monk who came from Britain in the fifth or sixth century. He is honored as the founder of the Breton town that bears his name, Saint-Brieuc, and as its first bishop. He is one of the seven founding saints of Brittany, whose cathedrals mark out the Tro Breizh pilgrimage. His life is known through a late account, written around the eleventh century, in which legend plays a large part. His feast day is May 1.

Who was Saint Brioc?

Brioc belongs to the great movement of British monks, from Wales and Cornwall, who evangelized Armorica (today's Brittany) between the fifth and seventh centuries. His Celtic name is thought to come from *Briomaglos*, "prince of strength." He left his mark on many places on both sides of the Channel: Saint-Brieuc, Briec, Saint-Brieuc-des-Iffs and Saint-Brieuc-de-Mauron in Brittany; St Breock in Cornwall; Llandyfriog in Wales.

History and legend must be distinguished, however. The *Life of Saint Brioc* (*Vita Briocii*) was written around 1050, probably at the abbey of Saint-Serge in Angers, where his relics had been taken in the ninth century. Most historians give it little historical value: it mixes real memories with borrowings from the Bible, from other saints' lives and from literary motifs. What can be held with caution is the existence of a monk from Britain who founded a monastery on the north coast of Brittany, around which a town grew.

Key dates

The following dates come from the tradition of the *Vita* and remain very uncertain.

- **About 409**: Born, according to tradition, in Ceredigion, Wales, to pagan parents.
- **Youth**: Monastic training, first in Britain and then in Gaul under Saint Germanus of Auxerre, according to the *Vita*.
- **About 447**: Ordained a priest; he then evangelizes his fellow Britons in Cornwall.
- **About 480**: He crosses to Armorica with many disciples and founds a monastery in the Tréguier region.
- **About 485**: He lands at the mouth of the Gouët and, on land given by his kinsman Riwal, founds the monastery from which Saint-Brieuc will grow.
- **About 502**: Dies in his monastery, according to tradition.
- **Ninth century**: His relics are taken to the abbey of Saint-Serge in Angers, at the time of the Norman invasions.
- **1166**: Solemn translation of his body at Saint-Serge in Angers, in the presence of King Henry II of England and Duke Conan IV.

A monk from Britain

According to the *Vita*, Brioc was born to pagan parents, Cerpus and Eldruda. An angel is said to have announced his birth to his mother and asked her to convert. Entrusted very young to monks, the boy was then sent to Gaul to Saint Germanus. The story tells of his first miracle: sent to fetch water, he gave his pitcher to lepers; scolded on his return, he received from God a bronze vessel to replace the one he had given away. Historians point out that the author probably confused Germanus of Auxerre with Germanus of Paris, who died at the end of the sixth century.

Once a priest, Brioc evangelized Cornwall, where his memory is kept at St Breock. Then he crossed the sea with his disciples. He first founded a monastery in the Trégor, which, according to the *Vita*, he entrusted to his

nephew Saint Tugdual. This detail mainly serves to assert Brioc's precedence over Tugdual, at a time when neighboring monasteries and dioceses were rivals.

The founding of Saint-Brieuc

The story then shows him landing at the mouth of the Gouët. He converted his kinsman Riwal, the Breton chief of the region, who gave him land. Brioc set up a monastery there, at the place called the Champ-du-Rouvre, around which the town would grow. Modern research suggests that the historical foundation may be later, in the course of the sixth century. Saint-Brieuc only became the seat of a diocese in the ninth century, under the Breton king Nominoë; the title of first bishop given to Brioc therefore belongs to tradition more than to history.

According to legend, at his death his monks saw his soul rise to heaven in the form of a turtledove.



Saint-Étienne Cathedral, Saint-Brieuc.

Relics and devotion

In the ninth century, at the time of the Norman raids, Brioc's relics were carried to the abbey of Saint-Serge in Angers. A solemn translation took place there in 1166. Part of the relics was later returned to Saint-Brieuc, at the beginning of the thirteenth century according to local tradition, and they are honored in Saint-Étienne Cathedral.

Why is Saint Brioc the patron saint of purse makers?

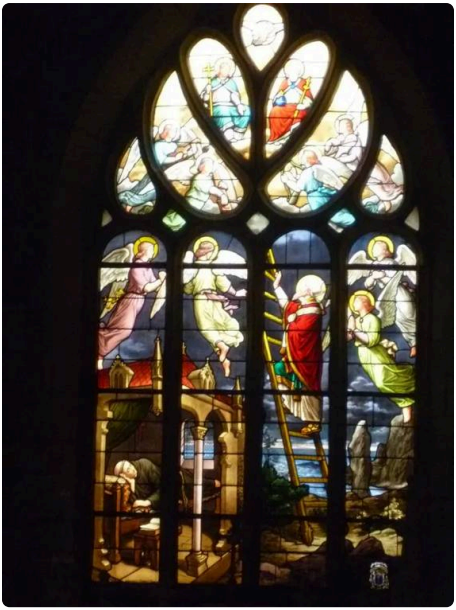
Saint Brioc was invoked against public calamities. He was also the patron of makers of purses and alms bags, perhaps because this trade flourished in his town, and because his *Vita* stresses his charity. Today he is above all the patron of the Diocese of Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier.

With Saint Paul Aurelian, Saint Tugdual, Saint Malo, Saint Samson, Saint Patern and Saint Corentin, Brioc is one of the seven founding saints of Brittany. Since the Middle Ages, the Tro Breizh, the "tour of Brittany," has linked the seven episcopal towns that keep their memory. Pilgrims still walk these roads today, and Saint-Brieuc is one of the stages.

Even though his biography remains uncertain, Saint Brioc bears witness to the monks from across the Channel who shaped Christian Brittany, and he is a link between Wales, Cornwall and Brittany. His legend highlights charity, peace and the courage to set out. Catholics pray to him for Brittany, for those who travel by sea, for the pilgrims of the Tro Breizh, and to learn to give, like the boy who offered his pitcher to the lepers. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Brioc and the novena to Saint Brioc.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Brioc in art

He is shown as a bishop, with miter and crozier, sometimes with three purses at his belt, recalling his patronage of purse makers and his charity. He may also appear with wolves: the legend tells that a threatening pack dispersed peacefully when he raised his hand.



The Saint-Brieuc fountain, traditional place of the saint's arrival.

Where to pray to Saint Brioc

- **Saint-Brieuc** (Côtes-d'Armor, France): Saint-Étienne Cathedral, where his relics are kept.
- **Saint-Brieuc**: the Saint-Brieuc fountain, near the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-la-Fontaine, associated by tradition with his arrival.
- **Erdeven** (Morbihan): the chapel of the Seven Saints, which has a statue of Saint Brioc.
- **Saint-Brieuc-des-Iffs** (Ille-et-Vilaine): the church dedicated to him.
- **St Breock** (Cornwall, England): the parish church that keeps his name.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Brioc, Pilgrim of the Sea

Saint Brioc (Brieuc), a monk from Britain and founder of the Breton town that bears his name, is one of the seven founding saints of Brittany. To our knowledge, there is no traditional prayer to him whose source we can cite with certainty. This page offers an original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by his legend and his cult.

Prayer to Saint Brioc, pilgrim of the sea

Saint Brioc, you left your homeland to carry the Gospel across the sea: teach me to set out when God calls me, to trust him, and not to let fear hold me back.

As a boy you gave your water pitcher to the lepers: give me a generous heart, attentive to the sick, the excluded and all who thirst to be loved.

You founded a monastery from which a town was born: watch over Saint-Brieuc, over Brittany and over all who live there. Keep alive the faith that the monks from across the Channel sowed there.

You calmed a pack of wolves with a simple gesture of your hand: calm the anger, violence and fear within me. Make me a peacemaker in my family and at work.

Protect sailors, fishermen and travelers, and walk with the pilgrims on the roads of the Tro Breizh. I entrust to you my intention (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may I in turn be a witness to Christ wherever he sends me. Amen.

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

Intentions to entrust to Saint Brioc

- The town of Saint-Brieuc and the Diocese of Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier.
- Brittany and its Christian tradition, and its ties with Wales and Cornwall.
- Sailors, fishermen and travelers.
- Pilgrims of the Tro Breizh.
- The sick and the excluded, in memory of the lepers of his legend.
- Protection from calamities, for which he was invoked in the past.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Brioc is celebrated on May 1. You can also pray to him before a journey or a pilgrimage, or at the Saint-Brieuc stage of the Tro Breizh. For nine days of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Brioc, and read the life of Saint Brioc to know him better.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Brioc

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and legend of Saint Brioc (Brieuc), the monk from Britain who founded Saint-Brieuc. Most of what we know about him comes from a *Life* written centuries after his death; the meditations draw from these stories what they teach about God, without presenting them as history. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on April 23; it ends on May 1, which always falls in the Easter season and opens the month of Mary. It is also the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, a fitting companion for a saint who built a monastery and a town.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the 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 carry the prayer into daily life. You may pray it alone, with your family, or as preparation for a pilgrimage.

Day 1: Born of pagan parents

According to his *Life*, Brioc was born to pagan parents, and an angel invited his mother to convert. Faith can enter a family through unexpected doors. No one is too far from God, and the prayer of one person can open the way for many.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for those in my family and among my friends who do not know you. Touch their hearts in your own way and time. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for someone close to you who is far from the faith.

Day 2: The pitcher given to the lepers

Sent to fetch water, the young Brioc gave his pitcher to lepers, and God gave him another vessel. The legend teaches that what we give is never lost, and that God is not outdone in generosity.

Prayer: Lord, give me a generous heart that gives without calculating, especially to the sick and the excluded. Amen.

Today: Give something you value to someone who needs it.

Day 3: Learning from a master

The *Life* says Brioc was trained in Gaul under Saint Germanus. Every Christian needs teachers and guides in the spiritual life.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who have taught me the faith. Bless teachers, catechists and spiritual guides. Amen.

Today: Thank a person who helped you grow in faith.

Day 4: Bringing the Gospel home

Once a priest, Brioc first evangelized his own people in Cornwall. Mission begins close to home, among those we know. It is often harder to speak of God to our own family than to strangers, yet that is where Brioc began.

Prayer: Lord, make me a witness to your love among my own family, friends and neighbors. Amen.

Today: Share, simply and without pressure, something of your faith with someone close to you.

Day 5: Crossing the sea

With his disciples, Brioc crossed the sea to Armorica. Leaving one's homeland for God takes courage and trust.

Prayer: Lord, protect sailors, fishermen, travelers and migrants. Give me the courage to set out when you call. Amen.

Today: Pray for those who are at sea or far from home today.

Day 6: A monastery, then a town

At the mouth of the Gouët, on land given by Riwal, Brioc founded a monastery around which a town grew. Prayer and community life can give birth to a whole society.

Prayer: Lord, bless my town, its people and its leaders. May our communities be built on prayer and charity. Amen.

Today: Do something good for your neighborhood or your parish.

Day 7: Calming the wolves

The legend tells that a threatening pack of wolves dispersed peacefully when Brioc raised his hand. Peace comes from a heart that rests in God. When we are anxious or angry, we spread that unrest around us; when we are at peace, others can find calm near us.

Prayer: Lord, calm the anger and fears within me, and make me a peacemaker in my family and at work. Amen.

Today: Answer a moment of tension with gentleness instead of irritation.

Day 8: The purse of charity

Brioc became the patron of purse makers, and his *Life* stresses his charity. Our money and goods can become instruments of love when we share them.

Prayer: Lord, free me from attachment to money, and teach me to use what I have for the good of others. Amen.

Today: Make a gift, even a small one, to a charity or to a person in need.

Day 9: The dove rising to heaven

According to legend, at his death his monks saw his soul rise to heaven like a turtledove. Every Christian life is a pilgrimage toward the Father's house, like the road of the Tro Breizh.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Brioc, guide my steps toward you, and receive me one day into your peace. Amen.

Today: Walk to a church or chapel, praying on the way.

Closing prayer

Saint Brioc, monk and pilgrim, founder of Saint-Brieuc, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for Brittany, for Wales and Cornwall, for sailors and travelers, for the sick and the excluded. Obtain for me a generous heart, the courage to set out and the gift of peace. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Brioc and pray the prayer to Saint Brioc.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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