BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Nothhelm of Canterbury

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 17

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IN BRIEF

Saint Nothhelm of Canterbury

Priest of London, collaborator of Bede the Venerable, Archbishop of Canterbury from 735 to 739.

Feast day	October 17
Born	late 7th century (date unknown), England (place unknown)
Died	October 17, 739, Canterbury (England)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	8th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Nothhelm for Those Who Study and Serve the Church

Novena to Saint Nothhelm of Canterbury

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Nothhelm of Canterbury

Saint Nothhelm (also spelled Nothelm) was an Anglo-Saxon priest of London who became the tenth Archbishop of Canterbury, from 735 until his death on October 17, 739. A friend and collaborator of Saint Bede the Venerable, he went to Rome to look for documents for the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. As archbishop, he reorganized the dioceses of Mercia. His feast day is October 17.

Who was Saint Nothhelm?

Nothhelm belongs to the golden age of the Anglo-Saxon Church, the age of Bede at Jarrow and of Boniface in Germany. We know him from solid sources: the preface of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, which names him among its informants, the correspondence of Saint Boniface, the lists of bishops and the acts of the synods of his time. On the other hand, nothing is known of his birth and youth. Before becoming archbishop, he was archpriest of the church of Saint Paul in London. His episcopate was short, barely four years, but he left the mark of a learned shepherd, attentive to the history of the Church and to the organization of dioceses.

Key dates in the life of Nothhelm

- **Late 7th century**: Born at an unknown date and place.
- **Before 731**: A priest in London, he goes to Rome and copies, in the papal archives, letters of Pope Gregory the Great about the mission to England.
- **c. 731**: Bede names him, in the preface to his *Ecclesiastical History*, among those who supplied him with information.
- **735**: He is consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury, succeeding Tatwine.

- **736**: Pope Gregory III sends him the pallium, the sign of his authority as archbishop.
- **736 or 737**: He presides over a synod that settles a dispute about the monastery of Withington, in Gloucestershire.
- **737**: He reorganizes the dioceses of Mercia and consecrates the bishops of Lichfield and Leicester.
- **October 17, 739**: Dies; he is buried in Canterbury Cathedral.

Bede's researcher

At the beginning of the 8th century, Bede the Venerable was preparing, in his monastery at Jarrow, a history of the Church in England since the arrival of Saint Augustine in 597. For the kingdom of Kent and the neighboring regions, he relied on Abbot Albinus, of the monastery of Saint Augustine in Canterbury, and on Nothhelm. Nothhelm made the journey to Rome. With the pope's permission, he consulted the archives of the Roman Church and brought back copies of the letters of Saint Gregory the Great concerning Augustine's mission. Thanks to him, these precious documents appear in Bede's work and have come down to us.

The link between the two men did not end there. Nothhelm asked Bede about difficult passages in the Books of Kings, and the monk of Jarrow answered him with a short treatise, the *Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings*, which he dedicated to him. Bede may also have written for him another small work on eight biblical questions.

Archbishop of Canterbury

In 735, Nothhelm became Archbishop of Canterbury, the principal see of the Church in England. His appointment may have owed much to King Æthelbald of Mercia, one of whose counselors he was, at a time when Mercia was becoming the most powerful kingdom in the south of the island. The

following year, Pope Gregory III sent him the pallium. In 736 or 737, he gathered a synod of nine bishops to settle a dispute over the ownership of a monastery, with no king presiding, which was unusual. In 737, he reorganized the dioceses of Mercia: he consecrated Witta as bishop of Lichfield and Torhthelm as bishop of Leicester, a see that then found a lasting existence. He also consecrated the bishops of Hereford, Sherborne and Elmham.

During his episcopate, Saint Boniface, the apostle of Germany, wrote to him to ask for a copy of Pope Gregory the Great's answers to Saint Augustine's questions, the *Libellus responsionum*, which he needed for his mission, as well as the exact date of the arrival of the first Roman missionaries in England. Some historians have suspected Nothhelm of fabricating this text; this theory has been refuted, even if the authenticity of the document is still debated.

Death and devotion

Nothhelm died on October 17, 739, and was buried in Canterbury Cathedral. He was afterward honored as a saint, with a feast on October 17. His cult has remained modest and local. A verse eulogy of Nothhelm has been preserved in a 16th-century manuscript in the library of Lambeth Palace, in London. No particular iconographic tradition has become attached to him.

What can we learn from Saint Nothhelm?

Saint Nothhelm is a saint of discreet service. Before he was archbishop, he put his time and knowledge at the service of another, Bede, so that the history of the Church would be handed down accurately. As archbishop, he set out to give Christians shepherds and well-organized dioceses. You can pray to him for historians, archivists and researchers, for those who work behind the scenes in the service of a shared work, and for bishops charged with organizing the Church.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Nothhelm and the novena to Saint Nothhelm.

Where to pray to Saint Nothhelm

- **Canterbury Cathedral** (Kent, England): the see of which he was archbishop and the place of his burial.
- **London**: the city where he served as archpriest of the church of Saint Paul.
- **Jarrow** (England): the monastery of Bede, with whom he worked.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Nothhelm for Those Who Study and Serve the Church

Saint Nothhelm, a priest of London and then Archbishop of Canterbury from 735 to 739, brought back from Rome documents for the history of the Church written by Saint Bede, and organized the dioceses of Mercia. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him those who study, those who serve behind the scenes and the shepherds of the Church.

Prayer to Saint Nothhelm

Saint Nothhelm,
priest of London and shepherd of Canterbury,
you searched the archives of Rome
for the memory of those who brought the Gospel to your people.
Help me to love the truth
and to keep alive the memory of the faith.

You worked behind the scenes
so that another could complete his work.
Teach me to serve without seeking to be seen,
and to rejoice in the good done by others.

As archbishop, you gave shepherds to your people.
Watch over our bishops and our priests,
over those who study and those who teach,
and keep the Church in unity.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Nothhelm

- On his feast day, October 17.
- Before a piece of research, study or writing.
- For historians, archivists and librarians.
- For those who work behind the scenes in the service of a shared work.
- For bishops, especially at the time of an appointment.

A prayer for study

> *Lord, source of all truth,*
> *enlighten my mind and make my work useful to others.*
> *Saint Nothhelm, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Nothhelm from October 9 to 17, and read the life of Saint Nothhelm.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Nothhelm of Canterbury

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Nothhelm, a priest of London and Archbishop of Canterbury in the 8th century. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, October 17, begin on October 9. You can also pray it at any other time of the year, for example at the start of a piece of study.

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: "Saint Nothhelm, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The facts mentioned come from the writings of Bede, the letters of Boniface and the documents of the Anglo-Saxon Church.

Day 1: A priest of London

Before becoming archbishop, Nothhelm served as a priest at the church of Saint Paul in London. Holiness begins in the daily service of a community.

Prayer: Lord, bless the priests of our parishes and make them faithful in the tasks of each day.

Act of the day: Thank your parish priest or a priest you know.

Day 2: The journey to Rome

Nothhelm made the long journey to Rome. He went to the source, to the successor of Peter.

Prayer: Lord, bless our pope and keep us united to the Church of Rome.

Act of the day: Pray a decade of the Rosary for the pope's intentions.

Day 3: Seeking the truth

In the Roman archives, he copied the letters of Gregory the Great. He looked for the facts, with patience and accuracy.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love the truth and to seek it honestly.

Act of the day: Check a piece of information before repeating or sharing it.

Day 4: At the service of another

Nothhelm's work served Bede's work. He did not seek his own glory, but the good of the Church.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the need to be recognized, and teach me to serve the work of others.

Act of the day: Help someone succeed in a project that is not yours.

Day 5: The memory of the founders

Thanks to him, we know Saint Augustine's mission to England better. Keeping the memory of those who handed on the faith to us is a way of giving thanks for them.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the missionaries who brought the Gospel to our lands.

Act of the day: Learn the history of the founding saint of your diocese or parish.

Day 6: Questioning the Scriptures

Nothhelm asked Bede questions about the Books of Kings. He was not content with a quick reading of the Bible.

Prayer: Lord, open my mind to your Word and give me a taste for studying it.

Act of the day: Read a chapter from a book of the Bible you know little.

Day 7: Shepherd of Canterbury

In 735, Nothhelm became Archbishop of Canterbury. A heavy charge, which he received in order to serve.

Prayer: Lord, support bishops in their mission. Give them wisdom and strength.

Act of the day: Pray for the bishop of your diocese.

Day 8: Giving shepherds

Nothhelm reorganized the dioceses of Mercia and consecrated new bishops, so that each region would have a shepherd.

Prayer: Lord, send laborers into your harvest and raise up vocations to the priesthood.

Act of the day: Pray for vocations, or encourage a young person who is discerning.

Day 9: A life fulfilled

Nothhelm died on October 17, 739, after a short episcopate. What matters is not length, but faithfulness.

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

Act of the day: Give thanks for the time you have been given and, if possible, attend Mass.

Living the novena with Saint Nothhelm

Saint Nothhelm reminds us that the Church needs discreet servants: researchers, organizers, faithful shepherds. During these nine days, you can carry bishops and priests, students and teachers, and all who work behind the scenes.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Nothhelm,*
> *friend of truth and servant of the Church,*
> *you kept the memory of the apostles of your people.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Help me to serve with humility and faithfulness.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

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