

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Rabanus Maurus

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: February 4

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IN BRIEF

Saint Rabanus Maurus

Benedictine monk, abbot of Fulda and Archbishop of Mainz, great scholar of the Carolingian Renaissance.

Feast day	February 4
Born	c. 780, Mainz, Germany
Died	February 4, 856, Winkel (Rheingau), Germany
Era	9th century

In this booklet

Life

Veni Creator Spiritus, the Hymn Attributed to Saint Rabanus Maurus

Novena to Saint Rabanus Maurus

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Rabanus Maurus

Saint Rabanus Maurus, also known as Hrabanus Maurus or Raban Maur, was a 9th-century Benedictine monk who became abbot of Fulda and then Archbishop of Mainz. A student of Alcuin, he was one of the greatest scholars of the Carolingian Renaissance: he commented on the Bible, wrote a handbook for training priests, compiled an encyclopedia and composed picture poems in honor of the Cross. Tradition credits him with the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, sung at Pentecost for more than a thousand years. Called the "teacher of Germany" (*Praeceptor Germaniae*), he is remembered on February 4.

Who was Saint Rabanus Maurus?

Rabanus was born around 780 in Mainz, into a noble family. While still a child, he was entrusted to the Abbey of Fulda, founded a few decades earlier by a disciple of Saint Boniface, the apostle of Germany. He received his first education there and became a monk.

After his ordination as a deacon, he left in 802 for the Abbey of Saint Martin in Tours, where Alcuin taught. Alcuin was the most famous teacher in the empire of Charlemagne, and he grew fond of this brilliant student. He gave him the nickname *Maurus*, in memory of Saint Maurus, the favorite disciple of Saint Benedict. Back in Fulda, Rabanus kept the name, which spoke both of his monastic faithfulness and of his debt to his teacher.



Rabanus Maurus presenting his work, a Carolingian illumination from Fulda.

Key dates in the life of Rabanus Maurus

- **Around 780**: Born in Mainz.
- **802**: Studies in Tours under Alcuin, who nicknames him Maurus.
- **803**: Takes charge of the school of the Abbey of Fulda.
- **814**: Ordained a priest.
- **822**: Elected abbot of Fulda.
- **840-845**: Falls out of favor after the defeat of Emperor Lothair, whom he had supported; withdraws to the Petersberg, near Fulda.
- **847**: Appointed Archbishop of Mainz.
- **850**: During a famine, he feeds more than three hundred poor people every day.
- **February 4, 856**: Dies at Winkel, in the Rheingau.

The teacher of Fulda

From 803 onward, Rabanus directed the monastic school of Fulda and made it one of the great intellectual centers of the West. It trained monks, but also priests and future leaders of the Church. His students included Walafrid Strabo, Lupus of Ferrières, Otfrid of Weissenburg and Rudolf of Fulda, who in turn became well-known scholars and writers.

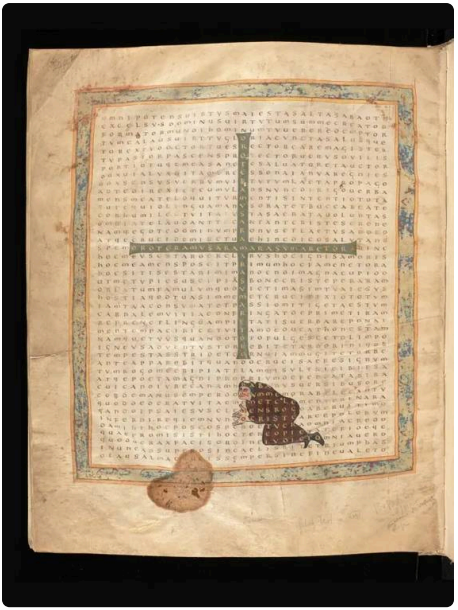
Elected abbot in 822, he completed the buildings begun by his predecessor, built new ones and enriched the library. His monks produced mosaics, tapestries and reliquaries under his direction. He also increased the number of priests serving the countryside and expanded the help the abbey gave to the poor.

A body of work at the service of the faith

The writings of Rabanus are immense. He commented on almost every book of the Bible, gathering what the Fathers of the Church had said about each one. Around 810 he composed *On the Instruction of Clerics* (*De institutione clericorum*), a handbook to train priests in the liturgy, in preaching and in study.

Poems in the shape of the Cross

His *Book in Praise of the Holy Cross* (*De laudibus sanctae crucis*) brings together picture poems, true calligrams in which the letters of the Latin text trace the Cross, the figure of Christ or angels. Each page can be read as a poem and contemplated as an image, a remarkable union of faith, art and learning.



A picture poem from the Book in Praise of the Holy Cross.

An encyclopedia for the Middle Ages

Between 842 and 847 he wrote *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum naturis*), also called *De universo*, the only true encyclopedia of the Carolingian age. Inspired by Saint Isidore of Seville, it explains the things of nature and draws out their spiritual meaning. It remained a reference work until the 13th century.

Rabanus also wrote a treatise on grammar, sermons, letters, poems and a martyrology. Through his glosses in a Germanic language, he contributed to the development of written German.

Archbishop of Mainz

Caught up in the struggles between the sons of Emperor Louis the Pious, Rabanus supported Emperor Lothair. After Lothair's defeat, he gave up his office as abbot and withdrew to the Petersberg, near Fulda, where he prayed

and wrote.

Once reconciled with King Louis the German, he became Archbishop of Mainz in 847, the see once held by Saint Boniface. He gathered synods to reform the life of the clergy and of the Christian people, and he took part in the doctrinal debates of his time. During the famine of 850, he gave away most of the revenues of the Church and fed more than three hundred people every day. He died at Winkel, in the Rheingau, on February 4, 856.

The Veni Creator Spiritus

Tradition attributes to Rabanus the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, "Come, Creator Spirit." The attribution is ancient and widely accepted, though not certain. The hymn is sung at Pentecost, at ordinations, at confirmations and at the opening of great assemblies of the Church, including the conclave that elects a pope. English-speaking Catholics know it in several versions, the best known being "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest."

If the hymn is indeed his, as tradition holds, then every Pentecost, every ordination and every confirmation still sings his words.

What does his holiness teach us?

Rabanus Maurus was neither a martyr nor a hermit, but a scholar monk for whom study was a form of prayer and a service to the Church. He spent his life handing on what he had received: the Bible, the Fathers, ancient learning and the faith. Dante placed him in his *Paradise*, among the doctors. The Roman Martyrology remembers him as a saint on February 4.

Is Saint Rabanus Maurus a patron saint?

Rabanus Maurus has no official patronage. Yet the man known as the "teacher of Germany" is a natural intercessor for teachers, catechists, students, librarians and all who serve the faith through study and education. His care for the hungry during the famine of 850 also makes him a fitting friend for those who serve the poor.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Rabanus Maurus in art

Rabanus is best known through the manuscripts of his own time. The most famous illumination shows him, with Alcuin at his side, presenting his book to the Archbishop of Mainz. He is usually depicted as a Benedictine monk or as a bishop, holding a book, the sign of his teaching. The picture poems of his *Book in Praise of the Holy Cross*, with their crosses and figures formed of letters, are the most striking image of his work.



Fulda Cathedral, on the site of the former abbey.

Where to pray to Saint Rabanus Maurus

Fulda, in Hesse, is the place most closely linked to his life. Its Baroque cathedral stands on the site of the abbey church where he was a monk, schoolmaster and abbot, and it keeps the tomb of Saint Boniface. Mainz, his birthplace and the see he governed as archbishop, also keeps his memory.

Wherever you are, you can pray with him through the Veni Creator Spiritus, attributed to Saint Rabanus Maurus, or the novena to Saint Rabanus Maurus.

PRAYER

Veni Creator Spiritus, the Hymn Attributed to Saint Rabanus Maurus

The *Veni Creator Spiritus* ("Come, Creator Spirit") is one of the most famous hymns of the Latin liturgy. Composed in the 9th century, it is traditionally attributed to Saint Rabanus Maurus, abbot of Fulda and Archbishop of Mainz. This ancient attribution is not certain, but it is widely accepted. The hymn is sung at Pentecost, at ordinations, at confirmations and at the opening of the great assemblies of the Church.

The Veni Creator Spiritus

Traditional Latin text (9th century), followed by an English translation.

Veni, Creator Spiritus,
mentes tuorum visita,
imple superna gratia,
quae tu creasti pectora.

Qui diceris Paraclitus,
altissimi donum Dei,
fons vivus, ignis, caritas,
et spiritalis unctio.

Tu septiformis munere,
digitus paternae dexterae,
tu rite promissum Patris,
sermone ditans guttura.

Accende lumen sensibus,
infunde amorem cordibus,
infirma nostri corporis
virtute firmans perpeti.

Hostem repellas longius,
pacemque dones protinus;
ductore sic te praevio
vitemus omne noxium.

Per te sciamus da Patrem,
noscamus atque Filium,
teque utriusque Spiritum
credamus omni tempore. Amen.

Come, Creator Spirit, visit the minds of your faithful; fill with grace from on high the hearts that you have made.

You who are called the Counselor, gift of God Most High, living spring, fire, love, and spiritual anointing.

You, the Spirit of the sevenfold gift, finger of the Father's right hand, you, the Father's promise, who put words on our lips.

Kindle your light in our minds, pour your love into our hearts, and strengthen the weakness of our bodies with your unfailing power.

Drive the enemy far from us and grant us peace without delay; so, with you as our guide, may we avoid all harm.

Through you may we know the Father and come to know the Son, and may we always believe in you, the Spirit of them both. Amen.

Source: Latin hymn of the 9th century, attributed by tradition to Rabanus Maurus (c. 780-856). English translation by Saintspedia, close to the Latin. The liturgy often adds a final verse of praise to the Holy Trinity. Many English hymnals use a sung version, such as "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest."



Saint Rabanus Maurus in a medieval manuscript.

Original prayer to Saint Rabanus Maurus

Saint Rabanus Maurus, monk of Fulda and shepherd of Mainz, you devoted your life to the study of the Scriptures to make them accessible to all: give me a love for the Word of God.

You trained generations of students: pray for teachers, catechists and all who hand on the faith and knowledge.

You fed the hungry in a time of famine: make me attentive to those who hunger for bread and for meaning.

With you, I call upon the Creator Spirit: may he kindle his light in my mind and pour his love into my heart. 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.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Rabanus Maurus is remembered on February 4, the day of his death in 856. The *Veni Creator* is especially suited:

- at Pentecost and during the days that prepare for it;
- before an exam, an important decision or the start of a new work;
- for those preparing for confirmation or ordination;
- for teachers, students and catechists at the beginning of a school year.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Rabanus Maurus, or pray the novena to Saint Rabanus Maurus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Rabanus Maurus

This novena to Saint Rabanus Maurus is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the path of the monk of Fulda: a child entrusted to a monastery, a student of Alcuin, a teacher, an abbot, a scholar, an archbishop who fed the hungry. Each day offers a short meditation, a prayer and a small concrete act. To end on his feast day, February 4, begin it on January 27. It is especially suited to students, teachers and anyone who wants to ask for the light of the Holy Spirit.

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. You may also sing or recite the first verse of the *Veni Creator*. End with the small act proposed. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Day 1: A child given to God

Rabanus was still a child when his family entrusted him to the Abbey of Fulda. He grew up in the rhythm of the Rule of Saint Benedict: prayer, work, study. What we receive in childhood can shape a whole life. God was already preparing him for his mission.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all who led me to you when I was young. Bless the children who are discovering the faith today. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for a child you know, or for your godchildren.

Day 2: The joy of learning

In 802, Rabanus went to Tours to study under Alcuin, the greatest teacher of his time. He did not hold back from learning: he went where the best teaching could be found. For him, the mind was a gift of God, made to seek the truth.

Prayer: Saint Rabanus, obtain for me a humble and eager mind, glad to learn and open to the truth. Amen.

Today: Read a page of Scripture or of a good spiritual book, slowly and attentively.

Day 3: A name received from a teacher

Alcuin gave his student the name *Maurus*, in memory of Saint Maurus, the beloved disciple of Saint Benedict. Rabanus kept it all his life, as a sign of gratitude. We, too, owe much to those who taught us.

Prayer: Lord, bless the teachers who opened my mind and my heart. Reward them for their patience. Amen.

Today: Thank a teacher, a mentor or a catechist, in person, by a message or in prayer.

Day 4: Handing on what we have received

For many years Rabanus led the school of Fulda and trained monks, priests and scholars. Some of his students became great writers in their turn. Teaching was, for him, a way of serving God and the Church.

Prayer: Saint Rabanus, pray for teachers and catechists: may they hand on the faith and knowledge with love and truth. Amen.

Today: Share something you have learned about the faith with someone who is curious about it.

Day 5: Loving the Word of God

Rabanus commented on almost every book of the Bible, gathering the wisdom of the Fathers of the Church. He did not study Scripture for its own sake, but to help others understand and live it. The Word of God was the center of his work.

Prayer: Lord, make your Word a lamp for my steps and a light for my path. Amen.

Today: Read the Gospel of the day and keep one sentence in your heart.

Day 6: Contemplating the Cross

In his *Book in Praise of the Holy Cross*, Rabanus wrote poems whose letters form the shape of the Cross and of Christ. Faith, art and intelligence all became praise. Everything in us can be turned toward the love of Christ crucified.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. Teach me to look at your Cross with love. Amen.

Today: Pause before a crucifix for a few minutes of silent prayer.

Day 7: Trust in times of trial

Caught up in the conflicts between the sons of Louis the Pious, Rabanus lost his office as abbot and withdrew to the Petersberg, near Fulda. He did not give up: he prayed and kept writing. Later, he was called to lead the Church of Mainz.

Prayer: Saint Rabanus, when I meet failure or disgrace, help me to keep praying and trusting in God. Amen.

Today: Offer to God a disappointment or a setback you are living through.

Day 8: Feeding the hungry

As Archbishop of Mainz, during the famine of 850, Rabanus gave away most of the revenues of the Church and fed more than three hundred poor people every day. The great scholar did not forget that faith is shown in works of charity.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes and my hands to those who are hungry, near me and far away. Amen.

Today: Give food or a donation to a food bank or to someone in need.

Day 9: Come, Creator Spirit

Tradition attributes to Rabanus the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, sung for more than a thousand years at Pentecost, at confirmations and ordinations. His whole life was an appeal to the Holy Spirit, the source of all light and all love.

Prayer: Come, Creator Spirit, visit my mind, fill my heart with your grace, kindle your light in me and pour out your love. Amen.

Today: Pray the whole *Veni Creator*, in Latin or in English.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Rabanus Maurus, faithful monk, patient teacher and generous shepherd, you loved the Word of God and you served the poor. Pray for us, that we may seek the truth with humility and live it with charity. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, to strengthen our hearts and to guide our steps. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To continue praying with him, read the life of Saint Rabanus Maurus and the Veni Creator Spiritus.

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