BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Guethenoc

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 5

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IN BRIEF

Saint Guethenoc

Breton saint of the 5th century, son of Saint Fragan and Saint Gwenn, brother of Saint Jacut and Saint Winwaloe according to tradition.

Feast day	November 5
Born	5th century, Wales, according to tradition
Died	5th century (unknown date)
Canonized	immemorial cult (local Breton cult)
Era	5th century

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Guethenoc

Saint Guethenoc, also called Venec or Vennec, and Gwezheneg in Breton, was a Breton saint of the 5th century. According to tradition, he was the son of Saint Fragan and Saint Gwenn, the brother of Saint Jacut and the elder brother of Saint Winwaloe (Guénolé), founder of Landévennec. He is honored in several chapels in Brittany, especially at Briec, in Finistère. His feast is kept on November 5.

Who was Saint Guethenoc?

Guethenoc is one of those saints from the beginnings of Brittany about whom very little is known. No ancient Life is devoted to him: his memory rests on a few mentions in the stories about his family, above all in the Life of Saint Winwaloe, and on the places of worship that bear his name. His name itself comes in an astonishing variety of forms: Guéthenoc, Guézennec, Guéhénec, Venec, Vennec, Wihenoc, Ethinoc and many others. These many spellings bear witness to an ancient and widespread cult, handed down orally from parish to parish. His story should therefore be read as the tradition of a holy family, without claiming to know more than the sources say.

Key dates in the life of Guethenoc

- **5th century**: Born in Wales, into a noble family; his father is Fragan and his mother Gwenn.
- **c. 418, according to one tradition**: The family emigrates to Armorica and settles on the banks of the Gouët, near Saint-Brieuc, at Ploufragan.
- **Shortly after**: Birth of his brother Winwaloe, then of his sister Clervia; traditions differ on this chronology.

- **Later**: With his brother Jacut, he founds a monastery at Landouar, on the peninsula of Saint-Jacut-de-la-Mer.
- **Then**: He joins his brother Winwaloe and travels with him along the coasts to meet the Britons arriving from the island of Britain.
- **5th century**: Dies at an unknown date and place.
- **c. 1578**: Date of the statue of Saint Gwenn with her sons, Guethenoc among them, which comes from the chapel of Saint-Vennec at Briec.

A family of saints from Wales

In the 5th century, many Britons from the island of Britain crossed the Channel to settle in Armorica. Tradition links Guethenoc to one of these families. His father, Fragan, is said to have given his name to Ploufragan, near Saint-Brieuc. His mother, Gwenn, is honored as a saint and often shown with three breasts, one for each of the sons she nursed: Guethenoc, Jacut and Winwaloe. Statues sometimes show her holding her children in her arms. The sources do not agree on dates: according to some, the family arrived around 418, while the Life of Saint Winwaloe places his birth in the second half of the 5th century.

A monk with his brothers

According to tradition, Guethenoc and his brother Jacut founded a monastery together at Landouar, on the peninsula that today bears the name of Saint-Jacut-de-la-Mer, on the north coast of Brittany. Guethenoc later joined his brother Winwaloe. Together they followed the coasts to meet the Britons fleeing the island of Britain and taking refuge in Armorica. This detail, though hard to verify, fits well with what we know of that period: monks were often the first to accompany and guide these emigrant communities.

Veneration and places of memory

The cult of Saint Guethenoc is attested in many places in Brittany. At Briec, in Finistère, the chapel of Saint-Vennec, with its 16th-century calvary and its fountain, is dedicated to him. The village of Quemper-Guézennec, in Côtes-d'Armor, bears his name. At Lanrivoaré a chapel of Saint-Venec is dedicated to him, and at Combrit the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-la-Clarté was originally dedicated to Saint Vennec. There is also a devotional fountain of Saint-Venec at Roudouallec. His memory is also associated with the towns of Langueux and Trégueux, near Saint-Brieuc. He was not canonized by the modern procedure: his cult, ancient and local, belongs to the tradition of the Breton saints.

What can we learn from Saint Guethenoc?

Saint Guethenoc is a saint in the shadows, overshadowed by his brother Winwaloe. His memory reminds us that holiness is often lived in family and in brotherhood: he founded with one brother and served with another. He accompanied exiles looking for a new land. We can pray to him for families, for brothers and sisters, for migrants and for Brittany.

Where to pray to Saint Guethenoc

- **Briec** (Finistère): the chapel of Saint-Vennec, its calvary and its fountain.
- **Quemper-Guézennec** (Côtes-d'Armor): the parish that bears his name.
- **Lanrivoaré** (Finistère): the chapel of Saint-Venec.
- **Combrit** (Finistère): the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-la-Clarté, also called the chapel of Saint-Vennec.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Guethenoc for Families and for Brittany

Saint Guethenoc, also called Venec or Vennec, was a Breton saint of the 5th century. According to tradition, the son of Saint Fragan and Saint Gwenn, he founded a monastery with his brother Jacut, then went with his brother Winwaloe to meet the Britons arriving from across the Channel. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him families, brothers and sisters, migrants and Brittany.

Prayer to Saint Guethenoc

Saint Guethenoc,
child of a holy family,
you received the faith from Fragan and Gwenn
and shared it with your brothers.
Bless our families,
and make our homes places where we pray together.

With Jacut you built a house for God,
with Winwaloe you walked along the coasts
to meet the exiles.
Teach us to work as brothers and sisters
and to welcome those who come from afar.

You who are still prayed to at Briec and in so many chapels,
watch over Brittany and its parishes,
over divided families
and over those looking for a land to live in.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Guethenoc

- On his feast day, November 5, or at a pardon in one of his chapels.
- For the unity of families and harmony between brothers and sisters.
- For migrants and families who have had to leave their country.
- For Brittany and for those who keep its chapels alive.
- When you begin a work together with others.

A short invocation

> *Saint Guethenoc, Saint Jacut and Saint Winwaloe,*
> *brothers in the flesh and in the faith,*
> *pray for our families and for Brittany. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Guethenoc from October 28 to November 5, and read the life of Saint Guethenoc.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Guethenoc

This novena honors the memory of Saint Guethenoc, or Saint Vennec, a Breton saint of the 5th century and, according to tradition, the brother of Saint Jacut and Saint Winwaloe. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, November 5, begin on October 28. You can also pray it at any other time of the year. Very little is known of his life: the meditations draw on Breton traditions without claiming greater precision.

How to pray this novena

Each day, make 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 Guethenoc, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A family that hands on the faith

Guethenoc was the son of Fragan and Gwenn, both honored as saints in Brittany. It was in his family that he learned to know God.

Prayer: Lord, bless the parents who hand on the faith to their children.

Act of the day: Pray for your parents, living or departed.

Day 2: Crossing the sea

According to tradition, the family left Wales to settle in Armorica, near Saint-Brieuc. Guethenoc grew up far from his native land.

Prayer: Lord, watch over migrant families and give them a land of welcome.

Act of the day: Make a gesture of welcome toward someone who has recently arrived.

Day 3: A mother who nourishes

Saint Gwenn is shown with three breasts, to nurse her three sons. This simple image speaks of the generosity of a mother who gives to each one.

Prayer: Lord, bless mothers and give them the strength and tenderness they need.

Act of the day: Do a favor for a mother.

Day 4: Brothers united

Guethenoc, Jacut and Winwaloe are all three honored as saints. Brotherhood by blood became brotherhood in faith.

Prayer: Lord, keep brothers and sisters united, and heal the wounds of our families.

Act of the day: Get in touch with a brother, a sister or a cousin.

Day 5: Founding with Jacut

With his brother Jacut, Guethenoc founded a monastery at Landouar, by the sea. Together they built a house for God.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who work together for your Kingdom.

Act of the day: Offer your help to a shared project.

Day 6: Serving with Winwaloe

Guethenoc then joined his brother Winwaloe. He agreed to serve alongside a brother better known than himself.

Prayer: Lord, free me from jealousy and teach me to rejoice in the good of others.

Act of the day: Sincerely congratulate someone on a success.

Day 7: Going to the exiles

The two brothers followed the coasts to meet the Britons arriving from the island of Britain. They went toward those who had left everything.

Prayer: Lord, open my heart to those who are uprooted and alone.

Act of the day: Support an organization that welcomes refugees.

Day 8: A hidden saint

Almost nothing is known of the life of Guethenoc. Yet his name, in countless forms, has stayed alive in the chapels and villages of Brittany.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to do good without seeking to be seen.

Act of the day: Do a quiet service known to God alone.

Day 9: The chapels of Brittany

At Briec, Lanrivoaré, Combrit and elsewhere, chapels keep the memory of Saint Vennec. The faithful have prayed there for centuries.

Prayer: Lord, bless Brittany and its parishes. Through the intercession of Saint Guethenoc, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Visit a chapel near you and pray there for a few moments.

Living the novena with Saint Guethenoc

Saint Guethenoc teaches us the quiet holiness of a brother who serves. During these nine days, you can carry in prayer your loved ones, separated families, migrants and Brittany. If you can, go to the chapel of Saint-Vennec at Briec or to another chapel dedicated to him.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Guethenoc,*
> *son of Fragan and Gwenn, brother of Jacut and Winwaloe,*
> *you served God with your brothers*
> *and went out to meet the exiles.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you,*
> *and keep our families united in faith.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Chapel of Saint-Vennec at Briec

The chapel of Saint-Vennec stands in the municipality of Briec, in Finistère, northeast of Quimper. It is dedicated to Saint Venec, whom tradition identifies with Saint Guethenoc, brother of Saint Winwaloe. With its calvary and its fountain, it is a fine example of a small Breton religious ensemble. The chapel and its calvary have been listed as historic monuments since 1955.

A place of memory of Saint Winwaloe's family

The area of Briec, one of the ancient original parishes of Cornouaille, had long-standing ties with the abbey of Landévennec, founded by Saint Winwaloe according to tradition. Saint-Vennec formed a small parish, suppressed at the Revolution and joined to Briec. The chapel honors Saint Venec, but also his whole family, as shown by the statue of Saint Gwenn, his mother, surrounded by her sons, which comes from it.

What you can see

The chapel is built of granite. It has a flat east end, a large transept and a nave without aisles. Its small bell tower ends in an octagonal stone spire. The chapel is known for its statue of Saint Gwenn with her sons, dated to around 1578, in which Saint Venec appears on his mother's right; according to some sources, it is now displayed in the museum of the former abbey of Landévennec. A statue of Our Lady of Tréguron in painted stone, from 1592, is also associated with the chapel.

In front of the chapel stands a calvary dated 1556, set on a triangular base. The twelve apostles are ranged around the pedestal; at the top, the cross of Christ is flanked by those of the two thieves. Saint Veronica, Saint Peter, Saint John,

Saint Mary Magdalene and a pietà can also be recognized. Nearby, a 16th-century fountain completes the ensemble, as often beside Breton chapels.

Praying there

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Guethenoc. In the chapel or at the foot of the calvary, entrust to the saint your family, your brothers and sisters, and those who have had to leave their country, then say the prayer to Saint Guethenoc. The calvary also invites you to meditate on the Passion of Christ. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Guethenoc

- **Quemper-Guézennec** (Côtes-d'Armor): the parish that bears his name.
- **Lanrivoaré** (Finistère): the chapel of Saint-Venec.
- **Combrit** (Finistère): the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-la-Clarté, originally dedicated to Saint Vennec.

Practical information

The chapel lies in the countryside of Briec and can be reached by car. Breton chapels are not always open outside pardons and heritage days: check with the parish or the town hall of Briec before your visit. Appropriate dress and silence are expected inside.

Credits and sources

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