

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Mamertus of Vienne

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 11

IN BRIEF

Saint Mamertus of Vienne

Bishop of Vienne in the fifth century, founder of the Rogation Days, first of the Ice Saints in popular tradition.

Feast day	May 11
Died	c. 475, Vienne, Gaul (France)
Canonized	Immemorial cult
Era	5th century
Patron saint of	farmers, gardeners, winegrowers, crops, protection against frost

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Mamertus of Vienne

Saint Mamertus was bishop of Vienne, in Gaul, in the second half of the fifth century. The brother of the theologian Claudianus Mamertus, he is remembered for instituting the Rogation Days, processions of prayer held on the three days before the Ascension to ask God's protection on the crops, after a series of calamities struck his city. He died around 475 and is celebrated on May 11. Popular tradition made him the first of the "Ice Saints."

Who was Saint Mamertus?

Mamertus belonged to a cultured family of Roman Gaul. His brother, Claudianus Mamertus, a priest of Vienne, was a respected Christian philosopher and poet, author of a treatise on the nature of the soul and a friend of Saint Sidonius Apollinaris. Mamertus himself was known for his learning and his knowledge of theology. Around 460 he became bishop of Vienne, one of the great metropolitan cities of Gaul, on the Rhône south of Lyon.

The sources for his life are letters of his time, especially those of Sidonius Apollinaris and of Pope Hilarius, the acts of councils, and the catalog of the bishops of Vienne written in the ninth century by Saint Ado, who calls him "a most remarkable bishop."

Key dates in the life of Saint Mamertus

- **5th century**: Born into a learned family of Gaul.
- **c. 460**: Becomes bishop of Vienne.
- **463**: Ordains a bishop for Die, which leads to a conflict with the bishop of Arles and the intervention of Pope Hilarius.

- **c. 470**: After a series of calamities, institutes the Rogation processions in Vienne.
- **c. 474**: Takes part in the Council of Arles that examines the teaching of the priest Lucidus on predestination.
- **May 11, c. 475**: Dies in Vienne.

An energetic bishop

Mamertus appears in the documents as a determined pastor, sometimes to the point of overstepping his rights. In 463 he consecrated a bishop for the city of Die, which in fact fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Arles. Leontius of Arles complained to Pope Hilarius, who expressed surprise at not having been informed earlier and entrusted the matter to a synod held at Arles. Mamertus had to submit. The episode shows the rivalry that then divided the great sees of the Rhône valley.

The institution of the Rogation Days

In the early 470s, Vienne was struck by a series of misfortunes. Saint Ado, drawing on older sources, tells of frequent fires, repeated earthquakes, strange rumblings at night, and even wild animals, wolves, bears and deer, coming into the city as far as the forum. One Easter night, when a great fire broke out, Mamertus remained in prayer before the altar, and the fire finally died down.

The bishop then decided to institute, for the three days before the feast of the Ascension, processions of penance and supplication, with fasting, prayer and the chanting of litanies, to ask God to turn away these scourges and to bless the land.

Sidonius Apollinaris, bishop of Clermont, adopted the practice at once, and his letters bear witness to its origin in Vienne. The Rogations spread through Gaul and then to the whole Latin Church. The Council of Orléans in 511 made them obligatory in Gaul, and they were later adopted in Rome.

The Rogation Days, a prayer for the land

For centuries the Rogation Days set the rhythm of rural life. Led by the priest, the faithful walked through the fields chanting the Litany of the Saints, asking for good harvests, protection from hail and frost, and God's blessing on their work. The name comes from the Latin *rogare*, "to ask." In England, the Rogation processions around the parish gave rise to the custom known as "beating the bounds."

The current Roman Missal leaves it to the bishops' conferences to set the date and form of these days of prayer. They are often an occasion to pray for agriculture, for the care of creation and for human work. Some rural parishes, in the United States and elsewhere, still bless fields, seeds and farm equipment in spring.

Why is Saint Mamertus the first of the Ice Saints?

His feast, May 11, falls at a time when spring can still bring hard frosts. Popular tradition in France, Germany and Central Europe made him, together with Saint Pancras on May 12 and Saint Servatius on May 13, one of the three "Ice Saints," days feared by gardeners and winegrowers. The proverb says to wait until they have passed before planting tender crops. This connection has nothing historical about it, yet it fits well with Mamertus's link to prayer for the harvest. This is why he is invoked for farmers, gardeners and winegrowers.

What can we learn from Saint Mamertus?

Mamertus answered his people's fear with common prayer. Facing disaster, he did not look for someone to blame; he gathered his city to implore God and to turn back to him. His initiative has lasted fifteen centuries. He can be invoked for farmers, gardeners and winegrowers, for the harvest, for the victims of natural disasters, and to learn to entrust the land and human work to God.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Mamertus in art

Mamertus is shown as a bishop, with miter and crozier, as in the statue in the Cathedral of Saint Maurice in Vienne. Some old engravings show him leading a procession of the faithful, a reminder of the Rogations.

Where to pray to Saint Mamertus

His sarcophagus, found in the nineteenth century, is kept in Vienne in the former Church of Saint Peter, now an archaeological museum.

- **Vienne** (Isère, France): the Cathedral of Saint Maurice, seat of his diocese, and the Saint Peter archaeological museum, which keeps his sarcophagus.
- **Les Côtes-d'Arey** (Isère, France): the Chapel of Saint Mamertus.
- **Everywhere**: during the processions and prayers of the Rogation Days, before the Ascension.

To pray with him, Saintspedia offers a prayer to Saint Mamertus for the harvest and a novena to Saint Mamertus ending on May 11.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Mamertus for the Harvest

Saint Mamertus is the founder of the Rogation Days, and the Church has prayed with him above all through the Litany of the Saints, chanted during those processions. There is no fixed traditional prayer addressed to him in English. Saintspedia offers below an original prayer inspired by his initiative: asking God for protection from disasters and for his blessing on the land and on human work.

The bishop of the Rogations

Around 470, facing fires, earthquakes and the fear spreading through his city, Mamertus called his people to pray and fast during the three days before the Ascension. For centuries these processions, the Rogations, wound through the fields of all Europe.

Prayer to Saint Mamertus

> *Saint Mamertus, you gathered your people in prayer in the hour of trial. Pray for us.*
>
> *Bless the work of farmers, ranchers, winegrowers and gardeners. Protect seeds, blossoms and young shoots from frost, hail and drought.*
>
> *Support those who have lost everything in a fire, a flood or an earthquake, and all who come to their aid.*
>
> *Teach us to respect the earth that God entrusts to us, to share its fruits with those who are hungry, and to give thanks for every harvest.*
>
> *I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). With all the saints, present it to the Lord, the master of life. Amen.*

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

Praying the Rogations at home

Since Mamertus's processions were built on the Litany of the Saints, you can pray it in his spirit during the Rogation Days or at planting time. A simple form is to walk around your garden, field or neighborhood, invoking a few saints and answering "pray for us," and then to ask: "From lightning and tempest, deliver us, O Lord. That you would give and preserve the fruits of the earth, we beseech you, hear us." These invocations are adapted from the traditional Litany of the Saints.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Mamertus is celebrated on May 11, the first of the three Ice Saints. You can pray to him:

- during the Rogation Days before the Ascension;
- at planting and sowing time, or when a late frost threatens;
- for farmers, gardeners and winegrowers;
- after a natural disaster, for the victims and those who help them;
- for the care of creation and a fair sharing of the earth's fruits.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Mamertus

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Mamertus, bishop of Vienne and founder of the Rogation Days. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, May 11, begin it on May 3. In many years it falls close to the Rogation Days before the Ascension. It can also be prayed at sowing time, during a drought or after a natural disaster.

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. If you can, add a few invocations of the Litany of the Saints, as in the Rogation processions. The small act suggested for the day helps you live in the spirit of Saint Mamertus: common prayer, conversion, and care for the land and those who work it. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day.

The nine days follow his path as the sources describe it: his learned family, his work as bishop of Vienne, the correction he accepted from the pope, the calamities that struck his city, his prayer before the altar, and the birth of the Rogations, which spread from Vienne to the whole Latin Church. If you are praying with a group, you can walk a short way together each day, outdoors if possible, as the faithful did in the old Rogation processions, and end with the prayer of the day.

Day 1: A learned family

Mamertus grew up in a cultured family of Roman Gaul; his brother Claudianus was a Christian philosopher and poet. Intelligence and learning are gifts of God, meant to serve faith and others.

Prayer: Lord, bless my mind and my studies. Let all I know lead me closer to you.

Today: Read a page of Scripture or of a spiritual book with attention.

Day 2: A shepherd for his city

Around 460 Mamertus became bishop of Vienne, a great city of Gaul. He took responsibility for a whole people, in its joys and its fears.

Prayer: Lord, bless our bishops and pastors. Give them a heart for all the people of their city.

Today: Pray for your town or city and for those who govern it.

Day 3: Accepting correction

When Mamertus overstepped his rights by ordaining a bishop for Die, the pope and a synod corrected him, and he submitted. Even saints make mistakes; holiness lies in accepting correction.

Prayer: Lord, give me the humility to accept correction and to grow from my mistakes.

Today: Accept a remark or criticism calmly, without justifying yourself.

Day 4: In the face of fear

Fires, earthquakes and wild animals in the streets filled Vienne with fear. Mamertus did not look for someone to blame. He turned his people toward God.

Prayer: Lord, when fear grips me, turn my heart toward you. Give peace to those who are afraid.

Today: Name a fear you carry and entrust it to God in prayer.

Day 5: Praying before the altar

One Easter night, when a great fire broke out, Mamertus remained in prayer before the altar, and the fire finally died down. Prayer is our first response, not our last resort.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray first, before I worry or act.

Today: Spend ten minutes before the Blessed Sacrament, or in silence at home.

Day 6: Praying together

Mamertus did not pray alone; he gathered his whole city in procession. Common prayer unites a people and gives it strength.

Prayer: Lord, make our parishes and families communities of prayer.

Today: Pray with someone else today, at a meal or in the evening.

Day 7: Fasting and conversion

The Rogations included fasting and penance. Mamertus knew that asking God for help also means turning our own lives back to him.

Prayer: Lord, change my heart. Help me to leave behind what keeps me far from you.

Today: Fast from something small and give what you save to the poor.

Day 8: Blessing the land

For centuries, the faithful walked through the fields during the Rogation Days to ask for good harvests and protection from frost and hail. The earth is God's gift, entrusted to our care.

Prayer: Lord, bless the fields, the gardens and the vineyards. Protect them from frost, hail and drought, and bless those who work them.

Today: Plant something, water a plant, or thank a farmer for their work.

Day 9: Fifteen centuries of prayer

Mamertus died around 475, but his initiative spread through the whole Church. A single act of faith can bear fruit for centuries. Sidonius Apollinaris took up the practice in Clermont, the Council of Orléans made it a rule in Gaul, and Rome adopted it in its turn.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Mamertus, grant the intention I bring to you, and make my faith fruitful for others.

Today: Pray for the victims of a recent natural disaster and, if you can, support those who help them.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Mamertus, bishop of Vienne, you answered the fear of your people with prayer, fasting and trust in God. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Bless the work of farmers and gardeners, protect the harvest from frost and storm, and comfort all who suffer from disaster. Teach us to receive the earth as God's gift and to share its fruits with all. Amen.*

To continue praying with him, use the prayer to Saint Mamertus, or read his life.

CREDITS

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