BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Maxellendis of Caudry

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 13

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IN BRIEF

Saint Maxellendis of Caudry

Young virgin and martyr of the Cambrésis in the 7th century, patron saint of Caudry, invoked for diseases of the eyes.

Feast day	November 13
Born	c. 650, Caudry (Nord, France)
Died	November 13, c. 670, Caudry (Nord, France)
Canonized	immemorial cult (translation of her relics under Saint Vindicianus, c. 673)
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	Caudry, the blind and visually impaired, diseases of the eyes

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Maxellendis of Caudry

Saint Maxellendis (Maxellende in French) was a young Christian woman of the 7th century, born around 650 at Caudry, in the Cambrésis region of northern France. According to tradition, she was killed around 670 by the suitor she had refused because she wished to give herself to God. Virgin and martyr, patron saint of Caudry, she is invoked for diseases of the eyes. Her feast day is November 13, or the following Sunday, in the basilica of Caudry that keeps her reliquary.

Who was Saint Maxellendis?

Maxellendis belongs to the Merovingian period, the time when northern Gaul, evangelized by bishops and monks such as Saint Vedast, Saint Gaugericus (Géry) and Saint Amand, was being covered with parishes and monasteries. Her story has come down to us through the tradition of the Church of Cambrai and through ancient liturgical texts, especially the diocesan breviary and the chronicle attributed to Baldric, written in the 11th century. Like many accounts from that age, it mixes real memories with edifying elements. Yet it keeps the essential: a young woman who preferred Christ to an imposed marriage, and who paid for it with her life. Her cult has never ceased since the 7th century, which makes her one of the great popular saints of the Cambrésis.

Key dates in the life of Maxellendis

- **c. 650**: Born at Caudry, into a family of wealthy landowners; according to tradition, her father's name was Huinlinus.
- **c. 665**: Her parents promise her to Harduin, a local lord; she wishes to consecrate herself to God.

- **November 13, c. 670**: She is killed by Harduin, who, according to the account, immediately goes blind.
- **Shortly after**: She is buried in the church of Saint-Souplet, near Le Cateau-Cambrésis.
- **c. 673**: Under Saint Vindicianus, bishop of Cambrai and Arras, her body is brought back to Caudry; Harduin, standing along the way, recovers his sight.
- **Middle Ages**: Her relics are kept in turn at Cambrai, at Le Cateau-Cambrésis, then at Caudry.
- **14th century**: The reliquary that holds her relics today is made; it is now a listed historic monument.
- **1887 - 1890**: The great church of Saint Maxellendis is built at Caudry to plans by Louis Cordonnier.
- **September 3, 1991**: The church is raised to the rank of minor basilica.

A young woman given to God

According to the traditional account, Maxellendis was the daughter of a wealthy landowner of Caudry, respected for his qualities, and of a very devout mother. From childhood she loved to withdraw in order to pray. Her parents, as was the custom, arranged her marriage to Harduin, a young lord of the neighborhood whom tradition links to Solesmes, in the Cambrésis. But Maxellendis had already given herself inwardly to the Lord. She refused the marriage and, to escape her suitor, she went into hiding.

This refusal was no whim. In Merovingian society, a young woman of good family had little freedom when faced with her parents' marriage plans. Choosing consecrated virginity meant declaring that life belongs first to God. Many women saints of that time in northern Gaul made the same choice, sometimes at the cost of great trials.

Martyrdom and forgiveness

Wounded in his pride, Harduin tried to carry her off. He finally found her and, as she still refused to follow him, he struck her dead. Tradition places this tragedy on November 13, around 670. The account adds that immediately after his crime Harduin lost his sight. Maxellendis was first buried in the church of Saint-Souplet, which the ancient breviary describes as a basilica dedicated to the apostles Peter and Paul and to Saint Sulpice.

Some years later, under the episcopate of Saint Vindicianus, her remains were carried back in procession to Caudry. Harduin, now blind, stood along the way. When the young woman's body passed in front of him, he burst into tears, asked forgiveness and recovered his sight. This miracle, the best known of her life, is at the heart of devotion to her: the victim obtains healing for her murderer. That is why she is invoked for the eyes, but also for inner light and reconciliation.

Devotion and art

Saint Maxellendis is honored on November 13, the day of her death; at Caudry, her feast is celebrated on that day or the following Sunday. Her relics traveled over the centuries, from Cambrai to Le Cateau-Cambrésis, before returning to Caudry. They now rest in a 14th-century reliquary, a listed historic monument, placed in the chapel dedicated to her in the right arm of the basilica's transept.

Patron of the people of Caudry and of the visually impaired, she has made Caudry a place of pilgrimage for the blind and those with eye problems. The building, at the end of the 19th century, of a huge church for a medium-sized town shows the strength of this devotion. She is depicted as a young woman bearing the martyr's palm, sometimes with the sword or knife of her death. The stained-glass windows of the basilica, by the Chartres master glazier Charles Lorin, tell her story.

What can we learn from Saint Maxellendis?

Maxellendis reminds us that a vocation is a personal call that no one can impose or erase. She chose Christ freely, despite the pressure of those around her. Her story also speaks of the power of forgiveness: the young martyr did not call for revenge, and it was as she passed by that her murderer saw again. We can pray to her for young people looking for their path, for women who suffer violence, for those with eye diseases, and for all who need to see clearly in their lives.

Where to pray to Saint Maxellendis

- **Caudry** (Nord): the basilica of Saint Maxellendis, which keeps her reliquary, a place of pilgrimage for the visually impaired.
- **Saint-Souplet** (Nord): the village where, according to tradition, she was first buried.
- **Le Cateau-Cambrésis** and **Cambrai** (Nord): the towns where her relics were kept in the Middle Ages.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Maxellendis for the Eyes and the Light of the Heart

Saint Maxellendis, a young woman of Caudry, refused an imposed marriage in order to give herself to Christ; killed around 670 by her suitor, she obtained, according to tradition, the healing of her murderer, who had gone blind. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to her those with eye diseases, young people seeking their vocation, and those who need to forgive.

Prayer to Saint Maxellendis

Saint Maxellendis,
virgin and martyr of the Cambrésis,
you loved Christ more than your own life
and kept your heart for him to the end.
Help me to stay faithful to him
when others would decide in my place.

You who obtained light
for the one who struck you down,
pray for those who suffer in their eyes,
for those who have lost their sight or fear losing it.
Obtain for us above all the light of the heart,
to recognize the path of the Gospel.

Teach us to forgive,
protect girls and women in danger,
and enlighten young people seeking their vocation.
Watch over the town of Caudry and over all who call on you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Maxellendis

- On her feast day, November 13, or the following Sunday, the day of the pilgrimage at Caudry.
- For someone with an eye disease, before an operation or an eye examination.
- For a young person discerning a vocation, to marriage or to consecrated life.
- For women who suffer violence and for their families.
- When it is hard to forgive a wound you have received.

A short invocation

> *Saint Maxellendis, you who gave sight back to your murderer,*
> *guard our eyes and enlighten our hearts. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Maxellendis from November 5 to 13, and discover the life of Saint Maxellendis.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Maxellendis of Caudry

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It follows the life of Saint Maxellendis, a young martyr of Caudry in the 7th century, as the tradition of the Cambrésis has handed it down. To finish it on her feast day, November 13, begin on November 5. You can also pray it at any other time, especially for someone with an eye disease.

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 Maxellendis, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from the traditional account, which mixes historical memories and legendary elements.

Day 1: A childhood turned toward God

According to tradition, Maxellendis grew up at Caudry with a very devout mother. As a little girl she loved to withdraw in order to pray. Faith was handed on to her within the family, like a seed that would grow.

Prayer: Lord, bless parents who teach their children to pray. Make the faith we received at baptism grow in us.

Act of the day: Pray for a few minutes with a child, or for the children around you.

Day 2: A taste for silence

Maxellendis looked for moments of solitude to be alone with God. In a rich and busy household, she was able to keep an inner space.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be silent so as to listen to you, amid the noise and the business of my days.

Act of the day: Turn off screens and music for a quarter of an hour to pray in silence.

Day 3: A personal call

Her parents promised her to Harduin, but Maxellendis had heard another call: to give herself to Christ. A vocation cannot be ordered from outside; it is received from God.

Prayer: Lord, enlighten young people who are looking for their path. Give them the courage to answer your call freely.

Act of the day: Pray for a young person discerning a vocation, to marriage, priesthood or consecrated life.

Day 4: Staying faithful under pressure

To escape the imposed marriage, Maxellendis went into hiding. She held firm, despite the will of those around her and the anger of her suitor.

Prayer: Lord, when others want to decide for me against my conscience, give me the strength to stay faithful to you.

Act of the day: Make a choice today that follows your conscience, even if it costs you.

Day 5: The gift of her life

Harduin found her and struck her dead, on a November 13, around 670. Maxellendis joined the long line of virgin martyrs who gave their lives rather than deny their consecration.

Prayer: Lord, welcome into your peace all the victims of violence. Protect girls and women in danger.

Act of the day: Pray for a woman who suffers violence, or support an organization that helps such women.

Day 6: In the darkness

After his crime, Harduin lost his sight. The account thus shows the night in which the one who does evil shuts himself up. But God does not abandon him to that night.

Prayer: Lord, visit those who are locked in the evil they have done. Open for them a path of conversion.

Act of the day: Pray for someone in prison, or for someone who has wronged you.

Day 7: The forgiveness that heals

When the body of Maxellendis was carried back to Caudry, Harduin wept as it passed and recovered his sight. The victim became a source of healing for her murderer.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you who forgave on the cross, teach me to forgive, even when the wound is deep.

Act of the day: Take a step, however small, toward someone with whom you are in conflict.

Day 8: The light of the eyes

For centuries people have come to Caudry to pray to Saint Maxellendis for diseases of the eyes. Sight is a precious gift, which we often appreciate only when it is threatened.

Prayer: Lord, keep for us the gift of sight. Relieve those who are blind or visually impaired, and bless those who care for them.

Act of the day: Do a practical service for a visually impaired person, or thank God for the beauty you see.

Day 9: The light of the heart

Beyond the eyes of the body, Maxellendis invites us to ask for inner light: to see our life as God sees it, and to walk the paths of the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, enlighten my heart. Through the intercession of Saint Maxellendis, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if you can, and entrust your intention to God in thanksgiving.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Maxellendis,*
> *faithful to Christ even to martyrdom,*
> *you who obtained light for your murderer,*
> *present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Guard our eyes, enlighten our hearts,*
> *and teach us to forgive.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Saint Maxellendis, Caudry

The basilica of Saint Maxellendis stands in the center of Caudry, in the Nord department, at the heart of the Cambrésis. This large neo-Gothic church keeps the reliquary of Saint Maxellendis, the young martyr of the town, killed around 670 according to tradition. It has long been a place of pilgrimage for the blind, the visually impaired and all who suffer from their eyes.

A church for the patron saint of Caudry

Devotion to Saint Maxellendis is attested at Caudry since the early Middle Ages. After her death, the young woman was first buried at Saint-Souplet; then, under Bishop Saint Vindicianus, her remains were brought back to her home town. Over the centuries, her relics were kept at Cambrai and at Le Cateau-Cambrésis, before returning to Caudry.

At the end of the 19th century, the town, then booming thanks to the lace and tulle industry, decided to build a church worthy of its people's devotion. The building was constructed from 1887 to 1890 to plans by the Lille architect Louis Cordonnier, known in particular for the Lille Opera House and the Peace Palace in The Hague. On September 3, 1991, a papal brief raised it to the rank of minor basilica.

What to see

The basilica, more than seventy meters long, is dominated by a bell tower about seventy-five meters high. Inside, the nave rises some twenty meters to the vault. The transept opens onto two chapels: on the left, that of Our Lady of the Rosary; on the right, that of Saint Maxellendis, where her 14th-century reliquary rests, a listed historic monument. Two large rose windows light the transept.

The stained-glass windows made between 1905 and 1940 by Charles Lorin, master glazier in Chartres, tell the life of the saint: her childhood, her refusal of marriage, her martyrdom and the healing of her murderer. The choir is adorned with a high altar of white marble, gilded copper and mosaics. The basilica also has a great organ by Charles Mutin, successor of Cavaillé-Coll, installed in 1913.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Maxellendis. Before her reliquary, entrust to her those with eye diseases, young people seeking their vocation and those who must forgive, then say the prayer to Saint Maxellendis. The feast of the saint is celebrated each year on November 13 or the following Sunday: it is the best time for a pilgrimage.

Practical information

Caudry lies in the Nord department, about fifteen kilometers east of Cambrai, and can be reached by car or by train. The basilica is an active parish church: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the parish or the Caudrésis tourist office before your visit.

Credits and sources

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