BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gobrian of Vannes

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 10

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IN BRIEF

Saint Gobrian of Vannes

Bishop of Vannes in the early 8th century, hermit on the Oust, invoked against St. Anthony's fire.

Feast day	November 10
Born	c. 660, Vannes country (Brittany)
Died	November 3, 725, hermitage on the Oust, near Josselin (Saint-Servant, Morbihan)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	8th century
Patron saint of	sufferers of St. Anthony's fire

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Gobrian of Vannes

Saint Gobrian (Gobrien in French) was a bishop of Vannes at the beginning of the 8th century. Born around 660 in the Vannes country of Brittany and trained at the abbey of Saint-Gildas de Rhuys, he was elected bishop of Vannes, then withdrew at the end of his life to a hermitage on the Oust, near Josselin, where he died in 725. Bretons invoked him against "St. Anthony's fire". His feast day is November 10.

Who was Saint Gobrian?

Gobrian belongs to the long list of holy Breton bishops of the early Middle Ages, whose memory has been kept mainly in chapels, fountains and statues. Written sources on his life are rare and late: the main one is the *Gallia Christiana*, the great reference work on the dioceses of France, which counts him among the early bishops of Vannes and gives the date of his death. The rest comes from local tradition, which made him a healing saint. The episcopal lists themselves differ: some place him nineteenth among the bishops of Vannes, others eleventh. His figure nevertheless remains very much alive in the Morbihan, where several places of worship bear his name.

Key dates in the life of Gobrian

- **c. 660**: Born in the Vannes country.
- **Youth**: He is trained in religious life at the monastery of Saint-Gildas de Rhuys.
- **Late 7th century**: He is ordained a priest at Vannes.
- **Early 8th century**: On the death of Bishop Morvan, he is elected bishop of Vannes.

- **c. 717**: According to tradition, he withdraws as a hermit to the bank of the Oust, near Josselin, where he builds a wooden oratory.
- **November 3, 725**: Dies in his hermitage, according to the *Gallia Christiana*; his body is laid on the site of the present chapel of Saint-Gobrien, at Saint-Servant.
- **11th century**: A first stone chapel replaces the oratory.
- **14th-16th centuries**: The chapel of Saint-Gobrien is enlarged, at the initiative of Olivier de Clisson and then in 1548-1549.

A monk of Rhuys who became bishop

Young Gobrian was trained at the abbey of Saint-Gildas de Rhuys, founded in the 6th century by Saint Gildas on the peninsula that closes the Gulf of Morbihan. There he learned prayer, the study of Scripture and the discipline of monastic life. Ordained a priest at Vannes, he became known for his piety. On the death of Bishop Morvan, the clergy and people chose him as his successor. He governed the diocese of Vannes at the beginning of the 8th century, at a time when Brittany still lived largely on the margins of the Frankish kingdom.

The healer of St. Anthony's fire

Tradition credits Gobrian with many healings, especially of people suffering from the "mal des ardents", also called "sacred fire" or St. Anthony's fire. This terrible disease, now known to be caused by ergot, a fungus that contaminates rye, caused violent burning in the limbs and could lead to gangrene. In the Middle Ages it struck whole villages, and people turned to healing saints. Gobrian became one of them in Brittany. A popular tradition even says that people placed a handful of nails on his tomb to obtain healing as the metal rusted.

The hermit of the Oust

At the end of his life, Gobrian left his office to withdraw into solitude. He settled on the bank of the Oust, not far from Josselin, and there, according to tradition, built a wooden oratory around 717. He lived there in prayer until his death on November 3, 725, according to the *Gallia Christiana*. His body was laid to rest on the spot. In the 11th century, a chapel in the shape of a Latin cross replaced the oratory; it was enlarged in the 14th and again in the 16th century, and it is this chapel that can be visited today at Saint-Servant.

Devotion and art

The calendar of Breton saints celebrates Saint Gobrian on November 10. Several buildings are dedicated to him: the church of Morieux, in the Côtes-d'Armor, the church of Rohan and the chapel of Saint-Gobrien at Camors, in the Morbihan, as well as a now ruined chapel at Kerleguen, in Grand-Champ. Fountains bear his name at Saint-Servant, Mesquer and Saint-Servan. He is shown as a bishop, mitre on his head and crozier in hand, as in the polychrome wooden statuettes of Saint-Servant (16th century) and Camors (17th century). The pardon (traditional Breton religious festival) of the chapel at Saint-Servant is celebrated on the first weekend of July.

What can we learn from Saint Gobrian?

Gobrian unites the great vocations of Christian Brittany: monk, bishop and hermit. He served his people as a pastor, then chose solitude to end his life in prayer. Popular memory has above all kept his compassion for the sick. You can pray to him for the sick, especially those suffering from skin diseases or burning pain, for the diocese of Vannes, and for those who, at the end of their working life, seek to give more room to God.

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

Where to pray to Saint Gobrian

- **Saint-Servant** (Morbihan): the chapel of Saint-Gobrien, near the Oust, where his body was laid, and the Saint-Gobrien fountain in the same municipality.
- **Camors** (Morbihan): the chapel of Saint-Gobrien and its 17th-century statue.
- **Rohan** (Morbihan) and **Morieux** (Côtes-d'Armor): churches dedicated to him.
- **Mesquer** (Loire-Atlantique) and **Saint-Servan** (Ille-et-Vilaine): fountains that bear his name.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gobrian for the Sick

Saint Gobrian, bishop of Vannes at the beginning of the 8th century, ended his life as a hermit on the Oust, near Josselin. Breton tradition invokes him for the sick, especially against "St. Anthony's fire". Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him the sick, the diocese of Vannes and those seeking inner peace.

Prayer to Saint Gobrian

Saint Gobrian,
monk of Rhuys and shepherd of Vannes,
you served the people of God
with the gentleness of a father.
Watch over the Church in Brittany,
over its priests and its faithful.

You whom the sick invoked
when the fire of suffering burned them,
look upon those who suffer today
in body and in heart.
Obtain for them relief and peace.

You who chose the solitude of the Oust
to end your life in prayer,
teach me to keep silence
and to let God take first place.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Gobrian

- On his feast day, November 10, or at the pardon of Saint-Servant, on the first weekend of July.
- For someone suffering from a skin disease, burns or sharp pain.
- For the diocese of Vannes and its bishop.
- At retirement, to give more room to prayer.
- When you need calm and solitude.

A short invocation

> *Saint Gobrian, bishop and hermit,*
> *relieve those who suffer and keep us in peace.*
> *Pray for us. Amen.*

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gobrian of Vannes

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is inspired by the life of Saint Gobrian, bishop of Vannes and hermit at the beginning of the 8th century. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, November 10, begin on November 2, the day on which the Church prays for all the faithful departed. 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 Gobrian, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come mainly from Breton tradition.

Day 1: A child of the Vannes country

Gobrian was born around 660 in the Vannes country. He grew up in a Brittany where the Gospel had been brought by monks who came from the sea.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the land where I was born and for those who sowed the faith there.

Act of the day: Pray for your parish and for those who keep it alive.

Day 2: The school of Rhuys

At the monastery of Saint-Gildas de Rhuys, Gobrian learned prayer and common life. He took root in an already ancient tradition.

Prayer: Lord, help me take root in the prayer of your Church.

Act of the day: Pray a psalm or one of the hours of the Divine Office.

Day 3: Priest at Vannes

Once ordained a priest, Gobrian served the people of Vannes. He proclaimed the Word and celebrated the sacraments.

Prayer: Lord, bless the priests of Brittany and of everywhere. Give them a shepherd's heart.

Act of the day: Pray for a priest you know.

Day 4: Bishop

On the death of Bishop Morvan, Gobrian was chosen to succeed him. He agreed to carry the responsibility of a whole diocese.

Prayer: Lord, sustain the bishop of Vannes and all bishops. Keep them humble and courageous.

Act of the day: Pray for the bishop of your diocese.

Day 5: Close to the sick

Tradition says that Gobrian healed many sick people. He saw in each sufferer a brother to comfort.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the sick, those who care for them and those who keep watch beside them.

Act of the day: Visit someone who is ill or write them a note.

Day 6: Against the burning fire

St. Anthony's fire burned the limbs of the sick. People invoked Gobrian to be delivered from it. Some sufferings burn the heart as well.

Prayer: Lord, soothe the pains that burn, those of the body as well as those of the soul.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who lives with chronic pain.

Day 7: Withdrawing

At the end of his life, Gobrian left his office to live as a hermit on the bank of the Oust. He gave God the time he had left.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to slow down and give you first place.

Act of the day: Take a time of silence, away from screens.

Day 8: A wooden oratory

By the river, Gobrian built a simple wooden oratory. Centuries later, a stone chapel still stands there.

Prayer: Lord, what I build with you, however poorly, you can make last.

Act of the day: Pray for a few minutes in a chapel or oratory.

Day 9: Dying in peace

Gobrian died in 725 in his hermitage. His tomb became a place where people came to pray and ask for healing.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to live and die in your peace. Through the intercession of Saint Gobrian, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Pray for the departed members of your family and, if possible, attend Mass.

Closing prayer

Saint Gobrian,
monk, bishop and hermit of Brittany,
you comforted the sick
and sought God in the silence of the Oust.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Relieve those who suffer
and keep me in the peace of Christ.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Chapel of Saint-Gobrien, Saint-Servant

The chapel of Saint-Gobrien stands at the place called Saint-Gobrien, in the municipality of Saint-Servant, in the Morbihan, near the banks of the Oust and not far from Josselin, in Brittany. According to tradition, it was here that Saint Gobrian, former bishop of Vannes, lived as a hermit at the end of his life, and here that his body was laid after his death in 725. The chapel, its enclosure and the chaplain's house are protected as historic monuments.

From wooden oratory to stone chapel

Tradition says that Gobrian built a wooden oratory on the bank of the Oust around 717. In the 11th century, a first stone chapel in the shape of a Latin cross replaced it. At the end of the 14th century, around 1378-1387, Olivier de Clisson, one of the most powerful lords of Brittany, had a vast chapel built. The south arm of the transept, in the Flamboyant Renaissance style, was built in 1548-1549. The cemetery cross, dated 1604, was listed as a historic monument in 1927, the cemetery in 1945, and the chapel with the chaplain's house was classified in 1996.

What you can see

The chapel, built of schist and granite rubble, consists of a single nave, a wide transept and a choir with a flat east end. Its squat square bell tower is pierced with arrow slits. You enter through a porch with an earthen floor. Inside, the schist paving of the choir forms a remarkable figure, a *vesica piscis* made of circles whose spacing follows a geometric progression. The chapel houses two canopied altarpieces, one with a Virgin and Child, the other with statues of

saints, as well as a carved wooden tomb from the 14th century, unique in Brittany. A 16th-century polychrome wooden statuette depicts Saint Gobrian. In the same municipality, a fountain also bears his name.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Gobrian. In the chapel, entrust to him the sick, especially those suffering from burning pain, as well as the diocese of Vannes. You can say the prayer to Saint Gobrian there. The pardon (traditional Breton religious festival), celebrated every year on the first weekend of July, is the best time to join the prayer of the local faithful. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Gobrian

- **Camors** (Morbihan): the chapel of Saint-Gobrien and its 17th-century statue.
- **Rohan** (Morbihan) and **Morieux** (Côtes-d'Armor): churches dedicated to him.
- **Mesquer** (Loire-Atlantique) and **Saint-Servan** (Ille-et-Vilaine): Saint-Gobrien fountains.

Practical information

Saint-Servant is a village in the Morbihan, close to Josselin, reachable by car. The chapel is a place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested. Opening conditions outside the pardon may vary: check with the parish or the Josselin tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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