BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Ithamar of Rochester

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: June 10

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IN BRIEF

Saint Ithamar of Rochester

7th-century bishop of Rochester, the first bishop of Anglo-Saxon birth.

Feast day	June 10
Born	early 7th century, kingdom of Kent (England)
Died	between 655 and 664, Rochester (Kent)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Ithamar for Young Churches and Vocations

Novena to Saint Ithamar

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Ithamar of Rochester

Saint Ithamar was an Anglo-Saxon bishop of the 7th century, a native of Kent. Consecrated bishop of Rochester around 644, he was the first Anglo-Saxon to receive the office of bishop, after the missionaries who had come from Rome with Saint Augustine. He died between 655 and 664 and was buried at Rochester. His feast day is June 10.

Who was Saint Ithamar?

Ithamar belongs to the first generation of English Christians trained on the spot by the mission sent by Pope Gregory the Great in 597. Until him, the bishops of southern England were Italians or Franks. His elevation therefore marks a milestone: the Church born of the mission gradually becomes a local Church, with its own shepherds. What we know of him comes almost entirely from Bede the Venerable, who mentions him briefly in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, and from a collection of miracles written at Rochester in the 12th century.

Key dates in the life of Ithamar

- **Early 7th century**: Born in Kent; he is probably trained in the schools founded by the Gregorian mission.
- **October 10, 644**: Death of Saint Paulinus, bishop of Rochester.
- **c. 644**: Archbishop Honorius of Canterbury consecrates him bishop of Rochester; he is the first Anglo-Saxon raised to the episcopate.
- **March 26, 655**: At Canterbury, he consecrates Deusdedit, the first archbishop of Canterbury of Anglo-Saxon birth.
- **Between 655 and 664**: Dies; he is buried at Rochester.
- **1080s**: Under Bishop Gundulf, first translation of his relics.

- **Mid-12th century**: A monk of Rochester writes the *Miracles of Saint Ithamar*.

The first English bishop

Bede reports that after the death of Paulinus, the former bishop of York who had become bishop of Rochester, Archbishop Honorius consecrated Ithamar to succeed him. He states that Ithamar was of the people of Kent and that he equaled his predecessors in learning. This remark matters: it shows that half a century after Augustine's arrival, the missionaries' schools had trained clerics capable of governing a diocese. Rochester was then the second see of Kent, founded in 604 for Saint Justus.

A name taken from the Bible

Ithamar's birth name is unknown. The name he bears is that of a son of Aaron, in the Old Testament, and he probably took it when he became bishop. Anglo-Saxons who changed their names usually chose that of a great saint from the history of the Church; names taken from the Old Testament were rather the custom of Christians in Ireland and Celtic Britain. Some historians see in this a sign of Irish influence on the young English Church, about which Bede says nothing.

His death and cult

In 655, Ithamar consecrated at Canterbury the new archbishop Deusdedit, also an Anglo-Saxon. He died a few years later, before 664, and was buried at Rochester. His cult developed above all after the Norman Conquest. In the mid-12th century, an anonymous monk of Rochester gathered nineteen miracles attributed to his intercession. This text tells of two translations of his relics: the first under Bishop Gundulf, in the 1080s, the second under a Bishop

John, in the 12th century, who is said to have been cured of blindness by the saint. Ithamar is celebrated on June 10. The sources do not say what became of his relics after the Reformation.

What can we learn from Saint Ithamar?

Ithamar is the fruit of a patient mission. Monks from Rome sowed the Gospel in Kent, opened schools and trained young people; fifty years later, one of them became bishop of his own people. You can pray to him for young Churches, for seminaries and houses of formation, and for all who prepare, without seeing it, the next generation.

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

Where to pray to Saint Ithamar

- **Rochester** (Kent, England): the cathedral, on the site of the church where he was bishop and was buried. It now belongs to the Church of England.
- **Canterbury** (Kent): the city where he consecrated Archbishop Deusdedit and where the first archbishops rest.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Ithamar for Young Churches and Vocations

Saint Ithamar, bishop of Rochester in the 7th century, was the first Anglo-Saxon to receive the office of bishop, a fruit of the mission sent by Saint Gregory the Great. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him young Churches, seminarians and those who hand on the faith.

Prayer to Saint Ithamar

Saint Ithamar,
son of the people of Kent,
you received the faith from missionaries who came from afar
and you became shepherd of your own people.
Bless those who proclaim the Gospel
and those who receive it for the first time.

Watch over seminaries and schools of faith,
over young people preparing to serve the Church,
and over those who patiently form them.
Obtain for us the grace to remain faithful to what we have received,
and to hand it on in our turn.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Ithamar

- On his feast day, June 10.
- For seminarians and priestly vocations.

- For Churches recently born of mission.
- For teachers and catechists.
- For the unity of Christians in England.

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Ithamar from June 2 to 10, and read the life of Saint Ithamar.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Ithamar

This novena meditates on the life of Saint Ithamar, the first Anglo-Saxon bishop, bishop of Rochester in the 7th century. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, June 10, begin on June 2.

How to pray this novena

Each day, make 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 Ithamar, pray for us."

Day 1: The seed of mission

In 597, monks sent by Pope Gregory arrived in Kent. Ithamar would be born in this land discovering the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who brought us the faith.

Act of the day: Pray for today's missionaries.

Day 2: At school

Ithamar was probably trained in the missionaries' schools. Faith also grows through study.

Prayer: Lord, bless schools and teachers who hand on the faith.

Act of the day: Spend some time deepening your faith through reading.

Day 3: Learning at the service of others

Bede says he equaled his predecessors in learning. This knowledge was not for himself, but for his people.

Prayer: Lord, may my talents serve others.

Act of the day: Put one of your skills at someone's service.

Day 4: A new name

On becoming bishop, he took the biblical name Ithamar. To receive a mission is to become someone new.

Prayer: Lord, renew me for the mission you entrust to me.

Act of the day: Reread your baptismal promises.

Day 5: Shepherd of his people

The first Anglo-Saxon bishop, he guided the faithful of Rochester. The Church became the concern of a whole people.

Prayer: Lord, give every people shepherds after your own heart.

Act of the day: Pray for vocations in your diocese.

Day 6: Handing on in turn

In 655, he consecrated Deusdedit archbishop of Canterbury. The one who has received hands on.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to hand on what I have received from you.

Act of the day: Share your faith with a child or a young person.

Day 7: A quiet life

The sources say little about him. Many saints serve without making noise.

Prayer: Lord, let me carry out my task faithfully, even when it is hidden.

Act of the day: Do something useful without seeking to be noticed.

Day 8: The miracles of Rochester

Centuries after his death, the faithful of Rochester confided their troubles to Saint Ithamar. A bishop, according to the account, recovered his sight there.

Prayer: Lord, come to the aid of the sick, and open the eyes of our hearts.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who is ill or visually impaired.

Day 9: The communion of saints

Ithamar rests at Rochester, but he continues to intercede for the Church. The saints walk with us.

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

Act of the day: Attend Mass and pray for Christian unity.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Ithamar,*
> *first English shepherd of the people of Kent,*
> *present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you,*
> *and keep us faithful to the faith we have received.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Ithamar, and read the life of Saint Ithamar.

Credits and sources

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