

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gall

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 16

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IN BRIEF

Saint Gall

Monk and companion of Saint Columbanus, hermit whose cell gave rise to the Abbey of Saint Gall in Switzerland.

Feast day	October 16
Born	c. 550, Ireland, according to tradition
Died	c. 640 or 645, Arbon, on Lake Constance, according to tradition
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	St. Gallen (city and diocese)

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Gall

Cathedral of St. Gallen, on the Site of the Saint's Hermitage

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Gall

Saint Gall was one of the companions of Saint Columbanus, the great missionary monk who came from Ireland to the European continent. He arrived with his master on the shores of Lake Constance, stayed behind when Columbanus left for Italy, and lived as a hermit in a wild valley of what is now eastern Switzerland. A century later, the famous Abbey of Saint Gall grew up on the site of his cell, giving its name to a city and a Swiss canton. His feast day is October 16.

Who was Saint Gall?

Gall (in Latin, *Gallus*) was a monk of the sixth and seventh centuries. According to tradition, he was born in Ireland around 550 and trained at the monastery of Bangor, founded by Saint Comgall, before being chosen as one of the twelve monks who went with Saint Columbanus to the continent.

Many historians today think instead that he was a Gaul, perhaps from the Vosges region, who joined Columbanus during his time at Luxeuil. His Latin name, which means "the Gaul," would point in that direction. The question remains open.

His life is known through accounts written in the ninth century by monks of the Abbey of Saint Gall, notably Walafrid Strabo. These Lives blend old memories with marvelous episodes that should be read with caution. Gall is venerated by both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches.

Key dates

- **c. 550**: Born, in Ireland according to tradition.

- **Late sixth century**: Follows Saint Columbanus to Gaul and takes part in the founding of Luxeuil.
- **c. 610**: Columbanus, expelled from Burgundy, travels with his disciples to Lake Zurich, then to Lake Constance.
- **612**: Columbanus leaves for Italy; Gall, who is ill, stays near Bregenz.
- **After 612**: He settles as a hermit in the valley of the Steinach, the future site of St. Gallen.
- **c. 640 or 645**: Dies at Arbon, on Lake Constance, on October 16 according to tradition.
- **719**: Saint Othmar founds an abbey on the site of his hermitage.

The companion of Saint Columbanus

Gall followed Columbanus in his foundations in Gaul, especially at Luxeuil, where the monks from Ireland attracted many disciples. When Columbanus had to leave Burgundy after rebuking Queen Brunhild and her grandson King Theuderic for their disorderly lives, Gall was among the faithful who went with him into exile.

From 610, the small community tried to preach the Gospel to the people living on the shores of Lake Zurich. Poorly received, the monks moved on and settled near Lake Constance, at Bregenz, around an old chapel dedicated to Saint Aurelia, where pagans had set up their idols again. Gall, who knew the local language, preached there with success. He is often presented as one of the first missionaries in the region to proclaim the Gospel in the language of the people rather than in Latin.

The Life of Saint Gall relates that the demon of the lake complained about this stranger against whom he was powerless, "for the name of God is always in his mouth." Behind its simple style, the story keeps the memory of a monk who prayed without ceasing.

The hermit of the Steinach

In 612, faced with the hostility of the Alemanni, Columbanus decided to leave for Italy, where he would found the monastery of Bobbio. Gall was ill and could not follow him. According to his biographers, Columbanus, displeased, forbade him to celebrate Mass for as long as Columbanus lived. Gall obeyed and is said to have resumed celebrating only when he learned of his master's death in 615. Whatever its details, the episode shows the strength of the bond between the two men.

Once he recovered, Gall went deep into the forest and settled in the valley of the Steinach, south of Lake Constance. There he built cells of earth and branches, and a few disciples joined him.

The best-known tradition tells that a bear came out of the forest. Gall ordered it to bring wood for the fire and gave it bread, on condition that it then leave the valley. This is why he is so often shown with a bear carrying a log.

A monk who refused honors

Little by little, Gall won the respect of the Alemanni. His biographers credit him with healings, including that of the daughter of Duke Gunzo, which earned him the favor of this chieftain.

He is said to have been offered the office of bishop of Constance, and later that of abbot of Luxeuil. He refused both, preferring to remain in his hermitage and to continue preaching the Gospel from there. According to tradition, he died at Arbon around 640 or 645, on October 16.

The Abbey of Saint Gall

Gall never founded a great monastery himself. But in 719, Saint Othmar established an abbey on the site of his cell. It became one of the greatest centers of learning in medieval Europe, famous for its school, its scriptorium and its

library. The monks there later adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict.

The city of St. Gallen, the canton of the same name and many towns in Switzerland, Austria and Germany bear his name. The former abbey, with its cathedral and library, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Why is Saint Gall the patron saint of St. Gallen?

Saint Gall is the patron saint of the city and the diocese of St. Gallen, because the city grew up around the abbey built on the place where he lived and prayed. He never saw the abbey, the library or the town, yet everything there began with his small hermitage in the forest.

What can we learn from Saint Gall?

Saint Gall is the disciple who stayed. Separated from his master by illness, he did not lose heart: he turned the forest where he was held back into a place of prayer, and from that small beginning came a great work that he never saw.

He reminds us of the value of quiet faithfulness, of unceasing prayer and of the humility that turns down honors. We can pray to him for missionaries, for those whose path has been interrupted by illness, and for the Christians of Switzerland. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Gall and the novena to Saint Gall.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Gall in art

- **The bear**: his most famous emblem, usually shown carrying a log, recalling the story of the bear in the Steinach valley.
- **The monk's habit**: he is shown as a monk, sometimes with a pilgrim's staff, a reminder of his travels with Columbanus.

Where to pray to Saint Gall

- **St. Gallen** (Switzerland): the Cathedral of St. Gallen, the former abbey church built on the site of his hermitage.
- **Arbon** (Switzerland): the town on Lake Constance where, according to tradition, he died.
- **Bregenz** (Austria): the area where he preached with Saint Columbanus.
- In any church on October 16, his feast day.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gall, Hermit and Missionary

Saint Gall, companion of Saint Columbanus and hermit of the Steinach valley, is the patron saint of the city and diocese of St. Gallen in Switzerland. No ancient prayer in his name is in common use in English, so here is a prayer inspired by what his biographers tell us about him: his unceasing prayer, his faithfulness to his master and his refusal of honors.

Prayer to Saint Gall

Saint Gall, pilgrim monk, you left everything to follow Saint Columbanus and to proclaim Christ to peoples who did not yet know him. Give me a heart ready to answer God's call.

It was said that the name of God was always on your lips. Teach me to pray without growing weary, at work and at rest, in joy and in trial.

Illness stopped you on the road, and you made the forest a place of praise. Help me to accept the limits of my life without bitterness, and to serve God where he has placed me.

You refused honors to remain poor and humble. Keep me from pride and from seeking the first places.

Saint Gall, pray for missionaries, for monks and nuns, for the sick, and for the Church in Switzerland. I also entrust to you this intention: (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Gall's feast day is October 16, the day of his death according to tradition. You can also pray to him:

- when an illness or an obstacle interrupts a plan or a journey;
- for monastic and missionary vocations;
- to learn to pray without ceasing in daily life;
- for the Church in Switzerland, Austria and southern Germany, where his memory is alive.

A short invocation

For a brief prayer during the day, you can simply say: *"Saint Gall, faithful disciple, keep the name of God always on my lips. Pray for us."*

To go further, read the life of Saint Gall or pray the novena to Saint Gall, nine days of prayer ending on his feast.

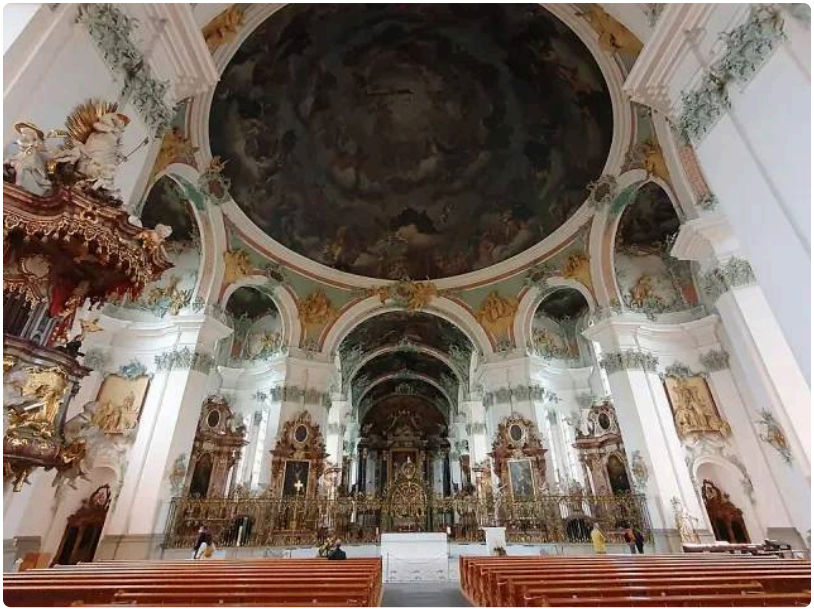
NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gall

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Gall as told by his early biographers. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, October 16, begin it on October 8. It can also be prayed at any time, especially when illness or an obstacle has interrupted your plans, or for missionaries and monastic vocations.

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 each day helps you live in the spirit of Saint Gall: faithfulness, unceasing prayer and humility. You can pray it alone, with your family or with a parish group.



Inside the Cathedral of St. Gallen.

Day 1: Leaving everything

Gall left his homeland to follow Saint Columbanus and carry the Gospel to distant lands. He did not know where the road would lead. Every Christian life begins with a first yes, and that yes has to be renewed again and again.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to leave behind whatever keeps me from following you, and to trust you with the road ahead.

Today: Name one habit or attachment that holds you back, and offer it to God.

Day 2: A faithful companion

Gall stayed with Columbanus through foundations, exile and rejection. When his master was driven out of Burgundy, he went with him. Faithfulness is often less spectacular than great deeds, but it is the ground on which God builds.

Prayer: Lord, make me faithful to those you have entrusted to me, in good times and in hard times.

Today: Call or write to someone who has stood by you, and thank them.

Day 3: Speaking the language of others

At Bregenz, Gall preached to the people in their own language. He did not ask them to come to him; he went to them. The Gospel is meant to be heard in words people understand, and with the patience of those who take the time to listen.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to speak of you simply, with words and deeds that the people around me can understand.

Today: Listen fully to someone today without interrupting or thinking about your answer.

Day 4: The name of God always on his lips

His biographers tell how the demon of the lake complained that he could do nothing against Gall, because the name of God was always in his mouth. Unceasing prayer is not a matter of long words; it is a heart that keeps turning back to God throughout the day.

Prayer: Lord, let your name be on my lips and in my heart, at work and at rest.

Today: Choose a short prayer, such as "Jesus, I trust in you," and repeat it several times during the day.

Day 5: Stopped by illness

When Columbanus left for Italy, Gall was too ill to follow. His plans were broken, and his master was displeased with him. Yet this setback became the beginning of his true mission. God can work through what seems to us a

failure.

Prayer: Lord, when illness or obstacles stop me, help me to accept them without bitterness and to look for your will in them.

Today: Pray for someone who is sick, or visit or call a person who is housebound.

Day 6: Obedience

According to his biographers, Columbanus forbade Gall to celebrate Mass while he lived, and Gall obeyed until he learned of his master's death. Whatever the details, Gall chose peace and humility over his own justification.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the need to always be right, and give me a humble and peaceful heart.

Today: Let go of a grievance, and do not seek to have the last word in a disagreement.

Day 7: The hermit and the bear

In the forest of the Steinach, tradition says Gall asked a bear to bring wood for the fire and gave it bread. The story speaks of peace with creation and of a man so rooted in God that even a wild animal became his helper.

Prayer: Lord, Creator of all things, help me to respect your creation and to live in peace with everything you have made.

Today: Spend a few moments outdoors in silence, thanking God for the beauty of creation.

Day 8: Refusing honors

Gall is said to have refused to become bishop of Constance and later abbot of Luxeuil. He preferred to stay in his hermitage, praying and preaching from there. True greatness lies in serving where God wants us, not in seeking the first places.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from pride and from the desire to be seen, and let me find my joy in serving you.

Today: Do a good deed in secret, without telling anyone.

Day 9: A seed that bears fruit

Gall never saw the abbey, the library or the city that would bear his name. A century after his death, Saint Othmar founded a monastery on the site of his cell, and it became one of the great centers of faith and learning in Europe. What we sow in faith can bear fruit far beyond our lifetime.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the small seeds I sow each day. Let them bear fruit in your time, for your glory.

Today: Pass on something of your faith to a younger person: a prayer, a story, a book.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Gall, faithful companion of Saint Columbanus, hermit of the forest and friend of the poor, you made the place where illness held you back into a home of prayer. Obtain for us a heart that prays without ceasing, faithfulness in trials and humility in service. Pray for missionaries, for monks and nuns, for the sick, and for the intention I have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Learn more in the life of Saint Gall, or pray the prayer to Saint Gall.

PILGRIMAGE

Cathedral of St. Gallen, on the Site of the Saint's Hermitage

St. Gallen Cathedral, in eastern Switzerland, stands on the site of the hermitage where Saint Gall lived in the 7th century. Formerly the church of the abbey founded by Saint Othmar in 719, it is now the cathedral of the Diocese of St. Gallen. Together with the famous Abbey Library, the whole former abbey complex has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1983.

From hermitage to abbey

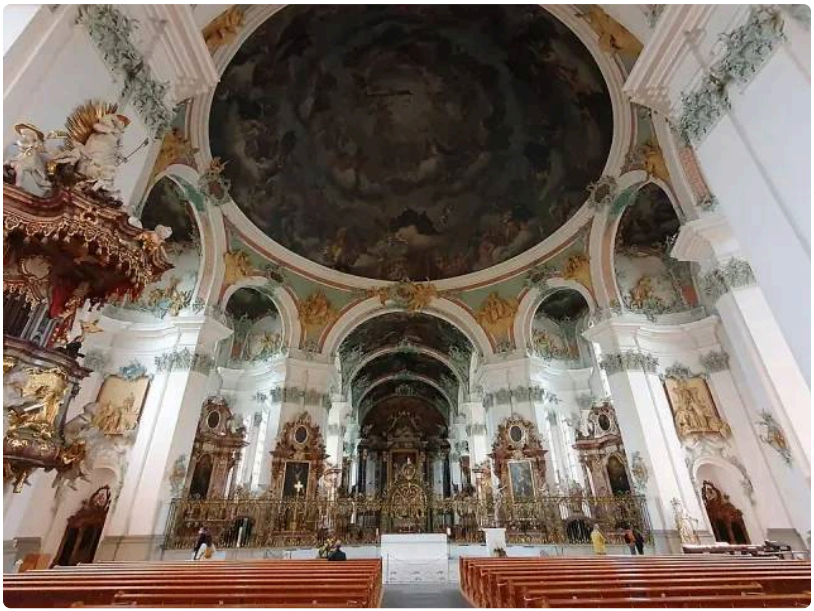
After 612, Saint Gall, a companion of Saint Columban, settled in the Steinach valley and lived there as a hermit with a few disciples. After his death, his tomb became a place of prayer. In 719, the priest Othmar founded a true abbey there, which soon adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict. For centuries, the Abbey of St. Gall was one of the great centers of culture in Europe: manuscripts were copied and illuminated there, liturgical music was composed, and teaching was carried on. The famous Plan of St. Gall, drawn in the 9th century, shows the ideal monastery of the Carolingian era.

The abbey was suppressed in 1805. In 1847, the former abbey church became the cathedral of the new Diocese of St. Gallen.

What you will see

The present church was rebuilt in the Baroque style in the 18th century. Its eastern facade is framed by two towers; the interior, very bright, is adorned with stucco, frescoes and woodwork. The choir stalls and the decoration recall the history of the abbey and its saints, Gall and Othmar.

Next to the cathedral, the Abbey Library (Stiftsbibliothek) is one of the oldest monastic libraries in the world still in operation. Its great Baroque hall holds medieval manuscripts of exceptional value.



The Baroque interior of St. Gallen Cathedral.

Praying at St. Gallen

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Gall. In the cathedral, a time of silence lets you give thanks for the missionary monks who evangelized Europe, or pray for vocations or for someone who is ill. The prayer to Saint Gall suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places associated with Saint Gall

- **Arbon**: a small town on the Swiss shore of Lake Constance, where he died according to tradition.

- **Bregenz**: at the eastern end of Lake Constance, in Austria, where he preached with Saint Columban.
- **Luxeuil** (Haute-Saône): the monastery founded by Saint Columban, where Gall lived before the exile.

Practical information

The cathedral is in the old town of St. Gallen, on the abbey square (Klosterhof), a few minutes' walk from the train station. It is open for worship and for visits, outside services; the Abbey Library is visited with an admission ticket. The feast of Saint Gall, on October 16, is celebrated there with solemnity. Ask the cathedral parish or the tourist office for times and visits.

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