

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Louis IX

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 25

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IN BRIEF

Saint Louis IX

King of France from 1226 to 1270, model of the Christian ruler.

Feast day	August 25
Born	April 25, 1214, Poissy, France
Died	August 25, 1270, near Tunis, Tunisia
Canonized	August 11, 1297, by Pope Boniface VIII
Era	13th century
Patron saint of	Secular Franciscans, hairdressers, barbers

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Louis

The Sainte-Chapelle in Paris

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Louis IX

Saint Louis IX was King of France from 1226 to 1270. Crowned at the age of twelve, he reigned for more than forty years, striving to make justice and peace prevail, founding hospitals, building the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris to house the Crown of Thorns and leading two crusades. He died near Tunis on August 25, 1270. Canonized less than thirty years after his death, he is celebrated on August 25 and remains the only King of France recognized as a saint by the Church.

Who was Saint Louis IX?

Louis was born on April 25, 1214, in Poissy, near Paris, the son of the future King Louis VIII and of Blanche of Castile. He was baptized in the collegiate church of Poissy and, out of affection for the place, sometimes signed his name "Louis of Poissy." When his father died in November 1226, he was only twelve years old: he was crowned in Reims, and his mother governed the kingdom as regent.

Blanche of Castile passed on to him a demanding faith. The chroniclers report a phrase attributed to her: she would rather see her son dead than guilty of a mortal sin. The young king never forgot it.

In 1234, Louis married Margaret of Provence. The couple had eleven children. Witnesses describe a devout king who attended Mass every day and prayed the Divine Office, but also a cheerful man who loved conversation and refused to let devotion become gloomy or showy.

Key dates in the life of Saint Louis

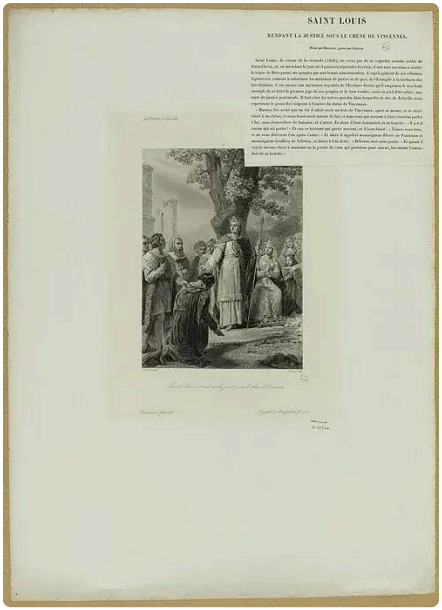
- **April 25, 1214**: Born in Poissy.

- **November 29, 1226**: Crowned in Reims at the age of twelve, under the regency of Blanche of Castile.
- **1234**: Marries Margaret of Provence.
- **1239**: The Crown of Thorns, acquired from the emperor of Constantinople, arrives in Paris.
- **1247**: Sends investigators throughout the kingdom to gather complaints against royal officials.
- **April 26, 1248**: Consecration of the Sainte-Chapelle.
- **1248-1254**: Seventh Crusade; captured in Egypt in 1250, then released for a ransom.
- **1254**: Great ordinance reforming the royal administration.
- **1259**: Treaty of Paris with King Henry III of England.
- **August 25, 1270**: Dies near Tunis during the Eighth Crusade.
- **August 11, 1297**: Canonized by Pope Boniface VIII.

A king who rendered justice

Popular memory keeps the image handed down by his friend and biographer Jean de Joinville: the king seated at the foot of an oak tree in the forest of Vincennes, listening in person to the complaints of anyone who came to him. Beyond the picture, Louis IX deeply reformed the government of France. He sent investigators into the provinces to correct the abuses of his own officers, banned trial by combat in his domain, developed the right of appeal to the king's justice and imposed a reliable royal currency.

He also sought peace with his neighbors, even giving back land to obtain a lasting agreement, as in the Treaty of Paris of 1259 with England. His contemporaries often chose him to arbitrate their conflicts, even in England.



Saint Louis rendering justice under the oak of Vincennes.

Charity toward the poor

Louis IX fed poor people at his table every day, washed the feet of beggars and visited the sick. In Paris he founded the Quinze-Vingts hospice for the blind, and he supported the Hôtel-Dieu hospital and many convents. Close to the Franciscan and Dominican friars, he is regarded as a member of the Franciscan Third Order, and the Secular Franciscan Order counts him among its patrons.

The Sainte-Chapelle and the Crown of Thorns

In 1239, Louis bought from the Latin emperor of Constantinople the Crown of Thorns, venerated as the crown of Christ's Passion. He received it barefoot, dressed as a penitent. To house it, he built the Sainte-Chapelle in his palace on

the Île de la Cité. Consecrated in 1248, this masterpiece of Gothic architecture has stained-glass windows that cover almost the entire walls. The Crown of Thorns is kept today at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.



The upper chapel of the Sainte-Chapelle, consecrated in 1248.

The crusades and death near Tunis

In 1248, Louis left on crusade for Egypt. After the capture of Damietta, his army was defeated and the king was taken prisoner in 1250. Released for a ransom, he stayed four more years in the Holy Land to fortify the Christian cities. In 1270, despite fragile health, he set out again, this time for Tunis. Disease struck the camp, and Louis died on August 25, 1270. According to the accounts of his death, he lay on a bed of ashes as a sign of humility. His remains were brought back to France and buried in the Basilica of Saint-Denis.



The death of Saint Louis near Tunis in 1270, medieval miniature.

What can we learn from his holiness?

Saint Louis shows that it is possible to hold power without giving up the Gospel. He was not without faults, and historians also recall the harshness of some of his decisions, especially toward the Jews of his kingdom. But the Church recognized in him a constant effort to govern justly, to serve the poorest and to remain faithful to prayer.

The *Teachings* he left to his son sum up this program: love God, be just toward all and keep a compassionate heart toward the poor. He is invoked for those who govern, for families and for peace. You can pray with him using the prayer to Saint Louis and the novena to Saint Louis, which begins on August 16 and ends on the eve of his feast.

Why is Saint Louis the patron saint of Secular Franciscans?

Louis lived in the world, as a husband, father and king, while sharing the Franciscan ideal of poverty, prayer and service of the poor. For this reason the Secular Franciscan Order, made up of lay people living the spirit of Saint Francis in their daily lives, honors him as one of its patrons. In France he is also traditionally the patron of hairdressers and barbers.

In the English-speaking world, his name lives on most visibly in the city of St. Louis, Missouri, named in his honor, whose Cathedral Basilica is dedicated to him.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Louis in art

- **The royal crown and scepter**, signs of his kingship.
- **The fleur-de-lis**, emblem of the kings of France, often on his blue mantle.
- **The Crown of Thorns**, which he holds in his hands or on a cushion.
- **The oak of Vincennes**, in scenes where he renders justice.
- **The nails of the Passion**, sometimes shown with the Crown of Thorns among the relics he honored.

Where to pray to Saint Louis

- **Paris**: the Sainte-Chapelle, his great reliquary chapel, and the church of Saint-Louis-en-l'Île.
- **Poissy**: the collegiate church of Notre-Dame, where he was baptized.
- **Saint-Denis**: the basilica, burial place of the kings of France, where he was buried.
- **Versailles**: the Cathedral of Saint-Louis.
- **Aigues-Mortes**: the fortified town he had built in order to sail for the crusade.
- **Rome**: the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, national church of France.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Louis, Just King and Servant of the Poor

This page offers first a few pieces of advice from the *Teachings* that Saint Louis wrote for his son, the future Philip III, followed by an original prayer by Saintspedia. Saint Louis left no prayer under his own name: his *Teachings* are the text closest to his own voice.

The Teachings of Saint Louis to his son

Saint Louis wrote this advice in his own hand, probably shortly before leaving for Tunis in 1270. The text has come down to us in particular through the *Life of Saint Louis* by Jean de Joinville, completed in 1309. Here are a few passages, rendered into modern English by Saintspedia from the medieval text (public domain):

> *Dear son, the first thing I teach you is to set your whole heart on loving God, for without this no one can be saved.*
>
> *If God sends you adversity, accept it with patience and give him thanks. If he gives you prosperity, thank him humbly, so that you do not become worse through pride in what should make you better.*
>
> *Have a gentle and compassionate heart toward the poor, the unfortunate and the afflicted, and help them as much as you can.*
>
> *Be just and upright toward your subjects, turning neither to the right nor to the left, and uphold the cause of the poor until the truth is made clear.*

Source: Jean de Joinville, *Life of Saint Louis*, chapter of the Teachings (medieval text in the public domain).



Saint Louis IX at prayer.

Prayer to Saint Louis

Saint Louis, King of France and servant of the poor, you who sought to govern according to the Gospel, pray for us.

Teach those who hold responsibility, in our countries, in businesses and in families, to decide with justice, to listen to the weakest and to prefer peace to easy victories.

You who welcomed the poor to your table, give me a heart attentive to those I pass by without seeing. You who loved prayer in the midst of the affairs of the kingdom, help me keep time for God in my busy days.

I entrust to you my family, my loved ones and the intention I carry today: (name it in silence). Obtain for me the grace to accept with patience what is hard and with gratitude what is given.

Through your intercession, may Christ crowned with thorns, whom you venerated so deeply, reign in our hearts. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Louis is celebrated on August 25, the day of his death. Pray to him for those who govern, for judges and public servants, for fathers and mothers, and whenever you face a decision where justice and mercy must go together. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Louis, from August 16 to 24. You can also read the life of Saint Louis.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Louis

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Louis and by the *Teachings* he wrote for his son. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on August 16: it ends on August 24, the day before his feast on August 25. You can also pray it at any other time of year, for your family, for your country or before an important decision.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father. The small act suggested for the day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

The nine days follow the great themes of his life: love of God, the faith received from his mother, justice, service of the poor, prayer, family, peace, trial and a humble death.



Saint Louis IX, in a church statue or window.

Day 1: Loving God with all your heart

This is the first piece of advice Saint Louis gave his son. Everything else, justice, charity and peace, flows from this first love. Before speaking of government, armies or money, the king spoke of God. A king with a whole kingdom to govern began with the simplest thing: to set his heart on God.

Prayer: Lord, be first in my life. May the choices I make today spring from my love for you.

Today: Begin the day with a short prayer, before any other activity.

Day 2: Receiving the inheritance of faith

Louis received his faith from his mother, Blanche of Castile, who raised him with high demands and deep love. Each of us owes our faith to people who passed it on.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for those who made your name known to me. Bless them, living or dead.

Today: Pray for a parent, a godparent or a friend who passed on the faith to you.

Day 3: Rendering justice

Under the oak of Vincennes, the king listened to complaints in person. Justice begins with listening to everyone, without favoring the powerful. He even sent investigators to correct the abuses of his own officials.

Prayer: Lord, give me upright judgment. May I favor no one out of self-interest or fear.

Today: Listen all the way through to someone you disagree with.

Day 4: Serving the poor

Saint Louis fed poor people every day and founded the Quinze-Vingts hospice for the blind in Paris. For him, power was first of all a service.

Prayer: Christ who became poor, open my eyes to those who lack everything, and my hands to help them.

Today: Make a donation or do a concrete service for someone in need.

Day 5: Praying in the midst of affairs

Despite the burden of the kingdom, Louis attended Mass every day and prayed the Divine Office. His days were full, but never without God.

Prayer: Lord, in my overcrowded days, keep a place for yourself.

Today: Set aside a time of prayer in your calendar for the coming week.

Day 6: Loving your family

Husband of Margaret of Provence and father of eleven children, Saint Louis wrote advice full of tenderness to his son and his daughter. Holiness is lived first of all at home.

Prayer: Lord, bless my family. Give us patience, faithfulness and the joy of being together.

Today: Write a note of affection to a member of your family.



Praying with Saint Louis IX.

Day 7: Choosing peace

Louis preferred to give land back to the King of England rather than prolong war. Some of his advisers criticized the Treaty of Paris of 1259, but it brought a lasting peace between the two kingdoms. Peace sometimes means giving up the need to be right.

Prayer: Prince of Peace, make me a builder of reconciliation, even at the cost of my pride.

Today: Take the first step toward someone with whom a conflict lingers.

Day 8: Going through trials

A prisoner in Egypt, often ill, grieving the death of loved ones, Saint Louis asked his son to receive adversity with patience and to give thanks.

Prayer: Lord, when trials come, keep me in trust. Do not let me become bitter.

Today: Entrust a present difficulty to God, then name one reason to give him thanks.

Day 9: Dying in humility

Near Tunis, the king died lying on ashes. The most powerful ruler in the West placed himself in God's hands like a poor man.

Prayer: Lord, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Louis, teach me to live and to die in your friendship. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who is sick or nearing the end of life.

Closing prayer

Saint Louis, at the end of this novena, I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for our country and for those who govern it, for families and for the poor. Obtain for us the grace to love God with all our heart and our neighbor with justice. Amen.

After the novena

On August 25, if you can, attend Mass for the feast of Saint Louis and pray for your country and those who govern it. Keep one of the small acts of these nine days as a habit: a morning prayer before anything else, a regular gift to the poor, or a note of affection to someone at home. Louis did not become a saint through one great gesture, but through faithfulness renewed day after day.

To go further, read the life of Saint Louis and pray the prayer to Saint Louis.

PILGRIMAGE

The Sainte-Chapelle in Paris

The Sainte-Chapelle, on the Île de la Cité in Paris, was built by Saint Louis to house the Crown of Thorns and the other relics of the Passion that he had acquired. Consecrated on April 26, 1248, it is one of the summits of Gothic art and the place that best expresses the king's faith.

A reliquary of stone and light

Saint Louis had the chapel built within the grounds of his palace in just a few years. It has two levels: the lower chapel, intended for the palace staff, and the upper chapel, reserved for the king and his close circle, where the relics were displayed. In the upper chapel, the walls seem to have disappeared in favor of fifteen great stained glass windows, which tell the biblical story from Genesis to the Resurrection, then the arrival of the relics in Paris. A large share of this glass dates from the 13th century.



The Sainte-Chapelle in Paris.

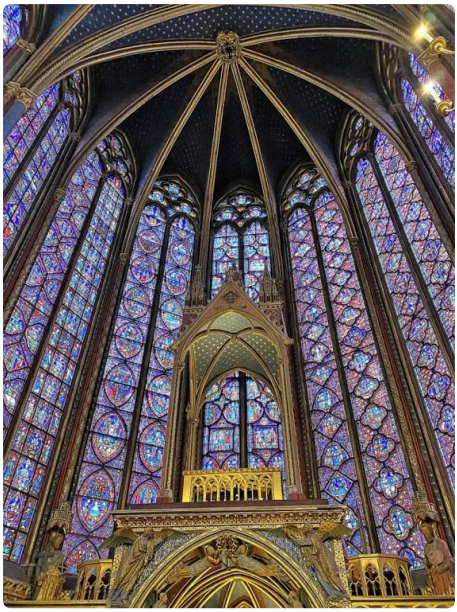
What became of the relics?

At the Revolution, the treasury of the Sainte-Chapelle was dispersed and largely destroyed. The Crown of Thorns was saved and entrusted in 1806 to Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. It escaped the fire of 2019 and has returned to the restored cathedral. It is presented for the veneration of the faithful on certain dates: inquire with the cathedral.

Praying at the Sainte-Chapelle

The Sainte-Chapelle is now managed as a historic monument and is visited with a ticket. It is not a parish, but celebrations are held there on certain occasions. For a spiritual visit, you may read the life of Saint Louis beforehand,

then take a time of silence in the upper chapel before the story told by the windows. The prayer to Saint Louis can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, the interior.

Other places of Saint Louis

- **Poissy** (Yvelines): the collegiate church of Notre-Dame, where he was baptized.
- **Saint-Denis**: the basilica where he was buried, necropolis of the kings of France.
- **Vincennes**: the castle and woods associated with the image of the king dispensing justice under an oak.
- **Aigues-Mortes** (Gard): the fortified town from which he set sail on his two crusades.
- **Versailles**: the Cathedral of Saint-Louis.

- **Rome**: San Luigi dei Francesi, also famous for its paintings by Caravaggio.

Practical information

The Sainte-Chapelle is within the grounds of the Palais de Justice, on Boulevard du Palais, and entry includes a security check. It is very busy in season: online booking is advised. The light of the windows is most beautiful in clear weather, in late morning. Concerts are regularly given there in the evening. Check the hours on the website of the Centre des monuments nationaux before you come.

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