

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Petroc of Bodmin

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: June 4

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Petroc of Bodmin

6th-century Welsh monk, evangelizer of Cornwall and Devon, also honored in Brittany.

Feast day	June 4
Born	early 6th century, Wales
Died	June 4, c. 564 (traditional date), Cornwall, England
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Cornwall, Devon, Bodmin, Padstow

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Petroc

Novena to Saint Petroc

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Petroc of Bodmin

Saint Petroc (also spelled Petrock, and Pedrog in Welsh) was a 6th-century monk, born in Wales and trained in Ireland, who brought the Gospel to Cornwall and Devon. Founder of the monastery at Padstow and, according to tradition, of Bodmin, he is one of the great saints of southwest England, and he is also honored in Brittany under the names Perreux and Pérec. His feast day is June 4.

Who was Saint Petroc?

Petroc belongs to the great generation of Celtic saints who, in the 5th and 6th centuries, traveled between Wales, Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany. We know him mainly through several Latin *Lives* written in the Middle Ages, long after his death, which mix old memories with a great deal of the marvelous. Historians agree on the heart of his story: a monk of Welsh origin, active in Cornwall in the 6th century, whose cult became established first at Padstow and then at Bodmin.

Welsh genealogies make him the son of a king of Glywysing, in South Wales. The village of Llanbedrog, on the Llŷn Peninsula, may bear his name. Alban Butler states that he died on June 4, around 564, but that date is not certain.



Saint Petroc in a stained glass window of Bodmin church.

Key dates

- **Early 6th century**: Born in Wales, according to tradition into a princely family.
- **Youth**: Goes to study in Ireland, where he stays, according to his *Life*, about twenty years.
- **Around the mid-6th century**: Lands on the north coast of Cornwall at the mouth of the River Camel and founds the monastery of Lanwethinoc, the future Padstow.
- **Following years**: According to tradition, a pilgrimage to Rome and, later, a period as a hermit.
- **End of his life**: Withdraws to inland hermitages, including Bodmin, where the hermit Guron lived.
- **June 4, around 564**: Dies in Cornwall, according to the traditional date.

- **Late 10th century**: The community and the relics are settled at Bodmin, which becomes the center of his cult.
- **1177**: His relics, stolen and taken to the abbey of Saint-Méen in Brittany, are returned to Bodmin through the intervention of King Henry II.

From Ireland to Cornwall

Like many Welsh monks of his time, Petroc went to Ireland for his formation, which was then a center of monastic life and study of the Scriptures. Some traditions make Saint Kevin of Glendalough his disciple, though this remains uncertain.

Back in Britain, he crossed the sea and landed on the north coast of Cornwall, in the estuary of the River Camel. There he founded a monastery called Lanwethinoc. The place later took the name *Petroc-stow*, "Petroc's place," which became Padstow.

Petroc lived there for many years, surrounded by disciples. His *Life* credits him with miracles, healings and great austerity: he is said to have recited the psalms while standing in the cold water of the river, an ascetic practice attributed to several Celtic saints.

The stag, the wolf and the king

The legends about Petroc are full of animals. The best known tells that a young stag, hunted by the men of King Constantine of Dumnonia, took refuge with the saint. Petroc protected it, and the king, moved by his gentleness, was converted. This is why he is often shown with a deer.

Other stories show him taming a wolf or, more fantastically still, traveling as far as India. In their own way, these tales express the peace the saint spread around him.

Bodmin and the relics

At the end of his life, Petroc withdrew inland, to the moors, and settled at Bodmin, where a hermit named Guron lived and gave up his place to him. After Viking raids on Padstow at the end of the 10th century, the community and the relics were moved to Bodmin, which became the main center of his cult in Cornwall.

In 1177 a canon of Bodmin stole the relics and carried them off to Brittany, to the abbey of Saint-Méen. The prior of Bodmin appealed to King Henry II, who obtained their return. The relics came back in a carved ivory casket of Siculo-Arabic origin, which is still kept in the church of Saint Petroc in Bodmin. The bones themselves disappeared at the time of the Reformation.

Why is Saint Petroc the patron saint of Cornwall and Devon?

Petroc is one of the most honored saints of southwest England, and he is regarded as a patron of Cornwall and Devon, as well as of Bodmin and Padstow. Dozens of churches are dedicated to him in Cornwall and especially in Devon, almost always near the sea or an estuary. The unofficial flag of Devon is called "Saint Petroc's Cross." The village of Petrockstowe bears his name. In Wales, two churches are dedicated to him, at St Petrox near Pembroke and at Y Ferwig.

In Brittany his cult is attested at Lopérec, whose name means "place consecrated to Pérec," at Saint-Perreux and in several other parishes. He is also associated with Dol, as a companion of Saint Samson.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Petroc in art

- He is shown as a monk or abbot, sometimes as a bishop.

- His most common emblem is a stag or young deer, recalling the animal he sheltered from the hunters.
- He may also carry a book or a pilgrim's staff.

What can we learn from Saint Petroc?

Petroc was a man of journeys and of peace. He crossed the sea to proclaim the Gospel, then sought the silence of the hermitage. The deer that took refuge with him reminds us that holiness calms and protects. You can pray to him for sailors and travelers, for those seeking refuge, and for Christians in the Celtic lands.

Where to pray to Saint Petroc

- **Bodmin, Cornwall**: the church of Saint Petroc, which keeps the casket of his relics.
- **Padstow, Cornwall**: the church of Saint Petroc, on the site of his first foundation.
- **Little Petherick, Cornwall**: another place associated with his hermitages.
- **Lopérec, Brittany, France**: the parish church, which keeps his memory in Brittany.
- **Saint-Perreux, Brittany, France**: the village that bears his name.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Petroc

Saint Petroc, a 6th-century Welsh monk, brought the Gospel to Cornwall and Devon, and tradition shows him sheltering a young deer hunted by the king's men. We know of no ancient prayer to Saint Petroc in common use, so here is an original prayer by Saintspedia, followed by a short invocation for those who travel by sea.

Prayer to Saint Petroc

Saint Petroc, you left your homeland of Wales to be formed in Ireland,
then crossed the sea to proclaim the Gospel in Cornwall:
teach me to set out when God calls me.

You founded a monastery beside the estuary
and prayed day and night with your brothers:
give me a love for prayer and for life in community.

You gave refuge to the hunted deer,
and your gentleness touched the heart of a king:
make me a peacemaker.
Protect those who are hunted, threatened or homeless,
and teach us to respect all of creation.

You ended your life in the silence of the hermitage:
help me to find God in stillness.
I entrust to you especially: (name your intention).
Amen.

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

Invocation for those who travel by sea

> *Saint Petroc, you sailed between Wales, Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany: watch over sailors, fishermen and all who go to sea. Keep them safe in the storm and bring them home to harbor. Amen.*

(Original prayer by Saintspedia.)

Intentions to entrust to Saint Petroc

- Sailors, fishermen and travelers.
- People who are threatened, persecuted or seeking refuge.
- Christians of Cornwall, Devon, Wales and Brittany.
- Those who seek silence and prayer.
- Respect for animals and for creation.

When to pray this prayer

His feast day is June 4. You can also pray to him before a sea voyage, before a retreat, or when you are seeking a place of peace. For nine days of prayer, follow the Novena to Saint Petroc, and read the life of Saint Petroc.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Petroc

This novena to Saint Petroc is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the journey of the Welsh monk who crossed the sea to bring the Gospel to Cornwall and Devon, from his youth in Wales to his last years as a hermit at Bodmin. Much of what we know of him comes from medieval *Lives* full of legend, and this novena draws on their spiritual meaning. To end on his feast day, June 4, begin on May 27. You can also pray it before a journey, a retreat or a new beginning.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Read the meditation, pray the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Finish by choosing the small act suggested. Petroc loved silence: if you can, begin each day with a minute of stillness before you pray. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.



Saint Petroc and the deer he protected.

Day 1: Leaving home

According to Welsh tradition, Petroc was born into a princely family in South Wales. He left comfort and status behind to follow Christ. Every vocation begins with a departure, even when we stay in the same place: a departure from ourselves toward God.

Prayer: Saint Petroc, help me to let go of what holds me back from following Christ. Lord, show me where you are calling me. Amen.

Today: Give away something you no longer need.

Day 2: Learning in Ireland

Petroc went to Ireland to be formed in the monasteries there, and stayed about twenty years, according to his *Life*. He took time to learn the Scriptures and to pray before setting out to preach.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayers of Saint Petroc, give me a love for your Word, and patience in learning to know you. Amen.

Today: Read a chapter of the Gospels slowly.

Day 3: Crossing the sea

Petroc crossed the sea and landed in the estuary of the River Camel. The Celtic saints trusted their lives to the waves to carry the Gospel to new lands.

Prayer: Saint Petroc, watch over sailors, fishermen and all travelers. Give me courage when I must step into the unknown. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who is traveling, or for those who work at sea.

Day 4: A house of prayer by the water

At Lanwethinoc, the future Padstow, Petroc founded a monastery and lived there for many years with his disciples. Prayer in common was the heart of his mission.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Petroc, bless monasteries and parishes, and make my home a place of prayer. Amen.

Today: Pray one of the psalms, perhaps Psalm 23 or Psalm 104.

Day 5: Austerity and freedom

His *Life* tells that he recited the psalms standing in the cold water of the river. Whatever we make of the detail, it speaks of a man who wanted nothing to come between him and God.

Prayer: Saint Petroc, help me to practice a little self-denial, not out of pride, but out of love for God. Amen.

Today: Give up one small comfort and offer it for someone in need.

Day 6: Refuge for the hunted

The best-known legend tells of a young deer, hunted by the king's men, that took refuge with Petroc. He protected it, and the king was converted by his gentleness.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayers of Saint Petroc, protect all who are hunted, threatened or forced to flee, and make me a refuge for others. Amen.

Today: Pray for refugees, or support an organization that welcomes them.

Day 7: Peace with creation

Other stories show Petroc taming a wolf. The Celtic saints lived close to nature and saw in it the hand of the Creator. Their peace reached even the animals.

Prayer: Saint Petroc, teach me to respect creation, and to live in peace with all that God has made. Amen.

Today: Take a walk outdoors and thank God for one thing you see.

Day 8: The silence of the hermitage

At the end of his life, Petroc withdrew inland to Bodmin, where the hermit Guron gave up his place to him. After years of mission, he sought God in silence.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Petroc, help me to find you in stillness, away from noise and hurry. Amen.

Today: Spend ten minutes in silence, without your phone.

Day 9: A saint who returns

Petroc's relics were stolen in 1177 and carried to Brittany, then returned to Bodmin through King Henry II. Today his name is borne by dozens of churches in Cornwall and Devon, and by Saint Petroc's Cross, the flag of

Devon. His memory has never left the land he served.

Prayer: Saint Petroc, at the end of this novena, I entrust my intention to you. Pray for Cornwall, Devon, Wales and Brittany, and for all who travel toward God. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Christians of the Celtic lands, or for your own region and its saints.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Petroc, monk and traveler for Christ,*
> *you crossed the sea to bring the Gospel to Cornwall,*
> *you gave refuge to the hunted,*
> *and you sought God in silence.*
> *I place in your hands the intention of these nine days.*
> *Watch over sailors and travelers,*
> *protect those who seek refuge,*
> *and teach me to be a peacemaker wherever I go.*
> *Amen.*

Read more on the page Saint Petroc, or pray the Prayer to Saint Petroc.

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: Unknown author, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Source
- Saint Petroc in a stained glass window of Bodmin church.: Image: Michael Garlick, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Petroc and the deer he protected.: Image: Michael Garlick, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License



More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com