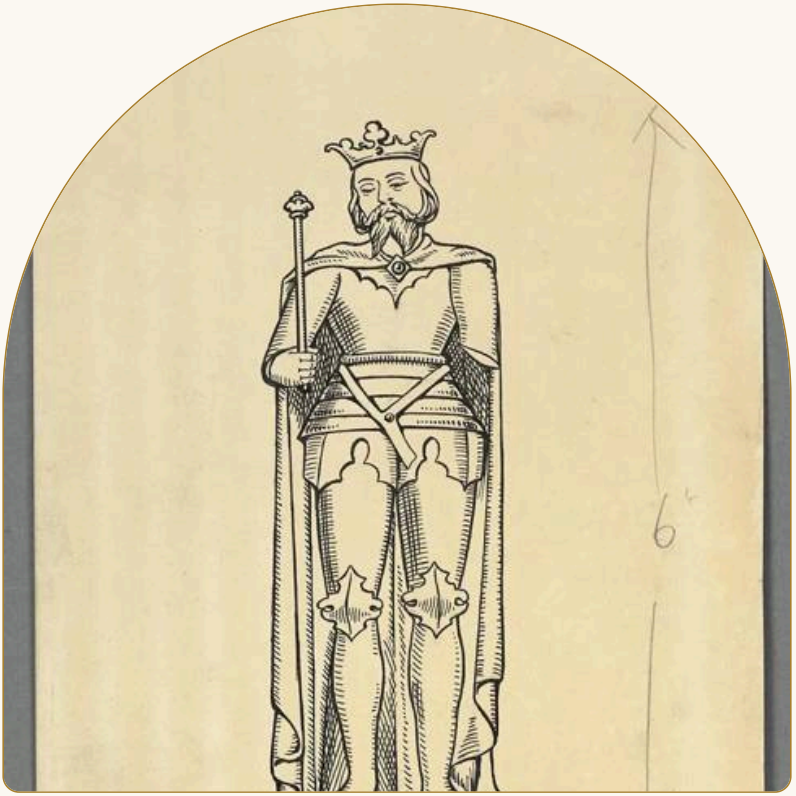


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Gwynllyw

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 29

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IN BRIEF

Saint Gwynllyw

Welsh king of Glywysing, father of Saint Cadoc, who became a hermit at Newport in the 6th century.

Feast day	March 29
Born	late 5th century, kingdom of Glywysing (south Wales)
Died	March 29, c. 500-523, Stow Hill, Newport (Wales)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Gwynllyw for a Change of Heart

Novena to Saint Gwynllyw

Credits and sources

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LIFE

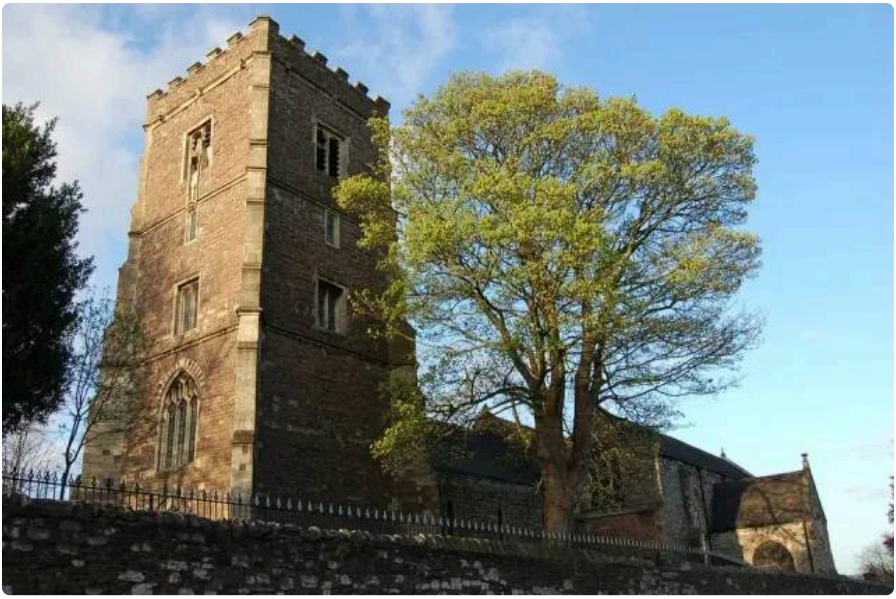
Saint Gwynllyw

Saint Gwynllyw, also called Gundleus or Woolos, was a king in south Wales who lived in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. A feared warrior, he was converted through the influence of his son, Saint Cadoc, gave up power and ended his life as a hermit on a hill above the River Usk, where Newport's cathedral stands today. His feast day is March 29, which he shares with his wife, Saint Gwladys.

Who was Saint Gwynllyw?

Gwynllyw is one of those Welsh kings of the early Middle Ages who, after a life of fighting, chose prayer and penance. He was the son of Glywys, the ruler who gave his name to the kingdom of Glywysing, in what is now southeast Wales. His nickname, *Milwr*, means "the warrior." The region he governed still bears his name: Gwynllwg, in English Wentloog, between Cardiff and Newport.

What we know of him comes mostly from two late texts: the Life of Saint Cadoc, written by Lifris toward the end of the 11th century, and a Life of Saint Gwynllyw composed in the 12th century. These accounts mix old memories, legends and literary themes. They should be read as a people's memory of a penitent king rather than as an exact biography.



St Woolos Cathedral in Newport, on the site of Saint Gwynllyw's hermitage.

Key dates

- **Late 5th century**: Born into the royal family of Glywysing, son of King Glywys.
- **On his father's death**: The kingdom is divided among the sons of Glywys; Gwynllyw, the eldest, receives the region that will bear his name, Gwynllwg.
- **Toward the end of the 5th century**: Marries Gwladys, daughter of King Brychan of Brycheiniog. According to the Life of Saint Cadoc, he carried her off against her father's will.
- **Soon after**: Birth of their eldest son Cadoc, future abbot of Llancarfan and one of the great saints of Wales.
- **Later in life**: On Cadoc's advice, he gives up violence and power; guided by a dream, he settles as a hermit on Stow Hill, in Newport.

- **March 29, c. 500-523**: Dies in his hermitage, attended according to tradition by his son Cadoc and by Saint Dubricius.
- **9th century**: The church built over his tomb is rebuilt in stone, a sign of the importance of his cult.

A warrior king

Tradition remembers Gwynllyw as a rough and violent chieftain. He is said to have fought the Irish settled in west Wales and the Saxons coming from the east. Some historians think he may have taken part in the Battle of Mount Badon, mentioned by Saint Gildas, which gave the Britons a period of relative peace.

The Life of Saint Cadoc tells the story of his marriage in dramatic fashion. When King Brychan refused to give him his daughter Gwladys, Gwynllyw is said to have come with three hundred men and carried her off. Pursued by Brychan, he was rescued, the story goes, by King Arthur and his companions. This account is one of the oldest mentions of Arthur in a saint's life. The Life of Gwynllyw, on the other hand, presents a marriage made in peace. Scholars see the abduction mainly as a literary theme, common in the stories of that time.

A father converted by his son

Gwynllyw and Gwladys had several children, including Cadoc, who became a monk and founded the great monastery of Llancarfan. According to tradition, it was Cadoc who urged his father to leave his life of violence and the affairs of the world to do penance. Gwladys encouraged him too.

The Life of Gwynllyw tells that an angel appeared to him in a dream and spoke of a white ox with a black spot on its forehead. The next day, he found this animal on a hill overlooking the River Usk, today's Stow Hill, in Newport. He

understood that God was calling him there. He built a small wooden church and a hermitage on the spot.

A hermit's life on Stow Hill

With Gwladys, Gwynllyw led a life of prayer, fasting and penance. According to the story, they lived on plants and plunged into the cold waters of the Usk as a sign of repentance. A spring is said to have gushed out at the king's prayer. These words about his hermitage are attributed to him: "There is no retreat in the world as pleasant as this place where I live. Happy is this place, and happier still the one who dwells in it."

Later, the couple decided to live apart so as to give themselves entirely to prayer; Gwladys withdrew to a place not far away. This choice of leaving the throne for the hermitage is found in several Welsh saints of that period. Gwynllyw died on a March 29, in his hermitage. Tradition says that his son Cadoc and Saint Dubricius, bishop of Llandaff, gave him the last sacraments.

Devotion and art

After his death, the hermitage became a place of pilgrimage, and a church was built over his tomb. In the 9th century it was rebuilt in stone, something rare in Wales at the time. This is the origin of today's St Woolos Cathedral in Newport, the seat of the Anglican bishop of Monmouth. The name "Woolos" is an anglicized form of Gwynllyw.

Gwynllyw is one of the Welsh saints honored since the early Middle Ages, with an immemorial cult. The Catholic Church, like the Anglican and Orthodox Churches, celebrates him on March 29, often with Saint Gwladys. He is shown as a king who has laid down his crown for the life of a hermit, sometimes with the white ox of his dream.

What can we learn from Saint Gwynllyw?

Gwynllyw was not born a perfect saint. He was a man of power and violence who let himself be corrected by his own son. He shows that it is never too late to be converted, and that we can receive the faith from our children. You can pray to him for those who want to leave a life of violence, for fathers, and for those seeking inner peace after a turbulent life.

Where to pray to Saint Gwynllyw

- **Newport** (Wales): St Woolos Cathedral, on Stow Hill, built on the site of his hermitage and tomb.
- **Llancarfan** (Vale of Glamorgan): the village of the former monastery of his son, Saint Cadoc.
- **Gelligaer** (Caerphilly): the ruins of the chapel of Saint Gwladys, his wife.

To pray with him at home, you can use the prayer to Saint Gwynllyw or the novena to Saint Gwynllyw.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Gwynllyw for a Change of Heart

Saint Gwynllyw was a warrior king in south Wales. Urged on by his son Cadoc, he gave up violence and power and ended his life as a hermit on a hill above the River Usk, in Newport. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life; it is not an official liturgical text. It asks for the grace of conversion for all who want to change their lives.

Prayer to Saint Gwynllyw

Saint Gwynllyw,
you were a king and a warrior,
you knew the strength of arms and the pride of power.
But you listened to the voice of your son
and let God change your heart.

On the hill above the Usk,
you laid down your crown,
you chose prayer, fasting and silence,
and you found the peace the world could not give.

Pray for those who are prisoners of anger and violence,
for those who think it is too late to change,
for fathers who must learn from their children.
Obtain for us a humble heart,
able to admit its faults and to begin again.

Pray also for families,
that faith may be handed on in both directions,
from parents to children and from children to parents.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Gwynllyw

- On his feast day, March 29.
- When you want to break a habit of anger, harshness or violence.
- For a loved one who seems far from God and whom you want to entrust to him.
- For a father, or for reconciliation between parents and children.

- When you are looking for a place and a time of silence to return to what matters most.

A penitent's prayer

You can repeat this short prayer during the day:

> *Lord, disarm my heart.*
> *What I have built by force, teach me to place in your hands.*
> *Saint Gwynllyw, pray for me. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Gwynllyw from March 21 to 29, and read the life of Saint Gwynllyw.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Gwynllyw

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Gwynllyw, a 6th-century Welsh king who became a hermit in Newport. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, March 29, begin on March 21: it often falls during Lent, a season of conversion. You can also pray it at any time of the year, especially when you want to change your life.

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 Gwynllyw, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live out concretely what you pray.

Day 1: A man of power

Gwynllyw was the son of a king and became king in his turn. He had land, men and power. Power is not evil in itself, but it can lock the heart in pride.

Prayer: Lord, show me where I hold power, small or great, and teach me to live it as a service.

Today: Do a practical service for someone who depends on you.

Day 2: The warrior

He was called "the warrior." His life was made of battles. We too sometimes wage wars: rivalries, grudges, words that wound.

Prayer: Lord, disarm what is violent in me. Calm my anger and my resentments.

Today: Hold back a harsh word, and replace it with a word of peace.

Day 3: Marriage and family

Gwynllyw married Gwladys, daughter of King Brychan. Tradition remembers a stormy marriage. Yet from this couple a great saint was born, Cadoc, and both spouses ended their lives in prayer.

Prayer: Lord, bless couples and families. Make holiness grow where the beginnings were difficult.

Today: Pray by name for each member of your family.

Day 4: Listening to his son

It was Cadoc, his own son, who urged Gwynllyw to change his life. The king needed great humility to take a lesson from his child. God often speaks through those we least expect.

Prayer: Lord, make me able to listen to those who correct me, even if they are younger or less important than I am.

Today: Ask someone close to you what you could do better, and listen without justifying yourself.

Day 5: The dream of the white ox

According to his Life, an angel showed him in a dream a white ox marked with black, which he found the next day on the hill where he was to settle. God guides those who sincerely seek their path.

Prayer: Lord, show me the path you want for me, and give me the courage to take it.

Today: Take a moment of silence to ask God what he expects of you.

Day 6: Laying down the crown

Gwynllyw gave up power for a wooden hut. He did not lose his dignity: he found it in the poverty of a hermit. Jesus says: "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Prayer: Lord, help me let go of what I cling to too tightly, of whatever keeps me from following you.

Today: Give up a comfort or a pleasure today, and give its value to someone in need.

Day 7: Penance and prayer

On Stow Hill, Gwynllyw and Gwladys fasted, prayed and plunged into the cold water of the Usk as a sign of repentance. Penance is not a punishment: it is a way of telling God that we truly want to come back to him.

Prayer: Lord, I acknowledge my sins before you. Purify my heart and make me new.

Today: Prepare for or receive the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Day 8: A happy place

These words about his hermitage are attributed to Gwynllyw: "Happy is this place, and happier still the one who dwells in it." The man who had owned a kingdom found his joy on a simple hill, with God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to find joy in simple things and in your presence.

Today: Thank God for three simple things in your day.

Day 9: A death surrounded by love

Gwynllyw died on a March 29, in his hermitage. According to tradition, his son Cadoc and Saint Dubricius were with him and gave him the last sacraments. The warrior died in peace, reconciled with God.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to live and die in your peace. Through the intercession of Saint Gwynllyw, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for the dying, and for those who accompany them.

Living the novena with Saint Gwynllyw

Saint Gwynllyw is a precious companion for those who carry a heavy past. He does not ask that we have always been blameless: he shows that a hard heart can open, at any age. During these nine days, you can carry in prayer someone you would like to see change, but begin with yourself. Remember also to thank God for those, sometimes younger than you, who have helped you grow in faith.

Closing prayer

Saint Gwynllyw,
king who became a hermit, warrior who became a man of peace,
you listened to the voice of your son
and let God transform your life.
Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days.
Obtain for me a humble and peaceful heart,
the courage to change what must be changed,
and the joy of living in his presence.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

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