

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Malo (Maclou)

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 15

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IN BRIEF

Saint Malo (Maclou)

Sixth-century Breton monk from Wales, first bishop of Aleth and one of the seven founding saints of Brittany.

Feast day	November 15
Born	Wales (according to tradition)
Died	November 15, between about 612 and 627, Archingeay, France
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	Saint-Malo, Diocese of Pontoise

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Malo (Maclou)

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Malo (Maclou)

Saint Malo, also known as Saint Maclou or by his Latin name Machutus, is one of the seven founding saints of Brittany. A monk who came over from Britain in the sixth century, he is honored as the first bishop of Aleth, today the Saint-Servan district, and he gave his name to the port city of Saint-Malo. His life is known through accounts written nearly three centuries after his death, rich in legend. He died at Archingeay, in the Saintonge region of western France, in the early seventh century, and his feast day is November 15.

Who was Saint Malo?

Malo belongs to the great movement of British monks who, in the fifth and sixth centuries, crossed the Channel from Wales and Cornwall to settle in Armorica, the land that would become Brittany. With Saint Samson of Dol, Saint Brieuc, Saint Tugdual, Saint Paul Aurelian, Saint Patern and Saint Corentin, he is one of the seven saints whose cathedral cities make up the Tro Breiz, the "tour of Brittany" pilgrimage.

It must be said frankly that the historical man almost entirely escapes us. Historians consider the real person to be practically out of reach behind the hagiographical accounts. What can be retained is that a monk named Maclou, or Malo, founded a community at Aleth, near the mouth of the River Rance, that his cult took root very early in the region, and that he died in Saintonge at a date estimated between about 612 and 627.

Key dates

- **Sixth century**: Born in Britain, probably in south Wales, according to the early Lives.

- **Sixth century**: Monastic training, which tradition places with Saint Brendan.
- **Sixth century**: Arrives in Armorica and settles at Aleth, near the Rance.
- **November 15, between about 612 and 627**: Dies at Archingeay, in Saintonge.
- **Between 866 and 872**: The deacon Bili writes his Life for Bishop Ratwili of Aleth.
- **c. 963-965**: His relics are taken to Paris, out of reach of the invasions.
- **1144-1146**: The bishop's seat is moved from Aleth to the island that takes his name, Saint-Malo.

The Lives of Saint Malo

Five Latin Lives of Malo have come down to us. The oldest was written by a deacon named Bili at the request of Ratwili, bishop of Aleth between 866 and 872, more than two and a half centuries after the saint's death. The others depend on it to a greater or lesser degree. These texts were written to edify and to honor a patron saint, not to produce a biography in the modern sense. They mix local memories, themes common to Celtic hagiography and wonder stories.

According to these Lives, Malo was born in Glamorgan or Gwent, in south Wales, and was entrusted very young to the monastery of Llancarfan. There he is said to have been a disciple of Saint Brendan, the famous seafaring monk, and even to have joined him on his voyages. This link with Brendan is a theme dear to the hagiographers and should be read with caution.

Arrival at Aleth

Tradition says that Malo first landed on the island of Cézembre, off the present city of Saint-Malo, and then reached the coast. There he is said to have met a hermit, Saint Aaron, who lived on the rock where the walled city now stands.

The two men shared the hermit's life for a time before Malo founded a community at Aleth, on the Saint-Servan peninsula, and became its bishop.

The accounts attribute to him miracles that belong to legend, such as driving out a dragon, a traditional image of the victory of the Gospel over paganism. They also tell of conflicts with part of the population and with local notables, who are said to have forced him to leave. Malo then found refuge in Saintonge with Bishop Leontius of Saintes and died at Archingeay, on a November 15.

A scattered cult

Malo's cult first grew at Aleth, where his relics are said to have been brought back. In the tenth century, fleeing Viking raids, many Breton monks and clerics escaped with the relics of their saints. Those of Malo were taken to Paris around 963-965, to the church of Saint-Barthélemy and later to the abbey of Saint-Victor. Other fragments were venerated in various places, especially at Montreuil, Rouen, Pontoise and Conflans-Sainte-Honorine.

This dispersal explains why his cult reaches far beyond Brittany. In Rouen, the church of Saint-Maclou is a masterpiece of Flamboyant Gothic. In Pontoise, the cathedral bears his name, and he is the patron of the diocese of Pontoise. In Brittany, in 1144-1146, Bishop Jean de Châtillon moved the bishop's seat from Aleth to the nearby, better protected island, which took the name Saint-Malo. The diocese of Saint-Malo existed until the French Revolution, and the city remains a stage of the Tro Breiz.

Why is Saint Malo the patron saint of Saint-Malo and Pontoise?

The city of Saint-Malo bears his name because tradition makes him the founder and first bishop of the Church of Aleth, whose seat was moved to the island in the twelfth century. Pontoise took him as patron because it received

part of his relics during the troubled tenth century; its cathedral is dedicated to him, and he is the patron of the diocese. Because he crossed the sea and died in exile, many also pray to him for sailors and for those who must leave home.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Malo in art

Saint Malo is usually shown as a bishop, with miter and crosier, sometimes in the act of blessing. Statues and stained-glass windows of him are found in Breton churches and in the churches that bear his name in Normandy and around Paris. A setting near the sea sometimes recalls his arrival by boat.

What can we learn from Saint Malo?

Malo is the face of a Brittany born of the sea and of faith. Behind the legends we glimpse the story of monks who left their homeland to proclaim Christ on another shore, founded communities and gave their names to whole towns. His forced departure to Saintonge also reminds us that the Gospel does not take root without resistance. We can pray to him for sailors, for migrants and for all who must start their lives over elsewhere.

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

Where to pray to Saint Malo

- **Saint-Malo** (Brittany, France): Saint-Vincent Cathedral, former seat of his diocese and a stage of the Tro Breiz.
- **Saint-Servan**: the site of the ancient city of Aleth, where tradition places his foundation.
- **Pontoise** (near Paris): the Cathedral of Saint-Maclou, seat of the diocese of which he is patron.
- **Rouen** (Normandy): the church of Saint-Maclou.

- **Archingeay** (Charente-Maritime): the place of his death according to tradition.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Malo for Sailors and Those Who Leave Home

There is no widely used traditional prayer to Saint Malo in English. Saintspedia offers this original prayer, inspired by what the early Lives remember of him: the monk who came by sea, the founder of the Church of Aleth, the exile who died far from his community.

The monk who came by sea

According to tradition, Malo left Wales and landed on the coast of Armorica, near the mouth of the River Rance. There he founded a community that would become the diocese of Aleth, and later of Saint-Malo. Forced to leave in later years, he died in Saintonge. His life, even veiled in legend, speaks to sailors, travelers and all who must leave behind what they have built.

Prayer to Saint Malo

> *Saint Malo, you left your homeland to carry the Gospel to another shore: give me the courage to set out when God calls me.*
>
> *You faced the sea and its dangers: protect sailors, fishermen and all who travel, and bring them safely back to port.*
>
> *You founded a Church on the banks of the Rance: pray for Christian communities in Brittany and everywhere, that they may stay alive and welcoming.*
>
> *You knew misunderstanding and exile: support those who must start their lives over far from home, and teach me to forgive those who reject me.*
>
> *I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Saint Malo, pray for us. Amen.*

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Malo's feast day is November 15. You can pray to him:

- before a sea voyage, or for a sailor or fisherman in your family;
- when moving house, emigrating or facing a difficult departure;
- for migrants and refugees who must rebuild their lives;
- during a pilgrimage, such as the Tro Breiz stage at Saint-Malo.

A short prayer for those at sea

> *Lord Jesus, who calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, watch over all who are at sea tonight. Through the prayers of Saint Malo, keep them from danger, give them a safe return, and comfort the families who wait for them on shore. Amen.*

To learn more about him, read the life of Saint Malo, or pray the novena to Saint Malo.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Malo (Maclou)

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Malo, also called Saint Maclou or Machutus, as told in the early Lives of the saint. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, November 15, begin it on November 7. It can also be prayed before a journey, a move abroad or any new beginning.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you live in the spirit of the monk who crossed the sea for Christ. You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group.

Day 1: A child entrusted to God

According to the Lives, Malo was entrusted very young to the monastery of Llancarfan, in Wales. Before any great mission, there is a long formation: years of prayer, learning and community life. God prepares his servants patiently, and nothing of those quiet years is lost.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who are being formed in the faith, and make me patient in the slow work you do in me.

Today: Pray for a young person preparing for a sacrament or a vocation.

Day 2: Learning from the masters

Tradition makes Malo a disciple of Saint Brendan, the seafaring monk. Whatever the historical truth, it tells us that faith is passed on from person to person. We all need teachers and companions on the way, and none of us reaches God entirely alone.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who taught me to know you. Make me in turn a guide for others.

Today: Thank, in word or in prayer, someone who helped you grow in faith.

Day 3: Leaving home

Malo left his land to cross the sea. Like Abraham, he set out without knowing all that awaited him. Every Christian life includes departures, large or small, when we must let go of the familiar to follow God.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to leave what holds me back when you call me further.

Today: Let go of one habit that keeps you from God.

Day 4: The dangers of the sea

The crossing from Britain to Armorica was dangerous. Malo's story is a story of the sea, and sailors and fishermen have long felt close to him. On the water, people learn how small they are and how much they depend on God.

Prayer: Lord, protect sailors, fishermen and all who travel, and bring them safely home.

Today: Pray for those who work at sea or who are traveling today.

Day 5: Friendship with a hermit

On arriving, Malo is said to have shared for a time the life of the hermit Aaron, on the rock where the walled city of Saint-Malo stands today. Before founding anything, he prayed with a brother. Mission begins in silence and friendship, not in haste or in plans made alone.

Prayer: Lord, give me friends who lead me to you, and make me such a friend for others.

Today: Spend ten minutes in silent prayer.

Day 6: Founding a Church

At Aleth, near the Rance, Malo founded a community that became a diocese and later gave its name to a city. Small beginnings can bear fruit for centuries. What we build for God with faith is never wasted.

Prayer: Lord, bless our parishes and communities, and make them living and welcoming.

Today: Welcome a newcomer in your parish or neighborhood.

Day 7: Victory over darkness

The legends tell that Malo drove out a dragon. It is an old image of the victory of the Gospel over fear and false gods. Christ is stronger than all that frightens us.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the fears that paralyze me, and let your light shine in my darkness.

Today: Name before God one fear, and entrust it to him.

Day 8: Rejected and exiled

The Lives say that Malo met opposition and had to leave Aleth for Saintonge, where Bishop Leontius of Saintes welcomed him. Even saints know failure and rejection. Christ himself was not welcomed in his own town, and he promised his disciples that they would share his path.

Prayer: Lord, comfort those who are rejected or forced to leave their homes, and teach me to forgive.

Today: Do something concrete for a migrant or refugee, or pray for one by name.

Day 9: Dying far from home

Malo died at Archingeay, far from the community he had founded, on a November 15. Yet his memory returned to Brittany and spread to Rouen, Pontoise and Paris. For a Christian, no place is truly exile, because our homeland is with God.

Prayer: Saint Malo, present our intentions to the Lord, and help us to walk toward our true homeland. Amen.

Today: Pray for the dying, especially those far from their families.

Closing prayer

> *Lord our God, you led Saint Malo across the sea to proclaim your Gospel and found your Church on a new shore. Through his prayers, protect all who travel, support all who must start again far from home, and make us faithful witnesses wherever you send us. Grant the intention I place before you in this novena, if it is according to your will. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To learn more about him, read the life of Saint Malo or pray the prayer to Saint Malo.

Credits and sources

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