BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gwinear

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: December 14

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IN BRIEF

Saint Gwinear

Irish prince, hermit and martyr in Brittany in the 5th century according to tradition, patron of Pluvigner.

Feast day	December 14, March 23
Born	4th century, Ireland
Died	c. 455, Armorica (Brittany), according to Breton tradition
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	Pluvigner

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Gwinear for Exiles and Persecuted Christians

Novena to Saint Gwinear

Church of Saint-Guigner, Pluvigner

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Gwinear

Saint Gwinear, known in Brittany as Éguiner or Guigner, and also as Fingar, was a martyr of the 5th century, honored in Brittany and in Cornwall. According to legend, this son of an Irish king, driven out for embracing the Christian faith, came to live as a hermit in Armorica with companions, before being put to death with them around 455. He is the patron saint of Pluvigner, in the Morbihan. His feast is kept on December 14; some calendars give March 23.

Who was Saint Gwinear?

Gwinear belongs to the great company of saints who came from the British Isles in the 5th and 6th centuries and whose memory is written into the place names of Brittany. Pluvigner, "the parish of Guigner", as well as Loc-Éguiner and Loc-Eguiner-Saint-Thégonnec, in Finistère, bear his name. The accounts of his life are late and do not agree with one another: they do not always give the same places or the same dates. They must therefore be read as pious legends, which keep the memory of an Irish missionary who died for his faith, rather than as a precise biography.

Key dates in the life of Gwinear

- **4th century**: Born in Ireland, into a royal family according to legend.
- **Early 5th century**: Having become a Christian, he is driven out by his father, who remained a pagan.
- **According to tradition**: He is counted among the disciples of Saint Patrick.
- **5th century**: He sails for Brittany, where he is warmly welcomed.

- **Shortly after**: He returns to Ireland to invite other Christians to follow him, then comes back with them.
- **Same period**: He lives as a hermit with his companions; tradition places his hermitage at Pluvigner.
- **c. 455**: He is put to death with his companions on the orders of a prince called Theodoric.
- **After his death**: His relics are said to have been brought to Pluvigner, which becomes the center of his cult.

The prince driven out for his faith

The legend says that Gwinear was the son of a king of Ireland. Having received baptism, he was rejected by his father, who clung to the old gods, and had to leave his country. He set sail for Armorica, the future Brittany. The welcome he received there was so warm that he decided to return to Ireland to persuade other Christians to come and settle with him in this hospitable land. Tradition makes him and his companions disciples of Saint Patrick, the apostle of Ireland.

Hermit and martyr

Back in Armorica, Gwinear and his companions lived as hermits, in prayer and penance. According to the tradition of Pluvigner, he built his hermitage within the parish; a window in the church shows him landing on the banks of the Loch with his companions, then settling at the place called Le Moustoir. But their presence troubled a local prince, called Theodoric in the accounts. Around 455, he had them put to death. Gwinear has been honored ever since as a martyr.

The tradition of Cornwall, where a parish bears the name of Gwinear, also tells of his martyrdom, but places these events on the other side of the Channel. Such differences are common for the saints of the early centuries, whose cult

traveled with monks and sailors between Ireland, Britain and Brittany.

Devotion and the pardon of Pluvigner

Saint Gwinear is celebrated on December 14; some calendars commemorate him on March 23. Pluvigner, of which he is the patron, has dedicated its parish church to him, the church of Saint-Guigner, built in the 16th century, as well as a monumental fountain dating from 1526. Every year in spring, the parish celebrates its patron saint with a pardon (a traditional Breton religious festival), together with the feast of the Banielo, that is, of the banner. The church's 20th-century windows tell of his arrival and settlement in the area.

What can we learn from Saint Gwinear?

Gwinear paid dearly for his baptism: rejected by his father, exiled, then put to death. Yet his story is first of all that of a man who, having found a welcoming land, wanted others to share it. He reminds us that faith is meant to be shared and that hospitality is a work of mercy. You can pray to him for those who suffer because of their conversion, for exiles, for persecuted Christians, and for Brittany.

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

Where to pray to Saint Gwinear

- **Pluvigner** (Morbihan): the church of Saint-Guigner and its fountain, center of his cult and of his pardon.
- **Loc-Éguiner** and **Loc-Eguiner-Saint-Thégonnec** (Finistère): two villages that bear his name.
- **Gwinear** (Cornwall, England): the parish that keeps his memory across the Channel.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gwinear for Exiles and Persecuted Christians

Saint Gwinear, called Éguiner or Guigner in Brittany, was an Irish prince driven out for his faith, who lived as a hermit in Brittany and died a martyr there around 455, according to tradition. He is the patron of Pluvigner. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him exiles, persecuted Christians and those who suffer because of their faith.

Prayer to Saint Gwinear

Saint Gwinear,
son of a king who became poor for Christ,
you lost everything to keep the faith of your baptism.
Help me to prefer Jesus to all things,
even when it costs me.

Welcomed in the land of Brittany,
you wanted to lead your brothers there.
Teach me to share the joy of believing
and to open my door to the stranger.

Martyr with your companions,
support persecuted Christians,
console those in exile,
and watch over the parish of Pluvigner
and over all Brittany.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Gwinear

- On his feast day, December 14, or at the pardon of Pluvigner.
- For people rejected by their families because of their faith.
- For exiles, migrants and those who welcome them.
- For persecuted Christians around the world.
- For Brittany and for the parishes that bear his name.

A short invocation

> *Saint Gwinear, faithful witness unto martyrdom,*
> *strengthen our faith.*
> *Pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Gwinear from December 6 to 14, and read the life of Saint Gwinear.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gwinear

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Gwinear, called Éguiner or Guigner in Brittany, an Irish prince, hermit and martyr, patron of Pluvigner. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, December 14, begin on December 6. 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 Gwinear, pray for us." The small act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from the legend, whose versions differ.

Day 1: A king's son

Gwinear was, according to legend, the son of a king of Ireland. He could have lived in wealth and honor.

Prayer: Lord, free my heart from honors and riches, so that you may be my only treasure.

Act of the day: Give something to someone in need.

Day 2: Choosing baptism

Gwinear received the Christian faith. This choice would turn his whole life upside down.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gift of my baptism. Help me to live it every day.

Act of the day: Renew your baptismal promises by reciting the Creed.

Day 3: Rejected by his father

His father, who remained a pagan, drove him out. Some forms of faithfulness cost very dear ties.

Prayer: Lord, console those whose faith separates them from their loved ones, and heal divided families.

Act of the day: Pray for a member of your family who is far from God or from you.

Day 4: Setting out to sea

Gwinear set sail for Armorica, without knowing what awaited him. He trusted in God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to move forward with trust, even into the unknown.

Act of the day: Entrust to God a worry about the future.

Day 5: A welcoming land

In Brittany, Gwinear was received with kindness. The hospitality of the Bretons gave him a home again.

Prayer: Lord, make me welcoming toward the stranger, as you have welcomed me.

Act of the day: Make a gesture of welcome toward someone new in your neighborhood or parish.

Day 6: Going back for his brothers

Gwinear returned to Ireland to invite other Christians to join him. Good news is not kept to oneself.

Prayer: Lord, give me the desire to share the joy of faith.

Act of the day: Invite someone to Mass or to a time of prayer.

Day 7: The life of a hermit

With his companions, Gwinear lived as a hermit. Prayer, penance and brotherhood were their rule of life.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray in silence and to live as a brother.

Act of the day: Spend ten minutes in silence before God.

Day 8: Martyrs together

Around 455, Gwinear and his companions were put to death on the orders of a prince. They bore witness to the end.

Prayer: Lord, support Christians who are persecuted today, and give them strength and peace.

Act of the day: Pray for a country where Christians are persecuted.

Day 9: Patron of Pluvigner

Fifteen centuries later, Pluvigner still bears his name and celebrates his pardon. The seed of the martyr has borne fruit.

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

Act of the day: Attend Mass, or pray for your parish.

Living the novena with Saint Gwinear

Gwinear teaches us that faith can cost a great deal, but that it makes us generous. During these nine days, you can carry exiles, converts rejected by their families, persecuted Christians and Brittany. If you can, go to Pluvigner, to his church and his fountain.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Gwinear,*
> *exiled prince and martyr of Christ,*
> *you found in Brittany a land of welcome*
> *and gave your life there.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you,*
> *and obtain for me a courageous faith.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Guigner, Pluvigner

The church of Saint-Guigner stands in the heart of Pluvigner, in the Morbihan, about twenty kilometers northwest of Vannes. It is dedicated to Saint Gwinear, called Guigner here, the patron of the parish and of the town, whose name means "the parish of Guigner". According to tradition, this Irish prince who became a hermit lived in the area with his companions, and his relics were brought here after his martyrdom, around 455.

A 16th-century church enlarged several times

The present church was built in the 16th century. Its south door, opening into the nave, has been listed as a historic monument since 1925. The tower and belfry date from 1781 and were restored in the 19th century. In 1841, lightning damaged the roof timbers and the sacristy, which were then repaired. The following year, in 1842, the transept arms were added, giving the building its Latin-cross plan.

The windows of Saint Gwinear

The church has had stained glass since the 16th century. Some elements of the old main window of the chevet, with colorful plant motifs, have been reused in the oculi of the transept arms and in the last windows of the nave. The 20th-century windows are the work of the Rennes workshop of the brothers Paul and André Rault. They tell the story of the saints honored by the parish: a Crucifixion at the chevet, the vocation of Saint Gwenael and the preaching of Saint Goal in the choir, and the piety and charity of the penitent Pierre de Kériolet in the transept. In the nave, you can follow Saint Gwinear and his companions landing on the banks of the Loch, then settling at Le Moustoir.

The fountain of Saint-Guigner

Close to the church stands the large fountain of Saint-Guigner, built in 1526 and joined to a wash house. Like many Breton devotional fountains, it is linked to the cult of the patron saint and is part of the pilgrims' route.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Gwinear. Before the windows of the nave, entrust to him exiles and persecuted Christians, then say the prayer to Saint Gwinear. The high point of the year is the parish pardon, in spring, with the feast of the Banielo, the banner. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Pluvigner is in the Morbihan, about 23 km northwest of Vannes and 27 km east of Lorient, and is easily reached by car. The church is a parish place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested, especially during services. Mass times and the exact date of the pardon vary from year to year: check with the parish or the town hall of Pluvigner before you come.

Credits and sources

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