

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Henry II

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 13

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IN BRIEF

Saint Henry II

Holy Roman Emperor from 1002 to 1024, reformer of the Church and founder of the diocese of Bamberg.

Feast day	July 13
Born	973, Bavaria
Died	July 13, 1024, near Göttingen, Germany
Canonized	1146, by Pope Eugene III
Era	11th century
Patron saint of	Bamberg

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Henry II for Those Who Govern

Novena to Saint Henry II

Bamberg Cathedral and the Tomb of Saint Henry II

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Henry II

Saint Henry II was the last emperor of the Saxon (Ottonian) dynasty, ruling the Holy Roman Empire from 1002 until his death in 1024. An energetic prince, often at war, he was also a reformer of the Church, founder of the diocese of Bamberg and protector of monasteries. He rests with his wife, Saint Cunigunde, in Bamberg Cathedral. Canonized in 1146, he is the only German emperor recognized as a saint by Rome. His feast day is July 13.

Who was Saint Henry II?

Henry was born in 973 into the ducal family of Bavaria. His father, Henry the Quarrelsome, was a restless cousin of the Ottonian emperors; his mother, Gisela, was a daughter of the King of Burgundy. First intended for the clergy, young Henry was educated by Bishop Abraham of Freising and then at the cathedral school of Hildesheim. This education left a lasting mark on his piety and his knowledge of the Church. Yet he chose the lay state, succeeded his father as Duke of Bavaria in 995, and married Cunigunde of Luxembourg.

When his cousin, Emperor Otto III, died in January 1002, Henry seized the royal insignia and had himself elected King of Germany at Mainz, despite the opposition of other claimants. He spent his reign strengthening his authority, from Italy to the eastern borders of the Empire.



Bamberg Cathedral, at the heart of the diocese founded by Henry II.

Key dates

- **973**: Born in Bavaria, into the ducal family.
- **995**: Becomes Duke of Bavaria on his father's death.
- **June 7, 1002**: Elected King of Germany at Mainz.
- **May 15, 1004**: Crowned King of Italy at Pavia.
- **1007**: Founds the diocese of Bamberg.
- **February 14, 1014**: Crowned emperor in Rome by Pope Benedict VIII.
- **1018**: Peace of Bautzen with Bolesław, Duke of Poland.
- **1020**: The pope comes to Bamberg to consecrate a church in the new episcopal city.
- **August 1023**: Meets King Robert the Pious of France at Ivois.
- **July 13, 1024**: Dies near Göttingen; buried at Bamberg.

- **1146**: Canonized by Pope Eugene III.
- **1200**: Canonization of his wife, Cunigunde.

A ruler in a violent world

Henry's reign was anything but peaceful. He had to fight Arduin of Ivrea, who had proclaimed himself King of Italy, and wage a hard campaign in Lombardy. In the east, for nearly fifteen years, he fought Bolesław, Duke and later King of Poland, until the Peace of Bautzen in 1018; to do so, he did not hesitate to ally himself with peoples who were still pagan. In 1022 he led a great expedition to southern Italy to support the pope against Byzantine influence.

His holiness does not erase these realities of power. It shows rather in the way he understood his office: as a service rendered to God and to the Church. The chronicles also record that in 1006 he closed the last slave market of the Empire, at Mecklenburg.

Reformer of the Church and founder of Bamberg

Henry relied on the bishops to govern and took care that they were worthy men. He supported monastic renewal, encouraged clerical celibacy, and took part in 1022 in the Synod of Pavia, which furthered the reform of the Church. He was preparing a new council with the pope when death overtook him.

His most lasting work is Bamberg. In 1007, on lands that belonged to him personally, he founded a new diocese, endowed it richly and made it a center of culture and prayer. He had a cathedral built there and gathered precious manuscripts. Bamberg still bears the mark of its founder, whose tomb stands in the center of the cathedral.

An imperial couple united in faith

Henry associated Cunigunde with his government. Their marriage remained childless, and tradition saw in it a marriage lived in chastity by mutual choice. Historians are more cautious, since some sources suggest that Henry could not have children. What is certain is that the couple were venerated together: after Henry's canonization in 1146, Cunigunde was in turn declared a saint in 1200.

Today Saint Henry is celebrated on July 13, the day of his death in 1024; his feast was formerly kept on July 15. Saint Cunigunde is celebrated on March 3. In Bamberg the two founders are honored together, and their shared tomb in the cathedral draws visitors and pilgrims to pray before the founders of the city.

Why is Saint Henry II the patron saint of Bamberg?

Bamberg owes its existence as a diocese to Henry: he founded it, endowed it, built its cathedral and chose to be buried there. The city has honored him as its patron ever since, together with Saint Cunigunde.

Beyond Bamberg, Saint Henry shows that one can exercise power without forgetting God, even in a hard world. He was not a hermit with a crown, but a statesman who wanted a better-governed Church, worthy bishops and fervent monasteries. He is prayed to for political leaders, for married couples, especially those who have not been given children, and for all who must reconcile public responsibilities with Christian life. To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Henry II and the novena to Saint Henry II.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Henry II in art

- the **imperial crown**, often with scepter and orb;
- a **model of a church** in his hand, recalling his foundation of Bamberg Cathedral;

- frequently, **Saint Cunigunde** at his side.

Where to pray to Saint Henry II

- **Bamberg** (Bavaria, Germany): his tomb in the cathedral, shared with Saint Cunigunde and carved by Tilman Riemenschneider.
- **Basel** (Switzerland): the cathedral, whose facade bears Gothic statues of Henry, holding a model of a church, and of Cunigunde.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Henry II for Those Who Govern

Saint Henry II left no spiritual writings and no prayer handed down by tradition. The Church of Bamberg has celebrated him for centuries together with his wife, Saint Cunigunde. Below is an original prayer by Saintspedia that entrusts to him those who hold power and those who live the vocation of marriage.

Prayer to Saint Henry II for those who govern

> *Saint Henry, you who received the crown of the Empire and sought to serve Christ in that office, pray for those who govern today. Obtain for them integrity, a care for peace and the courage to refuse injustice.*
>
> *You who founded Bamberg so that God might be praised there, help us to build, wherever we live, places of prayer, culture and fellowship.*
>
> *You who wanted a Church more faithful to the Gospel, pray for our bishops, our priests and our religious communities.*
>
> *With Saint Cunigunde, your wife, watch over couples and families, especially those who have not been given children. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).*
>
> *Teach me to fulfill faithfully the duties of my state in life, never forgetting that Christ is the only King. Amen.*

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Henry II is celebrated on July 13, the day of his death in 1024; his feast was formerly kept on July 15. Saint Cunigunde, his wife, is celebrated on March 3. This prayer is also well suited to:

- election days, or the start of a new government or term of office;
- anyone who holds authority: a mayor, a manager, a school principal, a parish council member;
- married couples, on their anniversary or in a time of difficulty;
- couples who long for a child and have not received one;
- the founding of a new work, a parish project or a community.

For nine days of prayer with him, see the novena to Saint Henry II.

A short invocation

> *Saint Henry and Saint Cunigunde, faithful in power and united in faith, pray for those who govern and for all married couples.*

To learn more about him, read the life of Saint Henry II.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Henry II

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia that follows the life of Saint Henry II, from his education in Bavaria to his tomb in Bamberg. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on the eve of his feast on July 13, begin on July 4; it ends on July 12. You can also pray it at any time of year, for leaders, for your country or for your marriage.

Saint Henry was not a hermit but a ruler who lived in a world of wars, alliances and hard decisions. This novena does not hide that. It asks with him how to serve God faithfully in the midst of responsibilities, whatever their size: a country, a company, a parish, a family.

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, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. Married couples can pray it together, entrusting their home to Saint Henry and Saint Cunigunde. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.



Bamberg Cathedral, where Saint Henry II and Saint Cunigunde rest.

Day 1: Formed in faith

As a young man Henry was educated by Bishop Abraham of Freising and at the cathedral school of Hildesheim. That formation shaped his whole life, even when he chose to live as a layman and a prince.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who formed me in faith. Bless all teachers, catechists and schools.

Today: Read a page of the Catechism or of a spiritual book.

Day 2: Called to the lay state

Henry was first intended for the clergy, but he became duke, then king and emperor. Holiness is not reserved for priests and religious: it can be lived in the family, at work and in public life.

Prayer: Lord, help me to seek holiness in the place where you have put me, with the duties that are mine.

Today: Offer your daily work to God at the start of the day.

Day 3: The weight of power

When he became king in 1002, Henry inherited a vast and divided realm. Power brought him burdens, conflicts and hard choices. Those who govern need our prayer more than our criticism.

Prayer: Lord, give wisdom, integrity and courage to those who govern my country and my city.

Today: Pray by name for a leader, including one you disagree with.

Day 4: Seeking peace

Henry fought many wars, but he also made peace, as at Bautzen in 1018, and met the King of France to strengthen bonds between their realms. Peace is built by patient and sometimes humble effort.

Prayer: Lord, make me a peacemaker in my family, at work and in my neighborhood.

Today: Take a step to calm a tension around you.

Day 5: Freedom for the oppressed

The chronicles record that in 1006 Henry closed the last slave market of the Empire. Even in a hard age, a Christian ruler could act for human dignity.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for all victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. Free them and convert those who exploit them.

Today: Learn about or support an organization fighting human trafficking.

Day 6: Building for God

In 1007 Henry founded the diocese of Bamberg on his own lands and built a cathedral there. He used his wealth to create a lasting place of prayer and learning.

Prayer: Lord, help me use my goods and my talents to build up your Church and serve my neighbor.

Today: Make a gift to your parish or to a work of the Church.

Day 7: A Church to renew

Henry wanted worthy bishops, fervent monasteries and a Church more faithful to the Gospel. He took part in the Synod of Pavia and was preparing a council when he died.

Prayer: Lord, renew your Church. Bless our pope, our bishops, our priests and all consecrated men and women.

Today: Pray for a priest you know, and thank him if you can.

Day 8: A couple united in faith

Henry associated Cunigunde with his government, and the Church honors them together. Their marriage remained childless. Couples who live that same sorrow can find in them companions and intercessors.

Prayer: Lord, through Saint Henry and Saint Cunigunde, bless married couples. Console those who long for a child, and make every marriage fruitful in love.

Today: Do something kind for your spouse, or pray for a married couple you know.

Day 9: Christ the only King

Henry died in 1024 and was buried in his cathedral at Bamberg. The emperor laid down his crown before the King of kings. Every earthly power passes; only love remains.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, King of the universe, reign in my heart and in my life. Saint Henry, pray for us.

Today: Spend a moment in silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, or in prayer at home.

Closing prayer

> *God our Father, you gave Saint Henry the grace to serve you in the office of emperor and to build up your Church. Through his intercession and that of Saint Cunigunde, receive the intention I have carried for these nine days. Give wisdom to those who govern, peace to our nations, and faithful love to married couples. May I serve you in my own state in life, looking always to Christ, the only King. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Henry II each day, and read his full life.

PILGRIMAGE

Bamberg Cathedral and the Tomb of Saint Henry II

Bamberg Cathedral, in Bavaria, is the great shrine of Saint Henry II. The emperor rests there with his wife, Saint Kunigunde, in a sculpted tomb at the center of the building. It was he who founded the Diocese of Bamberg in 1007: to visit the cathedral is to enter the work he willed into being.

A cathedral born of an emperor's will

In founding the Diocese of Bamberg, Henry II wanted to create a center of prayer and culture in the heart of his lands. He had a first cathedral built and endowed it with many properties and manuscripts. He died in 1024 and was buried there, and Kunigunde joined him after her own death. The present building, with its four towers, was rebuilt in the 13th century, at the turning point between Romanesque and Gothic, after fires. The old town of Bamberg is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

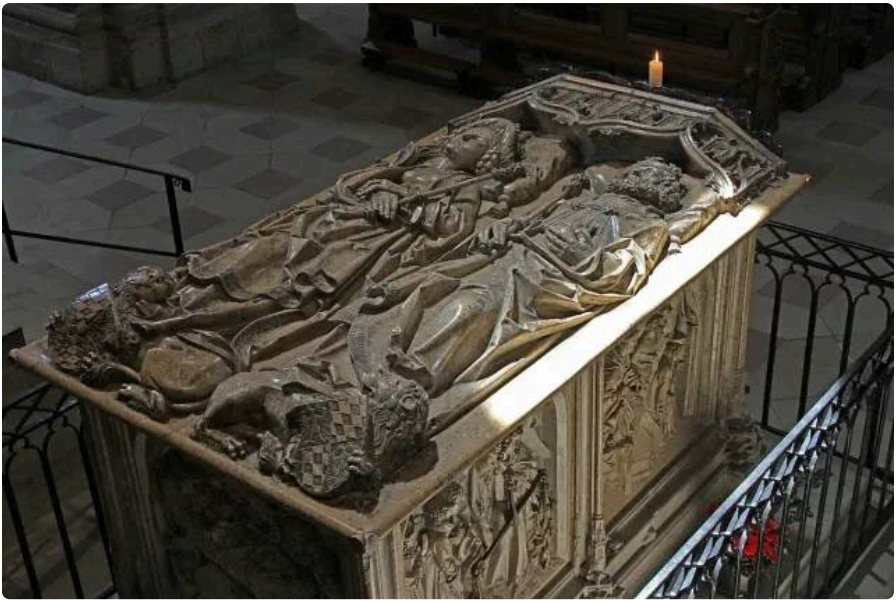


Bamberg Cathedral, founded by Saint Henry II.

The tomb of Henry and Kunigunde

The imperial tomb, of limestone, is the work of the sculptor Tilman Riemenschneider, in the early 16th century. On the lid lie the effigies of the couple. The sides tell, in bas-relief, episodes of their lives as tradition has handed them down, including the trial by fire that Kunigunde is said to have undergone to prove her innocence. These scenes belong to legend, but they speak of the veneration the people had for the imperial couple.

The cathedral also houses other famous treasures, such as the equestrian statue known as the "Bamberg Horseman," and the tomb of Pope Clement II, the only pope buried north of the Alps.



The imperial tomb sculpted by Tilman Riemenschneider.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you may wish to read the life of Saint Henry II. Before the tomb, you can entrust to God those who hold public responsibilities, as well as married couples, thinking of the union of Henry and Kunigunde. The prayer to Saint Henry II can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Henry II

- **Basel** (Switzerland): the cathedral, whose façade bears statues of Henry and Kunigunde.
- **Pavia** (Lombardy): the Basilica of San Michele Maggiore, where he was crowned King of Italy in 1004.
- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Basilica, where he was crowned emperor in 1014.

Practical information

The cathedral overlooks the old town of Bamberg, reachable on foot from the center. It remains a place of worship: visits may be suspended during services. Consult the official website of the cathedral or of the Archdiocese of Bamberg for opening hours and guided tours.

Credits and sources

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