

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Omer

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint Omer

Monk of Luxeuil and seventh-century bishop of Thérouanne, founder of the church that gave rise to the town of Saint-Omer.

Feast day	September 9
Born	c. 600, Orval, near Coutances, France, according to tradition
Died	c. 667, Wavrans-sur-l'Aa, France
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	Saint-Omer, eye diseases

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Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Saint-Omer

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Omer

Saint Omer, known in Latin as Audomar, was a monk of Luxeuil who became bishop of Thérouanne, in northern France, in the seventh century. Born in the Cotentin, in Normandy, he evangelized the land of the Morini, today the Pas-de-Calais and French Flanders. With his companions, he founded a church and a monastery on the river Aa, around which grew the town that bears his name, Saint-Omer. He died blind around 667, is invoked for diseases of the eyes and is celebrated on September 9.

Who was Saint Omer?

What we know of Omer comes from several successive *Lives*. The first, now lost, was written at the beginning of the ninth century from oral tradition. A few documents also survive, such as a privilege he granted in 662 to the monastery of Sithiu. The main outline of his life is therefore known, but the details call for caution.

According to tradition, he was born around 600 at Orval, near Coutances, to parents named Friulf and Domitta. He grew up in a region where Saxons had settled and learned their language and customs. This proved a great asset for his future mission in the North, where the coasts were also populated by Saxons.

Key dates

- **c. 600**: Born at Orval, near Coutances, according to tradition.
- **Youth**: Enters the monastery of Luxeuil with his widowed father.
- **c. 637**: Becomes bishop of Thérouanne, under Dagobert I.
- **651**: Adroald gives him the estate of Sithiu, on the Aa; founding of a church dedicated to the Virgin.

- **Following years**: With Mommolinus, Bertin and Bertrand, founds the monastery of Sithiu, the future Saint-Bertin.
- **662**: Charter of privileges for Sithiu.
- **c. 667**: Dies, blind, at Wavrans-sur-l'Aa; buried in the church of Notre-Dame at Sithiu.

A monk of Luxeuil

When his mother died, Omer's father decided to enter religious life, and his son followed him to the monastery of Luxeuil, in the Vosges. Luxeuil had been founded at the end of the sixth century by the Irish monk Saint Columbanus. It was then the great school of holiness of the Frankish kingdom: many bishops and founders were trained there, and its monks spread throughout northern Gaul. Omer received a demanding formation, centered on prayer, penance and mission.

Bishop of the Morini

Around 637, during the reign of King Dagobert I, Omer was called to become bishop of Thérouanne, the city of the Morini. The region had been evangelized in the fourth century, but the invasions had brought much of it back to paganism, and the coasts had become Saxon.

Omer traveled throughout his diocese. He preached, celebrated the great feasts among his people, had crosses set up and churches built. His knowledge of the Saxon language helped him make himself understood.

The gift of Sithiu

Near the mouth of the Aa, he was welcomed by a wealthy landowner, Adroald, whom he converted. In 651, Adroald gave him several estates, including the island of Sithiu. There Omer founded a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary,

which later became a collegiate church and then the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Saint-Omer.

The companions of Sithiu

To help him, Omer called three monks trained in the tradition of Columbanus: Mommolinus, Bertin and Bertrand. Mommolinus became the first abbot of Sithiu before leaving for Noyon, where he would succeed Saint Eligius as bishop. Bertin succeeded him and founded, east of Notre-Dame, a church dedicated to Saint Peter, which became the great abbey of Saint-Bertin.

Around these two sanctuaries a town gradually grew up. In the Middle Ages it took the name of its founder: Saint-Omer.

The blind bishop

At the end of his life, Omer lost his sight. He died around 667 at Wavrans-sur-l'Aa and, as he had wished, Bertin had his body carried to the church of Notre-Dame at Sithiu. In the ninth century, an attempt was made to carry his relics off to Saint-Quentin, but Bishop Folquin of Thérouanne foiled it and brought them back to Saint-Omer.

Why is Saint Omer the patron saint of eyes and of the town of Saint-Omer?

The town of Saint-Omer owes him its very existence: it grew up around the church and monastery he founded at Sithiu, and it took his name. He is naturally its patron.

His blindness at the end of his life most likely explains why he is invoked for diseases of the eyes. People pray to him before eye surgery, for failing sight and for the blind and visually impaired. At Orval, in the Manche, his traditional birthplace, he is also invoked for intestinal troubles.

More broadly, Omer is one of those monk-bishops who rebuilt the Christian faith in northern Gaul after the invasions. A patient missionary, he knew how to surround himself with companions and trust them, so that his work outlived him and gave birth to a town. He can be prayed to for missionaries and for all who work as a team in the service of the Gospel.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Omer in art

Saint Omer is shown as a bishop, with miter and crosier. Statues of him are found in many churches of the Pas-de-Calais and French Flanders, such as the gilded wooden statue in the church of Houchin. An eleventh-century illuminated *Life of Saint Omer*, kept in Saint-Omer, depicts scenes of his life, including his arrival at Luxeuil with his father.

Where to pray to Saint Omer

- **Saint-Omer** (Pas-de-Calais): the cathedral of Notre-Dame, heir to the church he founded and where he was buried.
- **Saint-Omer**: the ruins of the abbey of Saint-Bertin.
- **French Flanders**: the many churches dedicated to Saint Omer, such as those of Brouckerque, Ledringhem and Rexpoëde.
- **Orval** (Manche): his native village according to tradition.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Omer or the novena to Saint Omer.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Omer for the Eyes

We know of no traditional prayer to Saint Omer whose text can be guaranteed. Saintspedia offers you an original prayer, inspired by what his *Life* tells us about him: the monk of Luxeuil, the missionary bishop of the Morini, the founder of Sithiu, the old man who became blind and who is invoked for diseases of the eyes.

A bishop who saw with the heart

Saint Omer traveled across the land of the Morini, in what is now northern France, to proclaim Christ in a region that had fallen back into paganism. He surrounded himself with companions, Mommolinus, Bertin and Bertrand, and entrusted his work to them. At the end of his life he lost his sight, but not the light of faith.

Prayer to Saint Omer

Saint Omer, you followed your father to the monastery of Luxeuil: teach me to listen to God's call and to follow it with simplicity.

You proclaimed the Gospel to the people of your diocese in their own language: help missionaries and catechists find the words that touch hearts.

You lost your sight in the evening of your life: I entrust to you all who suffer from their eyes, the visually impaired and the blind. Obtain healing for them, if it is God's will, and always the inner light of faith.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Open the eyes of my heart, so that I may see Christ in each 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

Saint Omer is celebrated on September 9. You can pray to him:

- before an eye examination or eye surgery, such as a cataract operation;
- for a loved one who is losing their sight or who is blind;
- for missionaries, catechists and parishes in northern France;
- when you need to work with others and learn to trust them;
- on a visit to the town of Saint-Omer and its cathedral.

A short prayer for the eyes

> *Lord Jesus, you gave sight to the blind man of Jericho. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, look with mercy on my eyes and on those of the people I love, and give us always the light of your face. Amen.*

You may end with an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. To go further, pray the novena to Saint Omer or read the life of Saint Omer.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Omer

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Omer, monk of Luxeuil and bishop of Thérouanne, who is invoked for diseases of the eyes. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast day, begin on August 31: the ninth day then falls on September 9. You may also pray it at any time of the year, before eye surgery, for a loved one losing their sight, or for a mission you have at heart.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God in a moment of silence. Read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps turn prayer into a concrete step.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: *Lord, you made Saint Omer a light for the people of the North and kept the eyes of his heart open when his own eyes grew dark. Through his intercession, enlighten me and hear the prayer I bring you today. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. Faithfulness matters more than perfection.

Day 1: A child of Normandy

Omer was born around 600 near Coutances. Growing up among Saxon settlers, he learned their language, without knowing that God would one day use this for his mission.

Prayer: Lord, nothing in my life is wasted in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, help me see how you prepare me for what lies ahead. Amen.

Today: Thank God for one experience of your past that has turned out to be useful.

Day 2: Following his father to Luxeuil

When his father, a widower, entered the monastery of Luxeuil, Omer followed him. Father and son set out together on the road of God.

Prayer: Lord, bless parents and children who seek you together. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, strengthen the faith of my family. Amen.

Today: Pray for your father, living or deceased.

Day 3: The school of Columbanus

At Luxeuil, founded by Saint Columbanus, Omer learned prayer, penance and the desire to bring Christ to others. A strong formation prepared a fruitful mission.

Prayer: Lord, form me in your school. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, give me a disciplined and generous heart. Amen.

Today: Give up a small comfort and offer it to God.

Day 4: Sent to the Morini

Around 637, Omer became bishop of Thérouanne, in a land that had largely returned to paganism. He accepted to start again almost from nothing.

Prayer: Lord, when the faith seems to fade around me, give me courage. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, make me a patient witness. Amen.

Today: Pray for a person close to you who has drifted away from the faith.

Day 5: Speaking the language of others

Omer's knowledge of the Saxon language helped him make the Gospel understood. Love looks for the words the other person can receive.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to speak of you in a way others can understand. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, bless missionaries and catechists. Amen.

Today: Listen to someone before speaking, and try to understand their world.

Day 6: A church for Our Lady

On the island of Sithiu, given by Adroald, Omer built a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It became the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Saint-Omer.

Prayer: Holy Mary, Mother of God, I place myself under your protection. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, lead me to your Son. Amen.

Today: Pray a decade of the Rosary.

Day 7: Trusting companions

Omer called Mommolinus, Bertin and Bertrand to help him, and entrusted the monastery of Sithiu to them. His work lasted because he did not try to do everything alone.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to work with others and to trust them. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, bless those who serve with me. Amen.

Today: Delegate a task, or thank a colleague for their work.

Day 8: Darkness and light

At the end of his life, Omer lost his sight. Blindness did not extinguish his faith: he kept seeing with the eyes of the heart.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those who suffer from their eyes and those who are blind. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, grant them healing if it is your will, and always your inner light. Amen.

Today: Help a visually impaired person, or support an organization that serves the blind.

Day 9: A town born from a church

Omer died around 667. Around the church and the monastery he founded, a town grew up and took his name. What is built with God can bear fruit for centuries.

Prayer: Lord, may what I build serve your Kingdom. Through the intercession of Saint Omer, bless the town where I live and its people. Amen.

Today: Pray for your town or city, its leaders and its poor.

Closing prayer

Saint Omer, monk of Luxeuil, bishop of the Morini and founder of Sithiu, you kept the light of faith when your eyes grew dark. Obtain for me the grace I have asked during these nine days, if it is God's will. Watch over the sick and the blind, bless missionaries and all who work together for the Gospel, and open the eyes of my heart to see Christ in every person. Amen.

To continue, you can pray the prayer to Saint Omer or read his life.

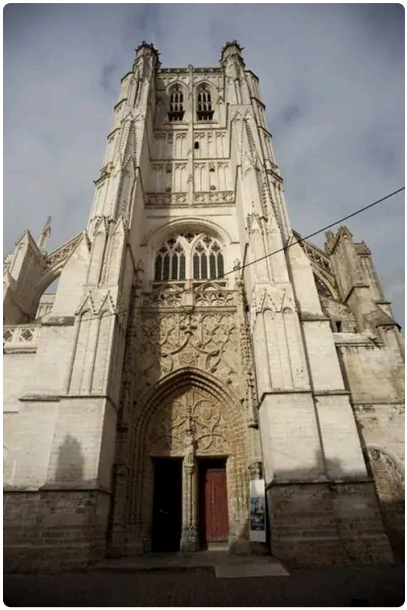
PILGRIMAGE

Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Saint-Omer

The Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Saint-Omer, in the Pas-de-Calais, is the direct heir of the church that Saint Omer founded in the 7th century on the estate of Sithiu and where he was buried. A great Gothic building, it towers over the town that bears its founder's name and remains the principal place of his memory.

From the Church of Sithiu to the Cathedral

In 651, Bishop Omer received the estate of Sithiu, on the Aa River, from the nobleman Adroald and founded a church there dedicated to the Virgin Mary. When he died around 667, his body was laid to rest there. The church became a collegiate church of canons, while the Abbey of Saint-Bertin grew up close by. The present building was constructed from the 13th to the 16th century. In 1559, after the destruction of Thérouanne by the troops of Charles V, it became the cathedral of a new diocese, which was suppressed after the Revolution; it has kept its title of cathedral.



The Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Saint-Omer.

What You Can See There

The cathedral preserves a rich collection of furnishings. The cenotaph of Saint Omer, a medieval funerary monument, recalls the burial of the founder. You can also see the sculpted group known as the "Grand Dieu de Thérouanne," from the old cathedral destroyed in 1553, a 16th-century astronomical clock, a great organ and many grave slabs. Together they bear witness to the wealth of the town in the Middle Ages and the early modern period.

Praying Beside Saint Omer

Before your visit, you might read the life of Saint Omer. In the cathedral, pause near his cenotaph to entrust to the saint the visually impaired, the sick and missionaries, then recite the prayer to Saint Omer. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other Places Associated with Saint Omer

- **Abbey of Saint-Bertin**: the ruins of the great abbey founded by his companion Bertin, in Saint-Omer.
- **Thérouanne**: the former episcopal city, of which he was bishop.
- **Wavrans-sur-l'Aa**: the village where he died.
- **Luxeuil-les-Bains** (Haute-Saône): the monastery of his formation.

Practical Information

The cathedral is in the historic center of Saint-Omer, within walking distance of the train station. It is a working church, so modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening hours, Mass times and guided tours may vary, so check with the parish or the Saint-Omer tourist office before your visit, especially around September 9.

Credits and sources

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