

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Paul Aurelian (Saint Pol de Léon)

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 12

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IN BRIEF

Saint Paul Aurelian (Saint Pol de Léon)

Monk from Wales, first bishop of Léon and one of the seven founding saints of Brittany.

Feast day	March 12
Born	late 5th century, South Wales
Died	March 12, late 6th century, Île de Batz, Finistère, France
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Saint-Pol-de-Léon, the Léon region of Brittany

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Paul Aurelian, Saint Pol de Léon

Novena to Saint Paul Aurelian

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Paul Aurelian (Saint Pol de Léon)

Saint Paul Aurelian, also known as Saint Pol de Léon, was a monk who came from Britain to Brittany in the 6th century. He became the first bishop of Léon and the founder of the town that bears his name, Saint-Pol-de-Léon, in Finistère. He is one of the seven founding saints of Brittany, honored by the Tro Breiz pilgrimage. At the end of his life he withdrew to the Île de Batz, where he died on March 12, the day the Church celebrates his feast.

Who was Saint Paul Aurelian?

Paul Aurelian, in Latin *Paulus Aurelianus* and in Breton *Paol Aorelian*, belongs to the great generation of British monks who, in the 5th and 6th centuries, crossed the sea to settle in Armorica, the land that became Brittany. His Latin surname, Aurelianus, suggests a family of Roman tradition.

He is known mainly through his *Life*, written in 884 by Wrmonoc, a monk of the abbey of Landévennec, at the request of the Bishop of Léon. This text, written more than three centuries after his death, mixes old memories, local traditions and marvelous stories typical of hagiography. Historians therefore read it with caution: it tells us a great deal about devotion to the saint in the 9th century, and less about his actual life.

What is certain is that Paul Aurelian was regarded very early as the founder of the diocese of Léon, and that his cult took deep root in northern Finistère.



Saint Paul Aurelian and the dragon, Kreisker chapel, Saint-Pol-de-Léon.

Key dates

- **Late 5th century**: Born in South Wales, at Penychen according to his *Life*; a late tradition proposes the year 492, other authors around 480.
- **Childhood**: Entrusted to the monastic school of Saint Illtud, where, according to tradition, Samson, Gildas and other British monks were also trained.
- **Youth**: Lives as a hermit, then is ordained a priest; stays with a King Mark, who wants to keep him in his kingdom.
- **Early 6th century**: Crosses the sea with twelve companions, lands on Ushant (Ouessant), then reaches the mainland.
- **First half of the 6th century**: Settles on the Île de Batz and on the site of today's Saint-Pol-de-Léon, with the support of Count Withur.

- **6th century**: Consecrated bishop, according to his *Life*, at the request of the Frankish king Childebert I.
- **Around 553**: According to tradition, he hands over his office to a disciple and withdraws to his monastery on the Île de Batz.
- **March 12, late 6th century**: Dies on the Île de Batz at a very advanced age; he is buried in his church on the mainland.

A monk formed in the school of Illtud

According to his *Life*, Paul came from a large noble family. His father entrusted him as a child to the monastery of Saint Illtud, a great center of learning and asceticism in Wales. There he learned the Scriptures and Latin. As a young man he chose solitude and lived as a hermit with a few companions.

Once ordained a priest, he was summoned by a King Mark, whom tradition sometimes identifies with King Mark of the legend of Tristan. The king wanted to make him bishop of his people, but Paul refused and went on his way. The *Life* tells that he asked the king for one of the bells of his court and was refused: a detail that prepares one of the best-known episodes of his story.

From Ushant to Léon

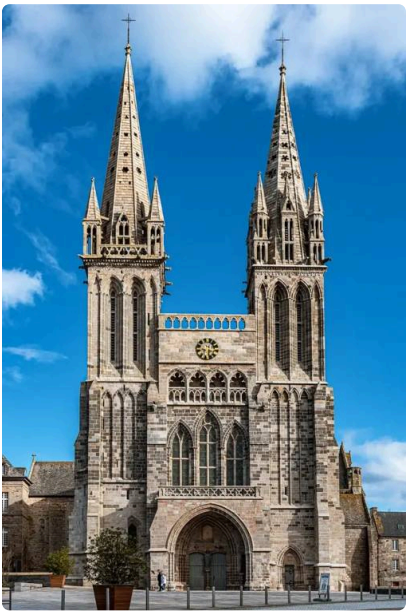
Paul set sail with twelve priests and some members of his family. He landed on Ushant, where he founded a first hermitage; the town of Lampaul, "Paul's church," may preserve its memory. He then crossed to the mainland and traveled through Léon. The *Life* tells of stops along the way, springs he made flow and healings. At last he reached an old Roman stronghold by the sea, then went on to the Île de Batz, home of Count Withur, who governed the region.

Withur, his cousin according to the *Life*, welcomed him with joy. During their conversation, the servant in charge of the fishpond came in carrying a salmon of astonishing size and a wonderful bell. Paul recognized the bell that King

Mark had refused him, and Withur gave it to him. This ancient bell, called *Hir-glaz* in Breton, is still kept in the cathedral of Saint-Pol-de-Léon.

The dragon of the Île de Batz

The most popular episode is that of the dragon. A monster was ravaging the island and devouring people and animals. Paul went alone to meet it, put his stole around its neck and led it to the tip of the island, where he ordered it to throw itself into the sea. The place is still called the Trou du Serpent, the "Serpent's Hole." As with other Breton saints, this story expresses in images the victory of Christ over evil and over the old pagan fears. An ancient stole, called Saint Pol's stole, is kept in the church on the Île de Batz; historians think it is much later than the saint.



The cathedral of Saint Paul Aurelian in Saint-Pol-de-Léon.

The first bishop of Léon

Withur wanted Paul to become bishop of the region. Knowing he would refuse, he sent him to carry a letter to King Childebert I in Paris; the letter in fact asked the king to have him consecrated bishop. Paul gave in. He returned to Léon and organized the local Church from the town that would become Saint-Pol-de-Léon. His diocese of Léon existed until the French Revolution and is now part of the Diocese of Quimper and Léon.

In old age he handed over his office to a disciple and withdrew to his monastery on the Île de Batz, where he died on March 12. His *Life* tells that a dispute broke out between the island monks, who wanted to keep his body, and the clergy of the town; he was finally buried in the cathedral church. During the Norman invasions his relics were scattered: some went to the abbey of Fleury on the Loire, and others were found at Saint-Florent-le-Vieil. The cathedral of Saint-Pol still keeps relics and the memory of his tomb.

Why is Saint Paul Aurelian the patron saint of Léon?

As the founder and first bishop of the diocese of Léon, he is the patron of the town of Saint-Pol-de-Léon and of the whole Léon region. He is one of the seven founding saints of Brittany, with Saint Samson of Dol, Saint Malo, Saint Brieuc, Saint Tugdual, Saint Paternus and Saint Corentin. The Tro Breiz, a medieval pilgrimage revived at the end of the 20th century, links the seven cathedrals that keep their memory. Many parishes in Finistère and Côtes-d'Armor bear his name or are dedicated to him, such as Lampaul-Guimiliau, Lampaul-Plouarzel, Lampaul-Ploudalmézeau and Tréglonou. He is also honored in Cornwall and in Wales.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Paul Aurelian in art

- He is shown as a bishop, with miter and crozier.
- At his feet is a dragon, held on a leash by his stole.

- His ancient bell, the *Hir-glaz*, is closely linked to his memory.

Where to pray to Saint Paul Aurelian

- **Saint-Pol-de-Léon, Brittany**: the cathedral of Saint Paul Aurelian, which keeps his relics and his bell.
- **Île de Batz, Brittany**: the church of Notre-Dame-du-Bon-Secours, which keeps the stole called Saint Pol's, and the ruins of the chapel of Saint Anne.
- **Saint-Pol-de-Léon**: the chapel of Notre-Dame du Kreisker, with its statue of the saint.
- **Ushant (Ouessant), Brittany**: the church of Lampaul, at the site of his first hermitage according to tradition.
- **Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, France**: the abbey of Fleury, which received part of his relics in the 10th century.

To pray with him, use the Prayer to Saint Paul Aurelian or the Novena to Saint Paul Aurelian.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Paul Aurelian, Saint Pol de Léon

Saint Paul Aurelian, or Saint Pol de Léon, has been invoked for centuries in northern Finistère. There are many Breton hymns in his honor, but we know of no traditional English prayer to him with a reliable source. Saintspedia therefore offers an original prayer to Saint Pol, followed by a short prayer for Brittany and its seafarers.

Prayer to Saint Paul Aurelian

Saint Paul Aurelian, you left your homeland
to carry the Gospel across the sea:
give me a willing heart, ready to go wherever God calls me.

You loved solitude and prayer:
teach me to keep each day a time of silence with the Lord.

You accepted the office of bishop without seeking it:
help those who receive a difficult responsibility
to carry it with humility and trust.

Tradition shows you overcoming the dragon of the Île de Batz:
free me from what gnaws at me and makes me afraid.
May the cross of Christ be stronger than the evil within me and around me.

Watch over the land of Léon and all of Brittany,
its families, its parishes and its vocations.
I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).
Amen.

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

Prayer for sailors and islanders

Saint Pol, you crossed the sea with your companions and spent your last days on the Île de Batz: protect sailors, fishermen and all who live from the islands and the coast. Keep them safe in the storm, bring them home unharmed, and comfort the families who wait for them. Amen.

(Original prayer by Saintspedia.)

Intentions to entrust to Saint Paul Aurelian

- The Diocese of Quimper and Léon, its priests and its vocations.
- Sailors, fishermen and the people of the Breton islands.
- People who must accept an unexpected responsibility or mission.
- Those living through exile or a difficult departure.
- Deliverance from evil, fears and anxieties.
- Pilgrims on the Tro Breiz.

When to pray this prayer

His feast day is March 12, the day of his death according to his *Life*. You can also pray to him before a sea crossing, during a pilgrimage in Brittany, or when you are asked to take on a task you did not seek. For a longer time of prayer, follow the Novena to Saint Paul Aurelian, and read the life of Saint Paul Aurelian.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Paul Aurelian

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Paul Aurelian (Saint Pol de Léon), first bishop of Léon, as Breton tradition tells it. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast day, March 12, begin on March 4. Each day follows a stage of his journey, from the monastic school of Illtud in Wales to his last years on the Île de Batz.

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 and a Hail Mary. The small act suggested helps carry the prayer into the rest of the day. If you miss a day, simply resume where you left off and complete the nine days.

Opening prayer for each day

> *Lord God, you called Saint Paul Aurelian to leave his homeland and to bring the light of the Gospel across the sea to Brittany. As I begin this day of the novena, I place before you my life, my fears and the intention I carry. Through his prayers, give me a heart that is free, ready to follow you wherever you lead, and strong against every evil. Amen.*



The Serpent's Hole on the Île de Batz, setting of the dragon legend.

Day 1: In the school of Illtud

As a child, Paul was entrusted to the monastery of Saint Illtud, where he learned the Scriptures. Before he set out on mission, he was formed for a long time. God prepares his servants patiently.

Prayer: Lord, give me a love for your Word, and the patience to let you form me. Saint Paul Aurelian, pray for me. Amen.

Today: Read a chapter of the Gospel slowly.

Day 2: Choosing solitude

As a young man, Paul withdrew to live as a hermit. He knew that mission is born first of all from prayer, and that we can only give what we have first received in silence.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to find time to be alone with you. Saint Paul Aurelian, help me to love silence. Amen.

Today: Turn off your phone and pray for ten minutes in silence.

Day 3: Refusing honors

King Mark wanted to keep Paul and offer him a position. Paul refused and went on his way. He preferred the freedom of the Gospel to the security of a royal court.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the desire to be recognized and admired. Through the prayers of Saint Paul Aurelian, make me humble. Amen.

Today: Do someone a favor without letting anyone know.

Day 4: Setting out to sea

With his companions, Paul crossed the sea to Ushant. He left his homeland with no hope of returning, for the sake of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage for the departures you ask of me. Saint Paul Aurelian, watch over all who travel. Amen.

Today: Pray for sailors, for migrants and for all who are on a journey.

Day 5: The springs of Léon

Tradition says that along the way Paul made springs flow for his thirsty companions. God gives living water to those who walk toward him.

Prayer: Lord, you are the spring of living water: quench my thirst for meaning and for peace. Amen.

Today: Make the sign of the cross with holy water, renewing your baptismal promises.

Day 6: The bell found again

The bell the king had refused him was given to him on the Île de Batz. What we give up for God, he knows how to give back to us in another way.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you what I have had to lose; teach me to trust you. Amen.

Today: Thank God for a gift you received unexpectedly.

Day 7: Overcoming the dragon

Paul faced the dragon with his stole and his faith. Evil, however strong it seems, cannot stand against Christ.

Prayer: Lord, deliver me from the evil that binds me and from my fears. Saint Paul Aurelian, pray for me. Amen.

Today: Name before God a fear or a sin that dominates you, and hand it over to him, if possible in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Day 8: Accepting the burden

Paul became a bishop almost in spite of himself. He accepted to serve the people God entrusted to him, and spent himself for them.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who carry responsibilities, and help me to fulfill my own faithfully. Amen.

Today: Pray for the bishop of your diocese and the priests of your parish.

Day 9: Rest on the island

At the end of his life, Paul withdrew to the Île de Batz to prepare to meet God. He died there in peace on March 12, after a long life given to God. The monks of the island and the people of the town both wanted to keep him, a sign of how much he was loved.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Paul Aurelian, grant me to live and to die in your peace. Amen.

Today: Pray for the deceased of your family and for those who will die today.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Paul Aurelian, traveling monk and shepherd of Léon,*
> *I entrust to you the intention of these nine days.*
> *Pray for Brittany, for its sailors and its families,*
> *and for the Church of Quimper and Léon.*
> *Obtain for us a free heart, a courageous faith*
> *and victory over evil.*
> *Amen.*

To go further, read the life of Saint Paul Aurelian and pray the Prayer to Saint Paul Aurelian.

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