BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Chrysolius

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 7

IN BRIEF

Saint Chrysolius

Bishop and martyr honored as the apostle of Comines and Verlinghem, according to a tradition attested from the 13th century.

Feast day	February 7
Born	3rd century, Armenia according to tradition
Died	c. 287 or 303 according to tradition, near Comines (Flanders)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Comines, flax fields

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Chrysolius

Saint Chrysolius (Chrysole or Chryseuil in French) is honored as the apostle of Comines and Verlinghem, in Flanders. According to tradition, this bishop of Armenian origin came to evangelize northern Gaul with Saint Piat and Saint Quentin, and suffered martyrdom there at the end of the 3rd century. Historians point out, however, that his story is attested only from the 13th century. His feast day is February 7, and February 8 in the Diocese of Tournai.

Who was Saint Chrysolius?

Saint Chrysolius is a much-loved saint on both banks of the Lys, where two churches of Comines, one in France and the other in Belgium, bear his name. Tradition makes him a missionary from the East, descended, it is said, from the kings of Armenia, who became a bishop and martyr in Flanders. But his life raises a real historical problem. The main account, the *Passion of Saint Chrysolius*, does not seem older than the 13th century, a thousand years after the events it describes. The ancient martyrologies, very well informed about the saints of the region, do not mention him. His figure must therefore be presented with caution, distinguishing tradition from history.

Key dates in the life of Chrysolius

- **3rd century**: According to tradition, Chrysolius, a native of Armenia and already a bishop, comes from Italy to northern Gaul with Saint Piat, Saint Eubert and Saint Quentin.
- **Late 3rd century**: He evangelizes the region of Comines and Verlinghem.
- **c. 287 or 303**: He dies a martyr near Comines; the dates given by tradition vary.

- **7th century**: According to tradition, Saint Eligius has his body exhumed and placed in a silver shrine.
- **Late 12th century**: A relic is attested at Comines, and his cult develops in the following century.
- **13th century**: Probable writing of the *Passion of Saint Chrysolius*; the church of Saint-Pierre in Comines later takes his name.
- **1967**: The Bishop of Bruges returns to Comines a relic until then kept in Bruges.
- **1925-1929**: Construction of the present church of Saint-Chrysole in Comines (France), after the destruction of the First World War.
- **1980**: A critical study concludes that his *Passion* is late and legendary.

The apostle of Comines according to tradition

According to the tradition taken up in the 20th century by Dom Gaspar Lefebvre in his famous missal, Chrysolius was a native of Armenia and already a bishop when he came from Italy to northern Gaul, around the middle of the 3rd century. He is said to have belonged to a group of missionaries with Saint Piat, the apostle of Tournai, Saint Eubert and Saint Quentin. He would have been the first to proclaim the Gospel in the region of Comines and Verlinghem, before being martyred in the midst of his apostolic work.

The account of his death took on marvelous forms in popular memory. According to one legend, the Romans cut off his head at Quesnoy-sur-Deûle, and he walked as far as Verlinghem, where he died. According to another, the executioner split open his skull at Verlinghem, and the saint walked, holding the top of his skull in his hands, as far as Comines. A fountain at Verlinghem keeps the memory of his passing: he is said to have struck the ground three times with his sword to quench his thirst. These stories belong to the genre of "cephalophore" saints, who carry their own heads, like Saint Denis.

What historians say

In 1980, a study presented at the congress of the archaeological and historical societies of Belgium, led in particular by the Benedictine Nicolas Huyghebaert, examined the documents on Saint Chrysolius. It concluded that the *Passion* goes back no further than the 13th century, and that it draws very heavily on that of Saint Piat. Before that time, the martyrology of Usuard and the calendars and liturgical books of the region do not mention him. The appearance of his cult coincides with the growth of the chapter of canons of Saint-Pierre in Comines, who claimed to possess his body. Historians speak of a "pious" construction, without being able to say whether it rests on the memory of a real person.

The question of the relics is also complex. In the 15th century, the canons of Lens claimed to possess his head and body, while those of Saint Donatian in Bruges also claimed an older relic, which may belong to another Chrysolius. In 1967, the Bishop of Bruges returned this relic to Comines, so that the banks of the Lys now keep two of them.

Devotion and art

Despite these uncertainties, devotion to Saint Chrysolius has remained alive. He is celebrated on February 7, and on February 8 in Tournai. His life is told in nine medallions in a stained-glass window of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Tournai. At Comines, a reliquary bust shows him as a bishop. The farmers of the Lys valley called on him as protector of the flax fields, long the great crop of the region. The two churches of Saint-Chrysole in Comines, on either side of the border, recall the unity of one Flemish land divided between two states.

What can we learn from Saint Chrysolius?

Saint Chrysolius invites us to a faith that does not fear the truth. His story is largely legendary, and the Church does not ask us to believe it as an established fact. But through him, the Christians of Flanders wanted to honor those who brought them the Gospel and those who gave their lives for Christ in the first centuries. You can pray to him for the Lys region, for farmers and for all who proclaim the Gospel in new lands.

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

Where to pray to Saint Chrysolius

- **Church of Saint-Chrysole in Comines** (Nord, France): the neo-Byzantine church that bears his name and keeps a reliquary bust.
- **Church of Saint-Chrysole in Comines** (Belgium): the other church dedicated to him, on the other side of the Lys.
- **Verlinghem** (Nord): the fountain of Saint Chrysolius, linked to the legend of his martyrdom.
- **Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Tournai** (Belgium): the stained-glass window that tells his life.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Chrysolius, Apostle of Comines

Saint Chrysolius is honored as the apostle of Comines and Verlinghem, a martyr according to tradition at the end of the 3rd century. His story is largely legendary, but his memory has gathered the Christians of both banks of the Lys for centuries. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him Flanders, farmers and those who proclaim the Gospel.

Prayer to Saint Chrysolius

Saint Chrysolius,
tradition says you came from far away
to sow the Gospel in the land of Flanders.
Make us grateful to those
who handed on the faith to us,
and make us, in our turn, sowers of the Word.

You who are honored as a martyr,
you gave your life for Christ
in the land you were evangelizing.
Give us the courage to bear witness
where God has placed us.

Protector of the flax fields,
bless the work of those who till the land,
and keep in friendship the peoples of both banks of the Lys.
May truth and charity grow together in us.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Chrysolius

- On his feast day, February 7, or February 8 in the Diocese of Tournai.
- For the town of Comines and the Lys valley, in France and in Belgium.
- For farmers, especially flax growers.
- For missionaries and all who proclaim the Gospel.
- For friendship between neighboring peoples and peace on borders.

A short invocation

> *Saint Chrysolius, apostle of Comines,*
> *pray for us and for our land. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Chrysolius from January 30 to February 7, and read the life of Saint Chrysolius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Chrysolius

This novena offers nine days of prayer with Saint Chrysolius, honored as the apostle of Comines and Verlinghem. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, February 7, begin on January 30. 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 Chrysolius, pray for us." The episodes of his life come from a late and largely legendary tradition: they are presented as such, to nourish prayer.

Day 1: From the East

Tradition has Chrysolius born in Armenia, one of the first countries to welcome the Christian faith. The Gospel travels from one people to another.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the faith that came from far away to reach us. Bless the Christians of Armenia and of the East.

Act of the day: Pray for the Christians of the Middle East.

Day 2: Sent on mission

According to tradition, Chrysolius set out with Piat, Eubert and Quentin to proclaim the Gospel in Gaul. Mission is lived together.

Prayer: Lord, send missionaries, and help us work together for your Kingdom.

Act of the day: Support a missionary work by prayer or a gift.

Day 3: Sowing in new land

Chrysolius is honored as the first to proclaim Christ at Comines and Verlinghem. He sowed without knowing what would grow.

Prayer: Lord, make me a patient sower of your Word, and help me leave the harvest to you.

Act of the day: Speak simply about your faith to someone.

Day 4: The witness

Tradition says he was martyred in the midst of his apostolic work. The word martyr means witness.

Prayer: Lord, may my life bear witness to you, even when it costs.

Act of the day: Pray for persecuted Christians.

Day 5: The fountain of Verlinghem

The legend says he made a fountain spring up to quench his thirst. Christ promises living water to those who thirst.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the living water of your Spirit, and quench my thirst for you.

Act of the day: Remember your baptism with a little holy water.

Day 6: Loving the truth

Historians have shown that the life of Chrysolius is largely legendary. Faith does not fear the truth, for God is the Truth.

Prayer: Lord, help me love the truth and always seek what is true.

Act of the day: Refuse any lie today, even a small one.

Day 7: Protector of the flax fields

The farmers of the Lys called on him for their flax fields. Prayer meets the work of the land.

Prayer: Lord, bless the work of farmers and give everyone their daily bread.

Act of the day: Buy something from a local farmer, or pray for the farming world.

Day 8: Two banks, one faith

Two churches of Saint-Chrysole face each other across the border. The saint gathers what borders divide.

Prayer: Lord, let friendship grow between neighboring peoples, and give peace to the borders of the world.

Act of the day: Make a gesture of welcome toward someone from another country.

Day 9: A living memory

For centuries, the Christians of Comines have honored Saint Chrysolius. Through him, they thank God for those who brought them the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Chrysolius, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and pray for your parish.

Closing prayer

Saint Chrysolius,
honored as apostle and martyr of Flanders,
present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep us faithful to the Gospel we have received,
and bless our land and those who work it.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Chrysole, Comines

The church of Saint-Chrysole stands in Comines, in the Nord department, facing the town hall and close to the Lys, which marks the border between France and Belgium here. Dedicated to Saint Chrysolius, honored as the apostle of Comines, it keeps a reliquary bust of the saint. Built between 1925 and 1929, it is one of the most original churches in the region.

A church born from the ruins of the Great War

The cult of Saint Chrysolius has been attested in Comines since the Middle Ages. According to a local tradition, his body rests on the site of the old church of Saint-Pierre, on which the church of Saint-Chrysole was founded. The medieval building went through many destructions and rebuildings. During the First World War, Comines, very close to the front, was devastated and the church destroyed.

In 1925, work began on a new church, entrusted to the architects Maurice Storez and Dom Paul Bellot, a Benedictine monk. They chose a neo-Byzantine style and used reinforced concrete, then an innovative material. The church was inaugurated on July 7, 1928, and completed in June 1929. Threatened with demolition because of its aging concrete, it was saved by the townspeople, who voted for its preservation in a local referendum in 1996. It has been a listed historic monument since 2002.

What you can see

The bell tower, fifty-one meters high, is striking for its openwork sections filled with bricks and blocks of different colors, which form geometric patterns. The dome and the volumes of the church recall the great sanctuaries of the East, echoing the Armenian origin that tradition gives the saint. Inside, many

stained-glass windows light the nave and the choir. The reliquary bust of Saint Chrysolius, showing him as a bishop, is one of the church's most precious objects.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Chrysolius, which distinguishes tradition from history. Before his reliquary, entrust to him the Lys region, farmers and those who proclaim the Gospel, then say the prayer to Saint Chrysolius. His feast, February 7, is the ideal time for a visit. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Chrysolius

- **Comines** (Belgium): another church of Saint-Chrysole, on the other side of the Lys.
- **Verlinghem** (Nord): the fountain linked to the legend of his martyrdom.
- **Tournai** (Belgium): the window in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame that tells his life.

Practical information

Comines lies north of the Lille metropolitan area, on the Belgian border. The church is in the town center, facing the town hall and its belfry. It is a place of prayer: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the parish or the town hall of Comines before you come.

Credits and sources

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