BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eliphius

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 16

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IN BRIEF

Saint Eliphius

Deacon and martyr of Lorraine in the 4th century, venerated as the first martyr of Lorraine.

Feast day	October 16
Born	4th century, land of the Leuci (present-day Lorraine), according to tradition
Died	October 16, 362, according to tradition, Soulosse, on the banks of the Vair (Vosges)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Eliphius, Martyr of Lorraine

Novena to Saint Eliphius

Church of Saint-Élophe, Vosges

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Eliphius

Saint Eliphius (Élophe in French, sometimes spelled Éloffe or Éliphe) is a martyr of Lorraine whom tradition says was beheaded on the banks of the Vair, near present-day Soulosse in the Vosges, under the emperor Julian, around 362. Regarded as the first martyr of Lorraine, he is nicknamed the "Saint Denis of Lorraine". A large part of his relics was taken to Cologne in the 10th century. His feast day is October 16.

Who was Saint Eliphius?

Eliphius is a very ancient saint whose real history almost entirely escapes us. His cult has long been attested in the south of the former diocese of Toul, around Soulosse and Neufchâteau. Yet he appears clearly in the documents only in the 10th century, when the bishop of Toul offered his relics to the archbishop of Cologne. His passion, that is, the account of his martyrdom, was written later still, in the 11th century, then expanded by Rupert of Deutz around 1130. Historians see it above all as an account meant to edify. The Roman Martyrology mentions him on October 16, presenting him as a victim of Julian.

Key dates in the life of Eliphius

- **4th century**: According to tradition, he is born into a Christian family in the land of the Leuci, with his brother Eucharius and his sisters Menna, Libaria and Susanna.
- **c. 362**: According to his passion, he preaches at Grand and at Toul, then is arrested on the orders of the emperor Julian.
- **October 16, 362**: Traditional date of his beheading on the banks of the Vair, at Solimariaca, present-day Soulosse.

- **c. 964**: Saint Gerard, bishop of Toul, gives a large part of his relics to Saint Bruno, archbishop of Cologne, who places them in the church of Saint Martin in Cologne.
- **11th century**: A cleric of the diocese of Toul writes an anonymous passion of the saint.
- **c. 1130**: Rupert, abbot of Deutz, takes up and develops this account.
- **1485**: Archbishop Hermann has the relics kept in Cologne examined.
- **1587 and 1633**: The church of Saint-Élophe is sacked, but, according to tradition, the relics are saved.
- **1926**: The church of Saint-Élophe, which keeps an ancient sarcophagus held to be his tomb, is listed as a historic monument.

The account of his passion

According to the anonymous 11th-century author, the emperor Julian, who had returned to the worship of the gods, came to Gaul to restore the idols. In the land of the Leuci, he learned of a well-known Christian family: Eliphius, his elder brother Eucharius and their sisters. Julian had thirty-three Christians arrested, among them Eliphius, and they were miraculously set free. Eliphius then went to Toul to be with his dying mother, converted many people there, and returned to preach at Grand, the ancient Grannum, a great pagan sanctuary of the region.

Denounced, he was arrested on the banks of the Vair and ordered to sacrifice to the idols. He refused and was condemned to be beheaded. The legend adds that he picked up his head, washed it at a spring and carried it to the top of the hill that now bears his name, where he was buried. This feature, called cephalophory, is found with other saints of the region, such as Saint Libaria, and with Saint Denis of Paris.

What can be said of it

Historians remain cautious. Julian's visit to the Vosges is very probably legendary, and the persecutions hardly touched the Christian communities of this region. If Eliphius did die a violent death at an early date, he may have been a victim of the unrest and invasions that struck northern Gaul. The Benedictines of Paris, in their Lives of the Saints, honestly conclude that we will never know the truth. The account also gathered into a single family several saints honored around Neufchâteau: Eucharius at Liverdun, Libaria at Grand, Menna at Poussay. No one knows how this cycle of legends took shape. What remains is the memory of a witness to Christ, venerated without interruption on his hill for more than a thousand years.

Devotion and art

Around 964, Saint Gerard of Toul entrusted the greater part of the relics of Eliphius to Saint Bruno of Cologne. They were placed in the church of Saint Martin in that city, where a cult grew up; this is probably the origin of the Martyrology's statement that places his martyrdom in Cologne. Scholars disagree about how the relics were divided: for some, almost the whole body went to the Rhineland, for others, only the head was taken there.

In the village of Saint-Élophe, the pilgrimage was still very popular in the 19th century. People came to ask for healing from fever, gout and kidney stones. Several churches are dedicated to him in the former dioceses of Toul and Trier, but also further away: at Rampillon, in Seine-et-Marne, the 13th-century church shows him as a young deacon on the central pillar of the doorway; in Eure-et-Loir, the village of Saint-Éliph bears his name. He is shown as a deacon, often carrying his head in his hands.

What can we learn from Saint Eliphius?

Even if his story is wrapped in legend, Saint Eliphius reminds us that the faith came to Lorraine carried by witnesses ready to give everything. His figure as a deacon is that of a servant of the Word, who proclaims Christ to the end. The head carried in his hands says, in the language of medieval images, that death did not have the last word. You can pray to him for faithfulness in trials, for the sick and for the Church in Lorraine.

Where to pray to Saint Eliphius

- **Church of Saint-Élophe**, at Soulosse-sous-Saint-Élophe (Vosges): on the hill where tradition places his burial, with an ancient sarcophagus held to be his tomb.
- **Church of Saint Martin in Cologne** (Germany): the church where his relics were placed in the 10th century.
- **Church of Saint-Éliphe at Rampillon** (Seine-et-Marne): a 13th-century church dedicated to him.
- **Saint-Éliph** (Eure-et-Loir): the village that bears his name, with a statue of the saint.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eliphius, Martyr of Lorraine

Saint Eliphius (Élophe), deacon and martyr, has been honored for more than a thousand years as the first martyr of Lorraine. According to tradition, he was beheaded on the banks of the Vair, near Soulosse, for refusing to deny Christ. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him faithfulness in trials, the sick and the Church in Lorraine.

Prayer to Saint Eliphius

Saint Eliphius,
deacon in the service of the Word,
you proclaimed Christ in the land of Lorraine
and you did not fear those who kill the body.
Give me the courage to stay faithful
when my faith is put to the test.

You whom tradition shows carrying your head,
a sign that death did not have the last word,
help me to believe that life is stronger,
and that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Watch over the sick who come to you,
over those who suffer in their bodies,
and over the Christian communities of Lorraine.
Make us humble and joyful servants of the Gospel.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Eliphius

- On his feast day, October 16, or during a pilgrimage to Saint-Élophe.
- When it becomes hard to bear witness to your faith.
- For the sick, especially those suffering from fever or pain, as pilgrims used to do.
- For deacons and all who serve the Church.
- For the Church in Lorraine and the Vosges.

A short invocation

> *Saint Eliphius, faithful witness to Christ,*
> *keep us steadfast in the faith. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Eliphius from October 8 to 16, and read the life of Saint Eliphius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eliphius

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Eliphius (Élophe), deacon and martyr, venerated as the first martyr of Lorraine. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, October 16, begin on October 8. 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 Eliphius, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from his passion, written in the 11th century, which mixes the memory of the saint with legend.

Day 1: A family of believers

Tradition links Eliphius to a family where faith was lived together: his brother Eucharius and his sisters are also honored as saints. Faith is often received in a home.

Prayer: Lord, bless our families. Make faith, hope and love grow in them.

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

Day 2: A deacon who serves

Eliphius is shown as a deacon. The deacon is the one who serves: the Word, the altar and the poor. His greatness lies in service.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you who came to serve, teach me to serve without seeking the first place.

Act of the day: Do a discreet service, without expecting thanks.

Day 3: Freed from prison

According to the account, Eliphius and other Christians, thrown into prison, were set free in a wonderful way. God does not abandon those who trust in him.

Prayer: Lord, free me from what shuts me in: fear, resentment, habits that take me away from you.

Act of the day: Pray for prisoners and for those who visit them.

Day 4: At his mother's bedside

The passion tells that Eliphius went to Toul to be with his dying mother and bury her. The martyr is also an attentive son.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you our elderly parents and those who are dying. Give them your peace.

Act of the day: Call or visit an elderly person you know.

Day 5: Proclaiming the Word

At Toul and then at Grand, Eliphius proclaims the Gospel. He does not keep the joy of believing to himself.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the right words to speak of God with gentleness and truth.

Act of the day: Share with someone a passage of the Gospel that has touched you.

Day 6: Refusing the idols

Ordered to sacrifice to the gods, Eliphius refuses. Our idols today have other names: money, power, self-image.

Prayer: Lord, you alone are God. Free my heart from all that takes your place.

Act of the day: Identify an "idol" in your life and take one step to let go of it.

Day 7: Faithful to the end

On the banks of the Vair, Eliphius accepts death rather than deny Christ. His faithfulness is his last witness.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the Christians persecuted today. Sustain them in their trials.

Act of the day: Pray for a country where Christians suffer for their faith.

Day 8: His head in his hands

The legend shows Eliphius carrying his head to the top of the hill. This image says that death did not defeat the witness to Christ.

Prayer: Risen Lord, strengthen my hope. Help me believe that life is stronger than death.

Act of the day: Pray for your departed and entrust to God those you have lost.

Day 9: A hill of prayer

For centuries, pilgrims have climbed to Saint-Élophe to pray at his tomb and entrust their sick to him. The place of his death has become a place of life.

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

Act of the day: Attend Mass and, if possible, visit someone who is sick.

Closing prayer

Saint Eliphius,
deacon and martyr,
you gave your life for Christ in the land of Lorraine.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me faithful in trials
and watch over those who suffer.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Élophe, Vosges

The church of Saint-Élophe stands on a hill above the Vair valley, in the village of Saint-Élophe, now part of the commune of Soulosse-sous-Saint-Élophe, in the Vosges, not far from Neufchâteau. According to tradition, this is where Saint Eliphius (Élophe), deacon and martyr, was buried after being beheaded in the valley around 362. The Catholic church has been listed as a historic monument since 1926.

A hill marked by martyrdom

The passion of Saint Eliphius, written in the 11th century, tells that after his beheading on the banks of the Vair, the martyr carried his head to the top of the hill, where he was buried. A chapel was built over his tomb; it later became the parish church. In the 10th century, Saint Gerard, bishop of Toul, had a large part of the relics transferred to Cologne, but the place remained a center of pilgrimage.

The site was sacked at least twice, in 1587 by Protestant troops, then in 1633 by the Swedes during the Thirty Years' War. According to tradition, the relics were preserved each time. In the 19th century, the pilgrimage was still very popular: people came to ask for healing from fever, gout and kidney stones.

What you can see

The church keeps an ancient sarcophagus, held by tradition to be the saint's tomb, as well as a venerated statuette dating from the 16th century. The building belongs to the family of hall churches of Lorraine, where the aisles are of nearly the same height. In the valley, the small chapel of Sainte-Épéotte also keeps the memory of the martyrs of the region: its name is thought to recall the sword of execution.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Eliphius. Near the sarcophagus, entrust to him the sick, those whose faith is being tested and the Church in Lorraine, then say the prayer to Saint Eliphius. October 16, his feast day, is the best time for this pilgrimage. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Eliphius

- **Church of Saint Martin in Cologne** (Germany): the church where his relics were placed in the 10th century.
- **Church of Saint-Éliphe at Rampillon** (Seine-et-Marne): a 13th-century church whose doorway shows the saint as a deacon.
- **Saint-Éliph** (Eure-et-Loir): a village that bears his name.

Practical information

Saint-Élophe is in the western Vosges, a few kilometers from Neufchâteau, and is easy to reach by car. The church is a place of worship: modest dress and silence are expected. Opening times and Mass times may vary: check with the parish or the Neufchâteau tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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