

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Egwin of Worcester

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 30

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IN BRIEF

Saint Egwin of Worcester

Anglo-Saxon Bishop of Worcester and founder of Evesham Abbey.

Feast day	December 30
Born	second half of the 7th century, Mercia, England
Died	December 30, 717, Evesham, England
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (immemorial cult)
Era	8th century
Patron saint of	Evesham

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Egwin

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Egwin of Worcester

Saint Egwin, also spelled Ecgwine, was an Anglo-Saxon monk and bishop who served as Bishop of Worcester from about 693 until his death on December 30, 717. He is best remembered as the founder of Evesham Abbey, in the kingdom of Mercia in the heart of England, and for the legend of the key found inside a fish in Rome. His feast day is December 30.

Who was Saint Egwin?

Egwin belongs to the first generation of bishops in central England, at a time when the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had only recently embraced Christianity. He is hard to know in detail: Saint Bede the Venerable does not mention him, nor does the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

The main sources are two later *Lives*, one written by Byrhtferth of Ramsey in the early eleventh century and the other by Dominic, a monk of Evesham, in the early twelfth century, along with copies of abbey charters dated between 692 and 717. These documents at least confirm his work on behalf of Evesham.

Key dates in the life of Saint Egwin

- **Second half of the seventh century**: Born in Mercia; his biographers say he was of royal descent.
- **About 693**: Becomes Bishop of Worcester, succeeding Oftfor.
- **Early eighth century**: Accused by opponents, he travels to Rome to clear his name; this is the episode of the key and the chains.
- **About 701-709**: Founds Evesham Abbey on land received from the king of Mercia.
- **December 30, 717**: Dies and is buried at Evesham.

A demanding bishop

According to his biographers, Egwin, once Bishop of Worcester, preached forcefully against the pagan customs that still survived and against unlawful marriages. His strictness made him enemies, who denounced him to the king and to the pope.

To answer the charges, he decided to go to Rome. As a sign of penance, he had his legs bound in chains, locked them, and threw the key into the River Avon.

The key in the fish

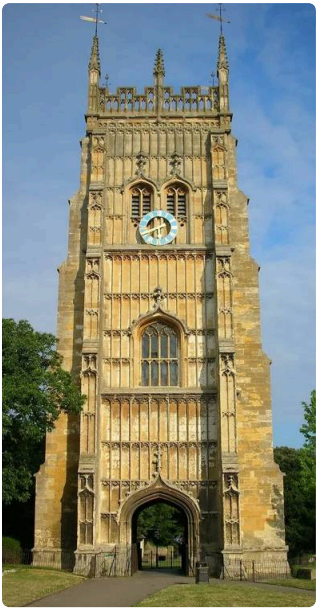
When he reached Rome, the legend says, one of his companions bought a fish caught in the Tiber. As it was being prepared, the key that had been thrown into the Avon was found inside it. Egwin could at last free himself from his chains, and the pope, seeing in this wonder a sign of his innocence, sent him back to his diocese with his support.

The story echoes other medieval legends and is not history in the strict sense. It expresses the conviction of those who loved him: God himself had taken up the defense of a slandered bishop.

The founding of Evesham

The abbey's tradition tells that a swineherd named Eof (or Eoves), tending his animals in the forest by the Avon, saw the Virgin Mary appear with two young women. When Egwin was told, he went to the spot and received the vision himself.

He obtained the land from the king of Mercia and founded a monastery there dedicated to the Virgin. The place took the swineherd's name: "Eof's ham," Evesham. The legend adds that Egwin traveled to Rome a second time, with Anglo-Saxon kings, to have the privileges of his foundation confirmed.



The bell tower of Evesham Abbey, England.

Cult and relics

Egwin died on December 30, 717, and was buried in his abbey. In the Middle Ages, Evesham became one of the great Benedictine abbeys of England, and its monks kept alive the cult of their founder. His relics were carried in procession across the country to raise funds after fires or rebuilding.

The abbey was dissolved in 1540 under Henry VIII and almost entirely destroyed, and the relics disappeared. What remains today is the great bell tower built shortly before the dissolution, a few ruins and two medieval parish churches within the old abbey precinct.

Why is Saint Egwin the patron saint of Evesham?

Evesham owes its very existence to Egwin's abbey: the town grew up around the monastery he founded, and its name preserves the memory of the swineherd's vision that led him there. For more than eight centuries the monks honored him as their founder, which made him the natural patron of the town.

Beyond Evesham, he can be invoked by those who are unjustly accused, by bishops and pastors who must speak hard truths, and by monastic communities. Slandered, he chose penance and trust over revolt.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Egwin in art

Saint Egwin is shown as a bishop with miter and crozier, often with **chains on his feet** or holding a **key**, and sometimes with a **fish**, recalling the legend of Rome. The Virgin Mary, the swineherd or pigs may also appear in scenes of the founding of Evesham.

What can we learn from Saint Egwin?

Egwin was a pastor who wanted the Gospel to change the way people actually lived, not only what they believed. That meant naming customs that were incompatible with the faith, and it cost him dearly. His response to opposition is the most striking part of his story. He did not take revenge, stir up a faction or abandon his post. He went to Rome as a penitent, in chains, and left his cause in the hands of God and of the Church.

The legends that grew around him, the key in the fish and the vision by the Avon, say in the language of the Middle Ages what his monks believed: that God stands by those who serve him faithfully, and that Our Lady watches over the places consecrated to her. For English Catholics today, the bell tower of Evesham is a reminder of a long monastic history, broken at the Reformation but not forgotten.

Where to pray to Saint Egwin

- **Evesham, Worcestershire, England**: the abbey site, its bell tower and the churches of the former monastic precinct.
- **Worcester Cathedral**: the seat of the diocese he governed as bishop.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Egwin for the Falsely Accused

Saint Egwin, Bishop of Worcester and founder of Evesham Abbey, preached the Gospel without compromise, endured slander and traveled to Rome in chains to clear his name. This original prayer by Saintspedia asks his help for those who are falsely accused and for the pastors of the Church.

Prayer to Saint Egwin for the falsely accused

Saint Egwin, faithful bishop of Mercia, you announced the Gospel with courage, even when it made you enemies.

When you were slandered, you did not answer with anger. You took up the chains of penance and put your trust in God, and God himself defended your innocence.

Look on all who are unjustly accused: those whose good name is damaged by lies, those who wait for a fair judgment, those who feel alone before their accusers. Give them patience, peace of heart and the grace to forgive. Let the truth come to light in God's time.

Pray also for our bishops and priests. Give them the strength to speak the truth with love and the humility to remain close to their people.

You who founded Evesham where Our Lady appeared, lead us to Mary, so that she may bring us to her Son. I entrust to you this intention: (name it in silence). Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

A prayer for a monastery or community

> *Lord, through the intercession of Saint Egwin, founder of Evesham, bless the monasteries and religious communities of our land. Make them places of prayer, peace and welcome, where all who seek you may find you. Amen.*

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Egwin is celebrated on December 30, the anniversary of his death in 717. You can pray to him when you or someone you love faces false accusations or a court case, when a reputation has been damaged, or when you are called to speak an unwelcome truth. He is also a fitting patron for the people of Evesham and the Diocese of Worcester, and for pilgrims visiting the remains of his abbey.

To prepare for his feast, pray the novena to Saint Egwin from December 22 to 30, and read the life of Saint Egwin.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Egwin

This novena to Saint Egwin is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the Anglo-Saxon bishop through the main stages of his story: his call to serve the young Church of Mercia, his demanding preaching, the slander he endured, his penitential journey to Rome, and the founding of Evesham under the protection of Our Lady. Since his feast falls on December 30, begin the novena on December 22 so that it ends on his feast day. It fits naturally into the Christmas season, and you can also pray it at any time of the year, especially in a time of false accusation.

How to pray this novena

Each day, take a few quiet minutes. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act suggested for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue with the next.

Much of what we know about Saint Egwin comes from later biographies and the traditions of his abbey. This novena draws on these stories for their spiritual meaning, without claiming that every detail is historical.

Day 1: A young Church

Egwin was born in Mercia when the faith was still new among the Anglo-Saxons. He received the Gospel from missionaries and spent his life passing it on.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who brought the faith to my land and to my family. Make me a faithful link in that chain. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Learn something about how the faith first came to your country or region.

Day 2: Called to be a shepherd

Around 693 Egwin became Bishop of Worcester. He took up a heavy responsibility for a people still learning to live as Christians.

Prayer: Lord, bless our bishop and all the pastors of your Church. Give them wisdom, courage and love for their people. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for your bishop and your parish priest.

Day 3: Speaking the truth

Egwin preached against pagan customs and unlawful unions. He knew the Gospel asks for real change, and he did not water it down to be liked.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak the truth with love, and the humility to hear it when others speak it to me. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Accept a criticism without defending yourself, and ask what truth it may hold.

Day 4: Slandered

His strictness made him enemies, who accused him before the king and the pope. Egwin knew the pain of having his name dragged through the mud.

Prayer: Lord, comfort all who are falsely accused. Protect their good name and give them peace while they wait for the truth to appear. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Refuse to repeat any gossip, and speak well of someone who is criticized.

Day 5: The chains of penance

Instead of fighting back, Egwin had his legs chained and threw the key into the Avon. He chose penance and trust, and set out for Rome.

Prayer: Lord, when I am hurt, keep me from bitterness and revenge. Teach me to place my cause in your hands. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Go to Confession, or plan when you will.

Day 6: The key returned

In Rome, the legend says, the key was found inside a fish from the Tiber. Whatever we make of the story, it tells us that God does not abandon those who trust him.

Prayer: Lord, you see what is hidden and you bring the truth to light. Free me from all that binds me, and set me free to serve you. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Name one thing that keeps you bound, and ask God to free you from it.

Day 7: Communion with Rome

Egwin brought his trouble to the successor of Peter and returned with his support. He loved the unity of the Church.

Prayer: Lord, bless the Pope and keep your Church united in truth and charity. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Pope and his intentions.

Day 8: Our Lady by the Avon

The tradition of Evesham tells of the swineherd Eof, who saw the Virgin Mary in the forest, and of Egwin, who received the same vision and built a monastery in her honor.

Prayer: Holy Mary, Mother of God, you showed yourself to a humble swineherd. Show yourself a mother to me, and lead me to Jesus. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray a decade of the Rosary, perhaps the Joyful Mysteries of this Christmas season.

Day 9: A house of prayer

Egwin died on December 30, 717, and was buried in his abbey. For centuries monks prayed there, and the town of Evesham grew around them. Even after the abbey's destruction, his memory remains.

Prayer: Lord, bless all monasteries and religious houses, and let my own home be a house of prayer. Saint Egwin, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Set aside a fixed time for prayer in your home this week.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Egwin, bishop and founder, you preached the truth, bore slander with patience and trusted God to defend you. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried through this novena. Protect those who are falsely accused, strengthen the pastors of the Church, and lead us, with Mary, to Christ who sets us free. Amen.*

Saint Egwin, feast day December 30, pray for us.

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