

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Pirmin

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Pirmin

Eighth-century missionary monk and bishop, founder of Reichenau, Murbach and Hornbach, patron saint of Alsace.

Feast day	November 3
Born	c. 670
Died	November 3, 753, Hornbach, Germany
Canonized	Pre-congregation (immemorial cult)
Era	8th century
Patron saint of	Alsace, Diocese of Speyer, Reichenau Island, Innsbruck

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Pirmin

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Pirmin

Saint Pirmin was an eighth-century missionary monk and bishop, probably from southern Gaul or Spain, who founded the abbey of Reichenau on Lake Constance in 724, then a series of monasteries between the Vosges and the Black Forest, including Murbach in Alsace. Evangelizer of the Alemanni, he died in 753 at his last foundation, Hornbach, in the Palatinate. Patron of Alsace and of the Diocese of Speyer, he is celebrated on November 3.

Who was Saint Pirmin?

Pirmin, in Latin *Pirminius* or *Priminius*, is a figure whose origins are still debated. Historians believe he was of Visigothic descent, from the area of Narbonne or from Spain, and shaped by Irish monasticism, then very present on the Continent. According to a frequently repeated hypothesis, he left Septimania (the region around Narbonne) around 717-719, when Muslim armies coming from Spain were invading the region.

He belongs to the great generation of eighth-century missionaries who, like Saint Boniface in Germany or Saint Willibrord in Frisia, completed the evangelization of the peoples settled east of the Frankish kingdom. His main tool was the monastery: a place of prayer, work and teaching, from which the faith spread into the countryside.

Key dates

- **c. 670**: Birth, probably in southern Gaul or Visigothic Spain.
- **c. 717-719**: He leaves Septimania, threatened by the Muslim invasion.
- **c. 718**: According to some sources, he serves for a few years the church of the castle of Antwerp.
- **724**: Founding of the abbey of Reichenau, on Lake Constance.

- **725-728**: Foundations of Gengenbach, then Murbach in Alsace, with Count Eberhard.
- **c. 734-740**: Foundation or reform of Amorbach, Wissembourg, Marmoutier, Neuwiller and other monasteries.
- **c. 742**: Founding of the abbey of Hornbach, in today's Palatinate.
- **November 3, 753**: Death at Hornbach, where he is buried.

Founder of Reichenau

In 724, Pirmin settled on an island in Lake Constance, Reichenau, with the support of the Frankish authorities. There he founded a monastery that would become, in the Carolingian and Ottonian periods, one of the greatest centers of culture in Europe, famous for its library, its school and its workshops of illuminated manuscripts. The three Romanesque churches of the island are today a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

But Pirmin did not stay long at Reichenau: political tensions with the Alemannic dukes forced him to leave around 727.

A sower of monasteries

He then continued his work further west. With Count Eberhard, he founded Gengenbach, in the Kinzig valley, and then, in 728, Murbach, in a valley of the Alsatian Vosges, which would become one of the most powerful abbeys of the region.

Other monasteries owe him their foundation or reform, such as Amorbach, Wissembourg, Marmoutier, Neuwiller or Niederaltaich, even if his exact role is not always certain for each one. He gave these communities a rule inspired by that of Saint Benedict and united them by bonds of prayer.

Each of these houses of prayer, work and teaching became a center from which the faith spread into the surrounding countryside, long after their founder had moved on.

His last foundation was Hornbach, around 742, then in the region of Metz. There he died on November 3, 753, and there he was buried.

Catechist of the Alemanni

The Roman Martyrology presents him as the bishop and abbot of Reichenau who evangelized the Alemanni and the Bavarians, founded many monasteries and wrote for his disciples a book on teaching the faith to uneducated people. A short handbook is indeed attributed to him, the *Scarapsus* or *Dicta abbatis Pirminii*, which summarizes the Christian faith and fights popular superstitions.

Historians doubt that it is entirely by his hand, but the text remains a precious witness to the beliefs and preaching of his time. It contains one of the oldest known versions of the Apostles' Creed in its current form, the Creed that Catholics still pray today at the beginning of the Rosary.

His relics and cult

Pirmin's relics remained at Hornbach until the Protestant Reformation. In the sixteenth century, they were moved to Innsbruck, in Austria, of which he became one of the patrons. Part of them returned to Germany in 1953 and is now divided between Hornbach, Speyer and Pirmasens, a town in the Palatinate that bears his name.

Why is Saint Pirmin the patron saint of Alsace?

Through Murbach and the other abbeys he founded or reformed in Alsace, such as Wissembourg, Marmoutier and Neuwiller, Pirmin planted the monastic life that shaped the Christian culture of the region for centuries. He is therefore honored as a patron of Alsace, as well as of the Diocese of Speyer, the island of Reichenau and the city of Innsbruck, which kept his relics.

Pirmin was a refugee who became a builder. Driven from his home region, he planted monasteries in lands where the faith was still young, and these houses of prayer formed the Christian culture of the Rhineland for centuries. He can be invoked for catechists, for those who hand on the faith in simple words, and for exiles who must start over elsewhere.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Pirmin in art

- **Bishop's crozier and miter**: he is usually shown as a bishop and abbot.
- **A book**: a reminder of his teaching and of the catechism attributed to him.

Where to pray to Saint Pirmin

- **Reichenau Island** (Lake Constance, Germany): the churches of the former abbey he founded in 724.
- **Murbach** (Alsace, France): the former Romanesque abbey church.
- **Hornbach** (Rhineland-Palatinate): the place of his death and burial.
- **Pirmasens** and **Speyer**: churches that keep part of his relics.
- **Innsbruck** (Austria): the city that received his relics in the sixteenth century.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Pirmin for catechists and exiles or the novena to Saint Pirmin.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Pirmin for Catechists and Exiles

No traditional prayer to Saint Pirmin is known to us with certainty. Below is an original prayer inspired by what history and the Roman Martyrology remember of him: the monk from the south, the founder of Reichenau and Murbach, the catechist who explained the faith in simple words. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

A missionary who built houses of prayer

Driven from his home region, Pirmin did not try to rebuild his life for himself: he founded monasteries, and these communities became centers of faith, culture and work for the whole surrounding country. He also thought of the simplest people, writing or inspiring a small book to teach the faith to those without education.

Prayer to Saint Pirmin for Catechists and Exiles

Saint Pirmin, you left your homeland without losing your faith:
support exiles and all who must begin their lives again far from home.

You founded monasteries on the shores of lakes
and in the valleys of the Vosges:
remind us that the faithful prayer of a community
can transform a whole land.

You taught the faith to simple people:
bless catechists, parents and all who hand on the Gospel
with patience and clarity.

Watch over Alsace, the Diocese of Speyer
and the lands you brought to Christ.
I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through your intercession, wherever God places me,
may I build a small house of prayer and welcome.
Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Pirmin is celebrated on November 3, the day of his death at Hornbach. You can also pray to him:

- at the beginning of a year of catechesis or religious education;
- for a religious community or a parish;
- when moving to a new home, or for migrants and refugees;
- for Alsace, southwestern Germany and Austria.

Praying the Creed with Saint Pirmin

The handbook attributed to Saint Pirmin contains one of the oldest known versions of the Apostles' Creed in its current form. Praying the Creed slowly is a fitting way to honor him:

> *I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.*

To learn more about him, read the life of Saint Pirmin or pray the novena to Saint Pirmin, from October 26 to November 3.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Pirmin

This novena to Saint Pirmin is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the missionary monk who left his homeland, founded Reichenau, Murbach and many other monasteries, and taught the faith in simple words to the peoples of the Rhine valley. To end on November 3, his feast day, begin it on October 26. You can also pray it at any time, especially at the start of a year of catechesis, for a religious community, or when you must start your life over in a new place.

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: Leaving home

Pirmin probably left Septimania, in southern Gaul, around 717-719, when Muslim armies were invading the region. He lost his homeland, but not his faith, and he turned his exile into a mission.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, support exiles, refugees and all who have had to leave their homes. Amen.

Today: Pray for refugees, or welcome a newcomer in your neighborhood or parish.

Day 2: Shaped by the Irish monks

Historians think Pirmin was shaped by Irish monasticism, then very present on the Continent through the heirs of Saint Columban. He received a tradition of prayer, penance and mission.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, help me to receive with gratitude the faith handed on to me by others. Amen.

Today: Thank God for one person who helped you grow in faith.

Day 3: An island of prayer

In 724, Pirmin founded the abbey of Reichenau on an island in Lake Constance. It became one of the greatest centers of culture in Europe.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, help me to make my home a place of prayer and peace. Amen.

Today: Set up a small corner for prayer in your home, or pray there with your family.

Day 4: Leaving again

Political tensions forced Pirmin to leave Reichenau around 727. Instead of losing heart, he went on to found other monasteries further west, in the Black Forest and in Alsace.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, when my plans are interrupted, help me to begin again with trust. Amen.

Today: Offer to God a project that did not work out, and ask him for a new beginning.

Day 5: Murbach and the valleys of Alsace

In 728, with Count Eberhard, Pirmin founded Murbach in a valley of the Vosges. It became one of the most powerful abbeys of the region, and Alsace honors him as its patron.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, protect Alsace and all the lands you brought to Christ. Amen.

Today: Pray for your own region and for its parishes.

Day 6: Communities united in prayer

Pirmin gave his monasteries a rule inspired by Saint Benedict and united them by bonds of prayer. Each community was supported by the others.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, pray for monks, nuns and religious communities, and for the unity of our parishes. Amen.

Today: Pray for a monastery or religious community, or send them a word of support.

Day 7: Teaching the simple

A small handbook for teaching the faith to uneducated people is attributed to Pirmin. He wanted everyone to be able to understand the Gospel.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, bless catechists, teachers of religion and parents who hand on the faith to their children. Amen.

Today: Explain one point of your faith simply to a child or a friend.

Day 8: The Creed

The handbook attributed to Pirmin contains one of the oldest known versions of the Apostles' Creed in its current form, the same Creed we pray today.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, strengthen my faith, and help me to profess it with my lips and my life. Amen.

Today: Pray the Apostles' Creed slowly, pausing on each phrase.

Day 9: Resting at Hornbach

Pirmin died at Hornbach, his last foundation, on November 3, 753. His relics, moved to Innsbruck in the sixteenth century, are now venerated in Hornbach, Speyer and Pirmasens.

Prayer: Saint Pirmin, help me to persevere to the end in the work God gives me. Amen.

Today: Attend Mass if you can, and offer your day for the Church in Europe.

Praying this novena as a group

Saint Pirmin never worked alone: he founded communities and bound them together in prayer. This novena lends itself well to being prayed by a catechist team, a parish group or a family. Each day, one person can read the meditation aloud, all can say the prayer together, and the group can choose one shared act for the day. At the end of the nine days, take a moment to thank God for the people with whom you pray and serve.

Closing prayer

Saint Pirmin,
exile, monk and founder of monasteries,
you planted houses of prayer in lands where the faith was young
and taught the Gospel in simple words.
Pray for exiles and refugees, for catechists and parents,
for religious communities and for Alsace.
Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days,
and help me to build, wherever I am, a home of prayer and welcome.
Amen.

To learn more about him, read the life of Saint Pirmin or pray the prayer to Saint Pirmin.

Credits and sources

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