

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eligius (Saint Eloi)

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: December 1

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IN BRIEF

Saint Eligius (Saint Eloi)

Goldsmith and adviser to King Dagobert, bishop of Noyon and Tournai, patron saint of metalworkers.

Feast day	December 1
Born	c. 588, Chaptelat, near Limoges, France
Died	December 1, 660, Noyon, France
Canonized	Immemorial cult
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	goldsmiths, blacksmiths, farriers, metalworkers

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Eligius for the Work of Our Hands

Novena to Saint Eligius

Notre-Dame Cathedral in Noyon, Episcopal See of Saint Eligius

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LIFE

Saint Eligius (Saint Eloi)

Saint Eligius, known in French as Saint Éloi, is one of the most popular saints of Merovingian France. A goldsmith of exceptional talent from the region of Limoges, he became adviser and treasurer to King Dagobert I, then, after a deep conversion, bishop of Noyon and Tournai, where he evangelized the lands of the north. Generous toward the poor, he spent his fortune buying the freedom of slaves and founding monasteries. He died on December 1, 660, his feast day, and remains the patron saint of goldsmiths, blacksmiths and all who work with metal.

Who was Saint Eligius?

Eligius was born around 588 at Chaptelat, near Limoges, into a Christian Gallo-Roman family. His father, Eucherius, noticed his skillful hands very early and apprenticed him to Abbo, a goldsmith who ran the mint of Limoges. There the young man learned to work gold, silver and precious stones, and to strike coins.

He then went to Neustria, in northern Gaul, and entered the service of Bobbo, treasurer of King Clothar II. The king was looking for a craftsman who could make him a ceremonial throne adorned with gold and jewels. According to his *Life*, Eligius received enough gold for one throne and made two, keeping nothing for himself. Struck by his talent and his honesty, Clothar took him into his service. His son Dagobert would make him one of his closest advisers.



A Goldsmith in His Shop, possibly Saint Eligius, by Petrus Christus (1449, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Key dates in the life of Saint Eligius

- **Around 588**: Born at Chaptelat, near Limoges.
- **Around 600-610**: Apprenticed to the goldsmith Abbo in Limoges.
- **Around 615-620**: Enters the service of King Clothar II.
- **629**: Accession of Dagobert I, who makes him adviser and master of the mint.
- **632**: Founds the abbey of Solignac, in the Limousin.
- **Around 633**: Founds a monastery for women in Paris, entrusted to Saint Aurea.
- **636**: Leads the embassy to the Breton king Judicael, who comes to make peace with Dagobert.
- **639**: Death of King Dagobert.

- **641**: Consecrated bishop of Noyon and Tournai, on the same day his friend Ouen becomes bishop of Rouen.
- **641-660**: Missions in Flanders and as far as the coastal regions of the north.
- **December 1, 660**: Dies at Noyon.

Goldsmith to King Dagobert

At Dagobert's court, Eligius held a leading place. He directed the minting of coins, and several coins of the period still bear his name. He made many precious objects for the king and for churches: according to his *Life*, he adorned with precious metal the tombs of several venerated saints, among them Saint Denis near Paris and Saint Martin in Tours. Almost none of these works has survived, but the goldsmith's reputation has remained intact through the centuries.

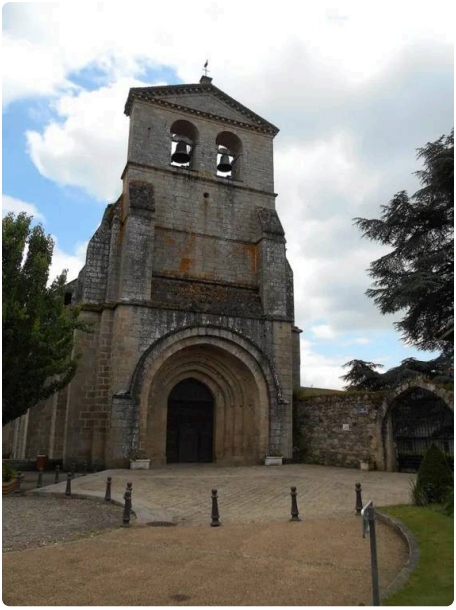
The king also entrusted him with political missions: in 636 Eligius led the embassy that brought the Breton king Judicael to make peace with the Franks. With his friends Ouen, the king's referendary, and Desiderius, the future bishop of Cahors, he formed at court a group of fervent laymen, nearly all of whom became bishops. The French folk song about "good King Dagobert," composed much later, kept the memory of this wise adviser, presenting him with humor.

A layman in the service of the poor

Rich and influential, Eligius nevertheless led a life of prayer and penance. He wore a hair shirt under his fine clothes, welcomed the poor to his table and gave generously from his wealth.

His great work of charity was the ransom of captives. At a time when prisoners of war were sold as slaves, he bought back a great number of them, especially Saxons, set them free and left them the choice of returning home or staying with him.

He obtained from Dagobert an estate at Solignac, near Limoges, and in 632 founded there a monastery following the customs of Saint Columban and Saint Benedict. In Paris, he turned a house received from the king into a monastery for women, under the guidance of Saint Aurea.



The abbey church of Solignac, on the site of the abbey founded by Saint Eligius in 632.

Bishop of Noyon and missionary

After Dagobert's death, Eligius left the court. In 641 he was chosen for the see of Noyon and Tournai, the former diocese of Saint Medard. This vast territory stretched to the North Sea, through regions that were still largely pagan. For nearly twenty years the bishop traveled across Flanders, preaching, baptizing and founding churches and monasteries, undeterred by the hostility he sometimes met. His *Life* also credits him with discovering the relics of Saint Quentin.

He died at Noyon on December 1, 660. His *Life*, attributed to his friend Saint Ouen and reworked in the Carolingian period, tells that Queen Bathilde wanted to have his body taken to the abbey of Chelles, but it proved impossible to move: he was buried at Noyon, where his cult developed at once.

Why is Saint Eligius the patron saint of goldsmiths and blacksmiths?

As a trained goldsmith and master of the royal mint, Eligius naturally became the patron of goldsmiths, silversmiths and coin makers. Popular traditions, such as the story of a horse he is said to have shod in a miraculous way, made him the saint of blacksmiths and farriers as well, and by extension of all metalworkers.

For centuries, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, farriers, locksmiths and wheelwrights celebrated their patron on December 1, often with a Mass, a blessing of tools or horses and a shared meal. In many parts of France and Belgium, "Saint Éloi's day" is still the feast of the metal trades. In the English-speaking world, the British Army's Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers also honor him as their patron.

Saint Eligius shows that work done with one's hands, with skill and honesty, can become a path to holiness. A craftsman and then a man of power, he never confused wealth with worth: he placed both at the service of the poor and of captives. He is prayed to for craftsmen, metalworkers, all workers and those with economic responsibilities.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Eligius in art

- **Bishop's vestments**, with miter and crosier, often combined with the tools of his trade.
- **A goldsmith's hammer, an anvil or tongs**, recalling his craft.

- **A chalice or a precious object** he is working on, in his goldsmith's workshop.
- **A horse's leg or a horseshoe**, from the legend of the miraculous shoeing.



The Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Noyon.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Eligius, or follow the novena to Saint Eligius from November 22 to 30, the eve of his feast.

Where to pray to Saint Eligius

- **Noyon** (Oise, France): the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, seat of his episcopate.
- **Solignac** (Haute-Vienne): the Romanesque abbey church, on the site of the abbey he founded in 632.
- **Chaptelat** (Haute-Vienne): his native village, which keeps his memory.

- **Dunkirk**: the Church of Saint-Éloi, a reminder of his missionary work in the north.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eligius for the Work of Our Hands

No prayer composed by Saint Eligius has come down to us with certainty. His *Life*, attributed to his friend Saint Ouen, reports sermons he is said to have preached, but their text was reworked over the centuries. Rather than attribute to him words that are not his own, this page offers an original prayer to Saint Eligius, inspired by his life as craftsman, royal adviser and bishop.

Praying with Saint Eligius

Devotion to Saint Eligius was born in workshops and guilds. For centuries goldsmiths, blacksmiths, farriers, locksmiths and wheelwrights celebrated their patron saint on December 1, often with a Mass, a blessing of tools or horses and a shared meal. In many parts of France and Belgium, Saint Éloi's day is still the feast of the metal trades. The prayer on this page can be said alone, with your family or during such a celebration.



Saint Eligius in his goldsmith's workshop.

Prayer to Saint Eligius for the work of our hands

Saint Eligius, you worked gold with your hands, with patience and talent: pray for us.

You gave back to the king all the gold he had entrusted to you: teach us honesty in our work, faithfulness in small things and the love of work well done.

You were rich and influential without clinging to your possessions: obtain for us a free heart. You ransomed so many captives: make us attentive to those who, still today, are deprived of freedom or exploited in their work.

I entrust to you craftsmen, laborers and all who work with metal, those who are looking for a job and those who carry responsibilities in the economy. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

You carried the Gospel to the lands of the north: make our work a praise of God and a service to our brothers and sisters. Amen.

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

A short invocation

Saint Eligius, patron of craftsmen, pray for us and bless the work of our hands.

An invocation composed by Saintspedia, to say before beginning your working day.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Eligius is celebrated on December 1, the day of his death. In some regions a "summer Saint Éloi" is also kept on June 25, in memory of a translation of his relics. This prayer is especially fitting:

- for jewelers, blacksmiths, welders, mechanics and all metalworkers;
- at the start of a new job or apprenticeship;
- when you are looking for work;
- when you face a temptation to dishonesty in money matters.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Eligius, and discover the life of Saint Eligius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eligius

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Eligius as tradition reports it. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on November 22; it then ends on November 30, and the next day, December 1, is the feast of Saint Eligius.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The suggested act helps you carry the prayer into your day, especially in your work. This novena is well suited to craftsmen and workers, to those looking for a job, and to anyone who wants to live their daily work as an offering to God.



Saint Eligius, church statue.

Day 1: The gift of hands

As a child, Eligius showed great manual skill, which his father noticed and encouraged. Every talent is a gift to be developed, not buried. The hands that work are also hands that can praise God.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gifts you have given me. Help me develop them for your glory and for others.

Today: Encourage a young person in a talent they are discovering.

Day 2: The apprenticeship

With the goldsmith Abbo, Eligius patiently learned his trade. He learned to work gold and silver, to set precious stones and to strike coins, gesture after gesture, under the eye of a master. There is no mastery without apprenticeship, and no holiness without perseverance.

Prayer: Lord, give me the patience to learn and the humility to receive from others.

Today: Thank someone who taught you your trade or profession.

Day 3: Two thrones instead of one

With the gold intended for one throne, Eligius made two and kept nothing for himself. His honesty won him the king's trust. Integrity in small things prepares us for greater ones.

Prayer: Lord, make me honest down to the details, even when no one is watching.

Today: Set right a small dishonesty, or give back what is not yours.

Day 4: Rich without attachment

At court, Eligius wore fine clothes, but he lived a life of prayer and penance. He wore a hair shirt under his costly garments and welcomed the poor to his table. Riches passed through his hands without taking hold of his heart. What we own is lent to us, to be shared.

Prayer: Lord, keep my heart free from money and honors.

Today: Go without an unnecessary purchase and give the money away.

Day 5: Ransoming captives

Eligius spent a large part of his fortune buying back slaves, then set them free. He saw in each of them a person, not merchandise, and he even left them free to go home or to stay with him. Today too, millions of people are trapped in forced labor and exploitation.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the victims of human trafficking and forced labor. Raise up men and women to set them free.

Today: Learn about an organization that fights modern slavery.



The Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Noyon, Saint Eligius's see.

Day 6: Adviser to the king

Dagobert listened to Eligius and entrusted him with missions of peace. Power can be a service when it is exercised with integrity and with concern for the weakest. Eligius used his influence to make peace, not to enrich himself.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you political and business leaders. Give them wisdom and care for the poorest.

Today: Pray for the elected officials of your town.

Day 7: Building to last

At Solignac and in Paris, Eligius founded monasteries where prayer would rise for generations. He built for God, beyond his own lifetime. The fruit of our work does not always belong to us: sometimes others will harvest what we have sown, and that is good.

Prayer: Lord, bless the communities that pray for the world, and help me support what will last after me.

Today: Support a religious community with a gift or a visit.

Day 8: Setting out on mission

As bishop, Eligius traveled across Flanders to proclaim the Gospel to people who did not know it. He left the security of the court for the roads of the north, sometimes meeting hostility.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to bear witness to you among those who do not know you.

Today: Speak simply about your faith with someone who has questions.

Day 9: Work as an offering

Eligius died at Noyon in 660, after a life in which the work of his hands, the service of the king and the office of bishop had been one single offering to God. Nothing was wasted: neither the gold of the workshop, nor the hours spent at court, nor the long journeys of the missionary bishop.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention before you. Through the intercession of Saint Eligius, make all my work an offering pleasing to you. Amen.

Today: Offer your working day to God in the morning.

Closing prayer

Saint Eligius, goldsmith, adviser and shepherd, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for craftsmen and workers, for those looking for a job and for those who are exploited. Obtain for us the grace to work honestly and

to share generously, so that the work of our hands may give glory to God. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Eligius and the prayer to Saint Eligius.

PILGRIMAGE

Notre-Dame Cathedral in Noyon, Episcopal See of Saint Eligius

Noyon, a small town in the Oise, was for nearly twenty years the episcopal see of Saint Eligius, from 641 until his death in 660. Its Cathedral of Notre-Dame, one of the first great Gothic churches in France, stands on the site of the churches where the goldsmith turned bishop carried out his ministry. It was in Noyon that he died and was buried, and that his veneration began.

Noyon, episcopal city

In the 6th century, Saint Medard transferred the see of the diocese of Vermandois to Noyon, and the diocese was united with that of Tournai. When Eligius was consecrated there in 641, its territory extended to the North Sea, across Flanders. Noyon remained an important episcopal city throughout the Middle Ages: Charlemagne was crowned king there in 768. The diocese was suppressed after the Revolution and attached to that of Beauvais, which today bears the name Diocese of Beauvais, Noyon, and Senlis.



Notre-Dame Cathedral in Noyon.

Notre-Dame Cathedral

The present cathedral was built from the middle of the 12th century, after a fire destroyed the previous building. It marks the transition from Romanesque to Gothic art: its rounded transept arms, its galleries, and the light of its choir make it a major monument of medieval architecture. Badly damaged during World War I, it was restored over the course of the 20th century. Around it survive buildings of the old canons' quarter, including a half-timbered chapter library.

The body of Saint Eligius was first venerated in a church in Noyon that later became the Abbey of Saint-Éloi. Over the centuries, wars and revolutions scattered his relics. The cathedral remains the place where the goldsmith bishop is remembered and where he can be prayed to, especially around December 1.

Praying in Noyon with Saint Eligius

Before your visit, you may reread the life of Saint Eligius. On site, a time of silence in the cathedral lets you entrust an intention, for example for your work, for artisans, or for those looking for a job. The prayer to Saint Eligius can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The nave of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Noyon.

Other places of Saint Eligius

- **Solignac** (Haute-Vienne): the Romanesque domed abbey church, on the site of the abbey he founded in 632.
- **Chaptelat** (Haute-Vienne): his native village, near Limoges.
- **Limoges**: the city of his apprenticeship under the goldsmith Abbo.
- **Tournai** (Belgium): the second see of his diocese, whose Cathedral of Notre-Dame is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- **Dunkirk**: the Church of Saint-Éloi, which recalls his missions in Flanders.

Practical information

Noyon is in the Oise, about sixty miles north of Paris, and can be reached by train via Compiègne or by car. The cathedral is in the historic center. On December 1, the feast of Saint Eligius, celebrations may be organized in the town and in the parishes of the diocese. Check Mass and visiting times with the parish or the tourist office before you come.

CREDITS

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