

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Guntram, King of the Franks

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: March 28

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IN BRIEF

Saint Guntram, King of the Franks

Frankish king of Burgundy, grandson of Clovis and Clotilde, penitent and protector of the poor.

Feast day	March 28
Born	c. 532
Died	March 28, 592, Chalon-sur-Saône, France
Canonized	Immemorial cult
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Guntram, Penitent King

Novena to Saint Guntram

Church of Saint-Marcel, Burial Place of Saint Guntram

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Guntram, King of the Franks

Saint Guntram was a 6th-century Frankish king, grandson of Clovis and Saint Clotilde, who ruled Burgundy from Chalon-sur-Saône from 561 until his death in 592. In an age of extremely violent family wars, he himself committed cruel acts, yet he is remembered as a penitent king, friend of bishops, protector of the poor and peacemaker. His contemporary Gregory of Tours left a mixed but often kindly portrait of him. His feast day is March 28.

Who was Saint Guntram?

Guntram (Gontran in French) was born around 532. He was one of the sons of Clothar I, himself a son of Clovis, and of Ingund. When Clothar died in 561, the kingdom of the Franks was divided among his four sons, according to custom. Guntram received a group of territories centered on Orléans and Burgundy, the former kingdom of the Burgundians, and chose Chalon-sur-Saône as his main residence.

We know him mainly through the *History of the Franks* by Saint Gregory of Tours, who met him several times. The bishop does not hide his faults: his fits of anger, his suspicions, executions ordered too hastily. But he also presents him as a man of faith, attached to the Church, capable of repentance and concerned for peace among the Frankish kings.

Key dates in the life of Saint Guntram

- **Around 532**: Born, son of King Clothar I and Ingund.
- **561**: Death of Clothar; Guntram becomes king of Orléans and Burgundy.
- **575**: Murder of his brother Sigebert; the wars between Clothar's sons grow worse.
- **577**: Adopts his nephew Childebert II, son of Sigebert, as his heir.

- **584**: Murder of his brother Chilperic; Guntram takes under his protection Chilperic's widow, Fredegund, and her young son Clothar II.
- **585**: The Council of Mâcon meets in his kingdom.
- **587**: Treaty of Andelot with Childebert II and Queen Brunhild.
- **591**: Becomes godfather of his nephew Clothar II at his baptism.
- **March 28, 592**: Dies at Chalon-sur-Saône and is buried in the abbey of Saint-Marcel, which he had founded. Some sources give the year 593.

A king in a violent century

The second half of the 6th century was marked by bloody rivalries between the grandsons of Clovis and by the struggle between Queens Fredegund and Brunhild. Guntram did not escape this violence.

Gregory of Tours reports, for example, that he had the physicians of his wife Austrechild executed after her death in 580, because she had asked for it before dying. Other brutal decisions are attributed to him as well.

Yet as the years went by, Guntram appeared more and more as a source of stability. Outliving his brothers, he protected his nephews, tried to avoid new wars and acted as an arbiter. The Treaty of Andelot, in 587, settled the succession and the borders with his nephew Childebert II. He also took under his protection the young Clothar II, son of Chilperic, and became his godfather.

Penitent king and protector of the Church

Guntram kept close ties with the bishops of his kingdom. He encouraged the holding of councils, notably at Mâcon in 585, which insisted on keeping Sunday holy and on Church discipline.

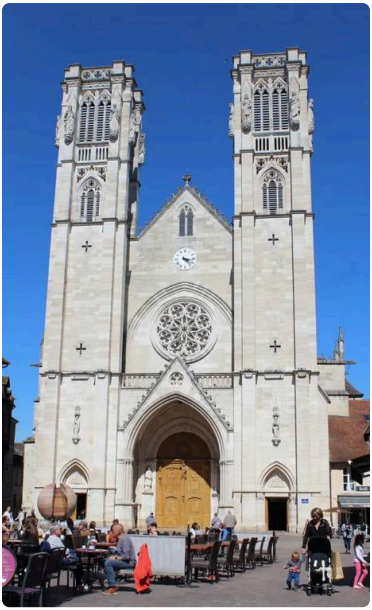
Near Chalon, on the tomb of the martyr Saint Marcellus, he founded an abbey where he arranged for continuous praise, day and night, on the model of Agaune, the monastery of Saint Maurice.

Gregory of Tours relates that during an epidemic, the king asked the people to gather in the churches, to fast and to pray, and that he himself set the example, more like a bishop than a king. He also reports that people believed in Guntram's power to heal: a mother is said to have cured her sick son by having him drink water in which she had soaked a few threads pulled from the king's cloak. Gregory says he does not doubt the story, but presents it as a popular belief.

Death and memory

Guntram died on March 28, 592, at Chalon-sur-Saône and was buried in the abbey of Saint-Marcel. He was venerated as a saint very early by the people and clergy of his kingdom.

His tomb was ransacked in the 16th century, during the French Wars of Religion, and his relics were largely scattered. His name nonetheless remains tied to the city of Chalon and to the memory of the Christian beginnings of Burgundy.



The cathedral of Saint-Vincent in Chalon-sur-Saône.

Who prays to Saint Guntram, and why?

Saint Guntram is not a spotless model. His holiness is that of a man of power who knew the violence of his time and turned, little by little, toward penance, peace and the service of the poor. He reminds us that conversion is possible at any age and in any situation.

He can be invoked for those who govern, for reconciliation within families, and for people who carry the weight of serious sins. His feast, which often falls in Lent, fits well with his figure of a penitent king.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Guntram, or follow the novena to Saint Guntram, from March 19 to 27, so that it ends on the eve of his feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Guntram in art

- **Crown and scepter**: he is shown as a king, sometimes in royal robes.

- **Beside his nephew**: medieval miniatures show him with Childebert II, recalling his role as protector and peacemaker.
- **Alms or a church**: signs of his charity to the poor and his foundation of the abbey of Saint-Marcel.

Where to pray to Saint Guntram

- **Saint-Marcel** (Saône-et-Loire, France): the church of Saint-Marcel, on the site of the abbey where he was buried.
- **Chalon-sur-Saône**: the cathedral of Saint-Vincent, in the heart of the city where he lived.
- **Mâcon**: the city of the council of 585, held during his reign.

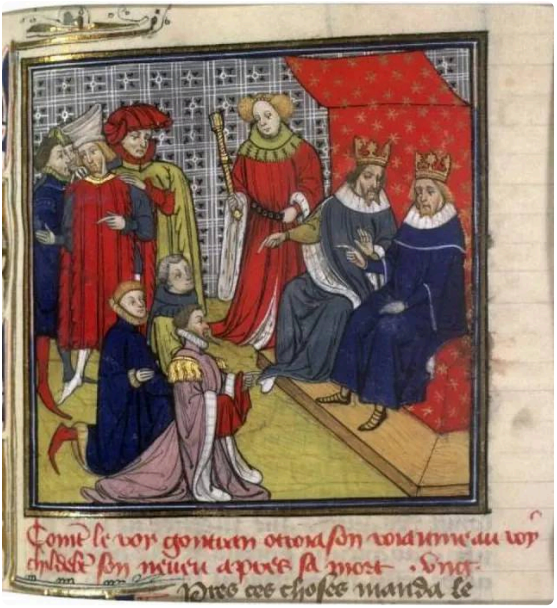
PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Guntram, Penitent King

No prayer composed by Saint Guntram has come down to us, and we attribute none to him. What we know of his faith comes mainly from his contemporary, Saint Gregory of Tours, who tells in his *History of the Franks* how this king, long caught up in the violence of his time, turned to penance and prayer. Below you will find this testimony, then an original prayer to Saint Guntram.

The testimony of Gregory of Tours

In book IX of the *History of the Franks* (chapter 21), written at the end of the 6th century, Gregory of Tours reports that during an epidemic King Guntram asked the people to gather in the churches to pray, ordered fasts and gave generous alms. The bishop adds that he behaved at that time less like a king than like a bishop caring for his people. Gregory's text is in the public domain; we summarize it here rather than quoting it word for word.



King Guntram in a medieval miniature.

Prayer to Saint Guntram, penitent king

Saint Guntram, you were a king in a time of violence and rivalry, and you turned to God through penance: pray for me.

You knew anger and harshness, then repentance: help me to recognize my sins without losing heart, and to believe that the mercy of God is greater than my sin.

You protected your nephews and sought peace among your own: I entrust to you divided families, those who govern and those responsible for others. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

You called your people to fasting, prayer and almsgiving: teach me to serve the poor and to seek first the Kingdom of God. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Guntram is celebrated on March 28, often during Lent, which suits his figure of a penitent king well. You can pray to him for a family reconciliation, for those who hold power, or to prepare for the sacrament of Reconciliation (confession). It is also a fitting prayer for anyone who feels weighed down by past mistakes and wants to begin again.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Guntram, and discover the life of Saint Guntram.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Guntram

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Guntram as told by Gregory of Tours. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on March 19, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph; it then ends on March 27. Since it often falls in Lent, it can accompany a time of conversion and preparation for Easter.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The suggested act helps you carry the prayer into your day, often during the season of Lent. This novena is especially suited to prayer for families in conflict, for leaders, and for one's own conversion.



Saint Guntram, church window or statue.

Day 1: Heir to a Christian family

Guntram was the grandson of Clovis and Saint Clotilde. He received the faith from his family, but also a history marked by violence. Each of us inherits a past we did not choose, with its light and its shadows.

Prayer: Lord, I give you the story of my family, with its graces and its wounds. Heal what needs to be healed.

Today: Pray for your ancestors and your departed loved ones.

Day 2: The weight of power

In 561 Guntram became king. He received immense power, in a world where his own brothers were his rivals. Power is a heavy burden, and it easily tempts those who hold it.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those who govern. Give them wisdom, justice and care for the weakest.

Today: Pray by name for the leaders of your town and your country, including those you did not vote for.

Day 3: Facing the violence

Gregory of Tours does not hide Guntram's fits of anger and cruel decisions. Holiness does not begin by forgetting the evil we have done, but by facing the truth about it.

Prayer: Lord, show me my harshness and my anger, and give me the grace of true repentance.

Today: Make an examination of conscience on the way you speak to others.

Day 4: The path of penance

Over the years, Guntram turned to fasting, prayer and almsgiving. He learned to convert, slowly. Conversion is rarely a single moment; it is a road we walk day after day.

Prayer: God of mercy, do not grow tired of me. Grant that I may return to you every day.

Today: Keep a small fast and give what you save to a charity.

Day 5: Protecting the young

Guntram adopted his nephew Childebert and protected the young Clothar, whose godfather he became. In a torn family, he took care of the children. Whatever his faults, he understood that the weakest members of his family needed someone to stand between them and the violence of the adults.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you children caught in the conflicts of adults. Give them protectors.

Today: Pray for a godchild, a nephew or niece, or a child you know.

Day 6: Seeking peace

Through the Treaty of Andelot in 587, Guntram tried to end the wars among his own. Making peace often means giving up part of what we believe is owed to us. Guntram chose agreement over endless revenge, and his kingdom knew a measure of calm because of it.

Prayer: Lord, make me a peacemaker in my family and among those around me.

Today: Make a gesture of reconciliation toward someone close to you: a call, a message or a kind word.

Day 7: Unceasing praise

Near Chalon, Guntram founded the abbey of Saint-Marcel, where monks sang the praise of God day and night. He wanted prayer never to cease in his kingdom. Even while he was busy with wars and treaties, he knew that the real strength of a people lies in its prayer.

Prayer: Lord, may my whole life become praise, in work as in rest.

Today: Pray a psalm of praise, for example Psalm 148.

Day 8: A king for the poor

During an epidemic, Guntram called his people to prayer and gave alms. He behaved, says Gregory of Tours, like a pastor. The man who had known so much violence learned to care for the sick and the poor.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the sick and the poor of my town. Show me how to serve them.

Today: Give alms or visit someone who is isolated or ill.

Day 9: Dying in hope

Guntram died on March 28, 592, after more than thirty years as king. The people soon venerated him as a saint. God's mercy had the last word. His life, with all its shadows, shows that God never stops calling us back, right up to the end.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Guntram, grant me a converted and peaceful heart. Amen.

Today: Go to confession, or prepare for it.

Closing prayer

Saint Guntram, penitent king and friend of the poor, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for those who govern, for divided families and for those who carry the weight of their sins. Obtain for us the grace of conversion and peace, and the trust that no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Guntram and the prayer to Saint Guntram.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Marcel, Burial Place of Saint Guntram

The Church of Saint-Marcel, a few miles east of Chalon-sur-Saône in Saône-et-Loire, stands on the site of the abbey founded by King Saint Guntram, where tradition places the martyrdom of Saint Marcellus. It was here that Guntram was buried in 592. Even though his tomb has disappeared, this place remains the main witness to his memory.

History of the Abbey of Saint-Marcel

According to tradition, Saint Marcellus, a Christian from Lyon, was martyred near Chalon in the 2nd century. A sanctuary rose over his grave. In the late 6th century, Guntram founded an important abbey there, where he established perpetual praise, on the model of the monastery of Agaunum. He was buried there at his death. In the Middle Ages, the abbey became a priory attached to Cluny; the philosopher Peter Abelard died there in 1142. During the Wars of Religion, in the 16th century, the church was plundered and the tombs were ransacked.

The present church

The church visited today is the former priory church, built mostly in the Romanesque period and remodeled afterward. It is protected as a historic monument and serves as a parish church. People come to pray there in the footsteps of Saint Marcellus and Saint Guntram, within the Diocese of Autun, Chalon, and Mâcon.

Praying at Saint-Marcel

Before your visit, you may wish to reread the life of Saint Guntram. In the church, a time of silence is a good moment to entrust an intention, for example for peace in a family or for those who govern. The prayer to Saint Guntram fits this moment well, especially during Lent, around his feast on March 28. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Guntram

- **Chalon-sur-Saône**: the city where he resided, with Saint-Vincent Cathedral, the former cathedral of the Diocese of Chalon.
- **Mâcon**: the city where the Council of 585 met during his reign.
- **Saint-Maurice** (Valais, Switzerland): the Abbey of Saint-Maurice d'Agaune, whose perpetual praise inspired that of Saint-Marcel.
- **Tours**: the city of Saint Gregory, who recounted his reign in the *History of the Franks*.

Practical information

Saint-Marcel is in the Chalon-sur-Saône urban area, a few miles from the city center, on the left bank of the Saône. Chalon is served by train on the Dijon-Lyon line. Check Mass times and church opening hours with the parish before you come.

Credits and sources

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