BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Cynog

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 7

IN BRIEF

Saint Cynog

5th-century Welsh saint, son of King Brychan according to tradition, honored as a martyr at Merthyr Cynog.

Feast day	October 7
Born	5th century (c. 434 according to some authors), Wales (kingdom of Brycheiniog)
Died	late 5th century (date unknown), the Van, in the Brecon Beacons (Wales), according to tradition
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	5th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Cynog

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Cynog

Saint Cynog (Kennauc in Old Welsh) is a Welsh saint of the 5th century, presented by tradition as one of the sons of Brychan, the king who gave his name to the kingdom of Brycheiniog, in south Wales. Honored as a martyr, he is said to have been killed on a height of the Brecon Beacons, and his relics were venerated at Merthyr Cynog. His feast day is October 7 (sometimes October 9).

Who was Saint Cynog?

Cynog belongs to the age of the saints, the period of the 5th and 6th centuries when Wales was covered with hermitages, small monasteries and churches founded by monks and members of princely families. As with most Welsh saints of this time, we have no early and detailed biography. What is known of him comes from medieval genealogies, from a few mentions in later accounts and above all from the geography of his cult: churches that bear his name, and a place, Merthyr Cynog, whose very name means "the shrine of the martyr Cynog". We must therefore be careful: the dates are uncertain, and the accounts of his death belong to tradition more than to history.

Key dates in the life of Cynog

- **5th century**: Born in Wales; some authors suggest a date around 434, others a little earlier.
- **Origins**: Tradition makes him a son of Brychan, king of Brycheiniog, and of Banhadlwedd, daughter of a prince of Powys.
- **Adult life**: He leads a life consecrated to God in the region of Brycheiniog, present-day Brecknockshire.

- **Late 5th century (date unknown)**: According to tradition, he is put to death on a height called the Van, in the Brecon Beacons.
- **Afterward**: He is buried and venerated at Merthyr Cynog, "the shrine of the martyr Cynog".
- **Middle Ages**: His cult spreads throughout Brycheiniog, to Defynnog, Ystradgynlais, Penderyn, Battle and Llangynog.
- **1188**: Gerald of Wales, crossing Brycheiniog, describes a gold collar venerated as having belonged to Saint Cynog.

A son of the family of Brychan

Brychan is one of the most famous figures of Welsh tradition. He is credited with a very large family, and many of his sons and daughters are honored as saints, in Wales, Cornwall and Devon: Saint Dwynwen or Saint Nectan, for example. This "family of saints" probably expresses less a genealogical reality than a memory: that of a region evangelized very early, where the faith was handed on through princely lines.

According to a tradition reported by medieval writers, Cynog's mother, Banhadlwedd, was the daughter of a prince of Powys, at whose court Brychan is said to have stayed as a hostage in his youth. Cynog is said to have been born of this union. These origins, which the accounts do not present as glorious, did not prevent him from being venerated as a saint throughout Brycheiniog.

The martyr of the Van

Tradition reports that Cynog was murdered on a height called the Van, in the Brecon Beacons range. The circumstances of his death are not known precisely, and the early sources do not say who killed him or why. The title of martyr, preserved in the name Merthyr Cynog, shows, however, that his violent death

was very early understood as a witness borne to Christ. In the Celtic world, the word *merthyr*, from the Latin *martyrium*, referred to a place where the remains of a saint, often a martyr, lay at rest.

It is at Merthyr Cynog that he is said to have been buried. His relics were kept and venerated there in the Middle Ages, and the village has kept his name to this day.

The collar of Saint Cynog

In 1188, the cleric Gerald of Wales accompanied Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury on a journey through Wales and wrote an account of it. Crossing Brycheiniog, he came upon a remarkable relic: a torque, that is, a rigid collar, said to have been worn by Cynog, probably as a princely insignia. Gerald describes it in detail. According to the art historian T. D. Kendrick, it was probably a piece of Welsh or Irish goldwork from the Viking age, that is, from the 10th or 11th century. Whatever its real origin, this relic shows how lively the cult of Cynog was in the 12th century.

Devotion and memory

The cult of Saint Cynog remained closely tied to Brycheiniog. Several churches are or were dedicated to him or associated with him: Merthyr Cynog, Defynnog, Ystradgynlais, Penderyn, Battle and Llangynog. He is celebrated on October 7, sometimes on October 9 depending on the calendar. Like many early Welsh saints, he was honored long before the Church had formal procedures of canonization: his is an immemorial cult, handed down by local communities. He can be shown as a young prince who became a man of God, with the gold collar mentioned by Gerald of Wales or with the martyr's palm.

What can we learn from Saint Cynog?

We know little about Saint Cynog, but that little is enough to sketch a figure: a man from a princely family who chose to give his life to God, and whose violent death was received as a witness. His difficult origins also remind us that God can bring holiness to birth where people do not expect it. You can pray to him for Wales, for wounded families, for those who carry the weight of their history and for those who suffer for their faith.

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

Where to pray to Saint Cynog

- **Merthyr Cynog** (Powys, Wales): the village where tradition places his tomb.
- **Defynnog**, **Ystradgynlais**, **Penderyn**, **Battle** and **Llangynog**: places in Brycheiniog linked to his cult.
- In any church, on October 7, praying for Wales.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Cynog for Wales and for Wounded Families

Saint Cynog, one of the sons of King Brychan according to tradition, is honored in Wales as a 5th-century martyr; his relics were venerated at Merthyr Cynog. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him Wales, wounded families and those who suffer for their faith.

Prayer to Saint Cynog

Saint Cynog,
son of a king of the Welsh land,
you chose to serve another King,
whose kingdom will have no end.
Teach me to seek first the kingdom of God.

Your birth was not glorious in the eyes of men,
but God made you a saint.
Take into your care children wounded by their history
and families who carry painful secrets.
May they discover how much the Father loves them.

You who gave your life on the heights of the Van,
support those who suffer for their faith,
and bless Wales and all its churches.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Cynog

- On his feast day, October 7.
- For Wales and for the Christians of the British Isles.
- For a child or an adult wounded by the circumstances of their birth.
- For Christians persecuted because of their faith.
- During a hike or a pilgrimage in the mountains.

A prayer for families

> *Lord, you who heal broken hearts,*
> *bring peace to divided families.*
> *Saint Cynog, pray for them. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Cynog from September 29 to October 7, and read the life of Saint Cynog.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Cynog

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is inspired by what Welsh tradition reports of Saint Cynog, son of Brychan and 5th-century martyr. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, October 7, begin on September 29. 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 Cynog, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. What we know of Saint Cynog is little, and comes mainly from tradition: these meditations keep to the essentials.

Day 1: A land of saints

Cynog was born in the 5th century, in a Wales where the faith was taking root through monks, hermits and Christian families.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who brought the faith to our lands. Raise up new witnesses today.

Act of the day: Pray for your diocese and for its bishop.

Day 2: A large family

Tradition credits King Brychan with many children, several of whom are honored as saints. Holiness can be handed on and shared.

Prayer: Lord, bless my family and help us encourage one another on the path of holiness.

Act of the day: Pray by name for each member of your family.

Day 3: A difficult birth

According to the accounts, Cynog was born of a union that was anything but glorious. But no human story prevents God from calling.

Prayer: Lord, heal what is wounded in my history and teach me to know that you love me.

Act of the day: Entrust to God, in silence, a wound from your past.

Day 4: The son of a king

Born into a princely family, Cynog chose to serve God. Power and prestige are not the last word of a life.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the desire to impress and help me seek your kingdom first.

Act of the day: Do a good deed without seeking to be noticed.

Day 5: The gold collar

In the 12th century, people venerated a gold collar attributed to Cynog. This sign of princely rank had become an object of prayer.

Prayer: Lord, may all that I own serve your glory and the good of my brothers and sisters.

Act of the day: Give a useful object to someone who needs it.

Day 6: On the heights

Tradition places Cynog's death on a height of the Brecon Beacons. In the Bible, the mountain is often the place of meeting with God.

Prayer: Lord, draw me toward the heights and teach me to seek you in silence.

Act of the day: Take a moment of prayer in nature, or contemplate the sky for a few minutes.

Day 7: A witness to the end

Cynog is honored as a martyr. His violent death was received as a witness borne to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, support persecuted Christians and give me the courage to bear witness to you.

Act of the day: Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted.

Day 8: The martyr's shrine

The village of Merthyr Cynog still bears his name. For centuries, the faithful came there to pray near his relics.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the places where generations prayed before us. Make our churches houses of prayer.

Act of the day: Go into a church for a few minutes of adoration.

Day 9: A faithful memory

Fifteen centuries after his death, Saint Cynog is still remembered. What God does in a life given to him is never lost.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Cynog, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass or pray for your departed loved ones.

Closing prayer

Saint Cynog,
son of Brychan and martyr of Christ,
you preferred the Kingdom of God to the honors of this world
and gave your life as a witness.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Heal the wounds of our families
and keep us faithful to the end.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Credits and sources

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