BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Etto

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 10

IN BRIEF

Saint Etto

Irish monk of the 7th century, missionary bishop and then hermit at Dompierre-sur-Helpe.

Feast day	July 10
Born	c. 590, Ireland
Died	c. 660, forest of Dompierre-sur-Helpe (Nord, France)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	farm animals, livestock breeders, Dompierre-sur-Helpe

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Etto

Church of Saint-Etton, Dompierre-sur-Helpe

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Etto

Saint Etto (Etton in French) was an Irish monk of the 7th century who came to preach the Gospel in northern Gaul, in Artois, Thiérache and Hainaut. Ordained a bishop in Rome according to tradition, he founded a monastery at Fusciau and ended his life as a hermit in the forest of Dompierre-sur-Helpe, in today's Nord department of France, where he died around 660. His relics are still venerated there. His feast day is July 10, and the parish of Dompierre also honors him on Ascension Day.

Who was Saint Etto?

Etto belongs to the great wave of Irish monks who, in the 6th and 7th centuries, left their island to become pilgrims for Christ on the continent. For them, voluntary exile was a form of renunciation: they left their land, their family and their language to place themselves entirely at God's service. Many founded monasteries in northern France and present-day Belgium. What we know of Etto, however, is very slight. The accounts about him are late and handed down mainly by the local tradition of Dompierre-sur-Helpe. They must therefore be read with caution. They sketch the figure of a missionary bishop, then of a hermit, whose memory has stayed alive in the countryside of the Avesnois, where he is invoked as a protector of animals.

Key dates in the life of Etto

- **c. 590**: Born in Ireland, according to tradition.
- **First half of the 7th century**: With a group of seven monks, he leaves Ireland and travels to Rome.
- **Between 649 and 655**: According to tradition, he is ordained a bishop by Pope Saint Martin I and sent on mission.

- **Then**: He preaches in Thiérache and settles for a time in Artois.
- **Later**: He goes to Hainaut and founds a monastery at Fusciau with a few faithful companions.
- **c. 660**: Dies in his hermitage in the forest of Dompierre-sur-Helpe.
- **16th century**: After a long stay in Mons, his relics are received by the abbey of Liessies.
- **July 1789**: Some four hundred inhabitants of Dompierre go to Liessies to fetch the relics and bring them back to their village.

An Irish pilgrim who became a missionary bishop

According to tradition, Etto was born in Ireland around 590. Like many of his countrymen, he set out for Rome with a small group of seven monks before beginning his apostolate. For these monks, the journey to the tomb of the apostles Peter and Paul was a way of placing themselves under the authority of Peter's successor before undertaking a mission. Tradition reports that he received episcopal ordination there from Pope Martin I, who governed the Church from 649 to 655. This probably means that he was a missionary bishop without a fixed see, as was then common among Irish monks.

Back in northern Gaul, he preached in Thiérache, a region still little Christianized, then settled in Artois. He then moved on to Hainaut. At Fusciau, he settled with a few disciples and founded a monastery, a center of prayer and a starting point for his preaching. The sources say almost nothing about his methods or the fruits of his work: behind these stages, one can only glimpse the itinerant life of a monk who went from village to village.

The hermit of Dompierre

At the end of his life, Etto withdrew into the solitude of the forest of Dompierre-sur-Helpe. This return to the hermit's life was common among Irish monks: after the mission, they sought silence to prepare for their meeting

with God. He died there around 660, at about seventy years of age. His tomb became a place of prayer for the people of the area. Popular tradition made him the great protector of farm animals: the peasants of the Avesnois came to entrust their livestock to him, on which the life of their families depended.

Relics and devotion

The relics of Saint Etto went on a long journey. They were kept for a long time in Mons, then, in the 16th century, the abbey of Liessies, close to Dompierre, received them. In July 1789, just as the Revolution was beginning, about four hundred inhabitants of Dompierre went to the abbey and brought the relics back to their village. Since then they have rested in the church of Saint-Etton, where a recumbent effigy of the saint and stained glass windows telling his life can be seen.

The saint is celebrated on July 10, the date kept by the calendars of saints. In Dompierre-sur-Helpe, the great parish feast takes place on Ascension Day. A traditional prayer of the parish entrusts to him families, possessions and the animals that God places at the service of people. He is shown as a bishop, with miter and crozier.

What can we learn from Saint Etto?

Etto left his country to proclaim Christ to peoples he did not know. He wanted to receive his mission from Rome, in communion with the pope. After traveling the roads, he chose the silence of a forest to end his life in prayer. The people of Dompierre kept the image of a protector close to their daily life, down to the care of their animals. You can pray to him for missionaries, for rural life and livestock farmers, and for those who seek to unite action and prayer.

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

Where to pray to Saint Etto

- **Dompierre-sur-Helpe** (Nord): the church of Saint-Etton, which keeps his relics and his effigy.
- **Liessies** (Nord): the site of the former abbey where his relics were kept from the 16th century.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Etto for Families, the Land and Animals

Saint Etto, a monk who came from Ireland in the 7th century, evangelized Thiérache, Artois and Hainaut before ending his life as a hermit in the forest of Dompierre-sur-Helpe, where his relics are venerated. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him families, rural life and animals, as the people of Dompierre have done for centuries.

Prayer to Saint Etto

Saint Etto,
pilgrim of Christ from Ireland,
you left your land and your people
to bring the Gospel to unknown nations.
Give me a willing heart
to go where God sends me.

You who received your mission in communion with the Church of Rome,
keep me faithful to the Church
and attentive to the word of the Lord.

Hermit of the forest of Dompierre,
teach me to seek God in silence.
Protect our families, our homes and our work,
watch over those who till the land and care for animals,
and help us to prefer above all the goods that do not pass away.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Etto

- On his feast day, July 10, or on Ascension Day with the parish of Dompierre-sur-Helpe.
- For farmers, livestock breeders and all who live from the work of the land.
- For the health of the animals entrusted to us.
- For missionaries far from their homeland.
- When you are looking for a time of silence and retreat.

A traditional prayer from Dompierre

The parish of Dompierre-sur-Helpe keeps an old prayer to its patron saint, given here in translation:

> *Eternal and almighty God,*
> *you are glorified in your saints and you crown their merits.*
> *Through the intercession of the blessed bishop Etto, beloved patron of Dompierre,*
> *preserve us from all misfortune, protect our families, our goods,*
> *the animals you place at our service,*
> *and grant us the grace to value above all the eternal goods.*
> *We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Source: traditional prayer used in Dompierre-sur-Helpe.

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Etto from July 2 to July 10, and read the life of Saint Etto.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Etto

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Etto, an Irish monk of the 7th century, missionary bishop and then hermit at Dompierre-sur-Helpe. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, July 10, begin on July 2. You can also pray it to prepare for the parish feast of Dompierre on Ascension Day, or at any other time.

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 Etto, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from local tradition, since ancient sources on Saint Etto are very scarce.

Day 1: Leaving one's land

Etto was born in Ireland around 590. Like Abraham, he agreed to leave his country to follow God's call. Exile became for him a path of faith.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from clinging to what reassures me, and help me follow you wherever you call me.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who lives far from their homeland.

Day 2: Walking with brothers

Etto did not set out alone: he traveled with a group of seven monks. Mission is the work of a community, not of a lonely hero.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the brothers and sisters you have placed on my path. Make us faithful companions.

Act of the day: Get in touch with a friend in the faith.

Day 3: The pilgrimage to Rome

Before beginning his mission, Etto went to Rome, to the tomb of the apostles. He wanted to proclaim the Gospel in communion with the whole Church.

Prayer: Lord, keep me united to your Church. Bless the pope and all the bishops.

Act of the day: Pray a decade of the Rosary for the pope's intentions.

Day 4: Receiving a mission

According to tradition, Pope Martin I ordained him a bishop and sent him on mission. Etto received his task as a gift, not as an honor.

Prayer: Lord, help me to welcome the mission you entrust to me today, in my family and my work.

Act of the day: Carefully do a task you tend to neglect.

Day 5: On the roads of Thiérache

Etto preached in Thiérache, in Artois, then in Hainaut. He went from village to village, without settling into comfort.

Prayer: Lord, bless the missionaries of yesterday and today, and give me the courage to speak of you simply.

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

Day 6: Founding a house of prayer

At Fusciau, he founded a monastery with a few faithful companions. Common prayer became the source of his whole mission.

Prayer: Lord, make our homes and parishes places where people pray together.

Act of the day: Pray with your family or a loved one, even for a few minutes.

Day 7: The silence of the forest

At the end of his life, Etto withdrew into the forest of Dompierre. After speaking much about God, he wanted above all to speak to God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be silent so that I may listen to you.

Act of the day: Turn off your screens for a while and pray in quiet.

Day 8: Protector of humble work

The people of the Avesnois called on him for their families, their goods and their animals. Nothing in human life is foreign to God.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who till the land and raise livestock. Teach us to respect your creation.

Act of the day: Thank God for the food on your table and for those who produce it.

Day 9: A saint kept by his people

In 1789, hundreds of inhabitants of Dompierre went to fetch his relics from Liessies to bring them home. A whole village wanted to keep its saint.

Prayer: Lord, help us to love the saints who prayed for our land. Through the intercession of Saint Etto, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass or visit a church near you.

Living the novena with Saint Etto

Saint Etto united three things: missionary departure, communion with the Church and the hermit's silence. During these nine days, you can carry missionaries, rural communities and those who seek God in solitude. If you can, visit the church of Saint-Etton in Dompierre-sur-Helpe, where his relics are venerated.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Etto,*
> *pilgrim from Ireland and missionary bishop,*
> *you carried the Gospel into our lands*
> *and ended your life in prayer.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Protect our families and our work,*
> *and lead us toward the eternal goods.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Etton, Dompierre-sur-Helpe

The church of Saint-Etton stands in Dompierre-sur-Helpe, a village of the Avesnois, in the Nord department of France, not far from Avesnes-sur-Helpe. It bears the name of the Irish monk who, according to tradition, lived as a hermit in the nearby forest and died there around 660. It keeps his relics, which the villagers themselves brought back from the abbey of Liessies in 1789. It is the heart of the devotion to Saint Etto.

A church and its relics

According to tradition, Etto, after preaching in Thiérache, Artois and Hainaut, withdrew into the forest of Dompierre to end his life in prayer. His memory remained attached to the village. His relics, however, went through a long exile: they were kept for a long time in Mons, then received in the 16th century by the nearby abbey of Liessies.

In July 1789, some four hundred inhabitants of Dompierre went to Liessies and brought the relics of their patron saint back to their church. This collective gesture, at the start of the Revolution, shows the attachment of a village to the one it considered its protector. Since then, the relics have rested in Dompierre.

What to see

Inside, a recumbent effigy shows Saint Etto lying in his bishop's vestments. Stained glass windows tell the stages of his life, in particular his episcopal ordination. These images allow visitors to follow the path of this monk who came from afar, whom local tradition honors as the great protector of animals.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Etto. Before his relics, entrust to him your family, farming communities and animals, then say the prayer to Saint Etto. The parish celebrates his feast on Ascension Day, and the Church celebrates him on July 10: these are special moments to join the prayer of the local people. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Dompierre-sur-Helpe is in the south of the Nord department, in the hedged farmland of the Avesnois, and is most easily reached by car. The church is a place of prayer: modest dress and silence are requested. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the parish or the town hall before you come. Your visit can continue at Liessies, where the abbey that long kept the relics once stood.

Credits and sources

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