

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eystein Erlendsson

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 26

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IN BRIEF

Saint Eystein Erlendsson

Twelfth-century archbishop of Nidaros, reformer of the Church in Norway and builder of Trondheim's cathedral.

Feast day	January 26
Born	between 1120 and 1130, Trøndelag, Norway
Died	January 26, 1188, Nidaros (Trondheim), Norway
Canonized	cult recognized by the synod of Nidaros in 1229
Era	12th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Eystein for the Church and for Reconciliation

Novena to Saint Eystein Erlendsson

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Eystein Erlendsson

Saint Eystein Erlendsson (in Norwegian, Øystein) was archbishop of Nidaros, today's Trondheim, from about 1161 until his death in 1188. A great reformer of the Church in Norway, he bound it more closely to Rome, crowned the first king of Norway to receive a Christian coronation and began the Gothic cathedral of Nidaros around the tomb of Saint Olaf. Caught up in the civil wars of his time, he lived in exile in England before returning to end his life in his diocese. His feast day is January 26.

Who was Saint Eystein Erlendsson?

Eystein came from Trøndelag, the region around Trondheim in central Norway. The date of his birth is unknown: historians place it between 1120 and 1130, probably at the farm of Råsvoll in Verdal. His father, Erlend Himalde, belonged to a family connected to the high Norwegian nobility and to the advisers of the kings.

According to tradition, he studied in France, probably at the Parisian abbey of Saint-Victor, one of the great intellectual centers of the age. Back in Norway, he became a priest, chaplain to King Inge I and then royal treasurer. In Latin documents he is called *Augustinus*, the learned form of his name.

Key dates

- **Between 1120 and 1130**: Born in Trøndelag, according to historians.
- **1150s**: Chaplain to King Inge I.
- **1157**: Chosen archbishop of Nidaros after the death of Jon Birgersson.
- **1161**: Receives the pallium in Rome from Pope Alexander III.

- **1163 or 1164**: Crowns the young King Magnus Erlingsson in Bergen, the first royal coronation in Norway.
- **1178**: Consecrates Saint Thorlak as bishop of Skálholt, in Iceland.
- **1181-1182**: Exile in England, notably at the abbey of Bury St Edmunds.
- **1183**: Returns to Norway and is reconciled with King Sverre.
- **January 26, 1188**: Dies in Nidaros.
- **1229**: A synod of Nidaros recognizes his cult.

The reforming archbishop

The archdiocese of Nidaros had only just been created, in 1152 or 1153, when Eystein became its second archbishop. His task was to organize a young Church over an immense territory that also included Iceland, Greenland, the Orkney Islands and the Faroe Islands.

He worked to apply what is known as the Gregorian reform: the freedom of the Church from the powerful, the discipline of the clergy and priestly celibacy. He brought in canons regular of Saint Augustine and drew up rules of law for the Church of Norway.

He is also credited with writing, or inspiring, the *Passio Olavi*, the Latin account of the life and miracles of Saint Olaf, the martyr king whose tomb in Nidaros was then drawing pilgrims from all over Scandinavia.

The first coronation of a Norwegian king

Norway at the time was torn by civil wars between rival claimants to the throne. Eystein supported the young Magnus Erlingsson and his father, the regent Erling Skakke, who in return granted important rights to the Church.

Around 1163 or 1164, in Bergen, he crowned Magnus according to a Christian rite, in the presence of a papal legate. It was the first ceremony of its kind in the country. A new law of succession, backed by the archbishop, reserved the

crown for legitimate sons, in order to put an end to the dividing of the kingdom.

Exile and reconciliation

In 1177 a new claimant, Sverre Sigurdsson, rose up against Magnus. After the defeat of his allies in 1180, Eystein had to leave Norway. He took refuge in England, where King Henry II allowed him to live on the revenues of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds.

The abbey's chronicler, Jocelin of Brakelond, reports that while there Eystein upheld the right of the monks to elect their own abbot. During this stay he also discovered the new English Gothic style, which would influence the cathedral of Nidaros.

In 1183 he returned to Norway and made peace with Sverre. He then withdrew from political life and devoted himself to his diocese and to the great building site of his cathedral, where he placed the relics of Saint Olaf.

A saint venerated in Trondheim

Eystein died on January 26, 1188. Miracles were soon reported at his tomb, and in 1229 a synod held in Nidaros officially recognized his cult, at a time when bishops could still proclaim saints within their own province.

In the thirteenth century, the popes ordered several inquiries with a view to a solemn canonization, which was never completed. His local cult, however, never ceased, and the Catholic Church in Norway celebrates him today on January 26.

Why is Saint Eystein honored as a builder of the Church?

Saint Eystein is not listed as the patron of any particular group, but he is remembered as a builder bishop, in both senses of the word. He gave the Church of Norway its structures, its law and its bond with Rome, and he began one of the most beautiful cathedrals of northern Europe.

His life, entangled in the affairs of the kingdom, shows how hard it is for a pastor to defend the freedom of the Church amid struggles for power, and how precious reconciliation is. He can be invoked for the Church in Scandinavia and for those who carry public responsibilities.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Eystein in art

Saint Eystein is shown as an archbishop in liturgical vestments, with a miter and a crosier. He is closely associated with Nidaros Cathedral, the building he began and which remains his great monument.

Where to pray to Saint Eystein

- **Trondheim, Norway**: Nidaros Cathedral, now Lutheran, whose Gothic construction he began.
- **Trondheim, Norway**: the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Olaf, seat of the Catholic Territorial Prelature of Trondheim.
- **Bury St Edmunds, England**: the ruins of the abbey where he lived in exile.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eystein for the Church and for Reconciliation

Saint Eystein Erlendsson, archbishop of Nidaros in the twelfth century, gave the young Church of Norway its structures and began the great cathedral of Trondheim around the tomb of Saint Olaf. Driven into exile by civil war, he came home and made peace with his former adversary. This prayer asks his help for the Church, for leaders and for reconciliation. It is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Eystein

Saint Eystein, faithful shepherd of Nidaros,
you built up the Church of the North with patience,
in stone and in living souls.
You loved the freedom of the Church more than the favor of kings,
and you knew the bitterness of exile.

Pray for the Church in Norway and in all Scandinavia,
that it may grow in faith, unity and charity.
Pray for those who govern nations and cities,
that they may serve justice and the common good.
Pray for those who are divided by conflict,
that they may find, as you did, the courage to be reconciled.

Help me to build my life on Christ, the cornerstone,
to stay faithful when I am misunderstood,
and to return home in peace after every trial.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

You may close with an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be.

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, January 26, or during the novena that leads up to it.
- For the Catholic Church in Norway, Iceland and the other Nordic countries, where Catholics are a small minority.
- For bishops and priests who must defend the freedom of the Church.
- For leaders and people in public life.
- When you are in conflict with someone and hope for reconciliation.
- When you feel far from home, as Eystein did during his exile in England.

A short prayer for reconciliation

> *Lord, you led your servant Eystein back from exile and gave him the grace of reconciliation. Soften what is hard in my heart, help me to take the first step toward peace, and through his prayers, make me a builder of your Church. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eystein Erlendsson

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Eystein Erlendsson, archbishop of Nidaros (Trondheim) from about 1161 to 1188. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, January 26, begin it on January 18. It can also be prayed at any time of the year, for the Church in the Nordic countries, for leaders, or for a reconciliation you are hoping for.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you put the prayer into practice. You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group.

Day 1: A son of Trøndelag

Eystein was born in Trøndelag, in central Norway, into a family close to the royal court. God called him from his own land to serve his own people. Our first mission field is usually the place where we were born and the people we already know.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the place and the family you gave me. Help me to serve you first where I am.

Today: Pray by name for three people from your town or your family.

Day 2: A student of the faith

According to tradition, Eystein studied in France, probably at the abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris, one of the great schools of its time. He did not separate learning from prayer. Knowing the faith better helps us love God better and explain our hope to others.

Prayer: Lord, give me a mind eager to know you and a heart ready to follow what I learn.

Today: Read a page of the Gospel or of the Catechism slowly and with attention.

Day 3: Called to lead

After serving as royal chaplain and treasurer, Eystein was chosen archbishop of Nidaros and received the pallium from Pope Alexander III in Rome. He accepted a heavy charge over an immense territory, from Norway to Iceland and Greenland. Responsibility is a form of service, not of honor.

Prayer: Lord, bless our bishops and priests. Give them strength for the burdens they carry for your people.

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

Day 4: A reformer of the Church

Eystein worked for the freedom of the Church, the discipline of the clergy and good laws for the Christian people. Reform always starts with conversion of heart. Before we ask the Church to change, we can ask God to change us.

Prayer: Lord, renew your Church, and begin with me. Show me what in my life needs to be set right.

Today: Make a careful examination of conscience, and plan to go to confession.

Day 5: Honoring the saints

Eystein loved Saint Olaf, the martyr king of Norway. He is credited with the *Passio Olavi*, the account of Olaf's life and miracles, and he placed Olaf's relics in his new cathedral. The saints are our elder brothers and sisters who show us the way to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the saints of every land. Through their example, draw me closer to you.

Today: Read the life of a saint from your own country or region.

Day 6: In the middle of conflict

Eystein lived through years of civil war. He crowned King Magnus and supported a law of succession meant to bring peace to the kingdom. Christians are not spared the conflicts of their time, but they are called to seek justice and peace in them.

Prayer: Lord, bring peace to countries torn by war and to families torn by division.

Today: Pray for a country at war, and for one family you know that is divided.

Day 7: The trial of exile

When his allies were defeated, Eystein had to leave Norway and take refuge in England, at the abbey of Bury St Edmunds. There he still defended the rights of the monks and opened his eyes to the beauty of the new Gothic churches. Even in exile, God can teach us and use us.

Prayer: Lord, be close to refugees, migrants and all who live far from home. Let them find welcome and hope.

Today: Do something concrete for a migrant or a newcomer: a visit, a gift, a word of welcome.

Day 8: The grace of reconciliation

In 1183 Eystein returned to Norway and made peace with King Sverre, the man who had driven him out. Reconciliation takes humility on both sides. It is one of the most beautiful fruits of the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to forgive and to ask forgiveness. Heal the relationships I have broken.

Today: Take one step toward someone you are at odds with: a message, a call, a prayer for them.

Day 9: Building for God

In his last years, Eystein devoted himself to his diocese and to the great cathedral of Nidaros. He did not see it finished, but he laid its foundations. We too build for God things we may never see completed, trusting that he will bring them to fulfillment.

Prayer: Lord, let my life be built on Christ, the cornerstone, and let what I begin for you bear fruit after me.

Today: Visit a church, pray there for a while, and offer something for its upkeep or for your parish.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Eystein, archbishop of Nidaros, builder of the Church and man of reconciliation, we entrust to you the intentions of this novena. Pray for the Church in Norway and in all the Nordic lands, for our bishops and priests, for those who govern and for all who are divided. Obtain for us faithfulness in trial, humility in conflict and joy in building up the Body of Christ. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Credits and sources

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