

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Radegund

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 13

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IN BRIEF

Saint Radegund

Princess of Thuringia, wife of King Clotaire I, founder of the Abbey of the Holy Cross in Poitiers.

Feast day	August 13
Born	c. 520, Thuringia
Died	August 13, 587, Poitiers, France
Canonized	Venerated since ancient times
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Poitiers

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Radegund, with the Vexilla Regis

Novena to Saint Radegund

Church of Sainte-Radegonde in Poitiers, Tomb of Saint Radegund

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LIFE

Saint Radegund

Saint Radegund (Radegonde in French) was a princess of Thuringia who became Queen of the Franks through her marriage to King Clotaire I, son of Clovis. She left the royal court to give herself to God and founded the Abbey of the Holy Cross in Poitiers, one of the first great monasteries for women in Gaul. There she received a relic of the True Cross, for which the poet Venantius Fortunatus wrote hymns still sung today. She died on August 13, 587; her feast is kept on that day, and she remains the patron saint of Poitiers.

Who was Saint Radegund?

Radegund was born around 520 into the royal family of Thuringia, in what is now central Germany. Around 531 the Frankish kings Theuderic and Clotaire invaded the kingdom. The little princess, then about ten years old, became part of Clotaire's spoils of war, and he took her and her young brother back to Gaul.

She was raised on the royal estate of Athies, in Picardy, where she received a careful education and learned the Christian faith.

Her life is well documented thanks to two biographies written shortly after her death, one by Venantius Fortunatus and the other by Baudonivia, a nun of her monastery, and thanks to the historian Gregory of Tours, who knew her personally.

Key dates

- **c. 520**: Born in Thuringia.
- **c. 531**: Thuringia is conquered by the Franks; Radegund is carried off by Clotaire I.

- **c. 540**: Marries Clotaire, now King of the Franks.
- **c. 550**: After her brother is murdered on the king's orders, she leaves the court; in Noyon, Bishop Saint Medard consecrates her to God.
- **c. 552**: Founds the monastery of Our Lady in Poitiers.
- **569**: A relic of the True Cross sent by Emperor Justin II arrives in Poitiers; the monastery takes the name of the Holy Cross.
- **August 13, 587**: Dies in Poitiers; Gregory of Tours presides at her funeral.

A queen who gave herself to God

Around 540 Clotaire married Radegund. She became queen, but life at court weighed on her. She gave her time and her wealth to the poor and the sick, founded a hospice at Athies and spent long hours in prayer, so much so that people said the king had married a nun rather than a queen.

Around 550 Clotaire had Radegund's brother, the last survivor of her family, put to death. She then left the court and went to Noyon, to Bishop Medard, begging him to consecrate her to God. Despite the bishop's hesitation before a queen, she obtained consecration as a deaconess.

She then withdrew to her estate at Saix, in Poitou, where she lived a life of prayer and service. Clotaire tried to bring her back, then gave up and even contributed to the founding of her monastery.



Saint Radegund in the illuminated manuscript of her Life, kept in Poitiers (11th century).

The Abbey of the Holy Cross in Poitiers

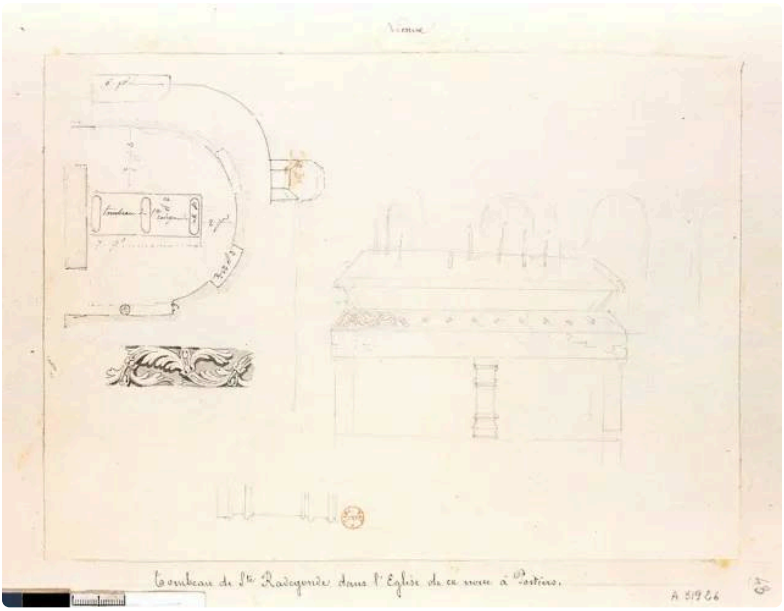
Around 552 Radegund founded a monastery for women in Poitiers, near the city walls. She did not take charge of it herself but entrusted it to a young nun, Agnes, and adopted for the community the rule written by Saint Caesarius of Arles for religious women. She herself lived as a simple nun, sharing the humblest tasks, praying and reading Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. She still intervened to make peace between the Frankish kings, her stepsons, who were tearing one another apart.

Her great desire was to obtain a relic of the Cross of Christ for her monastery. She sent an embassy to Constantinople, and Emperor Justin II sent her a fragment of the Cross in a precious reliquary. The relic arrived in Poitiers in 569, and from then on the monastery was known as the Holy Cross.

Venantius Fortunatus and the hymns of the Cross

Venantius Fortunatus, a poet from Italy, settled in Poitiers and became a friend and support to Radegund and Agnes; he would later become bishop of the city. For the arrival of the relic he composed two famous hymns, the *Vexilla Regis* ("The royal banners forward go") and the *Pange lingua gloriosi proelium certaminis* ("Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle"). Both entered the liturgy of the Church and are still sung during Holy Week. Fortunatus also left poems addressed to Radegund that bear witness to their spiritual friendship.

Radegund died on August 13, 587. She was buried in the church of Saint Mary outside the walls, which would later take her name. Gregory of Tours, who came for the funeral, describes the grief of the nuns crowded on the city walls. Her tomb became a much-visited place of pilgrimage.



The tomb of Saint Radegund in the crypt of her church in Poitiers.

Why is Saint Radegund a patron saint?

Radegund is the patron saint of Poitiers, the city where she founded her monastery and where her tomb is still venerated. Her life also explains why people turn to her in many trials. She lived through war, exile, the loss of her whole family and a forced marriage, yet she did not let the violence of her time make her bitter. She chose the service of the poor, prayer and peace.

She shows that one can give up power for a hidden life that is nonetheless fruitful. People pray to her for families torn apart, for refugees and for peace between nations.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Radegund in art

Radegund is often shown as a crowned queen, sometimes wearing a nun's veil beneath her crown, the sign of her double vocation. She may hold a scepter or a book, and she is frequently shown near the Cross, recalling the relic she obtained for her monastery.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Radegund, with the hymn *Vexilla Regis*, or follow the novena to Saint Radegund, from August 4 to 12.

Where to pray to Saint Radegund

- **Poitiers** (France): the Church of Sainte-Radegonde, where her tomb lies in the crypt.
- **Saint-Benoît** (Vienne): the Abbey of the Holy Cross, heir to her monastery, which keeps the relic of the Cross.
- **Saix** (Vienne): the estate where she withdrew after leaving the court.
- **Chinon**: the cave chapel of Sainte-Radegonde, linked by tradition to a hermit she is said to have visited.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Radegund, with the Vexilla Regis

Saint Radegund left no written prayer that can be quoted with certainty. But her life is bound up with one of the most beautiful hymns of the Latin liturgy, the *Vexilla Regis*, which the poet Venantius Fortunatus composed in Poitiers to welcome the relic of the Cross she had obtained from Emperor Justin II in 569. Below are two stanzas of this hymn, followed by an original prayer to Saint Radegund.

The Vexilla Regis of Venantius Fortunatus (569)

The Latin text is in the public domain; the English rendering is by Saintspedia.

Vexilla regis prodeunt,
fulget crucis mysterium,
quo carne carnis conditor
suspensus est patibulo.

The banners of the King go forth, the mystery of the Cross shines out: on this gibbet the Maker of all flesh was hung in the flesh.

Arbor decora et fulgida,
ornata regis purpura,
electa digno stipite
tam sancta membra tangere.

O tree of beauty and of light, adorned with the purple of the King, chosen as a worthy trunk to touch limbs so holy.

Source: Venantius Fortunatus, hymn *Vexilla Regis prodeunt*, composed in Poitiers for the arrival of the relic of the Cross at Radegund's monastery (569). The hymn is sung in the Roman liturgy during Holy Week.

Prayer to Saint Radegund for peace and healing

> *Saint Radegund, you knew war, exile and the loss of all your loved ones, and you did not let violence harden your heart: pray for me.*
>
> *You laid aside the crown to serve the poor and the sick: teach me to prefer service to honors, and prayer to the noise of the world.*
>
> *You longed so much for the Cross of Christ: help me to carry my crosses with trust and to see in them the way to life. I entrust to you families torn apart, refugees, nations at war, and my own intention (name it in silence).*
>
> *Obtain for our time the peace you sought among the kings of your day, and lead us with you into the light of Easter. Amen.*

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

When to pray this prayer

- On her feast day, August 13, the anniversary of her death in 587. In Poitiers, the feast is marked by celebrations around her tomb.
- For a family divided by conflict or grief.
- For refugees, exiles and children caught up in war.
- When you are carrying a heavy cross and need strength to go on.
- During Holy Week, when the *Vexilla Regis* is sung.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Radegund, and discover the life of Saint Radegund.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Radegund

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Radegund as told by Venantius Fortunatus and the nun Baudonivia. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast, begin on August 4; it ends on August 12, the day before her feast of August 13. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially for peace in a family, for refugees or for someone in mourning.

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. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into the rest of the day. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

Day 1: A child of war

Around 531, the little princess saw her country conquered and her family massacred. She was carried far from home as a prize of war. Her holiness began in a wound she had not chosen. Many children today live the same uprooting, far from everything they knew, and God does not forget a single one of them.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the children who are victims of war. Be their refuge and give them helping hands.

Today: Support an organization that helps refugee children.

Day 2: Discovering the faith

At Athies, Radegund learned to read and came to know Christ. In exile she found an inner home that no one could take from her. Those who taught her could not know what fruit their care would bear. Faith is often handed on quietly, by people who will never see the harvest of what they planted.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who passed on the faith to me. Make my heart your dwelling place.

Today: Pray for the person who first helped you to know God.

Day 3: A queen at the service of the poor

As queen, Radegund cared for the sick and the poor with her own hands in the hospice she had founded. The crown did not distance her from the least of her people. She did not send others to do what she could do herself; she bent down to wash and to feed.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve without counting the cost, and to recognize your face in the faces of the poor.

Today: Do something concrete for a person in need.

Day 4: Passing through grief

The murder of her brother, the last survivor of her family, broke Radegund's heart. She did not answer with revenge, but by giving herself entirely to God. Grief can close a heart or open it; in her, sorrow became a path toward a deeper love.

Prayer: Lord, comfort those who mourn a loved one, and keep our hearts free from hatred.

Today: Pray for someone who is grieving, or write them a few words.

Day 5: Leaving everything

In Noyon, Radegund begged Saint Medard to consecrate her. She laid her royal garments on the altar and chose to belong to God alone. What she gave up was real; so was the freedom she found.

Prayer: Lord, show me what I need to let go of to be freer to follow you.

Today: Give away an object you do not need, or drop an unnecessary habit.

Day 6: The humility of a nun

At the Holy Cross, the former queen refused to be abbess. She swept, washed and served in the kitchen like the other sisters, and found joy in it. Her former rank meant nothing to her now. What mattered was to love, in small things, the God she had chosen.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love the last place and to find joy in humble tasks.

Today: Do, without complaining, a task you do not enjoy.

Day 7: Longing for the Cross

Radegund sent messengers as far as Constantinople to obtain a relic of the Cross. For her, the Cross was not a defeat but the tree of life, the place where Christ's love is revealed.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, by your Cross you saved the world. Help me to carry mine with you.

Today: Spend a few moments in prayer before a crucifix.

Day 8: A peacemaker

From her monastery, Radegund wrote to the Frankish kings begging them to make peace. Her prayer became action. She did not withdraw from the world to forget it, but to love it better.

Prayer: Lord, make me a peacemaker in my family, my workplace and my country.

Today: Take one step toward reconciliation with someone.

Day 9: Spiritual friendship

Venantius Fortunatus, Agnes and the sisters of the Holy Cross surrounded Radegund with deep friendship. Holiness is not lived alone; God gives us companions for the road. Radegund knew how to receive friendship and how to give it, and her friends kept her memory alive by writing her life.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I entrust my intention to you. Through the intercession of Saint Radegund, grant me peace and faithfulness. Amen.

Today: Thank a friend who helps you grow in faith.

Closing prayer

Saint Radegund, queen and servant, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for families torn apart, for refugees and for peace among nations. Obtain for us the grace to love the Cross of Christ and to serve our brothers and sisters with humility. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Radegund and the prayer to Saint Radegund.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Sainte-Radegonde in Poitiers, Tomb of Saint Radegund

The Church of Sainte-Radegonde in Poitiers has housed the saint's tomb since her death in 587. Located in the cathedral district, near the banks of the Clain, it is the heart of devotion to the city's patron saint and the main pilgrimage site dedicated to her.

A church born of a tomb

During her lifetime, Radegund had a church built outside the walls of her monastery, meant for the burial of the nuns and then dedicated to the Virgin Mary. She was buried there in August 587, in the presence of Gregory of Tours. Pilgrims came in such numbers that the church soon took her name. The present building combines a Romanesque tower-porch and apse from the 11th century with a Gothic nave; the choir preserves fine medieval stained glass.



The Church of Sainte-Radegonde, in Poitiers.

The crypt and the tomb

Radegund's sarcophagus is in the crypt, beneath the choir. In 1562, during the Wars of Religion, Protestants desecrated the tomb and burned part of the relics; a few remains were saved and put back. The crypt remains a place of silent prayer, where the faithful come to entrust their intentions, often in writing.

In the church, a chapel also preserves the "Pas-de-Dieu" (God's Footstep): a stone bearing the imprint of a foot. According to tradition, Christ appeared to Radegund in her cell shortly before her death and left this mark there. It is a pious tradition, which the oldest accounts of her life do not mention in this form.

Praying at the tomb of Saint Radegund

Before your visit, you may wish to reread the life of Saint Radegund. On site, a time of silence in the crypt is a good moment to entrust an intention, for example for a family in distress or for peace. The prayer to Saint Radegund, with the *Vexilla Regis*, fits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The tomb of Saint Radegund, in the crypt.

Other places connected with Saint Radegund

- **Saint-Benoît** (Vienne), near Poitiers: the Abbey of Sainte-Croix, the community heir to her monastery, which preserves the relic of the Cross sent by Emperor Justin II.
- **Poitiers**: the nearby Saint-Pierre Cathedral, and the Baptistery of Saint-Jean, one of the oldest Christian buildings in France.
- **Saix** (Vienne): the estate where she withdrew after leaving the court.

- **Chinon** (Indre-et-Loire): the troglodyte Chapel of Sainte-Radegonde, which overlooks the town.
- **Noyon** (Oise): the city of Bishop Saint Medard, who consecrated her to God.

Practical information

The Church of Sainte-Radegonde is a few minutes' walk from Saint-Pierre Cathedral, in the historic center of Poitiers, reachable from the train station. The feast on August 13 and the days around it are marked by special celebrations. Check Mass and opening hours with the parish before you come.

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