BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Livarius of Marsal

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 17

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IN BRIEF

Saint Livarius of Marsal

5th-century martyr of Lorraine, defender of Metz against the Huns according to tradition, beheaded near Marsal.

Feast day	July 17, November 25
Born	early 5th century, Metz (Moselle, France)
Died	451 according to tradition (329 according to a 10th-century document), Côte Saint-Jean, facing Marsal (Moselle, France)
Canonized	immemorial cult

In this booklet

Life

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Chapel of Saint-Livier near Marsal

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Livarius of Marsal

Saint Livarius (Livier or Livaire in French) is a 5th-century martyr of Lorraine. Born in Metz into a noble family, he is said to have defended his city against Attila's Huns, before being captured and beheaded on the Côte Saint-Jean, a hill facing Marsal, in Moselle. A chapel, the goal of an annual pilgrimage, stands on the site of his martyrdom, and part of his relics is venerated in Metz Cathedral. His feast day is July 17.

Who was Saint Livarius?

Saint Livarius is one of the most popular saints of the region of Metz. His story, as tradition has handed it down, is that of a Christian knight who gave his life for his faith and for his people. But it must be read with caution. The detailed accounts of his life are late, and they were greatly enriched over the centuries, especially in the 17th century. Historians point out difficulties: a 10th-century document, the small cartulary of the abbey of Saint-Arnould, places his martyrdom in 329, long before Attila; and in 451 the Huns went from Metz toward Orléans, not toward Marsal. One scholar has even spoken of an "impossible story". What remains solid is the antiquity of his cult, attested by the transfer of his relics to Metz at the end of the 10th century, and the faithfulness of the pilgrimage that continues today.

Key dates in the life of Livarius

- **Early 5th century**: Born in Metz, according to tradition, into a noble family of the region.
- **Around age seventeen**: He goes to war with his father and sets free two captured enemy chiefs.
- **Next**: According to legend, he goes on pilgrimage toward Jerusalem.

- **c. 450**: Back in Metz, he leads the defense of the city against Attila's Huns.
- **April 7, 451**: According to tradition, he is taken prisoner when Metz falls and brought to the enemy camp near Marsal.
- **451**: After months of captivity, he is beheaded on the Côte Saint-Jean, facing Marsal.
- **End of the 10th century**: Bishop Theoderic I of Metz has part of his relics moved to Metz.
- **1623**: Jean de Gombervaux, abbot of Salival, has the present chapel built on the site of the martyrdom.
- **Since 2018**: A hermit brother lives by the chapel and welcomes pilgrims.

The defender of Metz

According to tradition, Livarius was the son of Honstrand, lord of the region of Metz, and of Guinarde, from an old family of the city. As a young man, he went with his father to fight invaders in Lombardy. Having captured two enemy chiefs, he released them at the end of the fighting: the account wants to show from the outset a merciful warrior. Legend adds a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and a marriage in the East, which nothing allows us to verify.

Learning that Attila's troops were marching west, Livarius returned to Metz. His parents had died. He took command of the city's defense. The Huns lifted a first siege to ravage Toul and Scarpone, then came back. Livarius attempted a last sortie with a handful of men, but the city fell and was almost entirely destroyed; according to tradition, only the oratory of Saint Stephen survived, on the site of today's cathedral.

The martyrdom on the Côte Saint-Jean

Once captured, Livarius was taken to the Huns' camp near Marsal, on the Côte Saint-Jean. Though a prisoner, he went on interceding for captives and orphans. One day, according to the account, he demanded that a chief return a

young girl to her weeping mother, and even threatened him. The chief had him put to death. After months of ill-treatment, Livarius was led in chains to the top of the hill, where he was beheaded with an axe, refusing to deny Christ. Tradition associates two companions with his martyrdom, Purgentius and Agentius.

Legend then tells of a wonder: Livarius picked up his head and walked a few steps holding it in his hands. He planted his staff in the ground, and it became an oak; where he laid down his head, a spring gushed forth, which still flows. Seized with fear, the Huns abandoned their camp. This motif of the "cephalophore" saint, who carries his own head, is found in some sixty legends of Lorraine, such as that of Saint Eliphius; some scholars see in it the Christian reworking of older stories.

Devotion, relics and art

The people of the Seille valley buried the martyr on the spot, and his tomb became a place of pilgrimage. At the end of the 10th century, Bishop Theoderic I of Metz had his relics moved to the abbey of Saint-Vincent, which he had just founded, and then to the church of Saint-Polyeucte, which took the name of Saint-Livier. Because of the distress of the local people, part of the remains was left on the Côte Saint-Jean; taken to safety in Verdun during the Thirty Years' War, it returned to the diocese of Metz in the 19th century. The relics in Metz disappeared during the Revolution, but fragments kept by the faithful were handed over to the bishop. Part of them is now venerated in the chapel of Saint Livarius in Metz Cathedral; others are at Marsal and at Contz-les-Bains.

Devotion never ceased at the site of the martyrdom. In the early 17th century, Duke Henry II of Lorraine came to pray there and, according to tradition, was healed after bathing his eyes with water from the spring; he had a fountain built. In 1623, the abbot of Salival had the present chapel built. A pilgrimage

takes place there every year on the first Sunday after July 17; tradition also celebrates him on November 25. Livarius is shown as a knight, sometimes carrying his head, as in the famous engraving by Jacques Callot.

What can we learn from Saint Livarius?

Beyond the legends, Saint Livarius embodies a figure dear to Christians: the strong man who puts his strength at the service of the weak. The account shows him freeing his prisoners, interceding for captives and orphans, and preferring death to denial. You can pray to him for those who defend others, for soldiers and police officers, for prisoners, and for those with eye ailments who still come to his spring.

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

Where to pray to Saint Livarius

- **Chapel of Saint-Livier**, on the Côte Saint-Jean, at Moyenvic, near Marsal (Moselle): the site of his martyrdom, his spring and the July pilgrimage.
- **Cathedral of Saint-Étienne in Metz**: the chapel of Saint Livarius, whose altar holds relics.
- **Church of Marsal** and **church of Contz-les-Bains** (Moselle): other relics of the saint.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Livarius for Those Who Defend Others

Saint Livarius, a 5th-century knight of Metz, is said to have defended his city against the Huns before being beheaded near Marsal for refusing to deny Christ. For centuries, pilgrims have come to pray at the place of his martyrdom and to bathe their eyes at his spring. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text.

Prayer to Saint Livarius

Saint Livarius,
knight of Christ and defender of your city,
you put your strength at the service of the weak
and gave freedom back to your defeated enemies.
Teach me to protect without crushing
and to forgive even in the struggle.

As a prisoner, you still pleaded
for captives and for orphans,
and you chose death
rather than deny your Lord.
Give me the courage to stay faithful
when faith costs me something.

You whose spring still flows on the hill,
obtain healing for those whose eyes are ailing,
and light for those who seek God.
Watch over Metz and Lorraine,
and over all who defend others.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Livarius

- On his feast day, July 17, or at the pilgrimage on the following Sunday.
- For those whose task is to defend others: soldiers, police officers, firefighters.
- For prisoners and hostages.
- For someone who suffers from their eyes.
- When courage is needed to bear witness to your faith.

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Livarius from July 9 to 17, and read the life of Saint Livarius.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Livarius

This novena invites you to pray for nine days with Saint Livarius, a 5th-century martyr of Metz, venerated at the chapel of Saint-Livier near Marsal and in Metz Cathedral. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, July 17, begin on July 9. You can also pray it at any other time.

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 Livarius, pray for us." The episodes mentioned come from tradition, which mixes history and legend.

Day 1: A faith received

Livarius grew up in Metz in a Christian family. Tradition says he showed signs of his faith very early.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the faith I have received. Make it grow in me and in my family.

Act of the day: Pray for your parents, living or departed.

Day 2: The mercy of the victor

As a young soldier, Livarius captured two enemy chiefs and set them free. True strength knows how to show mercy.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to forgive those who have wronged me, even when I have the upper hand.

Act of the day: Let go of a grudge or make a gesture of reconciliation.

Day 3: The pilgrim

Legend takes him on pilgrimage toward Jerusalem. Every Christian life is a journey toward Christ.

Prayer: Lord, guide my steps on your path and give me the desire to seek you.

Act of the day: Walk while praying, even for a few minutes.

Day 4: Coming back to serve

On learning of the danger threatening his city, Livarius came back. He did not run from his responsibility.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be present where my own people need me.

Act of the day: Help someone in your family or neighborhood who is going through a hard time.

Day 5: Defending his people

He led the defense of Metz. The battle was lost, but he had given all he could.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who protect others at the risk of their lives, and comfort them in failure.

Act of the day: Pray for soldiers, police officers and firefighters.

Day 6: The voice of the captives

As a prisoner, Livarius still pleaded for captives and orphans. He did not think of himself first.

Prayer: Lord, remember prisoners, hostages and children separated from their parents.

Act of the day: Support a charity that visits prisoners or protects children.

Day 7: Defending a weeping mother

According to the account, he demanded that a young girl be returned to her mother. This courage cost him his life.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to stand up for those who are mistreated.

Act of the day: Speak up, gently and firmly, for someone who is treated unjustly.

Day 8: Faithful unto death

Led to the top of the hill, Livarius refused to deny Christ and died by the sword. The martyr says with his life that Christ is worth more than everything.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful in small and great trials. Support persecuted Christians.

Act of the day: Pray for Christians persecuted today.

Day 9: The spring that never runs dry

Legend makes a spring gush forth where he laid down his head. For centuries, pilgrims have come there seeking healing.

Prayer: Lord, source of life, heal what is wounded in me. Through the intercession of Saint Livarius, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and, if possible, plan a pilgrimage to the chapel of Saint-Livier.

Closing prayer

Saint Livarius,
defender of Metz and martyr of Christ,
you loved to the point of giving your life.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Make me a protector of the weak
and a faithful witness to the Gospel.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Chapel of Saint-Livier near Marsal

The chapel of Saint-Livier stands in Moselle, on the Côte Saint-Jean, a hill overlooking Marsal and the Seille valley, in the municipality of Moyenvic. According to tradition, this is where Saint Livarius, defender of Metz, was beheaded by the Huns in the 5th century. A place of pilgrimage for centuries, it still welcomes the faithful every summer, and a hermit brother lives there today.

The place of the martyrdom

According to the traditional account, Livarius, taken prisoner at Metz, was brought to the Huns' camp on the Côte Saint-Jean. He was beheaded at the top of the hill. Legend says that a spring gushed forth where he laid down his head, and that the people of the Seille valley buried him on the spot. His tomb at once became a place of prayer. At the end of the 10th century, Bishop Theoderic I of Metz had his relics moved to the city, but he left part of them to the local faithful.

The pilgrimage never stopped. In the early 17th century, Duke Henry II of Lorraine came to pray there and, according to tradition, was healed of the ailments he suffered from after moistening his eyes with water from the spring; he had a fountain built under a vault. In 1623, Jean de Gombervaux, abbot of Salival, had the present chapel built; it has been restored several times since.

What you can see

Visitors find the 17th-century chapel, the spring and its fountain, as well as the site of the oak that legend says grew from the saint's staff. Relics have returned to the chapel over time.

A hermit and a pilgrimage

Every year, a pilgrimage takes place on the first Sunday after July 17, the saint's feast. Since 2018, a hermit brother has lived at the chapel: he welcomes visitors and the faithful, and can receive a man for a spiritual retreat or a time of rest.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Livarius. On site, entrust to him those who defend others, prisoners and those with eye ailments, then say the prayer to Saint Livarius. To complete the pilgrimage, you can also visit Metz Cathedral, where the chapel of Saint Livarius keeps part of his relics. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

The chapel is near Marsal and Moyenvic, in the Saulnois area, not far from Château-Salins. It is a place of prayer where a hermit lives: silence and respect are expected. For the conditions of welcome, the exact date of the pilgrimage or the possibility of a retreat, check with the diocese of Metz or the parish before you come.

Credits and sources

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