BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Hernin

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Hernin

6th-century Breton hermit from Britain, patron of Locarn and Saint-Hernin.

Feast day	November 3
Born	early 6th century (date unknown), island of Britain
Died	May 1, 535 or 540, Locarn, then part of Duault (Côtes-d'Armor)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Locarn, Saint-Hernin, people suffering from migraines and paralysis (traditional invocation)

In this booklet

Life

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Hernin

Saint Hernin (sometimes spelled Thernin) was a 6th-century Breton hermit who came from Britain with the Breton emigrants. He lived and died in a hermitage in the heart of Brittany, on the spot where the parish of Locarn, in the Côtes-d'Armor, later grew up. His relics, kept in precious silver reliquaries, are carried every year at the pardon of Locarn. His feast is November 3 in the Catholic calendar, and he is honored at Locarn on the Sunday after May 1.

Who was Saint Hernin?

Hernin belongs to the host of hermit saints who, in the 5th and 6th centuries, left the island of Britain to settle in Armorica and found places of prayer there. The sources about him are scanty and late. Most of what is told of him comes from the Lives of the Saints of Armorican Brittany, published in the 17th century by the Dominican Albert Le Grand, who gathered local traditions. Hernin's name also appears in the cartulary of the abbey of Redon. His story should therefore be read as a pious tradition rather than a biography. His cult, however, is old, well attested and still alive.

Key dates in the life of Hernin

- **Early 6th century**: Born in the island of Britain; the exact date and place are unknown.
- **528**: According to Albert Le Grand, he crosses to Armorica with the Britons emigrating to the continent.
- **Shortly after**: He settles as a hermit on land of the parish of Duault, where Locarn will be born.
- **May 1, 535 or 540**: Dies in his hermitage; the local people bury him on the spot, under a large stone.

- **Later**: According to tradition, a count of Poher rediscovers his tomb during a hunt and has a church built there.
- **Late 14th or early 15th century**: The goldsmith Jean Dieu makes the silver reliquary bust of Saint Hernin.
- **November 18, 1859**: His relics are divided between Locarn and Saint-Hernin, in Finistère.
- **February 10, 1948**: The treasury of Locarn, with its reliquaries, is listed as a historic monument.

A hermit in the heart of Brittany

According to Albert Le Grand, Hernin arrived in Armorica in 528, at the time of the great Breton emigration. He looked for a secluded place and stopped in the parish of Duault, on the edge of moors and woods. The lord of the place, of the Quelen family, agreed to give him a piece of land, on condition that he marked its limits with a ditch, and in a single day. Hernin, the story says, simply walked along dragging his staff behind him: a ditch half a league around opened up in his path. This kind of story, common in the Lives of Breton saints, says in its own way that the hermit's land is given by God.

Hernin spent the rest of his life there, in prayer and poverty. He died in his hermitage on a May 1, in 535 according to Albert Le Grand or in 540 according to other sources. The local people buried him where he had lived and laid a large stone on his grave.

The stag, the count and the church

The memory of the hermitage had almost been lost when, according to tradition, a count of Poher, hunting a stag, chased the animal to this spot. The stag lay down on Hernin's grave. The hounds, coming near it, could neither advance nor retreat; the horses of the count and his men were struck with the same stillness. The count had the stag released, learned from the local people

that he stood on the tomb of Saint Hernin, and decided to build a church there. During the work, the story adds, a flock of birds built a dome over the grave.

Relics, pardon and holy wells

Saint Hernin is the patron of Locarn, whose church bears his name, and of Saint-Hernin, in Finistère. He is also found at Trevarn, in Saint-Urbain, at Dirinon, at the hamlet of Saint-Hernin in Ploumagoar and at Leshernin, in Séglien. The treasury of Locarn keeps two reliquaries devoted to him: a 15th-century arm reliquary and above all a silver bust from the late 14th or early 15th century, signed by the goldsmith Jean Dieu, probably from Tréguier. This bust is considered one of the finest examples of Breton goldsmithing of the late Middle Ages. An early 17th-century processional cross shows him as a bishop.

Every year, on the Sunday after May 1, the anniversary of his death, Locarn celebrates his pardon (a traditional Breton religious festival), and the reliquary bust is carried at the head of the procession. Two holy wells are dedicated to him, at Locarn and at Saint-Hernin. They were said to help the paralyzed, and people came to the one at Saint-Hernin on the day of the pardon to dip their heads three times in the water to be freed from migraines. Hernin is shown with a staff and a book.

What can we learn from Saint Hernin?

Saint Hernin founded neither an abbey nor a diocese. He simply prayed, for a long time, in a corner of land that people had forgotten. But God willed that his tomb should become a church, and that generations of Bretons should come there seeking healing and peace. He reminds us of the hidden fruitfulness of silent prayer. You can pray to him for the sick, especially those suffering from headaches or paralysis, for those seeking silence, and for the rural parishes of Brittany.

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

Where to pray to Saint Hernin

- **Locarn** (Côtes-d'Armor): the church of Saint-Hernin, the treasury and its reliquaries, the holy well, and the pardon on the Sunday after May 1.
- **Saint-Hernin** (Finistère): the parish church, which keeps part of his relics, and the holy well of Saint Hernin.
- **Dirinon** (Finistère) and **Trevarn**, in Saint-Urbain (Finistère): places that have him as patron.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Hernin for the Sick and Those Who Seek Silence

Saint Hernin, a hermit who came from Britain in the 6th century, prayed all his life in the silence of a hermitage, where Locarn stands today. The faithful came to his holy wells to ask for healing from paralysis and migraines. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him the sick, those who seek silence and the parishes of Brittany.

Prayer to Saint Hernin

Saint Hernin,
you left your homeland
to seek God in silence:
teach me to make room for prayer
in the noise of my days.

Your staff traced the bounds of your hermitage,
and your hidden life bore fruit
long after your death.
Help me to believe that nothing is lost
of what is offered to God in secret.

You who were called on at your holy wells,
look upon those who suffer in their bodies:
the sick, the paralyzed,
those whom pain keeps from thinking and sleeping.
Obtain for them relief and courage.
Watch over Locarn, over Saint-Hernin
and over all Brittany.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Hernin

- On his feast day, November 3, or at the pardon of Locarn, on the Sunday after May 1.
- For someone who suffers from migraines or persistent pain.
- For people who are paralyzed or have limited mobility.
- When you are looking for a time of silence and retreat.
- For small rural parishes and their people.

A short invocation

> *Saint Hernin, hermit of God, pray for the sick and keep us in peace. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Hernin from October 26 to November 3, or from April 23 to May 1 before the pardon, and read the life of Saint Hernin.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Hernin

This novena is an original composition inspired by the tradition of Saint Hernin, a 6th-century Breton hermit honored at Locarn. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, November 3, begin on October 26. You can also pray it from April 23 to May 1, the anniversary of his death, to prepare for the pardon of Locarn.

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 Hernin, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes come from the tradition gathered in the 17th century by Albert Le Grand, which mixes memories and wonders.

Day 1: Leaving one's homeland

Hernin left the island of Britain for Armorica, like many of his compatriots in the 6th century. He set out without knowing where God would lead him.

Prayer: Lord, give me the trust of Abraham, who set out without knowing where he was going.

Act of the day: Pray for those who have had to leave their country.

Day 2: Seeking a secluded place

Hernin stopped in a remote corner of the parish of Duault, far from towns. He sought silence to listen better to God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to keep silence so that I may hear you.

Act of the day: Turn off screens and music for a while today.

Day 3: A land received

The lord of the place gave Hernin a piece of land. According to the story, the saint's staff traced in one day the ditch that marked its bounds.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all I have received without deserving it. Teach me gratitude.

Act of the day: Thank someone who helped you settle in or begin something.

Day 4: The hidden life

Hernin lived for many years in his hermitage, unknown to the world. His holiness was known to God alone.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the need to be seen. May my life be hidden with Christ in you.

Act of the day: Do an act of kindness without anyone knowing.

Day 5: A peaceful death

Hernin died in his hermitage on a May 1. The local people buried him on the spot and laid a stone on his grave.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to die in your peace, surrounded by those I love.

Act of the day: Pray for an elderly or dying person.

Day 6: The stag on the grave

According to tradition, a stag pursued by a count lay down on Hernin's forgotten grave, and the hunters could not reach it. The saint's resting place became a refuge.

Prayer: Lord, be my refuge when I am pursued by fear or weariness.

Act of the day: Offer your protection or your listening ear to someone vulnerable.

Day 7: A church for God

The count had a church built over the tomb. The story adds that birds formed a dome over the grave. All creation honors the friends of God.

Prayer: Lord, bless our churches and those who care for them. Make them living houses of prayer.

Act of the day: Do a service for your parish.

Day 8: The water of the holy wells

At Locarn and at Saint-Hernin, holy wells bear his name. People came there to ask for healing from paralysis and migraines.

Prayer: Lord, source of living water, heal the sick and relieve those who suffer in their bodies.

Act of the day: Visit or call a sick person.

Day 9: The pardon of Locarn

Every year, the reliquary bust of Saint Hernin is carried in procession at Locarn. A whole parish walks behind its saint.

Prayer: Lord, make us walk together toward you. Through the intercession of Saint Hernin, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and, if you can, a Breton pardon.

Living the novena with Saint Hernin

Saint Hernin is a saint of silence. His hidden life, his humble death and the faithful devotion of a small parish show that God forgets nothing of what is offered to him. During these nine days, you can carry the sick, people living with chronic pain, those who seek God in solitude and the countryside of Brittany. If you can, visit Locarn or Saint-Hernin.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Hernin,*
> *hermit of Locarn,*
> *you sought God in silence*
> *and your grave became a house of prayer.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Relieve the sick*
> *and keep us in peace.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Locarn: Church and Treasury of Saint Hernin

Locarn is a small village in the heart of Brittany, in the Côtes-d'Armor, on the edge of Cornouaille. According to tradition, it was here that Saint Hernin, a hermit who came from Britain in the 6th century, lived, died and was buried. The parish church bears his name, and the village keeps a remarkable treasury of goldsmith's work, including the famous reliquary bust of the saint, carried every year at the pardon.

From the hermit's tomb to the parish

According to Albert Le Grand, Hernin settled in a secluded spot of the parish of Duault, where Locarn would later be born, and died there on a May 1, around 535. The local people buried him on the spot. Tradition tells that a count of Poher, having rediscovered the tomb during a hunt, had a church built there. Devotion to the saint has never ceased: in 1859, his relics were divided between Locarn and the parish of Saint-Hernin, in Finistère.

The treasury of Locarn

The treasury of Locarn brings together four pieces from the 14th to the 17th century, listed as historic monuments since 1948. Three of them are linked to Saint Hernin. The silver reliquary bust, from the late 14th or early 15th century, is signed by Jean Dieu, a goldsmith probably from Tréguier: forty-seven centimeters high, it is among the finest works of Breton goldsmithing of the late Middle Ages, and it has been shown in Paris at major exhibitions. The 15th-century arm reliquary, in partly gilded silver, lets the relic be seen through a small window. The processional cross, attributed to the Morlaix goldsmith

Guillaume Desboys, shows the apostles, Saint Michael, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Hernin as a bishop. A chalice of 1659, decorated with scenes from the life of the Virgin, completes the set.

Formerly kept in the presbytery, the treasury is now displayed at the heritage house (maison du patrimoine) of Locarn.

The pardon of Saint Hernin

Every year, on the Sunday after May 1, the anniversary of the saint's death, Locarn celebrates the pardon of Saint Hernin, a traditional Breton religious festival. The reliquary bust then leaves the treasury and leads the procession. This is the best time to discover the place and pray with the community. The holy well of Saint Hernin, at Locarn, was reputed to help the paralyzed.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Hernin. In the church or before the reliquaries, entrust to him the sick, those suffering from persistent pain and rural parishes, then say the prayer to Saint Hernin. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Hernin

- **Saint-Hernin** (Finistère): the parish church, which keeps part of his relics, and the holy well where people came to be cured of migraines.
- **Dirinon** and **Trevarn**, in Saint-Urbain (Finistère): places that have him as patron.
- **Ploumagoar** (Côtes-d'Armor) and **Séglien** (Morbihan): hamlets that bear his name.

Practical information

Locarn is in the Côtes-d'Armor, not far from Rostrenen and Carhaix, in a landscape of hills and gorges; it can be reached by car. The church is a place of prayer: modest dress and silence are requested. The opening hours of the church and the heritage house, as well as the exact date of the pardon, may vary: check with the town hall or the parish before you come.

Credits and sources

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