BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Onenne

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 30

IN BRIEF

Saint Onenne

Breton saint of the 7th century according to tradition, honored at Tréhorenteuc.

Feast day	April 30
Born	c. 604, according to tradition, Gaël (according to tradition)
Died	c. 630, according to tradition, Tréhorenteuc (according to tradition)
Canonized	traditional local cult
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Onenne for Children and the Humble

Novena to Saint Onenne

Church of Saint-Eutrope-and-Saint-Onenne, Tréhorenteuc

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Onenne

Saint Onenne is a very local Breton saint, honored only at Tréhorenteuc, in Morbihan, on the edge of the forest of Brocéliande. Tradition makes her a 7th-century princess, the youngest sister of Saint Judicael, king of Domnonée, who chose a humble life as a goose-girl. Her life is known only through very late accounts, and her historical existence is uncertain. Her feast day is April 30; a procession is held at Tréhorenteuc on September 29.

Who was Saint Onenne?

Onenne (Onenn in Breton, sometimes Onenna or Ouenne) is an endearing figure of popular Breton Christianity. Her cult never spread beyond a single parish, Tréhorenteuc, whose church partly bears her name. The faithful see in her a pious girl, poor by choice, protected by the Virgin Mary and defended by her geese.

Historians are much more cautious. Her first written mention dates from the 11th century, four centuries after the time she is said to have lived: the *Chronicle of Saint-Brieuc* lists her name among the brothers and sisters of Judicael, without saying anything of her holiness. The accounts of her life were only written down from the 18th century onward. Several scholars, such as Philippe Walter, think her legend christianizes ancient Celtic tales linked to water and birds. Saintspedia therefore presents her life for what it is: a local tradition carrying a spiritual message, rather than a biography.

Key dates in the life of Onenne

- **c. 604, according to tradition**: Born at Gaël, into the family of King Judael of Domnonée and Queen Pritelle.

- **c. 616, according to Abbé Gillard**: At twelve, she makes her vows before Saint Elocan, at the hermitage of Saint-Léry.
- **Afterwards**: She settles at Tréhorenteuc, gives her goods to the poor and lives in prayer.
- **c. 630, according to tradition**: After an assault she survives, she dies young; her body is laid in the church of Tréhorenteuc.
- **11th century**: First mention of her name, among the children of Judael.
- **16th century**: The historian Pierre Le Baud speaks of "Saincte Onenne".
- **19th century**: Her tomb, in the church of Tréhorenteuc, draws many pilgrims.
- **1943**: Abbé Henri Gillard publishes his *Notice on Saint Onenne*; the tomb is removed during the restoration of the church.
- **Since 2018**: A procession once again links the church to the fountain of Saint Onenne, on September 29.

The princess who became a goose-girl

The accounts of her life exist in several versions. According to the oldest, taken from an 18th-century manuscript now lost, Onenne secretly leaves her parents' castle at the age of ten. On the way, she exchanges her princess's clothes for those of a poor woman, so as not to be recognized. She settles near a spring at Tréhorenteuc. One day, a young lord tries to carry her off to abuse her. Onenne cries out, and the ducks (or geese, depending on the version) near her cry out with her, alerting soldiers and peasants who come to rescue her.

A tale collected in the 19th century by Adolphe Orain puts her devotion to the Virgin at the center. Hired as a goose-girl at the castle of Tréhorenteuc, Onenne picks roses every day in the lady's garden to offer them to Mary. Intrigued, the lady follows her to the church, where she sees two angels lift the child up to an image of the Virgin, who gives her a kiss. Onenne then returns to her parents and dies young, serene, sure of joining Mary.

A saint of humility

No miracle is attributed to Saint Onenne. What touched the faithful was her choice: a king's daughter who preferred poverty, service and prayer to rank and honors. Her legend also speaks of a young woman who defends her dignity in the face of violence, and whom God protects through the humblest of his creatures. From the 17th century, when the parish depended on the abbey of Paimpont, her cult was closely associated with that of the Virgin Mary.

Devotion and art

The cult of Saint Onenne has remained attached to Tréhorenteuc. In the 19th century, her tomb, in the church, drew many pilgrims; it was moved several times and then removed in 1943. A marble plaque now recalls that she was buried there. The fountain of Saint Onenne, near the village, has become the main place of devotion to her. People prayed there for the healing of children and of those with fever, and invoked the saint against dropsy, a belief that came from her association with Saint Eutropius, also celebrated on April 30.

She is shown as a poor young girl, often with a duck or geese. Six stained-glass windows in the church of Tréhorenteuc tell her life, and a 17th-century banner, listed as a historic monument, shows her kneeling with Saint Eutropius near the Virgin and Child, with a white duck and three ducklings.

What can we learn from Saint Onenne?

Even if her story reaches us mainly through legend, Saint Onenne carries a clear message: true nobility is that of a humble heart. She invites us to choose simplicity, to pray to Mary with trust, and to defend the dignity of everyone, especially the most vulnerable. You can pray to her for sick children, for girls and women who are victims of violence, and for all who serve humbly.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Onenne and the novena to Saint Onenne.

Where to pray to Saint Onenne

- **Tréhorenteuc** (Morbihan): the church of Saint-Eutrope-and-Saint-Onenne, known as the "Grail church", with its windows and the plaque of her former tomb.
- **Tréhorenteuc**: the fountain of Saint Onenne, destination of the procession on September 29.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Onenne for Children and the Humble

Saint Onenne is a Breton saint honored at Tréhorenteuc, in Brocéliande. Tradition makes her a 7th-century princess, sister of Saint Judicael, who chose poverty and a humble life as a goose-girl, under the protection of the Virgin Mary. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to her children, young girls and the humble.

Prayer to Saint Onenne

Saint Onenne,
king's daughter who became a servant,
you left the honors of the castle
to live poor and hidden,
among the humble and the beasts of the fields.
Teach me true nobility, the nobility of the heart.

You who offered roses to the Virgin Mary,
help me to love her with simplicity
and to entrust myself to her each day.
You whom God protected from violence,
watch over girls and women in danger,
and give them back strength and dignity.

Bless sick children and their parents,
the parish of Tréhorenteuc that keeps your memory,
and all who serve unseen.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Onenne

- On her feast day, April 30, or at the procession on September 29.
- For a sick or feverish child.
- For a girl or woman who is a victim of violence.
- To grow in humility and simplicity.
- To entrust an intention to the Virgin Mary.

A short invocation

> *Saint Onenne, humble servant of Mary,*
> *pray for us and for our children. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Onenne from April 22 to 30, and read the life of Saint Onenne.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Onenne

This novena is inspired by the tradition of Saint Onenne, a Breton saint honored at Tréhorenteuc, in Brocéliande. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, April 30, begin on April 22. You can also pray it before the procession of September 29, or at any other time of the year.

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 Onenne, pray for us." The small act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes come from late popular accounts, which belong to legend more than to history.

Day 1: A king's daughter

According to tradition, Onenne was born at Gaël, into the royal family of Domnonée. She had everything the world could offer.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all I have received. Teach me not to cling to it.

Act of the day: Give thanks for three gifts received today.

Day 2: Exchanging her clothes

Onenne gave her princess's clothes to a poor woman and took her rags. She chose to become one of the poorest.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you who became poor for us, give me a heart close to the poor.

Act of the day: Give a piece of clothing in good condition to a charity.

Day 3: A word heard

In one of the accounts, a hermit tells her that her life will be short. She decides to devote her time to God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to number my days and to live them for you.

Act of the day: Offer God a time of prayer you had not planned.

Day 4: Goose-girl

Hired at the castle of Tréhorenteuc, the king's daughter kept the geese. She accepted the humblest work with joy.

Prayer: Lord, may I find your presence in the simple and repetitive tasks of my days.

Act of the day: Do a thankless task without complaining.

Day 5: Roses for Mary

Every day, Onenne picked roses to offer to the Virgin. Her love for Mary was simple and faithful.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, receive my love, poor as it is, and lead me to your Son.

Act of the day: Pray a decade of the rosary or place a flower before an image of Mary.

Day 6: The Virgin's kiss

The tale says that two angels lifted the child up to the image of Mary, who gave her a kiss. God delights in the humble.

Prayer: Lord, lift up the lowly and comfort those who feel forgotten.

Act of the day: Pay particular attention to someone who is seldom noticed.

Day 7: Defended by the humble

Attacked by a lord, Onenne was saved by the cries of her ducks, which alerted help. God protects through the smallest.

Prayer: Lord, protect girls and women who are threatened. Give them defenders and heal their wounds.

Act of the day: Pray for victims of violence, or support an organization that helps them.

Day 8: The fountain

At the fountain of Saint Onenne, people prayed for sick children. Water recalls baptism and the life God gives.

Prayer: Lord, source of life, heal sick children and strengthen their parents.

Act of the day: Make the Sign of the Cross with holy water, renewing your baptism.

Day 9: Dying young and at peace

According to tradition, Onenne died young, sure of joining Mary. The parishioners of Tréhorenteuc kept her memory for centuries.

Prayer: Lord, welcome into your peace the young who die before their time, and comfort their families. Through the intercession of Saint Onenne, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Pray for a young person who has died and for their family.

Closing prayer

Saint Onenne,
princess who became poor, friend of Mary,
you chose humility and prayer.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me simple and trusting,
and watch over our children.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Eutrope-and-Saint-Onenne, Tréhorenteuc

The church of Saint-Eutrope-and-Saint-Onenne stands at Tréhorenteuc, a small village in Morbihan, on the edge of the forest of Paimpont, also known as Brocéliande. It is the only church dedicated to Saint Onenne, the young local saint whom tradition says died here in the 7th century. It is nicknamed "the Grail church" because of the original decoration commissioned by Abbé Henri Gillard in the mid-20th century.

A country church with an eventful history

A Christian place of worship seems to have existed at Tréhorenteuc from the early Middle Ages. A priory is attested from the end of the 12th century, and the church was rebuilt in the early 16th century. The first patron of the parish is Saint Eutropius, bishop of Saintes; Saint Onenne is its secondary patron. In the 19th century, the saint's tomb, placed in the church, drew many pilgrims. But the building, modest and poor, fell into disrepair: in the 1930s, its gable was threatening to collapse.

In 1942, Abbé Henri Gillard was appointed rector. He set about restoring the church at his own expense, at the cost of great hardship, and worked on it until 1962. It was during this work, in 1943, that the tomb of Saint Onenne was removed; a marble plaque recalls that she was buried here.

What you can see

Abbé Gillard wanted a decoration that would link the Christian faith, the legends of Brocéliande and the Celtic world. Visitors discover stained-glass windows, including the one called "of the Round Table", made in 1943, and a

window showing the Grail behind the altar. Paintings by the artist Karl Rezabeck and a mosaic of the white stag with a golden collar complete the whole. The Stations of the Cross depict the houses and inhabitants of the village. Several windows tell the life of Saint Onenne: she can be seen exchanging her clothes with a poor woman and being saved by her geese. The church also keeps a 17th-century banner, listed as a historic monument, showing Saint Onenne and Saint Eutropius near the Virgin and Child. Above the door, an inscription chosen by the abbé invites the visitor to enter into himself: "The door is within".

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Onenne. In the church, pause before the windows that depict her and before the plaque of her former tomb, then say the prayer to Saint Onenne. You can then walk to the fountain of Saint Onenne, near the village, where the procession goes on September 29. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Tréhorenteuc is in Morbihan, near Ploërmel and Paimpont, at the heart of the walking routes of the forest of Brocéliande. The church is a parish church of the diocese of Vannes: enter it in a spirit of recollection, especially during services. Opening times and Mass times may vary: check with the parish or the Brocéliande tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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