BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Nabor

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 12

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IN BRIEF

Saint Nabor

Christian soldier martyred at Lodi with Saint Felix around 304, patron of Saint-Avold.

Feast day	July 12
Born	3rd century, Mauretania (North Africa) according to tradition
Died	c. 304, Lodi (Lombardy, Italy)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	3rd century
Patron saint of	Saint-Avold, sick children

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Nabor

Saint Nabor was a Christian soldier who died a martyr with his companion Saint Felix at Lodi, near Milan, in the early 4th century, during the great persecution of Diocletian. Venerated in Milan from the time of Saint Ambrose, the two martyrs are celebrated together on July 12. In Lorraine, the name of Nabor is linked to the town of Saint-Avold, which grew up around an abbey that received his relics in the 8th century.

Who was Saint Nabor?

Nabor is one of those military martyrs of the early centuries whose story has come down to us only in summary form. Tradition presents him as a legionary from Mauretania, in North Africa, serving with his friend Felix in the imperial army. When the persecution broke out, the two soldiers refused to deny Christ and were executed at Lodi, the ancient *Laus Pompeia*, around 304. The more detailed accounts of their passion are late and do not allow us to reconstruct their lives with certainty. The most solid fact is the antiquity of their cult in Milan, attested in the 4th century by Saint Ambrose himself.

Key dates in the life of Nabor

- **Late 3rd century**: According to tradition, Nabor and Felix, natives of Mauretania, serve as soldiers in the Roman army in northern Italy.
- **c. 304**: During the persecution of Diocletian, they are put to death at Lodi for their faith.
- **4th century**: Their bodies rest in Milan, in a basilica bearing their name.
- **386**: In this basilica, Saint Ambrose has the bodies of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius brought to light.

- **765**: Saint Chrodegang, bishop of Metz, brings relics of Saint Nabor from Rome and entrusts them to a Benedictine abbey in Lorraine.
- **Middle Ages**: The town that grows up around the abbey takes the name of Saint-Nabor, which later became Saint-Avold.
- **13th century**: According to an Alsatian legend, relics of the saint are carried as far as Mont Sainte-Odile.

Soldiers faithful to Christ

At the beginning of the 4th century, Emperor Diocletian and his colleagues launched against the Christians the most violent persecution in the history of the Empire. In the army, soldiers had to sacrifice to the gods; those who refused risked death. It is in this context that tradition places the martyrdom of Nabor and Felix. According to the accounts, they were arrested, questioned, then executed at Lodi, some thirty kilometers from Milan. Their witness joins that of other Christian soldiers of the same period, such as Saint Maurice and his companions or Saint Sebastian: men used to discipline and obedience, who recognized that there was a higher obedience.

The cult in Milan

The bodies of Nabor and Felix were taken to Milan, where a basilica was dedicated to them. It held an important place in the life of the Church of Milan: it was there, according to Saint Ambrose's own account, that the bishop had the bodies of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius brought to light in 386. A hymn attributed to Ambrose celebrates, together with Saint Victor, the martyrs Nabor and Felix who came from Africa. The Roman Martyrology commemorates Saints Nabor and Felix on July 12. They are traditionally invoked for the illnesses of children.

Saint Nabor in Lorraine and Alsace

In the 8th century, Saint Chrodegang, bishop of Metz and a great reformer of the Frankish Church, brought several holy bodies from Rome for the abbeys of his diocese. In 765, he entrusted relics of Saint Nabor to the Benedictine abbey founded on the site of present-day Saint-Avold. The abbey took the name of the martyr, and the town that developed around it was first called Saint-Nabor; this name later changed into Saint-Avold, but its inhabitants are still called Naboriens. August 24, the date the relics arrived, has remained a day of pilgrimage.

One uncertainty should be noted: the relics of Saint-Avold came from Rome and not from Milan, and another martyr named Nabor is known in Rome. The exact identity of the saint venerated in Lorraine is therefore debated; local tradition identifies him with the companion of Felix.

Other places received relics, such as the church of Saint-Nabor in Colombey. In Alsace, a legend tells that a camel, sent in the 13th century by Hugh, Count of Burgundy, was to carry part of the relics as far as possible; it stopped at the village that now bears the name of Saint-Nabor, before halting at the monastery of Niedermunster, at the foot of Mont Sainte-Odile. Saint Nabor is shown as a Roman soldier, with a spear or a javelin.

What can we learn from Saint Nabor?

Saint Nabor is a witness to courage. As a soldier, he knew the value of being faithful to an oath; as a Christian, he chose to remain faithful to Christ to the end. His friendship with Felix reminds us that we do not bear witness alone: faith is lived and defended together. You can pray to him for soldiers and police officers, for persecuted Christians, for sick children, and for all who must choose between the easy way and their conscience.

Where to pray to Saint Nabor

- **Saint-Avold** (Moselle): the abbey church of Saint-Nabor, which received his relics in 765 and where a large statue depicts him.
- **Milan** and **Lodi** (Italy): the cities of his martyrdom and of his first cult, with Saint Felix.
- **Saint-Nabor** (Bas-Rhin), at the foot of Mont Sainte-Odile: a village that bears his name.
- **Colombey**, in Lorraine: the church of Saint-Nabor, which received relics of the saint.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Nabor for Courage in Faith

Saint Nabor, a Christian soldier, died a martyr with his friend Saint Felix at Lodi, near Milan, around 304. Honored in Milan from the time of Saint Ambrose, he is also the patron of Saint-Avold, in Lorraine, where his relics were brought in 765. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him courage in faith, soldiers, persecuted Christians and sick children.

Prayer to Saint Nabor

Saint Nabor,
soldier of the emperor and witness of Christ,
you preferred faithfulness to your Lord
to the safety of your life.
Give me a steadfast heart
when my faith is put to the test.

With your friend Felix, you walked to martyrdom.
Teach us to support one another in faith,
never to leave alone a brother who suffers for Christ.

Protect those who serve in the armed forces and the police,
strengthen persecuted Christians,
and watch over sick children and their parents.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Nabor

- On his feast day, July 12, together with Saint Felix.
- On August 24, the traditional day of the Saint-Avold pilgrimage.
- When a child is ill.
- For soldiers, police officers and their families.
- For Christians who suffer because of their faith.

A short invocation

> *Saints Nabor and Felix, faithful soldiers,*
> *pray for us and for those who suffer for Christ. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Nabor from July 4 to 12, and read the life of Saint Nabor.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Nabor

This novena is inspired by the memory of Saint Nabor, a soldier martyred at Lodi with Saint Felix during the persecution of Diocletian. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition; it is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, July 12, begin on July 4. At Saint-Avold, you can also pray it from August 16 to 24, for the feast of the arrival of his relics.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with 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: "Saints Nabor and Felix, pray for us." The accounts of their passion are late: the meditations rely on what tradition has kept of their witness.

Day 1: From far away

According to tradition, Nabor and Felix came from Mauretania, in North Africa. Far from their homeland, they kept and lived their faith.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who live far from their country. Help them to find a family in your Church.

Act of the day: Greet and welcome someone who has come from another country.

Day 2: Soldiers and Christians

Nabor served in the army. He was disciplined and loyal, and he understood that his first loyalty was to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who serve their country in the armed forces. Keep them in justice and peace.

Act of the day: Pray for a soldier or police officer you know.

Day 3: Two friends in faith

Nabor was not alone: Felix walked with him. Their friendship gave them the strength to remain faithful.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the friends who help me believe. Make me a support for my brothers and sisters.

Act of the day: Encourage a friend who is going through a trial.

Day 4: Refusing the idol

Soldiers were required to sacrifice to the gods of the Empire. Nabor and Felix refused. Every age has idols to refuse.

Prayer: Lord, show me the idols in my life, and help me to prefer you to everything.

Act of the day: Give up today something that takes too much room in your life.

Day 5: The courage of witness

Martyrdom is the highest witness. But every day we are called to bear witness, more simply, to our faith.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak of you simply, without fear and without arrogance.

Act of the day: Do not hide your faith in a conversation where it belongs.

Day 6: For persecuted Christians

Today, too, Christians risk their lives because of their faith. Nabor and Felix are their elder brothers.

Prayer: Lord, support persecuted Christians. Give them strength, and convert the hearts of their persecutors.

Act of the day: Learn about a persecuted Church and pray for it.

Day 7: The martyrs of Milan

In Milan, the basilica of Nabor and Felix was such an important place of prayer that Saint Ambrose had other martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius, brought to light there. The blood of martyrs is a seed.

Prayer: Lord, make your Church grow through the witness of your saints. May their example awaken our faith.

Act of the day: Read the life of a martyr and share it.

Day 8: For sick children

Tradition invokes Saints Nabor and Felix for the illnesses of children. We entrust to them the little ones who suffer and those who care for them.

Prayer: Lord, heal sick children, comfort their parents, and give strength and skill to those who care for them.

Act of the day: Pray for a sick child, or support a family in difficulty.

Day 9: From Italy to Lorraine

His relics, brought to Saint-Avold in 765, gave birth to a town. A witness of faith can bear fruit very far away, and very long afterward.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Nabor and Saint Felix, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if possible, and give thanks for the faith you have received.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Nabor,*
> *faithful soldier and martyr of Christ,*
> *present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Give me your courage in trials*
> *and your faithfulness in friendship.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Abbey Church of Saint-Nabor, Saint-Avold

The abbey church of Saint-Nabor stands in the heart of Saint-Avold, in Moselle. This former Benedictine abbey church bears the name of the martyr whose relics were brought from Rome in 765 by Saint Chrodegang, bishop of Metz. The town grew up around the abbey, to the point of first taking its name: Saint-Nabor, which over the centuries became Saint-Avold. Its inhabitants are still called Naboriens.

An abbey at the origin of a town

According to tradition, the Irish monk Saint Fridolin founded on this site, in the early 6th century, an oratory called *Hilariacum*. Around 720, Saint Sigisbald, bishop of Metz, had an abbey built there dedicated to Saint Peter. Saint Chrodegang introduced the Rule of Saint Benedict and, on returning from a journey to Rome, placed the relics of Saint Nabor there on August 24, 765. From then on the abbey took the name of the martyr. It became a renowned religious center, with an active scriptorium, under the protection of the bishops of Metz. Saint Angilram, future bishop of Metz and close collaborator of Charlemagne, is said to have lived there as a monk.

The Revolution put an end to monastic life. The present church, rebuilt in the 18th century, became a parish church. It suffered from the bombing of 1944, which destroyed its stained glass and most of its bells.

What you can see

At the back of the choir stands a large stone statue of Saint Nabor, shown as a Roman soldier brandishing his javelin; the stone tabernacle is at his feet. The church also keeps an Entombment in the Burgundian style dated 1510, and a carved group of the Crucifixion in polychrome wood, with the Virgin and Saint John, from the 16th century. The large present windows, about 420 square meters, were made from 1969 to 1971 by the local stained-glass artist Arthur Schouler. The great bell, installed in 1920 and weighing six tonnes, is the only old bell to have escaped the looting of 1944.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Nabor. Before his statue, entrust to him soldiers, persecuted Christians and sick children, then say the prayer to Saint Nabor. August 24, the anniversary of the arrival of the relics, is traditionally a day of pilgrimage in Saint-Avold. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

A historical note

The relics of Saint-Avold came from Rome, whereas the cult of Saints Nabor and Felix is first of all Milanese. Since Rome also knew a martyr named Nabor, the exact identity of the saint venerated here is debated. Local tradition identifies him with the companion of Saint Felix, and that is how he is prayed to in Saint-Avold.

Practical information

Saint-Avold is in Moselle, between Metz and Saarbrücken, and can be reached by motorway and by train. The abbey church is a parish church: modest dress and silence are requested, especially during services. Opening times and Mass

times may vary: check with the parish or the Saint-Avold tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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