

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Marculf (Marcoul)

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 1

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IN BRIEF

Saint Marculf (Marcoul)

Sixth-century Norman priest and abbot, founder of Nanteuil, invoked against scrofula and skin diseases.

Feast day	May 1
Born	c. 490, Bayeux, Normandy, France
Died	May 1, c. 558, Nanteuil (now Saint-Marcouf, Manche), France
Canonized	immemorial veneration
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	people with scrofula, skin diseases, Corbeny

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Marculf

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Marculf (Marcoul)

Saint Marculf (in French, Marcoul or Marcouf) was a sixth-century priest and abbot from Normandy. Born in Bayeux, he founded the monastery of Nanteuil in the Cotentin peninsula and lived as a hermit on the islands that now bear his name. His relics, carried to Corbeny, near Laon, to keep them safe from the Vikings, became the goal of a royal pilgrimage: after their coronation in Reims, the kings of France came to pray there before touching people suffering from scrofula, the "King's Evil." His feast day is May 1.

Who was Saint Marculf?

Marculf (in Latin, *Marculfus*) was one of the evangelizers of western Normandy in the time of the Merovingian kings. His oldest *Life* was written several generations after his death, and its details must be received with caution.

His fame rests above all on what happened after his death. For centuries his relics, invoked against scrofula, were associated with the healing power attributed to the kings of France. The historian Marc Bloch devoted long pages to him in his famous book *The Royal Touch* (*Les Rois thaumaturges*, 1924).

Key dates

- **Around 490**: Born in Bayeux to a Christian family, according to tradition.
- **Early 6th century**: Orphaned, he is trained by the bishop of Coutances, who ordains him a priest.
- **First half of the 6th century**: Preaches in the Cotentin; according to his *Life*, King Childebert I grants him an estate at Nanteuil, where he founds a monastery.
- **Around 558**: Dies on a May 1; some traditions give a later date.

- **Late 9th century**: His relics are carried away from the coast to escape Viking raids.
- **Early 10th century**: King Charles the Simple receives the monks and relics at Corbeny, where a priory is founded.
- **14th to 17th century**: After their coronation, the kings of France go to Corbeny, or have his relics venerated, before touching the sick.

Missionary of the Cotentin

According to tradition, Marculf was born in Bayeux around 490. Orphaned young, he was entrusted to the bishop of Coutances, who taught him and ordained him a priest. He then traveled through the countryside of the Cotentin, still largely pagan, to proclaim the Gospel.

With disciples, he founded the monastery of Nanteuil on the eastern side of the peninsula, on an estate given by King Childebert I according to his *Life*. The place is now called Saint-Marcouf.

The hermit of the islands

Like many monks of his time, Marculf loved to withdraw into solitude to pray, especially during Lent. Tradition has him staying on the small islands off the coast, known ever since as the Îles Saint-Marcouf. There he is said to have met Saint Helier, another hermit of the Channel Islands, well known to the people of Jersey. He died around 558, on a May 1, and was buried at Nanteuil.

From Nanteuil to Corbeny

At the end of the ninth century, Viking raids threatened the monasteries of the Norman coast. The monks of Nanteuil carried their founder's relics inland. King Charles III, called the Simple, received them at Corbeny, between Laon and Reims, on a royal estate, and had a priory built for them.

The relics stayed there and became the object of great devotion. People invoked them above all against scrofula, a tuberculous disease of the lymph nodes of the neck, and more broadly against skin diseases, abscesses and boils.



The Saint Marculf oratory in Corbeny (Aisne).

"The king touches you, God heals you"

From the eleventh century, the kings of France were believed to have the power to heal scrofula by their touch. The chronicler Guibert of Nogent claimed, in the early twelfth century, to have seen King Louis VI touch the sick. English readers may know the same belief from England, where the disease was called the "King's Evil" and English monarchs also practiced the royal touch.

Little by little, the French royal gift was linked to Saint Marculf. One tradition explained that God had granted it to the kings in thanks for the welcome Charles the Simple had given his relics.

From the fourteenth century, it became customary for the king, after his coronation in Reims, to go on pilgrimage to Corbeny to venerate the saint's relics before touching the sick. The king laid his hand on the sick person, tracing a sign of the cross, and said: "The king touches you, God heals you." The rite was practiced from Louis X to Louis XIV. Later, because of wars, the relics were brought to Reims, to the Abbey of Saint-Remi. Charles X was the last king to touch for scrofula, in Reims in 1825.

Devotion to this day

During the French Revolution, the priory of Corbeny was suppressed and the reliquary melted down, but a villager hid the relics, which were returned to the parish church. In 1917, during the Battle of the Chemin des Dames, the village was completely destroyed; local people saved the relics. Today they are venerated in the rebuilt church of Corbeny.

In Normandy, Saint Marculf is honored at Saint-Marcouf, in both the Manche and Calvados departments, as well as at Gouville-sur-Mer and in Honfleur, where the church of Saint Catherine has a seventeenth-century wooden statue of him.

Why is Saint Marculf the patron saint of the sick with skin diseases?

For centuries, people suffering from scrofula came on pilgrimage to his relics at Corbeny, and the royal touch itself was placed under his protection. Devotion extended to other skin conditions, abscesses and boils. He is also the patron of Corbeny, the village that has kept his relics for more than a thousand years.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Marculf in art

Marculf is shown as an abbot, with a crozier. Old prints of the royal touch sometimes show him standing beside the king as the sick are presented.



The royal touch for scrofula, under the protection of Saint Marculf.

What can we learn from Saint Marculf?

Saint Marculf was first of all a missionary and a man of prayer, who proclaimed the Gospel in Normandy and sought God in the solitude of the islands. His cult also recalls the long Christian tradition of praying for the sick, and the conviction that authority must be a service, even to the point of touching the most shunned of the sick. We can ask his prayers for people with skin diseases, for caregivers and for those who hold authority.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Marculf for the sick and the novena to Saint Marculf.

Where to pray to Saint Marculf

- **Corbeny** (Aisne, France): the parish church, which keeps his relics, and the Saint Marculf oratory.

- **Saint-Marcouf** (Manche): the site of his monastery of Nanteuil, facing the Îles Saint-Marcouf.
- **Saint-Marcouf** (Calvados): the church dedicated to him.
- **Honfleur** (Calvados): the church of Saint Catherine and its statue of the saint.
- **Reims**: the Basilica of Saint-Remi, where his relics were once brought for the royal touch.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Marculf for the Sick

Saint Marculf, a sixth-century abbot from Normandy, was invoked for centuries by people suffering from scrofula and skin diseases, who came on pilgrimage to his relics at Corbeny. The old pilgrimage prayers have not come down to us in a reliable form, so this page offers a prayer inspired by his life and his cult. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Marculf for the Sick

Saint Marculf, you left your city of Bayeux to proclaim Christ in the countryside of the Cotentin: give me the zeal to bear witness to my faith with simplicity.

You withdrew to the islands of the sea to pray in silence: teach me to make silence within myself so that I can listen to God.

So many sick people have called on you over the centuries: look kindly on those who suffer in their bodies, especially from skin diseases, from wounds that do not heal, or from illnesses that make them feel rejected. Obtain relief for them, healing if God wills it, and above all peace of heart.

Bless doctors, nurses and all who care for the sick. May their hands, like the hands you once inspired, touch with respect and bring comfort. I entrust to you my intention (name it in silence). Amen.

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

Prayer for those in authority

> *Lord, through the intercession of Saint Marculf, to whom people prayed before the royal touch of the sick, give those who hold authority a care for the weakest. May they seek not their own glory but the good of those entrusted to them, and may they know how to bend down to those whom others avoid. Amen.*

Original prayer by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Marculf's feast day is May 1. You can pray to him:

- for someone who is sick, especially with a skin disease or a chronic illness;
- before a medical procedure or an operation;
- for doctors, nurses and caregivers;
- for leaders, that they may serve the weakest.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Marculf or pray the novena to Saint Marculf.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Marculf

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Marculf (Marcoul), sixth-century abbot and missionary in Normandy, invoked for centuries by the sick. It is not an official liturgical text. To end the novena on his feast day, May 1, begin on April 23. You can also pray it at any time for a sick person, especially someone suffering from a skin disease or a long illness.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and place your intention before God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Saint Marculf, pray for us." The small act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. If you miss a day, simply continue the next day. Prayer for the sick never replaces medical care: it accompanies it and entrusts it to God.

Day 1: An orphan in God's hands

Tradition says Marculf lost his parents young and was entrusted to the bishop of Coutances. God did not abandon him: he gave him a father in faith who taught him and prepared him for the priesthood.

Prayer: Lord, watch over orphans and children who lack love. Send them people who will care for them.

Today: Pray for children in foster care, or support an organization that helps them.

Day 2: Called to the priesthood

The bishop of Coutances ordained Marculf a priest. From then on his life belonged to God and to the people he would serve.

Prayer: Lord, bless the priests of my parish and diocese. Keep them faithful and joyful in their service.

Today: Thank a priest for his ministry, in person or in a short message.

Day 3: Proclaiming the Gospel

Marculf traveled through the countryside of the Cotentin, still largely pagan, to proclaim Christ. He did not wait for people to come to him: he went to them.

Prayer: Lord, make me a missionary where I live, at home, at work and among my friends.

Today: Invite someone to Mass, or share a word of faith with simplicity.

Day 4: Founding a community

With his disciples, Marculf founded the monastery of Nanteuil. Faith grows in community, where brothers and sisters pray and work together.

Prayer: Lord, bless religious communities and all Christian communities. Help us live in true fraternity.

Today: Take part in a parish activity, or reach out to someone who is isolated in your community.

Day 5: Silence on the islands

Marculf loved to withdraw to the small islands off the coast to pray, especially during Lent. In silence, far from noise, he found God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to find moments of silence with you, even in a busy life.

Today: Spend fifteen minutes in silent prayer, away from screens.

Day 6: Relics saved from danger

When the Vikings threatened the coast, the monks carried Marculf's relics inland, and they were saved again during the Revolution and in 1917. Faithful people kept the memory of the saint through every storm.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to keep the faith in difficult times, and to pass it on to those who come after me.

Today: Share something of your faith with a younger person in your family.

Day 7: The sick who are shunned

For centuries, people with scrofula and skin diseases came to Corbeny. Their illnesses were often visible and made others turn away. Saint Marculf became their friend.

Prayer: Lord, comfort the sick who feel ashamed or rejected because of their illness. Help them know that they are loved.

Today: Visit or call someone who is sick, and listen without judging.

Day 8: Hands that heal

"The king touches you, God heals you." The rite of the royal touch, placed under Marculf's protection, reminded kings that their power came from God and should serve the sick. Every caregiver's hand can be an instrument of God's tenderness.

Prayer: Lord, bless doctors, nurses, caregivers and all who touch the sick with respect and gentleness.

Today: Pray for a caregiver you know, and thank them if you can.

Day 9: Authority as service

On his feast day, we remember that even kings came to Corbeny to bow before the relics of a humble monk. True greatness is to serve, especially the weakest.

Prayer: Saint Marculf, pray for all who hold authority, that they may serve the poor and the sick. And pray for me, that I may use my own small authority to serve.

Today: Go to Mass if you can, and offer it for the sick you have prayed for during this novena.

Closing prayer

> *Lord our God, you called Saint Marculf to proclaim your Gospel in Normandy and to seek you in silence, and you have made him for centuries a friend of the sick. Through his intercession, comfort all who suffer in their bodies, bless those who care for them, and teach those in authority to serve. Hear the intention I have carried during this novena (name it in silence). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

If you are praying this novena for a sick person, you may tell them that you have been praying for them, or bring them a small sign of your care. If you are sick yourself, offer your sufferings in union with Christ for those who suffer more than you.

Saint Marculf, pray for us.

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