BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Grimbald

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 8

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IN BRIEF

Saint Grimbald

Flemish Benedictine monk of the 9th century, helper of Alfred the Great, honored as first abbot of the New Minster at Winchester.

Feast day	July 8
Born	9th century, Thérouanne according to later sources
Died	July 8, 901 (probably), Winchester (England)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	10th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Grimbald for Those Who Hand On the Faith

Novena to Saint Grimbald

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Grimbald

Saint Grimbald was a Benedictine monk from Flanders, of the second half of the 9th century. A monk of the abbey of Saint-Bertin at Saint-Omer, he was called to England by King Alfred the Great to take part in the religious and cultural revival of Wessex. He probably died at Winchester on July 8, 901, and the community of the New Minster honored him as its first abbot. His feast day is July 8.

Who was Saint Grimbald?

Grimbald belongs to the small group of scholars whom Alfred the Great, king of Wessex from 871 to 899, brought to his court to restore the Church and learning, ruined by the Viking invasions. A few contemporary sources speak of him: King Alfred himself, in the preface to one of his translations, and Asser, his biographer. The rest of what is told comes from later hagiographies, which include many anecdotes that are clearly imaginary. We must therefore distinguish the little that is known for certain from what tradition has added.

Key dates in the life of Grimbald

- **9th century**: Born, at Thérouanne according to later sources; he enters monastic life at a very young age.
- **Following years**: Monk and then priest at the abbey of Saint-Bertin at Saint-Omer.
- **c. 886**: Fulk, Archbishop of Reims and abbot of Saint-Bertin, recommends him by letter to King Alfred.
- **887**: He arrives in England and settles at Winchester, in a "little monastery."
- **890s**: He helps Alfred translate into Old English the *Pastoral Care* of Saint Gregory the Great.

- **c. 890**: According to tradition, he refuses the see of Canterbury and recommends Plegmund.
- **July 8, 901**: He probably dies at Winchester.
- **903**: Edward the Elder founds the New Minster at Winchester, of which Grimbald is considered the first abbot.
- **1110**: The monks of the New Minster move to Hyde Abbey, where his cult continues until the dissolution of the monasteries.

A monk of Saint-Bertin

According to later accounts, Grimbald was born at Thérouanne, in the north of present-day France, and entered monastic life very early. He became a monk, then a priest, at the abbey of Saint-Bertin at Saint-Omer, one of the great monasteries of the Frankish kingdom. His abbot was then Fulk, Archbishop of Reims. It was Fulk who, at King Alfred's request, recommended him in a letter so that he could be sent to England. Grimbald's departure was thus the fruit of an exchange between two neighboring Churches, united by the desire to restore faith and learning.

In the service of King Alfred

Grimbald arrived in England in 887 and settled, according to tradition, in a little monastery at Winchester, the chief town of Wessex. Alfred names him among the four scholars who helped him translate into Old English the *Pastoral Care* of Saint Gregory the Great, a book on the charge of pastors that the king wanted all his bishops to read. Asser, in his *Life of King Alfred*, praises Grimbald's learning in sacred matters and his skill as a singer. Here we find the portrait of a learned monk who put his culture at the service of the formation of the clergy and of liturgical prayer.

Tradition also reports that on the death of Archbishop Æthelred of Canterbury, Grimbald was offered the succession. He is said to have refused and recommended Plegmund instead, who became archbishop. The story is hard to verify, but it fits the image of a man more attached to monastic life than to honors.

The New Minster and the cult of Saint Grimbald

Grimbald probably died on July 8, 901, at Winchester. His little monastery seems to have been the origin of the New Minster, founded in 903 by Edward the Elder, Alfred's son, next to the cathedral. Although he died before the church was consecrated, the community regarded him as its first abbot. A cult developed around his memory, with a feast on July 8. It reached its peak in the 11th century, then declined after the Norman Conquest of 1066. In 1110, the monks of the New Minster moved to Hyde, north of Winchester. Saint Grimbald remained venerated there until the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII.

What can we learn from Saint Grimbald?

Grimbald is a saint of quiet service. He left his monastery and his country to help a king restore the Church of a neighboring people. He put his learning, his voice and his prayer at the service of others, and, according to tradition, refused the highest offices. His story also recalls the ancient ties between the Churches of Flanders and England. You can pray to him for teachers, translators, singers and all who hand on the faith through study.

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

Where to pray to Saint Grimbald

- **Winchester** (England): the town where he lived and died, and where the New Minster and later Hyde Abbey stood.
- **Saint-Omer** (Pas-de-Calais, France): the ruins of the abbey of Saint-Bertin, where he was a monk.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Grimbald for Those Who Hand On the Faith

Saint Grimbald, a monk of Saint-Bertin who came to England at the call of King Alfred, served the Church of Wessex by his learning, his singing and his prayer. He died at Winchester in 901. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him those who teach, translate and hand on the faith.

Prayer to Saint Grimbald

Saint Grimbald,
monk of Saint-Bertin,
you left your monastery and your land
to serve a Church that needed you.
Teach me to answer generously
when I am called upon.

You helped King Alfred
to put the words of the Fathers into the language of his people.
Bless teachers, translators and catechists,
and all who open to others
the treasures of the faith.

Singer of God's praise,
you preferred the humble life of a monk
to the honors you were offered.
Give me a simple heart and a voice to praise the Lord,
and keep me from seeking the first places.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Grimbald

- On his feast day, July 8.
- For teachers, students and translators.
- For cantors, choirs and all who serve the liturgy.
- Before leaving to serve far from home.
- To remain humble in positions of responsibility.

A short invocation

> *Saint Grimbald, learned monk and humble servant,*
> *pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Grimbald from June 30 to July 8, and read the life of Saint Grimbald.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Grimbald

This novena offers nine days of prayer with Saint Grimbald, a Flemish monk called to England by King Alfred the Great. 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 8, begin on June 30. 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 Grimbald, pray for us." Some episodes come from later accounts: they are presented as such.

Day 1: Given to God from childhood

According to tradition, Grimbald entered monastic life very young. He grew up in prayer and study.

Prayer: Lord, bless children and young people, and let them come to know you early.

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

Day 2: A monk of Saint-Bertin

At the abbey of Saint-Bertin, Grimbald became a monk and then a priest. He followed the Rule of Saint Benedict: to pray and to work.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to unite prayer and work in my life.

Act of the day: Offer your day's work to God as you begin it.

Day 3: A call from elsewhere

King Alfred was looking for scholars to restore the Church of Wessex. Archbishop Fulk recommended Grimbald to him.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to the calls you send me through others.

Act of the day: Say yes to a service you are asked to do.

Day 4: Leaving his land

In 887, Grimbald crossed the sea and settled at Winchester. Like Abraham, he set out for a country he did not know.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who leave to serve far from home: missionaries, volunteers and expatriates.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who has gone to live abroad.

Day 5: Translating to hand on

Grimbald helped Alfred translate the *Pastoral Care* of Saint Gregory the Great. The faith must be spoken in each person's language.

Prayer: Lord, bless translators and catechists, and give me words to speak of you simply.

Act of the day: Read a passage from a Father of the Church or the Gospel of the day.

Day 6: The song of praise

Asser praises Grimbald's skill as a singer. To sing is a way of praying twice.

Prayer: Lord, may my voice and my life sing your praise.

Act of the day: Sing or listen to a liturgical chant, such as the Magnificat.

Day 7: Refusing honors

According to tradition, Grimbald refused the archbishopric of Canterbury and recommended Plegmund. He preferred his life as a monk.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the desire for first places, and teach me to rejoice in the success of others.

Act of the day: Highlight someone else's work.

Day 8: Death at Winchester

Grimbald died at Winchester in 901, far from his native Flanders, among those he had come to serve.

Prayer: Lord, welcome into your peace those who die far from their country, and comfort their families.

Act of the day: Pray for those who have died far from home.

Day 9: The first abbot of the New Minster

The community of the New Minster honored him as its first abbot. His work continued after him for centuries.

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

Act of the day: Pray for monastic communities today.

Closing prayer

Saint Grimbald,
monk of Saint-Bertin and servant of the Church in England,
present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Help me to love study, praise and service,
and to remain humble in all things.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

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