

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Philibert of Tournus

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 20

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IN BRIEF

Saint Philibert of Tournus

Frankish monk of the seventh century, founder of the abbeys of Jumièges and Noirmoutier, venerated at Tournus.

Feast day	August 20
Born	c. 616, Eauze region, Gascony, France
Died	August 20, 684, Noirmoutier, France
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	Tournus, Noirmoutier

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Philibert of Tournus

Saint Philibert, also spelled Philbert, was a Frankish monk of the seventh century, founder of the great abbeys of Jumièges, in Normandy, and Noirmoutier, on an island off the Vendée coast of western France. He stood up with courage to Ebroin, the powerful mayor of the palace, and died at Noirmoutier in 684. Fleeing the Vikings, his monks carried his relics across France for nearly forty years, until they settled at Tournus, in Burgundy, where they still rest. He is celebrated on August 20.

Who was Saint Philibert?

Philibert was born around 616 in Gascony, in the region of Eauze, in Vasconia. He was the only son of Filibaud, an aristocrat who, after being widowed, became bishop of Aire-sur-l'Adour. Well educated, the young man was introduced by his father to the court of King Dagobert I, where he became friends with Saint Ouen, the future bishop of Rouen.

His life is known from a *Life* written shortly after his death by a monk of Jumièges, and the story of his relics from the account of the monk Ermentarius of Noirmoutier, in the ninth century. He belongs to the generation of great monastic founders of Merovingian Gaul, formed in the tradition of Saint Columban.

Key dates

- **Around 616**: Born in Gascony, near Eauze.
- **Around 636**: At twenty, he leaves Dagobert's court and enters the abbey of Rebais, in Brie.
- **Around 650**: He becomes abbot of Rebais, then travels to study the monasteries of Gaul and Italy.

- **654**: Founds the abbey of Jumièges, with the support of Queen Bathild and King Clovis II.
- **Around 674**: After a conflict with Ebroin, he leaves Normandy and founds the abbey of Noirmoutier.
- **August 20, 684**: Dies at Noirmoutier.
- **836**: Fleeing the Vikings, the monks carry his body to Déas, today's Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu.
- **875**: After a long journey, the relics reach Tournus.

From the royal court to Rebais

At twenty, weary of life at court, Philibert decided to give himself to God. With the king's consent, he sold his possessions, gave the money to the poor and to monasteries, and entered the abbey of Rebais, in Brie, which his friend Ouen had just founded and which was led by Saint Agilus. When Agilus died, around 650, the monks elected Philibert abbot.

Disagreements soon arose about how to apply the Rule of Saint Columban. Philibert then set out to visit the great monasteries of Gaul and Italy, as far as Bobbio, where Columban had died. He compared the rules of Saint Basil, Saint Macarius, Saint Benedict and Saint Columban, seeking the best way to organize a life of prayer and work.

The founder of Jumièges

Rich with this experience, in 654 he obtained from Queen Bathild and King Clovis II fertile land in a loop of the Seine, near Rouen. There he founded the abbey of Jumièges, which quickly became one of the largest monasteries of the kingdom, with hundreds of monks. He applied a mixed rule, inspired above all by Columban and Benedict. He also founded a community of nuns at Pavilly.

Courage before the powerful

Close to the great Frankish families, Philibert did not hesitate to oppose the mighty mayor of the palace of Neustria, Ebroin, whom he reproached for his violence, in particular against Bishop Leger of Autun, who would be tortured and put to death. This courage cost him dearly: he was imprisoned for a time and then had to leave Normandy.

Noirmoutier, the island of his last rest

Welcomed in Poitou by Bishop Ansoald, Philibert founded around 674 a monastery on the island of Her, today Noirmoutier, as well as other communities in the region. After the fall of Ebroin, he was reconciled with Ouen and could have returned to Jumièges. He chose instead to install another abbot there and went back to end his days at Noirmoutier. He died there on August 20, 684, at nearly seventy. His body was placed in a sarcophagus in the crypt of the abbey church, today the church of Saint-Philbert at Noirmoutier-en-l'Île.

The great journey of the relics

In the ninth century, the island was constantly attacked by the Vikings. In 836, the monks carried the saint's sarcophagus to the mainland, to Déas, which became Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu; the empty sarcophagus can still be seen there. Then, driven on by further invasions, they wandered with the relics through Anjou, Poitou and Auvergne, passing through Cunault and Messais among other places.

In 875, after nearly forty years of exile, they received from Charles the Bald the monastery of Tournus, on the Saône, already linked to the cult of the local martyr Saint Valerian. The abbey took the name of Saint-Philibert. This long journey explains the many towns and churches that bear his name throughout western and central France.

Why is Saint Philibert the patron of Tournus and Noirmoutier?

Saint Philibert is the patron of Tournus, where his relics have rested since 875, and of Noirmoutier, the island where he founded his last monastery and died. More broadly, he can be invoked for religious communities, for people forced into exile and for those who find the courage to speak the truth to the powerful. His monks, carrying his relics across France, also showed the faithfulness of a community to its founder.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Philibert in art

Saint Philibert is usually shown as an abbot, in a monk's habit, holding a crozier, the sign of his authority as founder and father of monks. A seventeenth-century statue at Moëlan-sur-Mer, in Brittany, shows him this way, crozier in hand.

Where to pray to Saint Philibert

- **Tournus** (Saône-et-Loire): the abbey church of Saint-Philibert, one of the great Romanesque buildings of France, which keeps his relics in a chapel of the choir, in a modern reliquary by the goldsmith Goudji.
- **Noirmoutier-en-l'Île** (Vendée): the church of Saint-Philbert and its crypt, site of his first tomb.
- **Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu** (Loire-Atlantique): the Carolingian abbey church and its sarcophagus.
- **Jumièges** (Seine-Maritime): the ruins of the abbey he founded.
- **Rebais** (Seine-et-Marne): the abbey where he was monk and abbot.

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

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Philibert for Courage and Exiles

We know of no traditional prayer to Saint Philibert whose text can be vouched for. Saintspedia offers an original prayer inspired by his life: the courtier who became a monk, the founder of Jumièges and Noirmoutier, the abbot who stood up to Ebroin, and the saint whose relics crossed France with his exiled monks.

A faithful and courageous founder

Philibert left the royal court to follow Christ, studied the rules of the great monks to found solid communities, and dared to rebuke an all-powerful mayor of the palace for his crimes, at the cost of exile. After his death, his monks did not abandon him: fleeing the Vikings, they carried his relics for nearly forty years, all the way to Tournus.

Prayer to Saint Philibert for Courage and Exiles

Saint Philibert,
you left the honors of the court to seek God alone:
teach me to prefer what is essential to what merely shines.

You founded Jumièges and Noirmoutier:
bless religious communities, monasteries
and all who live together to pray and to serve.

You spoke the truth to the mighty Ebroin:
give me the courage to defend justice and the dignity of victims,
even when it costs me.

Your monks had to flee from place to place:
protect exiles, refugees
and all who have lost their homes.
I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, may I remain faithful to Christ
on every road of my life. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- On August 20, the feast of Saint Philibert and the day of his death at Noirmoutier in 684.
- During a visit to Tournus, Jumièges, Noirmoutier or Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu.
- For a monastery or religious community, especially in a time of change.

- For refugees and migrants, or when you yourself must move or leave your home.
- Before a difficult conversation in which you must speak the truth to someone in authority.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Philibert or pray the novena to Saint Philibert, from August 12 to August 20.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Philibert

This novena to Saint Philibert is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the young courtier who left the court of King Dagobert, founded the abbeys of Jumièges and Noirmoutier, stood up to the powerful Ebroin and whose relics traveled across France with his monks before resting at Tournus. To end on August 20, his feast day, begin it on August 12. You can also pray it at any time, for a religious community, for exiles or when you need courage.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act suggested for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: A son of Gascony

Philibert was born around 616 near Eauze, the only son of Filibaud, who later became bishop of Aire. He grew up in a family where faith and responsibility went together. His father, after being widowed, became a bishop: the son learned early that a whole life can be placed at the service of God.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, bless fathers and sons, and help families to pass on the faith from one generation to the next. Amen.

Today: Pray for your father, living or deceased, and for the men who have guided you.

Day 2: Leaving the court

At the court of King Dagobert, Philibert had friends, prospects and honors. At twenty, he left it all, sold his goods and gave the money to the poor and to monasteries.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, free me from the attraction of status and success, and help me to seek God first. Amen.

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

Day 3: A faithful friendship

At court, Philibert became the friend of Ouen, the future bishop of Rouen. Their friendship went through trials and ended in reconciliation.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, bless my friendships, and give me the humility to seek reconciliation when a friendship has been wounded. Amen.

Today: Reach out to a friend you have lost touch with.

Day 4: Learning from others

As abbot of Rebais, Philibert traveled to the great monasteries of Gaul and Italy, as far as Bobbio, to study the rules of Saint Basil, Saint Benedict and Saint Columban. He was not too proud to learn. Before building, he took time to listen, compare and pray.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, give me a teachable heart, ready to learn from the wisdom of others. Amen.

Today: Read a few lines of a spiritual book or of the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Day 5: Building a community

In 654, with the help of Queen Bathild and King Clovis II, Philibert founded Jumièges on a loop of the Seine. Hundreds of monks came to live there in prayer and work.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, bless monasteries and religious communities. May they be places of peace, prayer and welcome. Amen.

Today: Pray for a monastery or convent you know, or for monastic vocations.

Day 6: Speaking the truth to power

Philibert rebuked Ebroin, the mighty mayor of the palace, for his violence, especially against Bishop Leger of Autun. It cost him prison and exile.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, give me the courage to defend the truth and the victims of injustice, even when it costs me. Amen.

Today: Pray for those who are imprisoned or persecuted for speaking the truth.

Day 7: A new beginning on an island

Forced to leave Normandy, Philibert did not give up. Welcomed in Poitou, he founded a monastery on the island of Noirmoutier and other communities in the region.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, help me to start again after failure or loss, trusting that God can bring good out of every trial. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who has to start over: after a move, a job loss or a breakup.

Day 8: Letting go

After his reconciliation with Ouen, Philibert could have returned to Jumièges. He chose to entrust it to another abbot and went back to Noirmoutier, where he died on August 20, 684.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, teach me not to cling to what I have built, but to hand it on freely to others. Amen.

Today: Encourage someone who is taking over a task or role from you.

Day 9: Pilgrims with the relics

Fleeing the Vikings, his monks carried his relics for nearly forty years, from Noirmoutier to Tournus. They remained faithful to their father, even in exile. Today his relics rest at Tournus, in the great Romanesque abbey church that bears his name.

Prayer: Saint Philibert, protect exiles, refugees and all who have lost their homes. Present to God all the intentions of this novena. Amen.

Today: Support a work that welcomes refugees or migrants, with a prayer or a gift.

Closing prayer

Lord God,
you called Saint Philibert from the royal court to the cloister
and made him a father of monks and a witness to the truth.
Through his intercession, bless religious communities,
give courage to those who defend justice,
protect exiles and refugees,
and grant us the graces we ask in this novena.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Philibert or pray the prayer to Saint Philibert.

PILGRIMAGE

Abbey Church of Saint-Philibert in Tournus

The abbey church of Saint-Philibert in Tournus, in Saône-et-Loire, is one of the greatest monuments of Romanesque art in France. It takes its name from the saint who founded Jumièges and Noirmoutier, whose relics were brought here in 875 by monks fleeing the Vikings, and who still rest here today.

The end of a long exile

Saint Philibert died in 684 on Noirmoutier. In the 9th century, Viking raids forced his monks to leave the island with his body: first to Déas, present-day Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu, in 836, then across Anjou, Poitou and Auvergne. In 875, they received from Charles the Bald the monastery of Tournus, on the Saône, already linked to the cult of Saint Valerian, a local martyr. The abbey took the name Saint-Philibert. The present building was largely constructed in the 11th and 12th centuries.

What you will see

The abbey church first strikes you with its massive westwork, a powerful two-story narthex, one of the oldest in Romanesque art. The nave, with its great cylindrical pillars of pinkish stone, is covered by a series of transverse barrel vaults, a very original architectural solution. The choir, consecrated in the early 12th century, is surrounded by an ambulatory and radiating chapels, above a vast crypt. The relics of Saint Philibert are kept in a chapel of the choir, in a contemporary reliquary made by the goldsmith Goudji. In 1998, thieves stole the saint's skull and two of his bones from it.

Praying near Saint Philibert

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Philibert. Before his relics, entrust to him religious communities, exiles and those who need courage, then recite the prayer to Saint Philibert. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places associated with Saint Philibert

- **Noirmoutier-en-l'Île** (Vendée): the church of Saint-Philbert and its crypt, where he was first buried.
- **Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu** (Loire-Atlantique): the Carolingian abbey church and its sarcophagus.
- **Jumièges** (Seine-Maritime): the ruins of the abbey he founded in 654.
- **Rebais** (Seine-et-Marne): the abbey where he was a monk and then abbot.

Practical information

Tournus is in Saône-et-Loire, on the banks of the Saône, between Chalon-sur-Saône and Mâcon; the town is served by train and by the A6 motorway. The abbey church is a working parish church: proper dress and silence are asked of visitors during services. Opening hours, Mass times and crypt visits may vary; ask the parish or the Tournus tourist office before you come, especially around August 20.

CREDITS

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