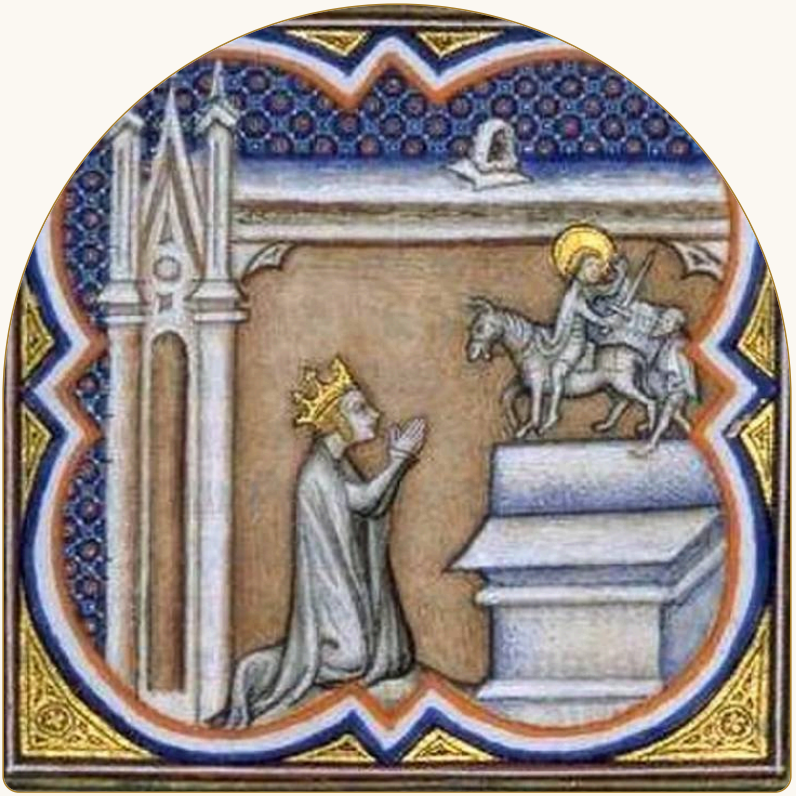


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Clotilde, Queen of the Franks

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: June 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Clotilde, Queen of the Franks

Burgundian princess who became Queen of the Franks, wife of Clovis, whom she led to baptism.

Feast day	June 3
Born	c. 475, Burgundian kingdom, probably Lyon
Died	June 3, 545, Tours, France
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	queens, wives, mothers

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Clotilde for a Spouse and Family

Novena to Saint Clotilde

Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Clotilde, Queen of the Franks

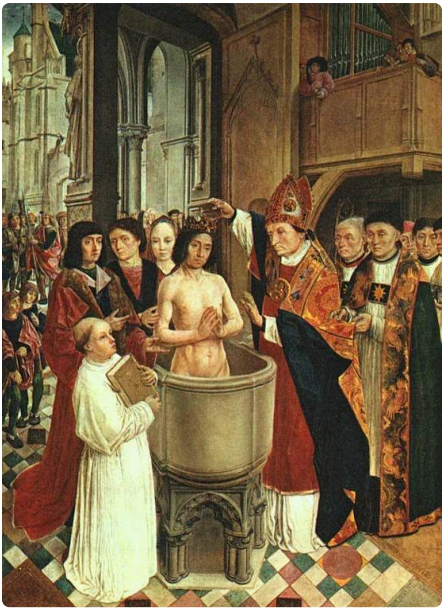
Saint Clotilde was a Burgundian princess who became Queen of the Franks through her marriage to King Clovis, and Christian memory has kept her as the woman who led her husband to baptism. The mother of four kings, she was tested by the violence of her own family and ended her life in Tours, near the tomb of Saint Martin, serving the poor. She died on June 3, 545, and her feast is kept on that day.

Who was Saint Clotilde?

Clotilde was born around 475 in the kingdom of the Burgundians, which then stretched from the Saône River to the Alps, with Lyon as one of its capitals. She was the daughter of King Chilperic and Queen Caretena. Remarkably, at a court dominated by Arianism, a form of Christianity that denied the full divinity of Christ, she was raised in the Catholic faith, most likely thanks to her mother.

Most of what we know about her comes from Saint Gregory of Tours, who wrote his *History of the Franks* some forty years after her death. It is a precious witness, but already colored by legend and by the desire to edify.

According to Gregory, her father was killed by her uncle Gundobad. Historians today doubt this drama, which mainly seems to explain the later wars between Franks and Burgundians. What is certain is that the young princess was living at her uncle's court, perhaps in Geneva, when Clovis, the young and still pagan king of the Salian Franks, asked for her hand.



The Baptism of Clovis, by the Master of Saint Giles (c. 1500).

Key dates in the life of Saint Clotilde

- **c. 475**: Born in the Burgundian kingdom.
- **c. 493**: Marries Clovis, King of the Franks.
- **c. 494**: Baptism and death of their first son, Ingomer.
- **c. 496**: Battle against the Alamanni, traditionally placed at Tolbiac; according to Gregory of Tours, Clovis calls on the God of Clotilde.
- **A Christmas Day, between c. 496 and 508**: Clovis is baptized at Reims by Saint Remigius; the exact year is still debated.
- **November 27, 511**: Death of Clovis, buried in Paris in the Church of the Holy Apostles that the couple had founded.
- **524**: Her son Chlodomer is killed at Vézeronce; two of her grandsons are then murdered by their uncles.
- **After 524**: She withdraws to Tours, near the tomb of Saint Martin.

- **June 3, 545**: Dies at Tours and is buried in Paris beside Clovis.

A Christian queen beside a pagan king

The marriage, concluded around 493, was first of all a political alliance. But Clotilde brought her faith into it. Gregory of Tours shows her speaking at length to her husband about the emptiness of idols and asking him to let their children be baptized. Clovis agreed.

Their first son, Ingomer, died soon after his baptism, still wearing his white garment. The king blamed his wife's God. Clotilde answered that she gave thanks, knowing her child was with God. Their second son, Chlodomer, fell ill in turn and then recovered, which Gregory attributes to his mother's prayer.

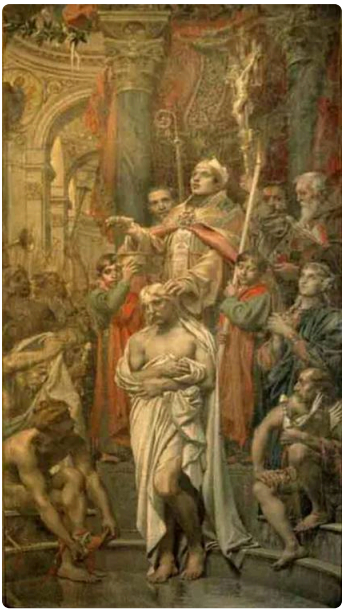
This patience is the most endearing trait of the saint: she forced nothing; she spoke, prayed and waited. Even if Gregory embellished his account, it preserves the memory of a woman who made her home the first place of her witness.

Tolbiac and the baptism at Reims

During a battle against the Alamanni, which tradition places at Tolbiac, the Franks began to give way. According to Gregory, Clovis then called on "Jesus Christ, whom Clotilde proclaims to be the Son of the living God," and promised to be baptized if he won the victory. The Alamanni fled. Clotilde secretly sent for Bishop Remigius of Reims, who completed the king's instruction in the faith.

The baptism took place at Reims on Christmas Day, together with, Gregory says, more than three thousand warriors. Historians hesitate over the year, between 496 and 508, and stress that Clovis's choice was also political: by receiving Catholic rather than Arian baptism, he drew closer to the bishops and to the Gallo-Roman population. Yet they recognize the real role of the

queen. The conversion of the Frankish king left a lasting mark on the history of Gaul, so much so that it was later seen as the birth certificate of Christian France.



The Baptism of Clovis, mural by Joseph Blanc in the Panthéon, Paris.

Widowhood and trials

When Clovis died in 511, the kingdom was divided among his sons Theuderic, Chlodomer, Childebert and Chlothar. Clotilde had her husband buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles, on the hill that would later bear the name of Saint Genevieve, whose holiness she had venerated.

The years that followed were terrible. In 524, Chlodomer was killed at Vézeronce fighting the Burgundians. His sons were entrusted to their grandmother, but their uncles Childebert and Chlothar, who coveted their share of the kingdom, murdered two of them. The third, Clodoald, escaped the massacre; he became a priest and is venerated as Saint Cloud.

Gregory of Tours also tells of the fate of her daughter, also named Clotilde, who was married to the Visigothic king Amalaric and mistreated by him because she remained Catholic. Within her own family, the queen thus suffered the violence of the power struggles of her age.

The servant of Tours

Clotilde then withdrew to Tours, near the basilica where Saint Martin lies. According to Gregory, she lived there in prayer, vigils and almsgiving, founded or endowed churches and monasteries, and was so humble that people took her less for a queen than for a servant of God. Tradition credits her in particular with founding a monastery at Les Andelys, in Normandy.

Another scene reported by Gregory shows her praying all night at the tomb of Saint Martin to prevent a war between her sons; a storm scattered the armies before the battle. She died at Tours on June 3, 545, and her sons had her buried in Paris, beside Clovis.



Saint Clotilde among the Queens of France in the Luxembourg Gardens (19th century).

Why is Saint Clotilde the patron saint of queens, wives and mothers?

Saint Clotilde left no writings, but she left a way of living the faith at the heart of a family and a court that did not share it. She bore patient witness to her husband, went through bereavements no mother should ever know, and in the evening of her life chose prayer and service rather than revenge.

That is why she is invoked as the patron of queens, wives and mothers. Catholics pray to her for married couples, for wives whose husbands are far from the faith, for grieving or tested mothers, and for peace in families.

To pray with her, you can use the prayer to Saint Clotilde for a spouse and family, or follow the novena to Saint Clotilde, prayed from May 25 to June 2, the eve of her feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Clotilde in art

- **The crown and royal mantle**: she is usually shown as a queen, crowned and wearing a long cloak.
- **The baptism of Clovis**: she often appears beside the font at Reims, where Saint Remigius baptizes her husband.
- **The Queens of France**: in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, her statue stands among the famous queens and women of French history.

Where to pray to Saint Clotilde

- **Paris**: the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde, in the 7th arrondissement, a nineteenth-century neo-Gothic church dedicated to her.
- **Les Andelys** (Normandy): the Fountain of Saint Clotilde and the collegiate church of Notre-Dame, linked to the tradition of the monastery she is said to have founded.
- **Reims**: the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, heir to the place where Clovis was baptized.
- **Tours**: the Basilica of Saint Martin, near which she spent her last years.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Clotilde for a Spouse and Family

Saint Clotilde left no written prayer. What we know of her faith comes from Gregory of Tours, who tells in his *History of the Franks*, written in the late sixth century, how Clovis finally called upon "the God of Clotilde." This page brings together that account and an original prayer to the Queen of the Franks for a spouse and family.

The vow of Clovis at Tolbiac

In the thick of the battle against the Alamanni, as his army was about to be crushed, Clovis raised his eyes to heaven. Gregory of Tours gives him this prayer, which says everything about Clotilde's patience: her husband turns to God by naming Him through her. Translated from the Latin by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.

> *"Jesus Christ, whom Clotilde proclaims to be the Son of the living God, you who are said to help those in distress and to give victory to those who hope in you, I fervently beg the glory of your aid."*
>
> *"If you grant me victory over these enemies, I will believe in you and be baptized in your name."*

Source: Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, Book II, chapter 30. The account was written about a century after the events and not every detail is historical, but it preserves the memory of the queen's decisive role.

A word of Saint Remigius

The same historian reports the words Bishop Remigius addressed to the king at his baptism in Reims:

> *"Bow your head gently, Sicamber; adore what you have burned, burn what you have adored."*

Source: Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, Book II, chapter 31, translated by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Clotilde for a spouse and family

> *Saint Clotilde, you who kept the faith at a court that did not share it, teach me the quiet faithfulness of those who believe without crushing anyone.*
>
> *You who spoke of God to your husband with patience, never growing weary, I entrust to you those I love who do not know Christ, or who have drifted away from Him. Give me the right words, and even more, a life that speaks for me.*
>
> *You who wept for your children and grandchildren, comfort parents who are suffering, those who have lost a child and those who see their family divided. Obtain peace for families torn apart by jealousy, money or power.*
>
> *You who ended your life as a servant, near the tomb of Saint Martin, teach me to prefer prayer and service to honors. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Amen.*

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Clotilde is celebrated on June 3, the anniversary of her death at Tours in 545. You can pray to her at any time for a husband or wife, for children, or for peace in the family, especially when a loved one is far from the faith. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Clotilde, and read the life of Saint Clotilde.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Clotilde

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Clotilde as Gregory of Tours tells it. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast, begin on May 25; it ends on June 2, the day before her feast on June 3. It can be prayed at any time of year for a spouse, for children or for peace in the family.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then a Hail Mary. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into family life.



Saint Clotilde, church stained glass or statue.

Day 1: A faith received from a mother

At an Arian court, Clotilde grew up in the Catholic faith, most likely handed on by her mother. Faith often comes to us through a familiar face before it comes through books. Clotilde kept what she had received in an environment that did not encourage it, and that fidelity later bore fruit far beyond her own life.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who handed on the faith to me. Keep it alive in me, so that I may pass it on in my turn.

Today: Pray for the person who first made God known to you.

Day 2: Marriage

Clotilde married a pagan king in an alliance decided by others. Yet she made it a place of faithfulness and love. She did not wait for ideal circumstances to live her faith; she began where God had placed her, beside a husband who did not yet share it.

Prayer: Lord, bless married couples, those who are just beginning and those who have lasted. Help them to love each other more each day.

Today: Give thanks for your spouse, or pray for a couple you know.

Day 3: Speaking of God with patience

According to Gregory of Tours, Clotilde often spoke to Clovis about the true God. She did not obtain his conversion in a day, but she never gave up. She did not lecture or force; she spoke when she could, prayed when she could not, and trusted God with the timing.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the patience to bear witness without judging, and the trust that you are at work in the hearts of those I love.

Today: Pray by name for a loved one who is far from the faith.

Day 4: The loss of a child

Clotilde's first son died soon after his baptism. When the king blamed her, she answered with faith: her child was with God. Her grief was real, yet she refused to let it turn into bitterness against God. Her faith did not remove the pain, but it gave it a horizon.

Prayer: Lord, comfort parents who have lost a child. Welcome into your light all the children who left us too soon.

Today: Pray for a grieving family, or reach out to them.

Day 5: In the midst of battle

At Tolbiac, Clovis called on "the God of Clotilde." The queen's faith became a support at the moment when all seemed lost. Without knowing it, a believer can become for others the sign that God is near. Our faithful prayer is never only for ourselves.

Prayer: Lord, be my help in my struggles. May my faith, however small, also sustain those around me.

Today: Write down a present difficulty and entrust it to God.

Day 6: The baptism

On a Christmas Day, Clovis was baptized at Reims. Clotilde saw fulfilled what she had asked for over many years. The waiting had been long, but it had not been in vain. Every baptism is a new birth, and the Church rejoices over each one.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for my baptism. Renew in me the joy of being your child.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism and pray for your godparents.

Day 7: Family wounds

After the death of Clovis, his sons tore each other apart, and two of Clotilde's grandsons were murdered. Even for the saints, the family can be a place of suffering. Clotilde knew rivalry, ambition and murder among her own children. She did not answer evil with evil, but carried her wounded family to God.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you divided families. Heal resentment, calm jealousy and give the courage to forgive.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation with a relative, however small.

Day 8: Praying for peace

Gregory tells how Clotilde spent a night in prayer at the tomb of Saint Martin to keep her sons from fighting each other. Prayer is also a way of acting. When she could no longer persuade her sons, she turned to God. When our own words fail, we can still pray for those who are in conflict.

Prayer: God of peace, I entrust to you the countries at war and those who govern them. Silence the weapons and open hearts.

Today: Pray a decade of the Rosary for peace.

Day 9: Servant of the poor

At Tours, the queen lived humbly, in prayer and almsgiving. She ended her life as a servant, far from the honors of the court. The woman who had worn a crown chose to be known as a servant of God. Her holiness grew in hidden service rather than in power.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Clotilde, give me a humble and generous heart. Amen.

Today: Give some of your time or money to someone in need.

Closing prayer

Saint Clotilde, wife and mother, you who knew the joys and tears of family life, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for couples, for children and for those who are far from God. Obtain for us the patience of love and peace of heart. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Clotilde and the prayer to Saint Clotilde for a spouse and family.

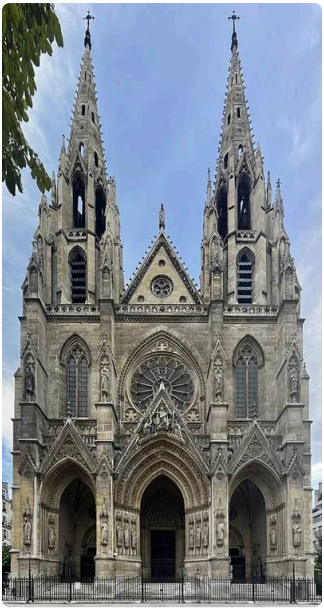
PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris

The Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde, in Paris's 7th arrondissement, is the main church dedicated to the queen of the Franks. Built in the mid-19th century, it is one of the first great Neo-Gothic buildings in the capital and a landmark of organ music. It is a reminder that Clotilde, wife of Clovis, has rested in Paris since the 6th century.

A church for the queen of Paris

At her death in Tours in 545, Clotilde was buried in Paris, in the Church of the Holy Apostles that she had founded with Clovis on Mont Sainte-Geneviève. That sanctuary, which became the Abbey of Sainte-Geneviève, disappeared after the Revolution. In the 19th century the city decided to build a new church in honor of the saint, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Work began in 1846 on plans by the architect Franz Christian Gau and was completed by Théodore Ballu. The church was consecrated in 1857; Pope Leo XIII raised it to the rank of minor basilica in 1897.



The Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris (19th century).

The architecture and decoration

Inspired by the Gothic cathedrals of the 14th century, the basilica is recognizable from afar by its two stone spires that rise above the neighboring square. Inside, the stained glass and paintings of the 19th century tell the story of the saint and of the conversion of the Franks. One chapel is dedicated to Saint Clotilde, and the basilica keeps relics attributed to her, venerated especially around June 3.

The organ loft of César Franck

Sainte-Clotilde is also famous for its great organ built by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. The composer César Franck was its titular organist from 1858 until his death in 1890; he improvised and composed much of his organ work there. After

him, Charles Tournemire and then Jean Langlais carried on this tradition, which makes the loft one of the legendary places of French organ music.



The Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris, the interior.

Praying at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Clotilde. On site, a time of silence in the saint's chapel is a chance to entrust to her your spouse, your children, or a family in trial. The prayer to Saint Clotilde suits this moment well, and the novena can end with a visit on June 3. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Clotilde

- **Les Andelys** (Eure): the Fontaine Sainte-Clotilde, linked to the tradition of the monastery she is said to have founded, the site of an ancient pilgrimage.

- **Reims**: Notre-Dame Cathedral, on the traditional site of Clovis's baptism by Saint Remigius, and the Basilica of Saint-Remi, where the bishop rests.
- **Tours**: the Basilica of Saint Martin, near the tomb of Saint Martin, where the queen spent her last years.
- **Paris**: the Church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, next to the former Abbey of Sainte-Geneviève where Clotilde was buried.

Practical information

The basilica is in the 7th arrondissement, between Boulevard Saint-Germain and Rue de Grenelle, a few minutes' walk from the Musée d'Orsay and the National Assembly. It is served by the subway and the RER. Organ concerts are given there regularly. Check Mass, visiting, and concert times with the parish before you come.

Credits and sources

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