

BOOKLET TO PRINT

# Saint Canice

*Life, prayer and novena*

Feast day: October 11

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IN BRIEF

## Saint Canice

*Sixth-century Irish monk, friend of Saint Columba, founder of Aghaboe and patron saint of Kilkenny.*

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| **Feast day** | October 11 |
| **Born** | c. 515-521, Glengiven, near Dungiven, Ireland |
| **Died** | c. 599-600, Aghaboe, Ireland |
| **Era** | 6th century |
| **Patron saint of** | Kilkenny, Diocese of Ossory, shipwrecked sailors |

## In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

# Saint Canice

Saint Canice, in Irish Cainnech and known in Scotland as Kenneth, was a sixth-century Irish monk, a friend of Saint Columba of Iona, a missionary in Scotland and the founder of the monastery of Aghaboe, in present-day County Laois. The city of Kilkenny, "the church of Canice," is named after him. Counted among the "Twelve Apostles of Ireland," he is believed to have died around 599-600. His feast day is October 11.

## Who was Saint Canice?

Canice is one of the great figures of Irish monasticism, from the golden age when the monasteries of Ireland trained saints and missionaries for the whole of Europe. We know his life through a medieval Latin *Life*, full of miracles, and through several mentions in the *Life of Saint Columba* written at the end of the seventh century by Saint Adomnán, abbot of Iona, which is an older and more reliable source. The details of his biography (dates, journeys and teachers) vary from one source to another and should be received with caution.

He is the patron saint of the Diocese of Ossory and of the city of Kilkenny, and several places in Ireland and Scotland bear his name, such as the island of Inchkenneth in Scotland.



*Saint Canice's Cathedral and its round tower, Kilkenny.*

## Key dates

- **c. 515-521**: Born at Glengiven, near present-day Dungiven in the north of Ireland, the son of a bard.
- **Youth**: Monastic training, according to tradition, in Wales under Saint Cadoc, then in Ireland.
- **c. 540-545**: Studies at Clonard under Saint Finnian, then at Glasnevin under Saint Mobhi, alongside other future great saints.
- **After 563**: Stays in Scotland, in connection with Saint Columba, settled at Iona.
- **Second half of the sixth century**: Returns to Ireland and founds the monastery of Aghaboe, in Ossory.
- **c. 599-600**: Dies at Aghaboe, where he is buried.

## A student in the schools of the Irish saints

The son of a bard, Canice grew up in a world where words and memory mattered greatly. According to his *Life*, he went to Wales as a young man to be trained in monastic life, then returned to Ireland.

He attended the great monastic schools of his day: Clonard, where Saint Finnian trained the men tradition would call the "Twelve Apostles of Ireland," then Glasnevin, near Dublin, under Saint Mobhi. There he came to know Saint Columba, Saint Comgall of Bangor and Saint Kieran of Clonmacnoise, among others. These monastic friendships would mark his whole life.

## With Columba in Scotland

When Columba founded the monastery of Iona in 563, Canice joined him in Scotland for a time. Adomnán mentions him several times in the *Life of Saint Columba*.

He tells, for example, that one day when Columba was at sea in a violent storm, he declared that Cainnech, then in Ireland, was praying for him. And indeed the saint, warned inwardly, had hurried away from his meal with only one shoe on, to run to the church and pray for his friend. Adomnán also reports that Cainnech once forgot his staff on Iona and miraculously found it again on the other side of the sea. These stories reveal the deep spiritual friendship that united the two men.

Tradition also credits Canice with missionary work in Scotland among the Picts, and with founding several churches. One tradition, which is disputed, even links his name to an early Christian settlement on the site of St Andrews. He is also said to have lived as a hermit on an island.

## Aghaboe and Kilkenny

Back in Ireland, Canice founded the monastery of Aghaboe, in Irish *Achadh Bhó*, "the field of the cow," in the kingdom of Ossory. The monastery became an important religious center and long remained the main seat of the Church in Ossory. Canice led a life of prayer, work and study there. A commentary on the Gospels called the *Glass Chainnigh*, "the chain of Canice," is attributed to him and is said to have been kept and studied for a long time.

He is also said to have founded, or inspired, a church on the site of present-day Kilkenny, in Irish *Cill Chainnigh*. In the Middle Ages, the seat of the Diocese of Ossory moved from Aghaboe to Kilkenny, and a great Gothic cathedral was built in his honor in the thirteenth century, next to an older round tower. Saint Canice's Cathedral now belongs to the Church of Ireland (Anglican), while the Catholic cathedral of Kilkenny is dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

## Death and cult

Canice died at a great age, around 599 or 600, and was buried at Aghaboe. Churches are dedicated to him in Ireland and Scotland, and as far away as Australia and New Zealand, where Irish emigrants brought his cult. The Orthodox Churches, which venerate the saints of early Ireland, also keep his feast.

## Why is Saint Canice the patron saint of Kilkenny?

Kilkenny takes its very name from him, and the medieval Diocese of Ossory, whose seat moved from his monastery of Aghaboe to Kilkenny, kept him as its patron. He remains the patron saint of the Catholic Diocese of Ossory. Tradition also invokes him for shipwrecked sailors, in memory of the stories of sea crossings and storms linked to his life.

Canice is above all a saint of friendship in Christ. His prayer for Columba in the middle of a storm shows the power of the communion of saints: to pray for an absent friend is already to support him. You can pray to him for your friends, for those who travel by sea, for students and for Ireland. See the prayer to Saint Canice and the novena to Saint Canice.

## Symbols and how to recognize Saint Canice in art

Saint Canice is shown as an Irish monk, often bearded, as in the carved head in Kilkenny. In Kilkenny, the cathedral that bears his name, with its round tower beside it, has itself become the most familiar image associated with him.

## Where to pray to Saint Canice

- **Kilkenny** (Ireland): Saint Canice's Cathedral, a Gothic building with a round tower, now Anglican, which bears his name.
- **Kilkenny**: the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Mary, seat of the Diocese of Ossory, of which he is the patron.
- **Aghaboe** (County Laois): the ruins of the abbey, on the site of his monastery and his tomb.
- **Inchkenneth** (Scotland): the small island that bears his name, near the Isle of Mull.

PRAYER

# Prayer to Saint Canice, Faithful Friend

Saint Canice has been invoked for centuries in Kilkenny and in the Diocese of Ossory, of which he is the patron. Since we cannot vouch for the exact source of any traditional prayer to him, this page offers an original prayer by Saintspedia. It draws especially on the story told by Saint Adomnán, in which Canice runs to the church to pray for his friend Columba, caught in a storm at sea.

## Prayer to Saint Canice, faithful friend

*Saint Canice, you hurried away from your meal to pray for your friend in danger at sea. Teach me to carry in my prayer the people I love, especially when they are going through a storm.*

*You were trained in the schools of the saints of Ireland. Bless students and those who teach them, and give us a love for the Word of God.*

*You crossed the sea to proclaim Christ in Scotland. Watch over sailors, fishermen, travelers and all who are in danger on the water. Protect the shipwrecked and those who go to their rescue.*

*You founded Aghaboe and gave your name to Kilkenny. Pray for Ireland, for the Diocese of Ossory and for all who call upon you. Rekindle in our lands the faith that your brother monks sowed there.*

*I entrust to you my intention, and also a friend for whom I want to pray: (name them in silence). Present them to the Lord, who calms the wind and the sea. Amen.*

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

## Short invocation

> *Saint Canice, friend of God and friend of the saints, pray for us and for those we love. Amen.*

This invocation is an original text by Saintspedia.

## Intentions to entrust to Saint Canice

- A friend or loved one in difficulty.
- Sailors, fishermen and travelers at sea.
- Students and schools.
- Ireland, Kilkenny and the Diocese of Ossory.
- Monks and missionaries.

## When to pray this prayer

Saint Canice is celebrated on October 11. You can also pray to him before a sea crossing, or when a friend is going through a trial. You can also pray the novena to Saint Canice, from October 3 to October 11. To learn more, read the life of Saint Canice.

NOVENA

# Novena to Saint Canice

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Canice (Cainnech), the Irish monk who founded Aghaboe and gave his name to Kilkenny. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, October 11, begin it on October 3. It can be prayed at any time of the year, especially for a friend going through a trial or for someone traveling by sea.

## How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short 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 the day helps you live in Canice's spirit of friendship, study and prayer. You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group.



*Saint Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny.*

## Day 1: The son of a bard

Canice was born in the north of Ireland, the son of a bard, in a culture that treasured words, poetry and memory. God used this inheritance: the boy who grew up among stories became a monk who loved the Word of God.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for the gifts I received from my family and my culture. Help me place them at your service.

**Today:** Read a psalm slowly, as a poem addressed to God.

## Day 2: Leaving home

According to his *Life*, the young Canice went to Wales to learn monastic life. Growing in faith often means leaving what is familiar to learn from others.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me the humility to learn and the courage to leave my comfort zone when you call me.

**Today:** Ask someone wiser than you for advice on your spiritual life.

## Day 3: The school of the saints

At Clonard, under Saint Finnian, and at Glasnevin, under Saint Mobhi, Canice studied alongside future saints such as Columba and Kieran. Good teachers and good companions shape a whole life.

**Prayer:** Lord, bless students and teachers, and give young people friends who lead them toward you.

**Today:** Pray for a teacher who helped you, and for a student you know.

## Day 4: Friends in Christ

The friendship between Canice and Columba lasted all their lives. True friendship in Christ is a gift of God: it supports, corrects and encourages, and it does not end with distance.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for my friends. Make our friendships faithful and rooted in you.

**Today:** Reach out to a friend you have not contacted in a long time.

## Day 5: Running to pray

Adomnán tells how Canice, warned inwardly that Columba was in danger at sea, left his meal with only one shoe on and ran to the church to pray for him. Prayer for others is not a small thing: it is a real way of helping them. Columba, far away on the stormy sea, knew that his friend was praying, and that knowledge itself was a comfort.

**Prayer:** Lord, when someone I love is in danger, teach me to turn to you at once and with trust.

**Today:** Stop what you are doing for a moment and pray for someone going through a storm.

## Day 6: Across the sea

Canice crossed the sea to Scotland and, according to tradition, preached among the Picts. Missionaries leave their homeland so that others may know Christ.

**Prayer:** Lord, protect sailors, fishermen and all who travel by sea, and bless missionaries far from home.

**Today:** Pray for a missionary or support a missionary work.

## Day 7: The field of Aghaboe

Back in Ireland, Canice founded the monastery of Aghaboe, "the field of the cow." There he lived a life of prayer, work and study. Holiness grows in the ordinary rhythm of daily tasks offered to God. A commentary on the Gospels, the *Glass Chainnigh*, is attributed to him.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me offer you my daily work and keep a balance of prayer, work and rest.

**Today:** Do one ordinary task carefully, offering it to God.

## Day 8: The church of Canice

Kilkenny, *Cill Chainnigh*, carries his name. Irish emigrants later brought his cult as far as Australia and New Zealand. Faith travels with people and takes root in new lands.

**Prayer:** Lord, bless Ireland, the Diocese of Ossory and all the Irish scattered across the world. Keep alive the faith they received.

**Today:** Pray for emigrants and for those who welcome them.

## Day 9: A long and faithful life

Canice died at a great age around 599 or 600 and was buried at Aghaboe. On his feast day, we give thanks for a life of friendship, study and mission that still bears fruit fourteen centuries later.

**Prayer:** Saint Canice, friend of God and friend of the saints, pray for us and for those we love.

**Today:** Thank God for the people who passed on the faith to you.

## Closing prayer

> *Saint Canice, monk of Aghaboe and patron of Kilkenny, you ran to pray for your friend in the storm. Pray for me and for those I love, especially those going through trials. Watch over all who travel by sea, bless students and teachers, and obtain for Ireland and for the whole Church a renewal of faith. I entrust to you my intention for this novena. Through Christ our Lord, who calms the wind and the sea. Amen.*

To learn more, read the page on Saint Canice, or pray the prayer to Saint Canice.

CREDITS

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