

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Judicael

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: December 17

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IN BRIEF

Saint Judicael

Breton king of Domnonea in the 7th century, who retired to the monastery of Gael beside Saint Meen.

Feast day	December 17
Born	c. 590, Domnonea (northern Brittany)
Died	December 16 or 17, between 647 and 652, monastery of Gael (today Saint-Meen-le-Grand, Ille-et-Vilaine, France)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Judicael

Abbey Church of Saint-Meen-le-Grand

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Judicael

Saint Judicael was a Breton king of the seventh century. Born around 590, the son of King Judael, he ruled Domnonea, the kingdom of northern Brittany, made peace with the Frankish king Dagobert I, then left the throne to end his life as a monk at the monastery of Gael, founded by Saint Meen. He died between 647 and 652. His feast day is December 17.

Who was Saint Judicael?

Judicael is one of the few figures of Brittany in his time to be mentioned by contemporary Frankish sources: the chronicle known as Fredegar's and the Life of Saint Eligius written by Saint Ouen. They describe him as a very religious man who feared God. The rest of his biography comes mainly from a Life written in the eleventh century by the monk Ingomar, and from later traditions, so several dates remain approximate. He belongs to a family of saints: his brother Saint Judoc (Josse) and, according to tradition, Saint Winnoc are also honored by the Church.

Key dates

- **c. 590**: Born, eldest son of King Judael of Domnonea and Queen Pritelle.
- **c. 605**: At his father's death, one of his brothers, Haeloc, seizes power. Judicael withdraws to the monastery of Gael, beside Saint Meen.
- **c. 615**: After Haeloc's death, he leaves the monastery to rule Domnonea.
- **c. 630**: He marries Morone, according to tradition.
- **635-636**: He meets Dagobert I at Clichy, concludes peace with the Franks and prefers to lodge with the devout Ouen, the future bishop of Rouen.
- **c. 642**: He gives up the throne and withdraws once more to the monastery of Gael.

- **December 16 or 17, between 647 and 652**: Dies at the monastery and is buried beside his master Saint Meen.

A prince between the throne and the cloister

Judicael was the eldest of a very large princely family. At his father's death, around 605, he was the rightful heir. But one of his younger brothers, Haeloc, urged on by his guardian, seized the kingdom. Rather than launch a war against his brother, Judicael withdrew to the monastery of Saint John at Gael, which Saint Meen had just founded in the heart of Brittany. There he learned prayer and life in community.

Haeloc died around 615. The Bretons then called Judicael back, and he left the monastery to govern Domnonea. According to Breton sources, he reigned for some twenty years with authority and wisdom.

Peace with Dagobert

In 635-636, some Bretons attacked the borders of the Frankish kingdom. Dagobert I threatened to send the army of Burgundy against them. Judicael agreed to meet him at his villa of Clichy, near Paris. The two kings exchanged gifts, and Judicael promised peace and acknowledged Dagobert's authority.

The chronicle tells a telling detail. Judicael refused to take his meal at the king's table, since the court was known for its loose morals. He preferred to go to the house of the referendary Dado, the future Saint Ouen, a man of prayer. Historians debate the political meaning of this gesture, but it shows a king concerned for his faith even in diplomacy. Saint Eligius, another adviser to Dagobert, is linked to these negotiations by the Life that Saint Ouen wrote of him.

The king who became a monk

Around 642, Judicael gave up power and returned to the monastery of Gael. Some traditions also mention a monastery he is said to have founded at Paimpont, in the forest of Brocéliande. He spent his last years in prayer and died in the night of December 16 to 17, between 647 and 652. He was buried near Saint Meen.



The former abbey church of Saint-Meen-le-Grand, heir to the monastery of Gael.

Veneration and relics

Judicael has been venerated as a saint in Brittany since the early Middle Ages, and his feast day is December 17. During the Viking invasions of 919, his relics were taken to safety at the abbey of Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes, in Poitou; they were returned to the abbey of Saint-Meen in 1130. The monastery of Gael, rebuilt in 1024 under the name of Saint-Meen, gave its name to the town of

Saint-Meen-le-Grand. He is shown as a king with a crown, sometimes with a monk's habit under the royal mantle. Since 2020, a granite statue has portrayed him at the Valley of the Saints, in Carnoët.

What to remember about Saint Judicael

Judicael held power without clinging to it. He refused to fight his brother, he chose peace with a more powerful neighbor, and in the end he laid down the crown to seek God alone. His life shows that one can govern as a Christian and that authority is a service. You can pray to him for those who govern, for peace between peoples and for Brittany.

Where to pray to Saint Judicael

- **Saint-Meen-le-Grand** (Ille-et-Vilaine, France): the former abbey church, heir to the monastery of Gael where he lived and died.
- **Paimpont** (Ille-et-Vilaine, France): the former abbey, which tradition links to his name.
- **Carnoët** (Côtes-d'Armor, France): his statue at the Valley of the Saints.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Judicael for Leaders and Peace

Saint Judicael was king of Domnonea, in northern Brittany, in the seventh century. He refused war against his brother, made peace with King Dagobert, then gave up the crown to end his life as a monk at the monastery of Gael, beside Saint Meen. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to his intercession those who govern and peace between peoples.

Prayer to Saint Judicael

Saint Judicael,
prince of Brittany and monk of Gael,
you preferred the cloister to war between brothers,
and you wore the crown without clinging to it.

Before the king of the Franks,
you chose peace over pride,
and you sought the company of men of God.
Then you laid down your power
to serve no one but the King of kings.

Pray for those who govern us:
may they seek the common good and not their own glory.
Pray for families divided by inheritance or ambition,
and for peoples who thirst for peace.

Teach me to live my responsibilities as a service,
and to know how to hand them over when the time has come.
Watch over Brittany and over all who call upon you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Judicael

- On his feast day, December 17.
- For elected officials, heads of state and all who hold power.
- When a family is divided by an inheritance or a rivalry.
- Before a negotiation or a difficult reconciliation.
- When you are leaving a responsibility or retiring.

A prayer for peace

> *Lord, make me a peacemaker,*
> *in my family, my work and my country.*
> *Saint Judicael, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Judicael from December 9 to 17, and discover the life of Saint Judicael.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Judicael

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Judicael, a Breton king of Domnonea who became a monk at Gael and died in the seventh century. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, December 17, begin on December 9: it then accompanies the season of Advent. You can also pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present 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 Judicael, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: Born to rule

Judicael was born around 590, the eldest son of the king of Domnonea. He was destined for power. But every life, princely or humble, first receives its true dignity from baptism.

Prayer: Lord, remind me that my true greatness is to be your child.

Today: Give thanks for your baptism by slowly making the Sign of the Cross.

Day 2: Refusing war between brothers

When his brother Haeloc seized the throne, Judicael did not take up arms. He withdrew. Peace in the family is worth more than a crown.

Prayer: Lord, heal the divisions in our families and help us to prefer peace to our rights.

Today: Take a step toward reconciliation with a brother, a sister or a relative.

Day 3: The school of Saint Meen

At the monastery of Gael, Judicael learned prayer from Saint Meen. These hidden years prepared him to govern. God forms his servants in silence.

Prayer: Lord, give me teachers in the faith, and the humility to listen to them.

Today: Take fifteen minutes of silence and prayer.

Day 4: Accepting the burden

After Haeloc's death, Judicael left the monastery to reign. He accepted a responsibility he had not sought. To serve is sometimes to answer a call that upsets our plans.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to take on the responsibilities you entrust to me.

Today: Carefully carry out a task you have been putting off for a long time.

Day 5: Governing with wisdom

Breton sources say that Judicael governed with authority and wisdom. Power can be a true service when it is exercised under the eyes of God.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who govern us. Give them wisdom and concern for the weakest.

Today: Pray by name for the mayor of your town and for the leaders of your country.

Day 6: Choosing peace

Threatened by the Frankish army, Judicael went to Clichy and made peace with Dagobert. He preferred negotiation to bloodshed. "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Prayer: Lord, give peace to the peoples at war, and make me a peacemaker.

Today: Pray for a country at war, or support a charity that serves its victims.

Day 7: Keeping the faith at court

At Clichy, Judicael refused the table of a licentious court and went to lodge with Ouen, a man of prayer. He stayed faithful to his faith even in a setting that despised it.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to remain faithful to the Gospel in places where it is forgotten.

Today: Choose a companion or a book that nourishes your faith.

Day 8: Laying down the crown

Around 642, Judicael gave up the throne to become a monk again. He knew that power is only a loan. Knowing how to hand over an office is an act of freedom.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to let go, and to give back to you what you have entrusted to me.

Today: Willingly give up some small thing you are attached to.

Day 9: Dying beside his master

Judicael died at Gael, in the night of December 16 to 17, and was buried near Saint Meen. The king had become a brother among brothers, waiting for the King who comes at Christmas.

Prayer: Lord, prepare my heart for your coming. Through the intercession of Saint Judicael, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Prepare the nativity scene, or a Christmas prayer, with your loved ones.

Living the novena with Saint Judicael

This novena falls during Advent, the season of waiting for the King who comes in the poverty of Bethlehem. Saint Judicael, a king who became a monk, is a good companion for this journey. During these nine days, look at your own "crowns": a position, a reputation, a place in the family. Ask for the grace to live them as a service and not to cling to them. Think also of those who govern and of the peoples waiting for peace, and entrust them to God each day.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Judicael,*
> *king of Domnonea and monk of Gael,*
> *you chose peace rather than war*
> *and the cloister rather than the crown.*
> *Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Teach me to serve without dominating,*
> *to make peace around me,*
> *and to wait for Christ, the one true King.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Abbey Church of Saint-Meen-le-Grand

The former abbey church of Saint-Meen-le-Grand, in Ille-et-Vilaine, is heir to the monastery of Gael, founded around 600 by Saint Meen with the permission of King Judicael. It was there that the Breton king took refuge in his youth, and where he returned to end his life as a monk. Today a parish church, it keeps the memory of both saints.

From the monastery of Gael to the abbey of Saint-Meen

According to Breton hagiography, Meen, a nephew of Saint Samson of Dol, founded the monastery of Saint John at Gael around 600, with the agreement of the king of Domnonea. Prince Judicael withdrew there a first time around 605, then around 642, after abdicating. He died there between 647 and 652 and was buried beside his master.

The history of the monastery was turbulent. Destroyed by the Franks in 799 or 811, it was rebuilt in 816, then ravaged again during the Viking invasions of 919. The monks then took the relics to safety: those of Saint Meen to Saint-Florent de Saumur, those of Judicael to Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes. The monastery was rebuilt in 1024, about two kilometers from the original site, under the patronage of Saint Meen. The relics of Meen came back in 1074, and those of Judicael in 1130.



The abbey church of Saint-Meen-le-Grand and its Romanesque tower.

A church of many transformations

The present church is a patchwork of periods. The great tower, 46 meters high, dates mostly from the Romanesque period. The transept dates from the 13th century and the former choir of the monks, now the nave, from the 14th. In the 17th century, the abbey was entrusted to the priests of the Mission and became a minor seminary. After the Revolution, the abbey church became a parish church, and it was turned around in 1850: the old choir has served as the nave ever since. It has been a listed historic monument since 1990.

Visiting the abbey church

Do not miss the chapel of Saint Vincent, the former chapter house from the late 13th or early 14th century. Its walls and vault are decorated with mural paintings rediscovered in 1986, which tell the life of Saint Meen. You can also

see the walled-up Romanesque arches in the wall of the nave, the last witnesses of the 11th-century church, and the Renaissance portal that now serves as the entrance.



The mural paintings of the chapel of Saint Vincent.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Judicael. In the abbey church, entrust to his intercession those who govern, peace between peoples and your own way of exercising authority, then recite the prayer to Saint Judicael. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Judicael

- **Paimpont** (Ille-et-Vilaine): the former abbey beside the pond, which tradition links to his name.

- **Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes** (Deux-Sèvres): the abbey church where his relics were sheltered for more than two centuries.
- **Carnoët** (Côtes-d'Armor): his granite statue at the Valley of the Saints.

Practical information

Saint-Meen-le-Grand is west of Rennes, not far from the forest of Paimpont. The abbey church is a working parish church: modest dress and silence are requested, especially during services. Opening hours, Mass times and any guided visits may vary: check with the parish or the tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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