BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Cannat

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 15

IN BRIEF

Saint Cannat

Hermit of Provence and bishop of Marseille in the 5th century, died around 490.

Feast day	October 15
Born	5th century, Provence
Died	October 15, 490, hermitage of Le Sauzet, now Saint-Cannat (Bouches-du-Rhône)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	5th century
Patron saint of	Saint-Cannat (Bouches-du-Rhône)

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Cannat, Hermit and Bishop of Marseille

Novena to Saint Cannat

Church of Saint-Cannat, Marseille

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 Cannat

Saint Cannat was a hermit of Provence in the 5th century who became bishop of Marseille around 486. His Latin name, *Canus Natus*, is said to mean "born white": tradition says he came into the world with white hair. At the end of his life he withdrew to his old hermitage near Aix-en-Provence, where he is said to have died on October 15, 490. The village of Saint-Cannat bears his name. His feast day is October 15.

Who was Saint Cannat?

Cannat belongs to the first Christian centuries of Provence, a time when Marseille, Arles and the islands of Lérins formed a great center of religious life. Early documents about him are very rare. What is told of him comes mainly from late accounts, local traditions and Provençal poems of the 19th century, which mix a few historical memories with a great deal of legend. What remains is the image of a man of prayer who loved solitude, and whom the Church of Marseille called, against his own wishes, to become its shepherd. His memory has stayed alive in Marseille, where a church bears his name, and in the village that grew up around his hermitage.

Key dates in the life of Cannat

- **5th century**: Born in Provence; according to legend, the child already has white hair, hence his Latin nickname *Canus Natus*.
- **Youth**: He withdraws as a hermit to a place called Le Sauzet, not far from Aix-en-Provence, named after the willows that shade it.
- **c. 486**: On the death of the bishop of Marseille, he is asked to succeed him; according to tradition, he accepts after the miracle of the staff that turned green again.

- **c. 486 - 490**: As bishop of Marseille, he fights doctrinal errors and the remains of paganism.
- **October 15, 490**: He dies in his old hermitage, to which he had returned at the end of his life.
- **After his death**: A chapel is built on the site of the hermitage, and a hamlet grows up around it; it will become the village of Saint-Cannat.
- **1992**: The chapel of Saint-Cannat, in the village, receives relics considered to be his.

The hermit of Le Sauzet

According to tradition, Cannat chose a withdrawn life very early. He settled in a wooded, damp place between Aix and the Durance, called Le Sauzet because of the willows that grew there. He lived there in prayer, work and poverty. The hermits of that time were not cut off from the world: people came to consult them, to ask for advice or for the healing of a sick person. Cannat's nickname, "born white", was understood as a sign: white hair suggested the wisdom of the elders, and people saw in him a man mature in faith from a young age.

The staff that turned green

The best known story of his life concerns his election. When the bishop of Marseille died, the clergy and the faithful thought of the hermit of Le Sauzet. Cannat refused. To show that this office was not for him, he is said to have declared that he had as much chance of becoming bishop as his dry reed staff had of turning green again. The staff, planted in the ground, then put out leaves. Cannat saw in this the will of God and agreed to become bishop of Marseille, around 486. This legend resembles other stories of saints, but it says something true about the way the early Church chose its shepherds: often among men who did not seek honors.

The memory of this miracle remains in the landscape: the coat of arms of the village of Saint-Cannat shows the staff that turned green.

Bishop of Marseille

Little is known of his time as bishop, which was short. Tradition presents him as a firm shepherd, attached to the faith of the Church, who fought against erroneous doctrines and against the pagan practices still present in the countryside of Provence. Feeling his end approaching, he is said to have returned to his hermitage at Le Sauzet. He died there on October 15, 490, the day on which the Church remembers him, his *dies natalis*, that is, the day of his birth into heaven.

Devotion and art

On the site of his hermitage a chapel was built, and houses gathered around it: this is the origin of the village of Saint-Cannat, in the Bouches-du-Rhône. In the village church of Notre-Dame-de-Vie, a medieval sarcophagus used as a holy water font bears an image of the saint. Since 1992, the chapel of Saint-Cannat has housed relics attributed to him. In Marseille, the former church of the Dominicans, on the Place des Prêcheurs, is today the church of Saint-Cannat. He is shown as a bishop, with miter and crozier, sometimes with the flowering staff that recalls his election.

What can we learn from Saint Cannat?

Saint Cannat is a saint of discretion. He loved solitude and did not seek to become a bishop; he accepted when he recognized God's call. His staff that turned green is a fine image of what God can do with a life that seems dry or too humble. You can pray to him for the Church of Marseille and Provence, for bishops and priests, for those who hesitate before a responsibility, and to keep a love of silence and prayer at the heart of action.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Cannat and the novena to Saint Cannat.

Where to pray to Saint Cannat

- **Church of Saint-Cannat** (Marseille, Place des Prêcheurs): the former Dominican church, which bears his name and has an altar dedicated to him.
- **Chapel of Saint-Cannat** (Saint-Cannat, Bouches-du-Rhône): on the site of his hermitage, it has housed relics attributed to him since 1992.
- **Church of Notre-Dame-de-Vie** (Saint-Cannat): its holy water font, an old sarcophagus, bears the saint's image.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Cannat, Hermit and Bishop of Marseille

Saint Cannat, a hermit near Aix-en-Provence and then bishop of Marseille around 486, accepted the office of shepherd only after seeing, according to tradition, his dry staff turn green again. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him the Church of Provence, its shepherds and all who hesitate before a call.

Prayer to Saint Cannat

Saint Cannat,
you who sought God in the solitude of Le Sauzet,
in the shade of the willows,
teach me to find each day
a time of silence to listen to him.

You did not want to be a bishop,
and the Lord made your dry staff turn green
to show you his will.
When my life seems dry and fruitless,
remind me that God can make it blossom again.

Shepherd of Marseille,
watch over the Church of Provence,
over our bishops and priests,
and over all who must say yes to a difficult task.
Keep us faithful to the faith received from the apostles.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Cannat

- On his feast day, October 15.
- For the Church of Marseille and Aix, and for the parishes that bear his name.
- For bishops, priests and vocations.
- When you hesitate to accept a responsibility entrusted to you.
- In times of spiritual dryness, when prayer seems fruitless.

A short invocation

> *Saint Cannat, whose staff turned green again,*
> *obtain for us the grace to bear fruit for God. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Cannat from October 7 to 15, and read the life of Saint Cannat.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Cannat

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Cannat, a hermit of Provence and bishop of Marseille in the 5th century. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, October 15, begin on October 7. You can also pray it at any other 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 Cannat, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from the tradition of Provence, which mixes history and legend.

Day 1: Born with white hair

Tradition says that Cannat came into the world with white hair, a sign of wisdom. True wisdom, however, is not received at birth: it grows through prayer and faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord, give me wisdom of heart, the wisdom that comes from you and grows with the years.

Act of the day: Listen attentively to an elderly person and thank them for what they pass on.

Day 2: Choosing solitude

While still young, Cannat withdrew to Le Sauzet, near Aix. He looked for a place where nothing would distract him from God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to keep silence amid the noise, so that I may hear you speak.

Act of the day: Take ten minutes of silence, without screens, to pray.

Day 3: In the shade of the willows

Le Sauzet owed its name to the willows that shaded it. Willows grow near water: the hermit lived near a spring, as the soul lives near God.

Prayer: Lord, spring of living water, quench the thirst of my soul and keep me close to you.

Act of the day: Say a prayer of thanksgiving as you drink a glass of water.

Day 4: They come looking for him

When the bishop of Marseille died, the people thought of the hermit. The man who fled honors was called to serve everyone.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who choose the shepherds of your Church, and give us bishops after your own heart.

Act of the day: Pray for the bishop of your diocese, calling him by name.

Day 5: Cannat's refusal

Cannat first refused. He knew he was poor and weak. His humility was not a lack of courage: he did not want to take a place that God had not given him.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from seeking the first places, and help me to discern your will.

Act of the day: Quietly leave the best place or the best portion to someone else.

Day 6: The staff that turned green

According to legend, the dry reed staff put out leaves. God showed that he can bring to life what seemed dead.

Prayer: Lord, make what is dried up in me blossom again, and give new life to what I thought was lost.

Act of the day: Get back in touch with someone with whom your relationship has cooled.

Day 7: Shepherd of Marseille

Bishop from around 486, Cannat guarded the faith of his people and fought errors and the remains of paganism. He served the truth with firmness.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen my faith and help me to pass it on with gentleness and clarity.

Act of the day: Read the Creed slowly, meditating on one of its phrases.

Day 8: Return to the hermitage

Feeling his end approaching, Cannat returned to the place of his youth. He found again the silence where he had met God.

Prayer: Lord, always bring me back to what matters most, and keep alive in me the grace of my beginnings.

Act of the day: Visit, if possible, a church that has mattered in your life of faith, or remember it in prayer.

Day 9: Born into heaven

Cannat died on October 15, 490, in his hermitage. A chapel rose on that spot, and a village grew up around it. A life given to God goes on bearing fruit.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Cannat, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will, and grant that I may one day die in your peace.

Act of the day: Pray for the departed members of your family and, if possible, attend Mass.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Cannat,*
> *hermit of Le Sauzet and shepherd of Marseille,*
> *you loved silence and you agreed to serve.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Make hope blossom again in me,*
> *and keep the Church of Provence in the faith.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Cannat, Marseille

The church of Saint-Cannat stands on the Place des Prêcheurs, in the 1st arrondissement of Marseille, near the lower end of the Rue de la République. Once the church of the Dominicans, it now bears the name of Saint Cannat, a hermit of Provence who became bishop of Marseille around 486. It is a place where you can both pray to this saint of the city and discover a fine collection of religious art from Marseille of the 17th and 18th centuries.

A church of the Friars Preachers

In 1524, as the imperial troops of the Constable of Bourbon approached, the people of Marseille demolished the buildings outside the ramparts, among them the Dominican friary. Once the siege was lifted, the friars built a new friary and a church inside the city. The first stone was laid on December 31, 1526, but the work lasted a long time, despite help from the city's notaries. The church was consecrated on May 18, 1619. The facade, in late Baroque style, was raised in 1739 by the architect Joseph Gérard and the sculptor Antoine Duparc. Part of it was demolished in 1926, after being weakened by the opening of the Rue de la République. The friary has disappeared, but the church has remained and taken the name of Saint Cannat. It has been listed as a historic monument since 1926.

What you can see

The nave, in Gothic style, is lined with side chapels once entrusted to the guilds. The choir is dominated by a high altar with a baldachin in colored marbles, made in 1755 by Dominique Fossati, and, behind it, by a very large painting of Our Lady of Peace painted in 1740. You can also see the walnut pulpit carved at the end of the 17th century by Albert Duparc, the organ case

by the Dominican friar Jean-Esprit Isnard (1746), and several paintings by Michel Serre and Pierre Parrocel. A statue of Saint Cannat and an altar dedicated to him recall the patron of the church.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Cannat. Before his altar, entrust to him the Church of Marseille, its shepherds, and those who hesitate before a responsibility, then say the prayer to Saint Cannat. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Cannat

- **Saint-Cannat** (Bouches-du-Rhône): the village that grew up around his hermitage; the chapel of Saint-Cannat has housed relics attributed to him since 1992.
- **Church of Notre-Dame-de-Vie** (Saint-Cannat): a medieval sarcophagus used as a holy water font bears his image.

Practical information

The church is in the very center of Marseille, a few minutes' walk from the Old Port. It is a church where Mass is celebrated: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the parish or the diocese of Marseille before you come.

Credits and sources

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