BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gwenael

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 3

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Gwenael

Breton monk of the 6th century, second abbot of Landévennec according to tradition.

Feast day	November 3
Born	early 6th century, Ergué-Gabéric (Finistère), according to tradition
Died	November 3, c. 590, Caudan, present-day Lanester (Morbihan), according to tradition
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Gwenael for Children, Young People and Vocations

Novena to Saint Gwenael

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Gwenael

Saint Gwenael (also spelled Gwenhael, Guénaël, Guénal, Guinal, Gwendal or Vendal) was a Breton monk of the 6th century. According to tradition, he was the favorite disciple of Saint Winwaloe (Guénolé) and succeeded him as second abbot of Landévennec, before dying around 590 in a monastery he had founded near present-day Lanester. His Life, written in the 9th century, is largely legendary, but his cult has remained alive throughout Brittany. His feast day is November 3.

Who was Saint Gwenael?

Gwenael belongs to the great age of the founding saints of Brittany, those monks who came from Britain or were born in Armorica and who planted monasteries and parishes throughout the country. What we know of him comes from a Life written in the 9th century, more than two centuries after his death. Present-day historians, such as Joseph-Claude Poulin, regard it as largely legendary. His story must therefore be read with caution.

His name, formed from the Breton words *gwenn* (white, pure, holy) and *hael* (generous, noble), means roughly "the generous saint". He has sometimes been confused with Saint Winwaloe, because the two names are similar. The spread of his cult across Brittany also suggests that several local saints with similar names may have merged into his figure.

Key dates in the life of Gwenael

- **Early 6th century**: Born, according to tradition, at Ergué-Gabéric, near Quimper, in Cornouaille.
- **At about eleven**: Saint Winwaloe meets him in a street of Quimper and obtains his parents' permission for him to come and study with him.

- **Following years**: He grows up and becomes a monk at the abbey of Landévennec.
- **c. 532**: On the death of Saint Winwaloe, he succeeds him as abbot of Landévennec, according to tradition.
- **Uncertain period**: The Life credits him with a stay in Ireland, where he is said to have restored several monasteries.
- **End of his life**: He founds a monastery at Caudan, on the territory of present-day Lanester (Morbihan).
- **November 3, c. 590**: Dies in this monastery, according to tradition.
- **Late 9th century**: His relics, first kept at Vannes, are carried to Corbeil to protect them from the Normans.

The child chosen by Winwaloe

The Life tells a touching scene. Saint Winwaloe, abbot of Landévennec, meets a boy of about eleven in a street of Quimper. He goes to see the boy's parents and asks them to entrust him to his care so that he can teach him. The parents agree, and young Gwenael follows the old abbot to Landévennec. A stained-glass window in Quimper cathedral shows this moment, when the child asks to follow the saint.

At the monastery, Gwenael learned prayer, Scripture and community life. The account presents him as the disciple whom Winwaloe chose to succeed him.

Abbot of Landévennec

According to tradition, Gwenael became the second abbot of Landévennec on the death of Winwaloe, around 532. He is said to have governed the abbey for many years, as a faithful continuer of his master's work. The lists of abbots of Landévennec, drawn up much later, do not all agree, however, on the order of Winwaloe's first successors.

The Life also credits him with a long journey to Ireland, where he is said to have restored several monasteries. This stay, hard to verify, fits into the many exchanges between the Celtic Churches of the period.

The foundation at Caudan

Toward the end of his life, Gwenael is said to have left Landévennec to found a new monastery on the banks of the Blavet, at Caudan, in an area that is now part of Lanester. A chapel of Saint-Guénaël still recalls his memory there. It is there that he is said to have died, around 590.

His relics were later moved to Vannes cathedral. At the end of the 9th century, when the Normans were ravaging Brittany, they were carried far from the coast, to Corbeil, south of Paris, like those of many other Breton saints.

Devotion and art

Saint Gwenael is celebrated on November 3. Many churches and chapels in Brittany are dedicated to him, under names that vary from place to place. The parish church of Ergué-Gabéric bears the name of Saint Guinal. The churches of Bolazec, Lescouët-Gouarec and Tréguidel are under his patronage, as are chapels at Lanester, Guiscriff, Gomené, Kerlouan and Douarnenez, where the chapel of Saint-Vendal has a holy well and a calvary.

Place names such as Locunel at Caudan, Saint-Guénal at Poullaouen or Lanvenaël at Plomeur probably preserve his name. The first name Gwenaël, now common in Brittany and beyond, comes from him. He is shown as a monk or abbot, with a crozier.

What can we learn from Saint Gwenael?

Behind the legend, Gwenael is the figure of the faithful disciple. Chosen as a child by a saint, he grew up in his school and took over from him with humility. He did not try to overshadow his master, but to carry on his work. You can pray to him for children and young people looking for their path, for those who must succeed someone they admire, for vocations and for Brittany.

Where to pray to Saint Gwenael

- **Ergué-Gabéric** (Finistère): the church of Saint-Guinal, in his birthplace according to tradition.
- **Lanester** (Morbihan): the chapel of Saint-Guénaël, on the site of his monastery.
- **Douarnenez** (Finistère): the chapel of Saint-Vendal, with its holy well.
- **Landévennec** (Finistère): the abbey of which he was second abbot according to tradition.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gwenael for Children, Young People and Vocations

Saint Gwenael, a Breton monk of the 6th century, was according to tradition chosen as a child by Saint Winwaloe, who took him to Landévennec and whose successor he became. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him children and young people, vocations and all who must take over from another.

Prayer to Saint Gwenael

Saint Gwenael,
child of Cornouaille,
you followed Saint Winwaloe
when he called you in a street of Quimper,
and you grew up in the school of prayer.

Watch over the children and young people of our families:
may they meet witnesses of God on their way,
and have hearts free enough to follow them.
Raise up among them vocations
to serve the Church.

You who took over from your master with humility,
help those who receive a charge after another
to serve without pride and without fear.
Bless Brittany, its chapels and its families.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Gwenael

- On his feast day, November 3, or at a pardon in one of his chapels.
- For children and young people, especially those who bear his name.
- For vocations to the priesthood and religious life.
- When you take over a responsibility from someone else.
- For Brittany and for those far from it.

A short invocation

> *Saint Gwenael, faithful disciple,*
> *keep our children on the path of God.*
> *Pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Gwenael from October 26 to November 3, and read the life of Saint Gwenael.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gwenael

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It draws on the life of Saint Gwenael, a Breton monk of the 6th century, disciple and successor of Saint Winwaloe at Landévennec according to tradition. To finish it on his feast day, November 3, begin on October 26. 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 Gwenael, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come from a Life written in the 9th century, which mixes history and legend.

Day 1: A name of goodness

The name Gwenael joins two Breton words: purity and generosity. Before he was a saint, he received a name that was like a calling.

Prayer: Lord, you call me by my name. Help me to become what you have willed for me.

Act of the day: Pray to your patron saint and for those who gave you your name.

Day 2: A meeting in the street

According to tradition, Saint Winwaloe met young Gwenael in a street of Quimper. A simple meeting changed a whole life.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to the meetings you place on my path, and make me a witness for those I meet.

Act of the day: Take the time to really listen to someone you meet today.

Day 3: Parents who entrust

Gwenael's parents agreed to entrust their son to Winwaloe. They gave up keeping him close so that he could grow near God.

Prayer: Lord, bless parents. Give them the trust to let their children grow according to your call.

Act of the day: Pray for the parents of a young person who is answering a vocation.

Day 4: In the school of a saint

At Landévennec, Gwenael learned prayer, Scripture and fraternal life with his master. He let himself be formed patiently.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who taught me to know you. Give me a disciple's heart.

Act of the day: Read and meditate on a passage of the Gospel.

Day 5: Taking over

On Winwaloe's death, Gwenael became abbot of Landévennec. He carried on his master's work without trying to overshadow it.

Prayer: Lord, when I receive a charge after someone else, give me humility and respect for what was done before me.

Act of the day: Thank someone who handed a responsibility on to you.

Day 6: Beyond the seas

The Life tells that Gwenael went to Ireland to restore monasteries. The Breton and Irish Churches had many exchanges at that time.

Prayer: Lord, bless missionaries and all who go far away to serve the Gospel.

Act of the day: Pray for a missionary or support a missionary work.

Day 7: Founding again

Toward the end of his life, Gwenael founded a new monastery near the Blavet, at Caudan. Even in old age, he remained ready to begin something for God.

Prayer: Lord, keep me available at every age. Never let me say it is too late to serve you.

Act of the day: Visit or call an elderly person.

Day 8: Chapels throughout the land

From Ergué-Gabéric to Lanester, from Douarnenez to Kerlouan, churches and chapels bear his name. Bretons have prayed to him from generation to generation.

Prayer: Lord, bless the chapels of our countryside and those who care for them. May they remain places of prayer.

Act of the day: Step into a church or chapel and pray there for a few minutes.

Day 9: A life fulfilled

According to tradition, Gwenael died around 590 in his monastery, after a long life of prayer and service. His relics were later venerated at Vannes and then at Corbeil.

Prayer: Lord, grant me a faithful life and a peaceful death. Through the intercession of Saint Gwenael, 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.

Living the novena with Saint Gwenael

Saint Gwenael is a saint of faithfulness and of handing on. During these nine days, you can carry children and young people, vocations, those taking on a new responsibility, and Brittany. If you can, visit one of the chapels dedicated to him.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Gwenael,*
> *disciple of Saint Winwaloe and monk of Brittany,*
> *you followed the call you received as a child*
> *and served God to the end.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Keep our children on the path of faith*
> *and make me faithful in my turn.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com