

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Norbert

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: June 6

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IN BRIEF

Saint Norbert

Rhineland priest turned reformer, founder of the Premonstratensian Order and Archbishop of Magdeburg.

Feast day	June 6
Born	c. 1080, Gennep, near Xanten (Germany)
Died	June 6, 1134, Magdeburg, Germany
Canonized	1582, by Pope Gregory XIII
Era	12th century
Patron saint of	Bohemia

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Norbert for Conversion and for Priests

Novena to Saint Norbert

Tomb of Saint Norbert at Strahov Basilica, Prague

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Norbert

Saint Norbert of Xanten was a twelfth-century priest from the Rhineland who, after a brilliant youth at the imperial court, underwent a sudden conversion, walked barefoot through France and the Low Countries preaching the Gospel, and in 1120 founded the Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré in the forest of Saint-Gobain. Known in English as the Norbertines or Premonstratensians, his order spread across Europe and today has abbeys in the United States, Britain and beyond. He became Archbishop of Magdeburg, died on June 6, 1134, was canonized in 1582 and has rested since 1627 at Strahov Abbey in Prague. His feast day is June 6.

Who was Saint Norbert?

Norbert was born around 1080, perhaps a little later, at Gennep, near Xanten, on the Lower Rhine. His father, Heribert, Lord of Gennep, belonged to the high nobility and was related to the imperial family. Destined for the Church at a young age, Norbert was placed in the chapter of canons at Xanten, where he received minor orders and the subdiaconate, but went no further.

His family connections brought him to the court of his relative, Emperor Henry V, who made him one of his chaplains. There he lived a comfortable and worldly life, and in 1110-1111 he took part in the emperor's expedition to Rome, which ended with the arrest of Pope Paschal II. Nothing at that time suggested a future reformer.

Key dates

- **c. 1080**: Born at Gennep, near Xanten.
- **1110-1111**: Accompanies Emperor Henry V to Rome.
- **1115**: Conversion, retreat, then ordination to the priesthood.

- **1118**: At Saint-Gilles, in Languedoc, Pope Gelasius II allows him to preach everywhere.
- **1120**: Founds the Abbey of Prémontré, near Laon.
- **November 27, 1121**: Founds the Abbey of Floreffe, near Namur.
- **1124**: Mission to Antwerp against the preaching of Tanchelm.
- **February 16, 1126**: Pope Honorius II approves the Order of Prémontré.
- **1126**: Becomes Archbishop of Magdeburg.
- **1130-1133**: Supports Pope Innocent II against the antipope Anacletus II, alongside Saint Bernard.
- **June 6, 1134**: Dies in Magdeburg.
- **1582**: Canonized by Pope Gregory XIII.
- **1627**: His relics are moved to Strahov Abbey in Prague.

A conversion like a thunderbolt

In 1115, while riding in Westphalia near Vreden, Norbert was caught in a violent storm. Lightning struck close to him, his horse threw him and he lay unconscious for a long time. When he came to, his early biography says, he understood that he must "turn from evil and do good." The comparison with the conversion of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus has often been made.

He left the court, withdrew to pray and do penance, then was ordained deacon and priest. Now dressed in a simple tunic, he tried to persuade the canons of Xanten to live more poorly. He was badly received, and at the Council of Fritzlar in 1118 he was even accused of wearing a religious habit without belonging to any order. He then gave up his property and income, distributed them to the poor and took to the roads.

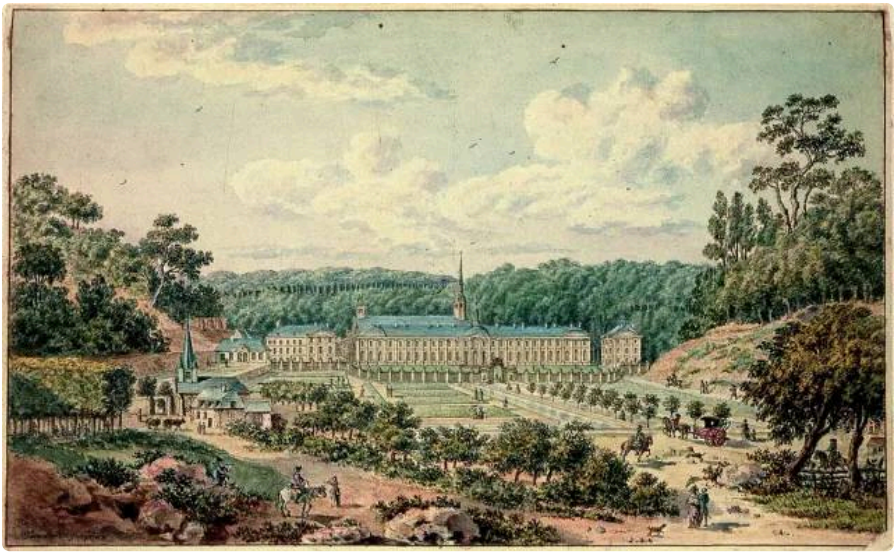
The wandering preacher

In the winter of 1118, barefoot, Norbert crossed France to Saint-Gilles, near Arles, where Pope Gelasius II was staying. The pope authorized him to preach wherever he wished. So began a life of itinerant preaching through Flanders, Hainaut, Brabant and northern France. He reconciled enemies, drew crowds and inspired vocations. At Valenciennes he met Hugh of Fosses, a young cleric who became his most faithful companion and later the first abbot of Prémontré.

Prémontré and the white canons

The Bishop of Laon, Bartholomew of Jur, wanted to keep Norbert in his diocese. After an unsuccessful attempt to reform the canons of Saint-Martin in Laon, he offered him an isolated valley in the forest of Voas, now the forest of Saint-Gobain, at a place called Prémontré. Norbert settled there in 1120 with his first disciples. At Christmas 1121, about forty of them made their profession according to the rule of Saint Augustine.

The originality of the Premonstratensians was to join the common life of monks, liturgical prayer and poverty with the ministry of priests: preaching, celebrating the sacraments, serving parishes. They wore a habit of undyed white wool, which earned them the name "white canons." In the early days, women were also welcomed in nearby communities. Foundations multiplied quickly: Floreffe, Saint Michael's in Antwerp, then others in France, Germany and the Low Countries. In 1126 Pope Honorius II approved the order.



The Abbey of Prémontré, cradle of the order founded by Saint Norbert.

Apostle of the Eucharist

In Antwerp, in 1124, Norbert confronted the influence of the preacher Tanchelm, who rejected the authority of the Church and the sacraments. His preaching, and especially his teaching on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, brought much of the population back. This is why Christian art often shows him holding a monstrance, sometimes trampling the figure of Tanchelm underfoot.

Archbishop of Magdeburg

In 1126 Norbert was elected Archbishop of Magdeburg, in Saxony, on the eastern borders of the Empire. He entrusted Prémontré to Hugh of Fosses and set out, still poorly dressed. He set about reforming his clergy, recovered Church property that had been seized, and installed Premonstratensians in the Abbey of Our Lady in Magdeburg. His reforms provoked violent opposition, even an attempt on his life.

During the schism of 1130, he sided with Saint Bernard of Clairvaux for Pope Innocent II against the antipope Anacletus II, and helped win Emperor Lothair III over to Innocent. In 1133 he accompanied Lothair to Rome as chancellor for Italy. Exhausted and ill, he returned to Magdeburg, where he died on June 6, 1134. He was buried in the church of the Abbey of Our Lady.

From Magdeburg to Prague

Norbert was not canonized until 1582, by Gregory XIII. Since Magdeburg had become Protestant, the Premonstratensians obtained permission to remove his body, and in 1627 it was solemnly moved to the Premonstratensian Abbey of Strahov in Prague, where it still rests. Saint Norbert then became one of the patron saints of Bohemia.



Strahov Monastery in Prague, where the relics of Saint Norbert rest.

Why is Saint Norbert a patron of Bohemia and of priests?

Saint Norbert became a patron of Bohemia after his relics arrived in Prague in 1627. More broadly, he is a man of radical conversion: having moved from the imperial court to Gospel poverty, he did not settle for a solitary holiness, but wanted priests who live together what they preach. Contemplative and apostle, demanding reformer and peacemaker, he united love for the Eucharist with concrete service of the Church. Catholics pray to him for priests, for conversion of heart, for devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and for the unity of the Church.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Norbert in art

- **The monstrance**, his best-known emblem, recalling his preaching on the Eucharist in Antwerp.
- **The white habit** of the Premonstratensian canons.
- **The miter and crosier** of the Archbishop of Magdeburg.
- **A figure trampled underfoot**, representing the heretic Tanchelm.

Where to pray to Saint Norbert

- **Prague**: his tomb in the Basilica of the Assumption at Strahov Abbey.
- **Prémontré** (Aisne, France): the place where his order was founded.
- **Floreffe** (Belgium): one of his first foundations.
- **Xanten** (Germany): the collegiate church of Saint Victor, where he was a canon.
- **Norbertine abbeys**: many living communities celebrate his feast solemnly around the world, including in the United States, where the Norbertines run abbeys, parishes and schools.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Norbert and the novena to Saint Norbert, from May 28 to June 5.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Norbert for Conversion and for Priests

Saint Norbert is prayed to every year by Norbertines around the world, and the universal Church keeps his memory on June 6. The collect of his Mass in the Roman Missal gives thanks for a bishop outstanding in prayer and pastoral zeal, and asks that the flock of the faithful may always find shepherds after God's own heart. Here is a Bible verse dear to his order, followed by an original prayer.

A motto for a whole life

> *"Ready to every good work."*

Source: Saint Paul's Letter to Titus 3:1 (Douay-Rheims; *ad omne opus bonum paratos* in the Latin Vulgate). This phrase is traditionally associated with the Order of Prémontré, which sees in it the spirit of its founder: a common life of prayer wholly available for the service of the Church.

Prayer to Saint Norbert for conversion and for priests

Saint Norbert, God stopped you on your road as he stopped Saint Paul: obtain for me the grace of a true conversion, and the courage to leave behind whatever keeps me far from him.

You loved Christ present in the Eucharist: make my desire to receive him and to adore him grow.

You wanted priests who live together what they preach: pray for priests and religious, for Norbertine communities and for vocations.

You worked for the peace and unity of the Church: calm our divisions and reconcile those who have drifted apart.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Make me ready to every good work, for the glory of God and the service of my brothers and sisters. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, **June 6**, the anniversary of his death in Magdeburg in 1134.
- During Eucharistic adoration, or on the solemnity of Corpus Christi, which some years falls close to his feast.
- When you pray for priests, for a seminarian or for vocations to religious life.
- When you feel called to change your life but lack the courage to take the first step.
- When your parish or your family suffers from division.

A short prayer before the Blessed Sacrament

> *Lord Jesus, truly present in the Eucharist, through the intercession of Saint Norbert, increase my faith in your presence, my hope in your promises and my love for you and for my neighbor. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Norbert, from May 28 to June 5, and read the life of Saint Norbert.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Norbert

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Norbert of Xanten. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish on the eve of his feast, June 6, begin it on May 28. Over nine days, it follows Norbert from the imperial court to Prémontré and Magdeburg: conversion, poverty, the Word of God, community life, the Eucharist and the unity of the Church. It can also be prayed at any time of year, for a personal intention, for priests or for vocations.

How to pray this novena

Each day, 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. The small act proposed for the day helps carry the prayer into daily life. Norbertine communities, parishes and schools named after Saint Norbert can also pray it together.

Day 1: A full life that was empty

As a young canon and chaplain to the emperor, Norbert had everything: noble birth, connections, comfort. Yet he lacked what matters most. Many people today know the same feeling: success on the outside, emptiness within.

Prayer: Lord, show me what in my life is taking the place that belongs to you. Through the intercession of Saint Norbert, give me the light to see clearly and the honesty to admit it. Amen.

Today: Make a sincere examination of conscience, for a few minutes, in silence.

Day 2: Struck by lightning

In 1115, lightning struck near him and threw him to the ground. He got up determined to change his life. God sometimes uses a shock to wake us up.

Prayer: Lord, let the trials of my life become calls to return to you. Saint Norbert, you heard the call to turn from evil and do good: help me to hear it too. Amen.

Today: Look back on a difficult event in your life and ask what God may have been saying through it.

Day 3: Leaving everything behind

Norbert gave his goods to the poor and set out barefoot on the roads. His poverty was not contempt for the world but freedom to proclaim the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, detach my heart from what I own, and set me free to love. Saint Norbert, teach me the joy of traveling light. Amen.

Today: Give away something you can do without.

Day 4: Proclaiming the Word

With the pope's permission to preach everywhere, Norbert traveled through Flanders and northern France. He reconciled enemies and brought many people back to the faith.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the right words to speak of you to the people I meet. Saint Norbert, pray for preachers, catechists and all who announce the Gospel. Amen.

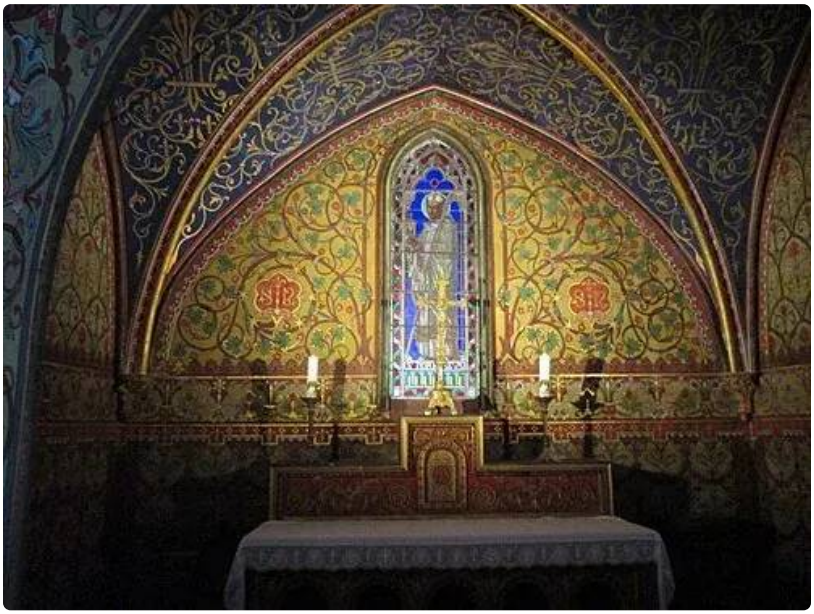
Today: Share with someone a Gospel passage that gives you life.

Day 5: Life in community

At Prémontré, Norbert gathered brothers who lived together, prayed together and served together. A community that lives in charity is already a sermon.

Prayer: Lord, bless religious communities, families and parishes. Help us live as brothers and sisters, patient with one another and united in prayer. Amen.

Today: Make a gesture of reconciliation or service in your community or your family.



Statue of Saint Norbert in a Premonstratensian church.

Day 6: Love for the Eucharist

In Antwerp, Norbert brought the city back to faith in the Eucharist. The monstrance he holds in his images expresses the heart of his life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament, increase my faith and my love for you. Saint Norbert, teach me to adore him and to receive him with a pure heart. Amen.

Today: Spend time in Eucharistic adoration, or attend a weekday Mass.

Day 7: A demanding shepherd

As Archbishop of Magdeburg, Norbert reformed his clergy and defended Church property meant for the poor. He met hostility and narrowly escaped death, but did not give up.

Prayer: Lord, sustain bishops and priests. Give them the courage of truth and the gentleness of charity. Saint Norbert, pray for the shepherds of your Church. Amen.

Today: Pray for your bishop and for the priests of your parish, by name.

Day 8: Serving unity

During the schism of 1130, Norbert worked with Saint Bernard for the unity of the Church around the legitimate pope.

Prayer: Lord, keep your Church united, and make me a peacemaker. Saint Norbert, heal the divisions in our parishes, our families and our world. Amen.

Today: Avoid every word of division or useless criticism today.

Day 9: Ready to every good work

Worn out, Norbert died in 1134 after giving everything. His brothers kept as their motto the words of Saint Paul: to be ready to every good work.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Norbert, make me available to your will, ready to every good work. Amen.

Today: Do a service you have been putting off.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Norbert, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for me, for priests and for all the communities that live by your spirit. Obtain for us a sincere conversion, love for the Eucharist and zeal for the Gospel. Amen.*

On June 6, if you can, attend Mass and give thanks for the graces received during these nine days. You might also visit a Norbertine abbey or parish, or simply spend a few minutes before the Blessed Sacrament, as Saint Norbert loved to do.

To go further, read the life of Saint Norbert and pray the prayer to Saint Norbert.

PILGRIMAGE

Tomb of Saint Norbert at Strahov Basilica, Prague

Since 1627, the relics of Saint Norbert have rested in Prague, in the Basilica of the Assumption of Strahov Monastery. This abbey of Premonstratensian canons, perched on the hill overlooking the castle and the city, is one of the oldest of the order still inhabited. It is also famous for its Baroque library, and attracts many visitors and pilgrims each year.

A Premonstratensian abbey in the heart of Prague

Strahov Monastery was founded in 1143, less than ten years after the death of Saint Norbert, by Duke Vladislav II of Bohemia and Bishop Jindřich Zdík of Olomouc, who called Premonstratensian canons there. Burned, plundered, and rebuilt several times over the centuries, the abbey took on its present appearance in the 17th and 18th centuries. Closed under the Communist regime in 1950, it was returned to the Premonstratensians after 1989, and a community lives there again.



The Basilica of the Assumption of Strahov Monastery.

The translation of 1627

Saint Norbert had died in 1134 in Magdeburg, where he had been buried in the church of Our Lady's Abbey. After the city went over to the Protestant Reformation, the Premonstratensians obtained permission to remove his body. The relics traveled to Prague and were solemnly received at Strahov in 1627. From that date, Saint Norbert has been honored as one of the patrons of Bohemia, and his presence makes Strahov a place of pilgrimage for the whole Premonstratensian order.

The tomb of Saint Norbert

In the Basilica of the Assumption, richly decorated in the Baroque style, a side chapel is dedicated to Saint Norbert. His relics are kept there in a reliquary. The paintings in the nave evoke scenes from the saint's life and the history of

the order. On his feast day, June 6, the Strahov community celebrates its founder with solemnity.

Visiting Strahov

Besides the basilica, visitors come to admire the monastery's library, with its two great Baroque halls, the Theological Hall and the Philosophical Hall, decorated with frescoes and antique globes. The site also offers one of the finest views of Prague. It is easy to combine with a visit to the castle and the Basilica of Saint George, where Saint Ludmila rests.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Norbert. In the chapel, you can entrust to the saint priests, religious, and a hoped-for conversion, then pray the prayer to Saint Norbert. Taking part in an Office of the Premonstratensian community is a fine way to enter into the founder's spirit. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Norbert

- **Prémontré** (Aisne): the place where the order was founded in 1120, in the forest of Saint-Gobain; the present buildings date from the 18th century.
- **Floreffe** (Belgium): the abbey founded in 1121, overlooking the Sambre.
- **Xanten** (Germany): the collegiate church of Saint Victor, where he was a canon.
- **Magdeburg** (Germany): the former Abbey of Our Lady, where he was first buried.
- **Living Premonstratensian abbeys**: in France, Belgium, and elsewhere, many communities celebrate his feast.

Practical information

Strahov Monastery is in the Hradčany district, a few minutes' walk from Prague Castle; it is served by the tram. The basilica is a living church: modest dress and silence are requested, and access may be limited during services. For the hours of the basilica and the library and visiting conditions, consult the official website of Strahov Monastery before you come.

Credits and sources

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