

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Canute Lavard

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 7

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IN BRIEF

Saint Canute Lavard

Danish prince and Duke of Southern Jutland, murdered in 1131 and venerated as a martyr.

Feast day	January 7
Born	1096, Roskilde, Denmark (probably)
Died	January 7, 1131, Haraldsted, near Ringsted, Denmark
Canonized	June 25, 1170, by Pope Alexander III
Era	12th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Canute Lavard for Peace and Reconciliation

Novena to Saint Canute Lavard

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Canute Lavard

Saint Canute Lavard (Knud Lavard in Danish) was a Danish prince of the early twelfth century, son of King Eric I. Duke of Southern Jutland and then king of the Obotrites, a Slavic people of the Baltic, he was murdered by his cousin Magnus on January 7, 1131, near Ringsted. His violent death, seen as the death of an innocent man, gave rise to a popular cult. His son, King Valdemar I, obtained his canonization from Pope Alexander III in 1170. His feast day is January 7.

Who was Saint Canute Lavard?

Canute was born in 1096, probably in Roskilde, the son of King Eric I of Denmark and Queen Bodil. His nickname, Lavard, comes from Old Norse and means "lord": the same word gave English its word *lord*. It probably designated a royal heir. In 1102 his parents left on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, from which his father never returned. The boy was entrusted to the powerful nobleman Skjalm Hvide, who raised him on the island of Zealand with his own sons.

Denmark at that time had only recently become a Christian kingdom, and the royal succession was still disputed among the many descendants of earlier kings. The throne passed to Canute's uncle Niels, who in 1115 made him Duke of Southern Jutland, a border march facing Germany and the Slavic world.



Saint Canute Lavard, Danish prince and martyr.

Key dates in the life of Saint Canute Lavard

- **1096**: Born, son of King Eric I and Queen Bodil.
- **1102**: His parents leave on pilgrimage; he is entrusted to Skjalm Hvide.
- **1115**: His uncle, King Niels, makes him Duke of Southern Jutland.
- **1116**: Marries Ingeborg, daughter of the prince of Kiev.
- **1129**: Lothair III, king of Germany and future emperor, grants him the title of king of the Obotrites.
- **January 7, 1131**: Murdered by his cousin Magnus at Haraldsted, near Ringsted.
- **January 14, 1131**: Birth of his son Valdemar, after his death.
- **June 25, 1170**: Official recognition of his holiness, at the request of Valdemar I.

A prince on the frontiers of Christendom

As Duke of Southern Jutland, Canute had to protect the kingdom against raids from the south and east. He drew closer to the German world and the imperial court. South of his duchy lived the Obotrites, Slavs of whom only some were Christian. Their Christian prince, Henry, raised in Denmark, died in 1127. His sons killed one another or were killed, and the tribes that were still pagan regained their independence.

In 1129 Lothair III, king of Germany and future emperor, gave Canute the title of king of the Obotrites, with the mission of completing the Christianization of this region of the Baltic. For the German ruler as for the prince, evangelization and political power went hand in hand at that time. This double responsibility made Canute a powerful figure, and therefore a dangerous one in the eyes of his Danish rivals.

The murder at Haraldsted

His cousin Magnus, son of King Niels, had also become a king, in western Sweden. Each of the two princes could now claim the throne of Denmark, and their rivalry turned to hatred. On January 7, 1131, Magnus and his men killed Canute in the forest of Haraldsted, near Ringsted, on Zealand. According to the Danish accounts, Canute had come to meet his cousin without suspicion, during the Christmas season.

His widow, Ingeborg, took refuge with her children among the Hvide family, who protected them. A week after the murder, their son Valdemar was born. He grew up with Absalon, son of Asser Rig, who would become his closest adviser and later archbishop of Lund. Canute's death set off a civil war that tore Denmark apart for years.

From popular devotion to canonization

Very soon the faithful came to pray at his tomb in Ringsted and regarded him as a martyr who had died innocent. After becoming king in 1157, Valdemar I asked Pope Alexander III to recognize his father's holiness. On June 25, 1170, a great ceremony at Ringsted celebrated both the elevation of his relics and the coronation of Valdemar's young son. The holiness of the father thus strengthened the dynasty of the son. Historians point out this political dimension, without it erasing the real devotion that surrounded his memory.

What does Saint Canute Lavard teach us?

Canute Lavard was neither a monk nor a Doctor of the Church: he was a prince of his time, caught up in the wars and ambitions of his family. The Church remembers his unjust death, which came as he went without suspicion to meet his cousin, and his mission to protect and evangelize lands that were still pagan. He has no widely recognized official patronage, but he is a natural intercessor for political leaders, for families divided by rivalry or inheritance, and for reconciliation between peoples. He reminds us that holiness can reach lives burdened with power and violence, and that the death of an innocent calls for reconciliation rather than revenge.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Canute Lavard in art

- **The crown**: medieval images show him as a crowned prince, recalling his royal birth and his title of king of the Obotrites.
- **The signs of his rank**: he holds the attributes of a ruler, as a duke and king.
- **Danish churches**: he appears in the art of Danish churches, especially in connection with Ringsted.

Where to pray to Saint Canute Lavard

- **Ringsted, Zealand**: Saint Bendt's Church, where he was buried and where his relics were raised in 1170; it later became the burial church of his dynasty.
- **Haraldsted**: the place of his murder, a few miles from Ringsted.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Canute Lavard for Peace and Reconciliation

Saint Canute Lavard left no writings and no prayer, and no authentic words of his have come down to us. Below you will find an original prayer to Saint Canute Lavard, inspired by what history remembers of him: a prince charged with defending and evangelizing, who was murdered by a member of his own family.



Saint Canute Lavard in the art of a Danish church.

Prayer to Saint Canute Lavard for Peace and Reconciliation

Saint Canute Lavard, prince of Denmark, you received the task of protecting a people and opening new lands to the Gospel: pray for those who hold power today. May they serve justice and peace rather than their own ambition.

You were killed by your cousin at Christmastime: bring before God the families torn apart by jealousy, inheritance or rivalry. May anger there give way to dialogue.

Your death was followed by years of war: obtain for divided peoples the grace of reconciliation, and for those who have suffered violence the strength not to answer with revenge.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

With you, I place my life in the hands of Christ, the King of peace, who gave his life for those who put him to death. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Canute Lavard's feast day is January 7, the anniversary of his murder in 1131. Because he died in the Christmas season, his feast falls the day after the traditional date of Epiphany, a fitting time to pray for peace in families. You can pray to him:

- for political leaders and all who hold public responsibility;
- for families divided by quarrels, jealousy or inheritance disputes;
- for peace between nations and an end to civil wars;

- for victims of violence and for the grace to forgive.

A short invocation

> *Saint Canute Lavard, innocent prince and witness of peace, pray for us and for all divided families. Amen.*

To know him better, read the life of Saint Canute Lavard, or pray the novena to Saint Canute Lavard.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Canute Lavard

This novena to Saint Canute Lavard is an original composition by Saintspedia. For nine days, it follows the Danish prince who was charged with protecting his people and spreading the Gospel, and who was murdered by his cousin in 1131. To end on his feast day, January 7, begin it on December 30, during the Christmas season, the very season in which he died. It is a novena for peace: in families, in nations and in our own hearts.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross. Read the meditation, pray the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act suggested for the day. If you are praying for a particular family conflict, you may name the people involved each day.

Opening prayer for each day

Lord God, King of peace, you called Saint Canute Lavard to serve you as a prince in a time of rivalry and violence. He went without suspicion to meet his cousin and lost his life, and your faithful people honored him as an innocent martyr. Through his intercession, I come before you with the divisions I carry: in my family, in my heart and in the world. Heal what jealousy and anger have broken, give wisdom and justice to those who govern, and teach me to answer evil with good. Receive the intention I place before you during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saint Canute Lavard, pray for us.

Day 1: A child without his father

In 1102 Canute's parents left on pilgrimage, and his father never came back. The boy was raised by Skjalm Hvide among his own sons. God often provides through people who open their homes.

Prayer: Saint Canute, pray for children who grow up without a father, and bless all who take them in. Amen.

Today: Pray for a foster family, a godparent or a mentor you know.

Day 2: The gift of a name

His nickname, Lavard, meant "lord." Yet the only true Lord is Christ, to whom every power must one day give an account.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be the Lord of my life, of my plans and of my ambitions. Amen.

Today: Offer to God, in a short prayer, one area of your life where you want to be in control.

Day 3: Serving at the border

As Duke of Southern Jutland, Canute guarded a frontier between peoples and languages. Borders can be places of conflict, or places of encounter.

Prayer: Saint Canute, pray for regions torn by conflict at their borders, and for all who work for peace between peoples. Amen.

Today: Pray for a country at war, naming it before God.

Day 4: Married love

In 1116 Canute married Ingeborg, daughter of the prince of Kiev. After his death she protected their children and gave birth to their son Valdemar.

Prayer: Saint Canute, bless married couples, strengthen them in trials and comfort widows and widowers. Amen.

Today: Do something kind for your spouse, or pray for a widowed person you know.

Day 5: Bringing the Gospel

In 1129 he received the mission of completing the Christianization of the Obotrites. In his time, mission and power were closely mixed. Today the Church proposes the Gospel freely, with respect and love.

Prayer: Lord, make me a witness of your Gospel by my life, with gentleness and respect. Amen.

Today: Pray for missionaries, and for someone you know who is far from the faith.

Day 6: The poison of rivalry

The rivalry between Canute and his cousin Magnus grew into hatred. Jealousy over power or inheritance can destroy families.

Prayer: Saint Canute, free my heart from jealousy and rivalry, and heal the families divided by them. Amen.

Today: Take one step toward a relative with whom you are in conflict: a message, a call, a prayer.

Day 7: Meeting without suspicion

According to the Danish accounts, Canute went to meet his cousin without suspicion, at Christmastime, and was killed. His trust was betrayed, but it was not a sin.

Prayer: Saint Canute, comfort those who have been betrayed by someone close, and keep their hearts from bitterness. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who has hurt you, asking God to bless them.

Day 8: After violence, reconciliation

His murder set off years of civil war in Denmark. Violence breeds violence, unless someone chooses to break the chain.

Prayer: Lord, Prince of Peace, break the chain of revenge in our families and nations, and make us instruments of reconciliation. Amen.

Today: Refuse a word of resentment or revenge, in speech or online.

Day 9: An innocent death

The faithful soon came to pray at his tomb in Ringsted and saw him as a martyr who had died innocent. In 1170 the Church recognized his holiness.

Prayer: Saint Canute Lavard, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Unite me with Christ, the Innocent One, who gave his life for all. Amen.

Today: Pray for victims of violence and for their families.

Closing prayer

Lord God, you gave Saint Canute Lavard the grace to remain your faithful servant in a world of power and rivalry. Through his intercession, grant peace to divided families and nations, give those who govern a love of justice, and teach us to answer evil with good. Hear the intention I entrust to you in this novena. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Canute Lavard and the prayer to Saint Canute Lavard.

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