

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Remigius of Reims

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: January 15

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IN BRIEF

Saint Remigius of Reims

Bishop of Reims for more than sixty years, who baptized Clovis, king of the Franks.

Feast day	January 15, October 1
Born	c. 437, Region of Laon, France
Died	January 13, 533 (traditional date), Reims, France
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Reims, France

In this booklet

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Basilica of Saint-Remi in Reims, Tomb of Clovis's Bishop

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Remigius of Reims

Saint Remigius (in French, Saint Remi) was the bishop of Reims who, at the end of the 5th century, baptized Clovis, king of the Franks, together with many of his warriors. A pastor of exceptional longevity, he led his Church for more than sixty years, in a Gaul where the Roman Empire had just disappeared. He died around 533 and is celebrated in France on January 15; Reims also keeps October 1, the anniversary of the translation of his relics.

Who was Saint Remigius?

Remigius was born around 437 in the region of Laon, into a wealthy Christian Gallo-Roman family. Tradition names his parents Emilius and Celinia, and makes his older brother Principius a bishop of Soissons. The young man received a solid education in Latin letters, as the few letters in his own hand that have survived show: a careful Latin, still marked by the culture of the Roman schools.

Around 459, when he was only about twenty, he was chosen as bishop of Reims, the metropolitan see of the province of Belgica Secunda. The choice of such a young layman was surprising, but not rare at the time: cities were looking for men able to defend and administer them as well as to teach them. Remigius held this see until his death, one of the longest episcopates known.

Key dates in the life of Saint Remigius

- **Around 437**: Born in the region of Laon.
- **Around 459**: Elected bishop of Reims at a very young age.
- **476**: The last Western Roman emperor is deposed; northern Gaul is divided between local powers and barbarian kingdoms.

- **Around 481**: Clovis succeeds his father Childeric; Remigius writes him a letter of advice, which has been preserved.
- **Around 493**: Clovis marries the Catholic Burgundian princess Clotilde.
- **A Christmas Day between 496 and 511 (the date is still debated)**: Remigius baptizes Clovis in Reims.
- **Around 497-500**: According to tradition, Remigius organizes the diocese of Laon.
- **January 13, 533 (traditional date)**: Dies in Reims at a very great age.
- **October 1, 1049**: Pope Leo IX consecrates the new abbey church of Saint-Remi and solemnly transfers his relics there.

A bishop in the Gaul of the Franks

When Remigius became bishop, Roman authority was fading north of the Loire. The Salian Franks, settled around Tournai, were gradually extending their rule. Their king Childeric, then his son Clovis, were pagans, while other Germanic peoples, such as the Burgundians and the Visigoths, had adopted Arianism, a form of Christianity that denies the full divinity of Christ. Catholic bishops, drawn from the Gallo-Roman aristocracy, were often the only stable leaders in the cities.

Remigius understood the importance of the young Frankish king very early. In the letter he sent him on his accession, he urged him to surround himself with good counselors, to honor the bishops, to protect widows and orphans and to judge fairly. This text, preserved in a collection known as the *Austrasian Letters*, is a precious witness: it shows a bishop dealing with power not through flattery but to steer it toward the common good.

The baptism of Clovis

The best-known account comes from Gregory of Tours, who wrote his *History of the Franks* nearly a century later. According to him, Queen Clotilde had long urged her husband to convert. During a hard battle against the Alamanni, Clovis is said to have called on "Clotilde's God," promising to be baptized if he won. Remigius, summoned by the queen, then instructed him in the faith. On Christmas Day, in the cathedral of Reims hung with tapestries and lit with candles, he baptized him along with, Gregory says, more than three thousand of his warriors.

Gregory puts in the mouth of Remigius a famous saying: "Bow your head humbly, Sicambrian; adore what you have burned, burn what you have adored." Historians today debate the exact date of the baptism and some of the circumstances told by Gregory, who modeled his account on the conversion of Emperor Constantine. But the fact itself is certain, and its consequences were immense. By choosing Catholic baptism rather than Arianism, Clovis brought the Franks closer to the Gallo-Roman population and the bishops, and opened a long alliance between the Frankish monarchy and the Church. This is why France is sometimes called the "eldest daughter of the Church."

Later, in the 9th century, Archbishop Hincmar of Reims added in his *Life of Saint Remigius* the episode of the Holy Ampulla: a dove was said to have brought from heaven a vial of holy oil for anointing the king. This story belongs to legend, but it founded the tradition of crowning the kings of France at Reims, down to Charles X in 1825.



The tomb of Saint Remigius in the Basilica of Saint-Remi, Reims.

Pastor and organizer

Beyond this founding moment, Remigius was first of all a bishop close to his people. Tradition credits him with creating or reorganizing several dioceses of northern Gaul, especially Laon, and with sending missionaries to regions that were still pagan. A will bearing his name, whose authenticity historians debate, details gifts of land and goods to his Church and to the poor. The stories of miracles that grew up around him, told by later biographers, often belong more to tradition than to history.

He died in Reims at a very great age around 533, on January 13 according to tradition. He was buried in a small chapel outside the city walls, which quickly became a place of pilgrimage and later the heart of a great Benedictine abbey.



One of the tapestries of the life of Saint Remigius given to the Abbey of Saint-Remi in Reims in 1531.

Why is Saint Remigius the patron saint of Reims?

Remigius was the bishop of Reims for more than sixty years, and his tomb has been venerated there for fifteen centuries, so the city naturally took him as its patron. He is also honored as one of the founders of Christian France, because of the baptism of Clovis. Catholics pray to him for the baptized and for catechumens preparing for baptism, for those who hold public responsibility, and for France.

Saint Remigius is the saint of patient beginnings. For decades he kept his Church standing in a world that was changing masters, and he never gave up proclaiming the Gospel to those who seemed farthest away, even a pagan king. He reminds us that faith is handed on by words, but also by the faithfulness of a pastor who stays at his post.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Remigius in art

- **Miter and crozier**: he is shown as a bishop in full vestments.
- **The baptism of Clovis**: his most frequent scene, with the king standing in the font.
- **The dove carrying a vial**: the legend of the Holy Ampulla, used for the anointing of the kings of France.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Remigius, or follow the novena to Saint Remigius from January 6 to 14, to finish it on the eve of his feast.

Where to pray to Saint Remigius

- **Reims**: the Basilica of Saint-Remi, the former abbey church that holds his tomb.
- **Reims**: the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, heir to the church where Clovis was baptized.
- **Laon**: the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, seat of the diocese that tradition says he founded.
- **Saint-Rémy-de-Provence** and the many towns of France that bear his name, a sign of how old his cult is.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Remigius of Reims for Conversion and Faithfulness

No prayer composed by Saint Remigius has come down to us. The most famous words attributed to him are those he is said to have spoken to Clovis at the moment of his baptism, recorded by Gregory of Tours at the end of the 6th century. You will find them below with their context, followed by an original prayer to Saint Remigius.

"Adore what you have burned" (Gregory of Tours)

As Clovis stepped toward the baptismal font, Remigius welcomed him with these words. English translation from the Latin by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.

> *"Bow your head humbly, Sicambrian; adore what you have burned, burn what you have adored."*

Source: Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* (*Decem libri historiarum*), Book II, chapter 31, written around 575-590. In Latin: "Mitis depone colla, Sicamber; adora quod incendisti, incende quod adorasti." Gregory wrote nearly a century after the events: these words faithfully express the meaning of the conversion, though we cannot be sure they are exactly what Remigius said.

These words are not a humiliation: they sum up what every conversion is. The one being baptized renounces what he served until then and turns to Christ, whom he did not know or had opposed.

Prayer to Saint Remigius

Saint Remigius, shepherd of Reims, you watched over the people entrusted to you for so many years: pray for me.

You led a pagan king to the waters of baptism: obtain for me the grace to live as one baptized, to bow my head before God alone, to give up what keeps me from him, and to love what he loves.

I entrust to you those preparing for baptism, those who have lost the path of faith, and those who hold authority over others: may they serve justice and protect the weakest. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Give me your patience and your faithfulness, so that I may stay in the place where God has put me, even when the world changes around me. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Remigius is celebrated in France on January 15. In Reims, October 1 is also kept, the anniversary of the translation of his relics in 1049. The Christmas season, when tradition places the baptism of Clovis, and the anniversary of your own baptism are also good times to pray to him. His prayer suits catechumens and their sponsors, parents preparing a child's baptism, and anyone praying for a loved one's conversion.

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Remigius of Reims

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Remigius, bishop of Reims. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on January 15, begin on January 6, the traditional date of the Epiphany; it then ends on January 14. It can also be prayed at any time of year, especially before a baptism.

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 and the Apostles' Creed, the profession of faith of baptism. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.

The nine days follow the life of Remigius: his call as a young man, his long faithfulness, his courage before the powerful, and the baptism of Clovis, which opened the door of faith to a whole people.

Day 1: Called young

Remigius was only about twenty when he was chosen as bishop. God does not look at age or experience, but at the openness of the heart. He calls us before we feel ready.

Prayer: Lord, you call whom you will. Make me attentive to what you are asking of me today, without waiting until I feel ready.

Today: Pray for a young person who is looking for their path.

Day 2: Staying at one's post

For more than sixty years, Remigius kept his Church in a troubled age. His holiness was made of endurance, patience and faithfulness to small tasks, day after day.

Prayer: Faithful God, give me perseverance in the commitments I have made, even when they become heavy.

Today: Finish a task you have been putting off for a long time.

Day 3: Speaking truth to the powerful

In his letter to the young Clovis, Remigius urged him to protect widows and orphans and to judge fairly. He did not flatter the king: he reminded him of his duty.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those who govern. Give them a concern for the common good, and give me the courage to speak the truth with gentleness.

Today: Pray by name for a public official or a business leader.

Day 4: A wife's prayer

Before Remigius, there was Clotilde, who prayed and hoped for her husband. The conversion of Clovis was also the fruit of patient prayer within a home.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those close to me who do not know you. Keep me from judging them, and make my life a witness.

Today: Pray a decade of the Rosary for a member of your family.

Day 5: Teaching the faith

Before the baptism, Remigius instructed Clovis. Faith is not simply a political choice: it needs to be understood and welcomed, with the mind as well as the heart.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the desire to know my faith better, so that I can give an account of it to those who ask.

Today: Read a page of the Catechism or a passage from the Gospel of John.

Day 6: Adoring what we have burned

"Adore what you have burned, burn what you have adored." Each of us has idols, more discreet than those of a pagan king: money, self-image, comfort.

Prayer: Lord, show me what has taken your place in my life, and give me the strength to let it go.

Today: Make an examination of conscience, or prepare for confession.



The nave of the Basilica of Saint-Remi in Reims.

Day 7: The grace of baptism

On Christmas Day, Clovis went down into the waters of baptism. For every Christian, that day is a beginning: we become children of God.

Prayer: Father, thank you for my baptism. Rekindle in me the grace I received that day, and help me live as a child of light.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism and make the Sign of the Cross with holy water.

Day 8: A whole people

With Clovis, thousands of Franks were baptized. Faith is never a purely private matter: it shapes a culture, laws and ways of living together.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust my country to you. May those who live here discover or rediscover the Gospel.

Today: Pray for the catechumens of your diocese.

Day 9: The shepherd's rest

Remigius died in Reims at a great age, after a whole life given to his people. His tomb became a place of prayer where, for fifteen centuries, people have come to entrust their intentions.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Remigius, grant me to remain faithful to you to the end. Amen.

Today: Pray for your bishop and for the priests of your parish.

Closing prayer

On January 15, the feast of Saint Remigius, you can give thanks for the nine days you have prayed, attend Mass if possible, and renew your baptismal promises. If you are praying this novena for a catechumen or for a child who will soon be baptized, tell them that you have prayed for them: it is already a way of welcoming them into the family of believers.

Saint Remigius, you opened the door of baptism to the Franks: I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for me, for my family and for my country. Obtain for us the grace to live as baptized Christians, faithful and patient, and to lead others in turn to Christ. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

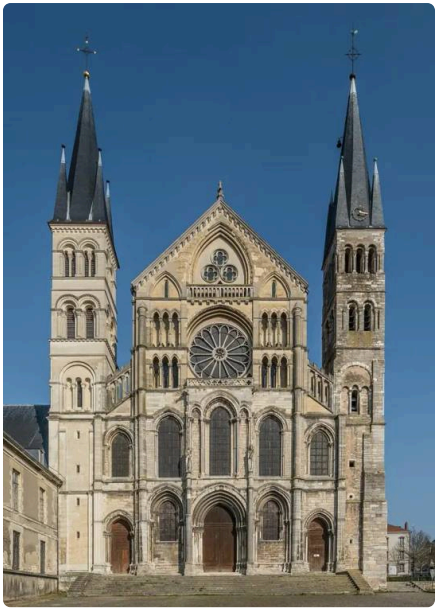
Basilica of Saint-Remi in Reims, Tomb of Clovis's Bishop

The Basilica of Saint-Remi in Reims has housed, since the Middle Ages, the tomb of the bishop who baptized Clovis. Once the church of a powerful Benedictine abbey, it is inscribed with Notre-Dame Cathedral and the Palace of Tau on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to Saint Remigius.

From Funerary Chapel to Great Abbey Church

When he died around 533, Remigius was buried outside the walls of Reims, in a modest chapel dedicated to Saint Christopher. The tomb quickly drew the faithful, and a community formed to guard it; over the centuries it became the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Remi. In the 11th century the monks undertook a vast Romanesque church. On October 1, 1049, Pope Leo IX, passing through France, consecrated it and solemnly transferred the saint's relics there. This is the origin of the Reims feast of October 1.

For centuries the abbey kept the Holy Ampulla, the vial of oil used for the anointing of the kings of France, which legend said was brought from heaven at the baptism of Clovis. It was shattered during the Revolution; a fragment gathered at the time is now kept in a 19th-century reliquary.



The facade of the Basilica of Saint-Remi in Reims.

The Building and the Tomb

The basilica first strikes you by its length and its Romanesque nave, one of the largest in France, extended by a Gothic choir from the late 12th century, bathed in light by its ancient stained glass. The tomb of Saint Remigius is in the choir, behind the high altar: the present monument, rebuilt in the 19th century after the destruction of the Revolution, is surrounded by statues that include Clovis and the suffragan bishops of Reims. Severely hit during the First World War, the church underwent a long restoration in the 20th century.

The old abbey buildings, next to the basilica, now house the Saint-Remi Museum. Among other things, you can see there the tapestries of the life of Saint Remigius, given to the abbey in 1531.

Praying at the Tomb of Saint Remigius

Before your visit, you might reread the life of Saint Remigius and the account of the baptism of Clovis. Once there, a time of silence before the tomb allows you to entrust an intention, for example for a catechumen, a loved one far from the faith or those with public responsibilities. The prayer to Saint Remigius fits this moment well, as does the profession of faith of baptism. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The tomb of Saint Remigius in the choir of the basilica.

Other Places Associated with Saint Remigius

- **Reims**: Notre-Dame Cathedral, heir to the episcopal church where Clovis received baptism, and the site of the royal coronations.
- **Reims**: the Palace of Tau, the former archbishops' palace, which keeps the cathedral treasury and the reliquary of the Holy Ampulla.

- **Laon** (Aisne): Notre-Dame Cathedral, seat of the former diocese whose foundation tradition attributes to Saint Remigius.
- **Saint-Rémy-de-Provence** and many parishes of Saint-Remi in France and Belgium, witnesses to the antiquity of his cult.

Practical Information

The basilica is south of downtown Reims, about a twenty-minute walk from the cathedral, and Reims can be reached by train from Paris. The church is also a parish: Masses are celebrated regularly, and special celebrations mark the feasts of January 15 and October 1. Check times with the parish or the Diocese of Reims before you come, as well as those of the Saint-Remi Museum.

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