

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gummarus of Lier

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 11

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IN BRIEF

Saint Gummarus of Lier

Frankish knight at the court of Pepin the Short who became a hermit, patron saint of the town of Lier.

Feast day	October 11
Born	c. 717, Emblem, near Lier (Brabant)
Died	October 11, 774, according to tradition, Lier (present-day Belgium)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	8th century
Patron saint of	Lier, couples in difficulty, woodcutters

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Gummarus for Couples in Difficulty

Novena to Saint Gummarus of Lier

Church of Saint Gummarus in Lier

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Gummarus of Lier

Saint Gummarus (in Latin *Gummarus*, in French *Gommaire*) was a Frankish knight of the 8th century in the service of King Pepin the Short. Tried by a very difficult marriage, he ended his life as a hermit at Nivesdonck, in Brabant. The town of Lier, in present-day Belgium, grew up around his tomb, and he is its patron saint. According to tradition, he died on October 11, 774. His feast day is October 11.

Who was Saint Gummarus?

Gummarus was a lay saint: neither a priest nor, at first, a monk, but a courtier and a soldier, and a married man. His life is known to us through a Latin *Life* written long after his death and published by the Bollandists in the *Acta Sanctorum*. It mixes old memories with legendary stories, and historians do not agree on every detail: some sources place his death in 714 rather than 774, and there is uncertainty about which Pepin he served. What comes through clearly is the portrait of a patient and faithful man who went through a great trial in his marriage without hatred, before giving himself entirely to God in solitude.



Saint Gummarus, knight and hermit.

Key dates

- **c. 717**: Born, according to tradition, into the family of the lord of Emblem, a village north of Lier, in Brabant.
- **Youth**: Trained at the court of Pepin the Short, where he becomes a knight and receives a position of trust.
- **Adulthood**: The king arranges his marriage to a noblewoman, Gwinmaria, a union that proves very unhappy.
- **For eight years**: He follows Pepin on his campaigns in Lombardy, Saxony and Aquitaine.
- **On his return**: He repairs the injustices done in his household, then, with his wife's consent, withdraws to a cell of prayer.
- **End of his life**: Setting out for Rome, he stops at Nivesdonck and lives there as a hermit.

- **October 11, 774**: Dies at Nivesdonck, according to the most commonly accepted date.
- **From 1378**: Construction of the great Church of Saint Gummarus in Lier.

A faithful knight at the court of Pepin

The son of a lord of Brabant, Gummarus was sent young to the court of Pepin the Short. According to his Life, he stood out there for his sense of duty, his loyalty and his piety. The king gave him an important position. Gummarus showed that one can serve a prince and remain a man of prayer, amid intrigue and arms.

He went with the king to war in Lombardy, Saxony and Aquitaine. These campaigns kept him away from home for eight years. The account presents him as a just soldier who did not use war to make himself rich.

The trial of an unhappy marriage

It was Pepin who arranged a marriage for Gummarus with a lady of high birth, Gwinmaria. According to his biographers, his wife was proud, capricious and harsh. While her husband was away, she mistreated the servants and the peasants of the estate. On his return, Gummarus found his house in disorder. He did not take revenge: he gave justice to those who had suffered and compensated the victims.

The Life dwells on his patience. He bore humiliation with gentleness and prayed for his wife's conversion. For a time Gwinmaria seemed to repent, but the change did not last. The couple had no children. With his wife's consent, Gummarus then withdrew to a cell near his home to lead a life of prayer. Tradition also links him to Saint Rumbold, with whom he is said to have founded a community in Lier.

The hermit of Nivesdonck

Later, Gummarus set out for Rome as a pilgrim. But he did not get far: he stopped at Nivesdonck, on the banks of the Nete, and built himself a hermitage there. He spent the rest of his life there in solitude, prayer and penance. He died there, according to tradition, on October 11, 774.

Wondrous stories grew up around this period. It is said that a spring gushed out where he planted his staff, and that he brought a felled tree back to life by binding it with his belt. These legends explain why woodcutters call on him.



The Church of Saint Gummarus in Lier, Belgium.

Devotion and art

A pilgrimage grew up at the place of his burial, and then a town: this is the origin of Lier. His relics have been venerated there since the 8th century. From 1378, a great church in the Flamboyant Gothic style was built in his honor, for

a long time a collegiate church. His relics rest in a 17th-century shrine of embossed silver, carried in procession through the streets of the town every year around October 11.

Gummarus has been honored by the Catholic Church as a saint since the early Middle Ages. He is the patron saint of Lier and, because of his story, he is invoked for the reconciliation of couples in difficulty. He is shown as a knight, sometimes with a pilgrim's staff, or near a tree.

What can we learn from Saint Gummarus?

Gummarus did not have the family life he had hoped for. Yet he refused violence and resentment. He gave justice, he was patient, and then he placed his life in God's hands. He speaks to those whose marriage is wounded, to those who suffer in their own home, and to all who must carry a trial without knowing how it will end. His life also reminds us that a layman, a soldier and courtier, can become a saint.

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

Where to pray to Saint Gummarus

- **Lier** (province of Antwerp, Belgium): the Church of Saint Gummarus, which keeps the shrine of his relics. See the page Church of Saint Gummarus in Lier.
- **Emblem** (Ranst, province of Antwerp): his family's village, according to tradition.
- **The Lier and Campine region**: several parish churches are dedicated to him.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gummarus for Couples in Difficulty

Saint Gummarus was a Frankish knight, loyal to King Pepin the Short, who was tried by an unhappy marriage that he bore with patience, before ending his life as a hermit near Lier. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to his intercession couples in difficulty, wounded homes and all who seek reconciliation.

Prayer to Saint Gummarus

Saint Gummarus,
loyal knight and man of prayer,
you knew the wound of a home without peace,
and you answered neither with anger nor with revenge.

When you came back from war,
you repaired the injustices of your household
and gave each person what was due.
You prayed for your wife
and placed your life in the hands of God.

Look upon couples who are tearing each other apart,
husbands and wives who no longer know how to talk to each other,
children who suffer from their parents' quarrels.
Obtain for them patience, humility and forgiveness,
and, if God wills, the joy of peace restored.

Teach us, as you learned at Nivesdonck,
to seek in the silence of prayer
the strength we cannot find in ourselves.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Gummarus

- On his feast day, October 11.
- When a couple is going through a crisis or considering separation.
- For a home where harshness or injustice reigns.
- For couples who carry the trial of not having children.
- For those who work with wood and in the forest, of whom he is a traditional protector.

A prayer for peace in the home

You can say this short prayer each day, for your family or for a couple dear to you:

> *Lord, put your peace where there is discord.*
> *Give husbands and wives patient hearts and a new way of seeing each other.*
> *Saint Gummarus, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Gummarus from October 3 to 11, and read the life of Saint Gummarus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gummarus of Lier

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Gummarus, a knight of Pepin the Short who became a hermit near Lier in the 8th century. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, October 11, begin on October 3. It is especially suited to a couple in difficulty or a wounded home, and you can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present 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 Gummarus, pray for us." The small act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A loyal man

At Pepin's court, Gummarus was noticed for his faithfulness and his sense of duty. He served his king without denying his faith. Loyalty is the first stone of any life shared with others, at work as in marriage.

Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in small things as in great ones. May my word be reliable.

Today: Keep a promise that you had set aside.

Day 2: A disappointing marriage

The marriage of Gummarus, arranged by the king, soon proved painful. Many people know this experience: life together does not look like what they had hoped. God is not absent from these disappointments.

Prayer: Lord, I bring you the disappointments of my family life. Keep me from bitterness and discouragement.

Today: Pray by name for a couple you know to be struggling.

Day 3: Patience

According to his Life, Gummarus bore humiliation with gentleness. Patience is not weakness: it is the strength not to return evil for evil.

Prayer: Lord, give me patience when I am hurt, and gentleness when I want to answer harshly.

Today: Hold back a sharp word and answer calmly.

Day 4: Far from home

For eight years, Gummarus followed the king to war. Separation weighs on families. Even today, husbands and wives are kept apart by work, illness or war.

Prayer: Lord, protect families separated by distance. Keep alive the love of those who are far from each other.

Today: Reach out to a loved one who lives far away.

Day 5: Repairing injustice

Back home, Gummarus discovered that his servants had been mistreated. He did not take revenge, but he gave justice and repaired the wrongs. Charity does not close its eyes to injustice.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to those who suffer under my roof or beside me, and give me the courage to make amends.

Today: Make up for a wrong you have done, even a small one.

Day 6: Praying for the other

Gummarus prayed for his wife's conversion. Praying for the one who makes us suffer is the path Christ showed us. It is often how the heart finds peace.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the person who hurts me. Bless them and change my heart toward them.

Today: Pray a Hail Mary for someone you are in conflict with.

Day 7: Choosing peace

When life together became impossible, Gummarus withdrew to a cell, with his wife's consent. He did not drive her out or curse her. He sought peace without crushing the other.

Prayer: Lord, guide me by your Spirit in difficult decisions. Keep me from contempt and violence.

Today: Ask a priest or a wise person for advice about a decision that weighs on you.

Day 8: The pilgrim who stopped

Gummarus set out for Rome, but God was waiting for him at Nivesdonck, very close to home. Our plans are not always God's plans, and he often meets us where we did not expect him.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to find you where I am, without waiting to be somewhere else.

Today: Spend some time in silence in a church near your home.

Day 9: The tree that grew green again

A legend says that Gummarus brought a broken tree back to life by binding it with his belt. It is an image of hope: with God, what seems dead can grow green again. The hermit died in peace, and his tomb became a place of prayer.

Prayer: Lord, make what is broken in my life and in my home bloom again. Through the intercession of Saint Gummarus, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Make a concrete gesture of reconciliation, or entrust it to God if it is not yet possible.

Living the novena with Saint Gummarus

You may be praying this novena for your own marriage, or for loved ones who are tearing each other apart. Saint Gummarus does not promise a magic solution: his own marriage was not healed. But he shows how to go through a trial without losing your soul, by staying just, patient and prayerful. If you are suffering violence in your home, do not hesitate to ask for help: Christian patience does not ask you to put yourself in danger. Entrust your intention to God each day, and let him act in his own time.

Closing prayer

Saint Gummarus,
faithful knight and hermit of Lier,
you bore a wounded marriage with patience
and found in God the peace the world cannot give.
Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days.
Obtain for couples in difficulty forgiveness and peace,
and for each of us a gentle and just heart.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

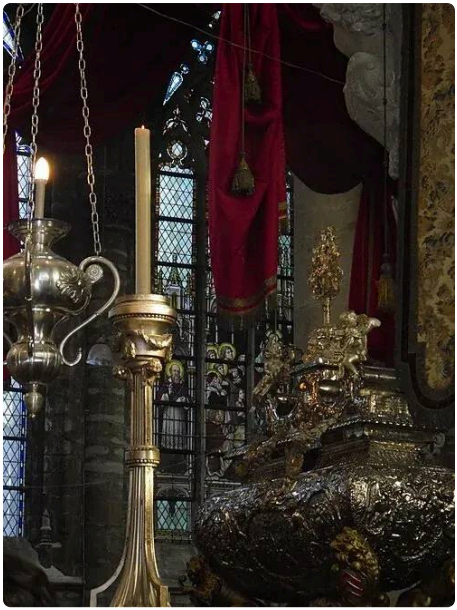
Church of Saint Gummarus in Lier

The Church of Saint Gummarus (*Sint-Gummaruskerk*) stands in the center of Lier, in the province of Antwerp, Belgium. Dedicated to the knight turned hermit whose tomb gave birth to the town, it keeps the shrine of his relics. It is the heart of devotion to Saint Gummarus, especially around his feast on October 11.

A great Gothic church for the town's patron saint

After the death of Gummarus in the 8th century, his tomb drew pilgrims and a settlement formed around it: this is the origin of Lier. The present church, in the Flamboyant Gothic style, was built from 1378 to 1540. Hendrik Meys was its first architect, and members of the Keldermans family and Domien de Waghemakere continued the work. For a long time it was a collegiate church, served by a chapter of canons. It was here, in 1496, that the wedding of Philip the Handsome and Joanna of Castile was celebrated.

The shrine of Saint Gummarus, in embossed silver, dates from the 17th century. It is carried in procession through the streets of Lier, especially around the saint's feast.



The shrine of Saint Gummarus.

Visiting the Church of Saint Gummarus

It is the largest church in town, with a massive tower about 270 feet (83 meters) high that houses a carillon. Inside, look for the white stone rood screen of 1536, adorned with statues of the Evangelists and the Fathers of the Church, the choir stalls of 1555, the Baroque pulpit and a fine set of stained glass windows, several of them given by Emperor Maximilian in 1516. The building is a listed monument. Restoration work has been going on for several years and the shrine may have been moved temporarily: check before you come.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Gummarus. Before his relics, entrust to him couples in difficulty, homes that lack peace and those who seek reconciliation, then recite the prayer to Saint Gummarus. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Gummarus

- **Emblem** (municipality of Ranst): the village where, according to tradition, his family lived.
- **The streets of Lier**: the Saint Gummarus procession passes through them every year, around October 11.
- **The Antwerp Campine**: several parish churches under his patronage.

Practical information

Lier is about nine miles southeast of Antwerp and easy to reach by train. The church is in the town center, a few minutes' walk from the Grote Markt (main square). It is a working church: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening hours, visiting times and Mass times may vary, especially during the works: check with the parish or the Lier tourist office before you come.

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