BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Sæthryth

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: January 10

IN BRIEF

Saint Sæthryth

7th-century Anglo-Saxon princess, second abbess of Faremoutiers in Brie.

Feast day	January 10
Born	first half of the 7th century, East Anglia (England)
Died	c. 660, Faremoutiers (Seine-et-Marne, France)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Sæthryth

Saint Sæthryth, sometimes called Saethryth or Sethrida, was an Anglo-Saxon princess of the 7th century, stepdaughter of Anna, king of the East Angles. She went to Gaul, became a nun at the abbey of Faremoutiers, in Brie, and later its second abbess after Saint Fara. She died around 660. Her feast day is January 10 (some calendars give January 7).

Who was Saint Sæthryth?

Sæthryth is known to us through a few lines by Saint Bede the Venerable, the great historian of Christian England, who wrote his Ecclesiastical History of the English People in the early 8th century. He presents her as the stepdaughter of King Anna, that is, the daughter the queen had from a first marriage. A later chronicle, the Book of Ely, wrongly made her a daughter of Anna and his wife Hereswith, who was in fact the king's sister-in-law. These few facts, sober but reliable, are enough to sketch a life given to God far from her native land.

Key dates in the life of Sæthryth

- **First half of the 7th century**: Born in England; she grows up at the court of Anna, king of the East Angles, whose stepdaughter she is.
- **Around the middle of the 7th century**: She leaves for Gaul and enters the abbey of Faremoutiers, in Brie.
- **653 or 654**: King Anna is killed in battle.
- **655 or 657**: On the death of Saint Fara, founder of the abbey, she becomes the second abbess of Faremoutiers.
- **c. 660**: She dies at Faremoutiers; her half-sister Æthelburh succeeds her at the head of the monastery.

- **Early 8th century**: Bede the Venerable records her name in his Ecclesiastical History.

An English princess in Gaul

In the middle of the 7th century, England still had very few monasteries. Bede explains that many English people who wished to embrace religious life then went to the monasteries of the kingdom of the Franks. Many women of the royal family of East Anglia made this choice. Sæthryth left for Faremoutiers, where she was joined by her half-sister Æthelburh, daughter of King Anna.

Faremoutiers had been founded around 620 by Saint Fara, a young woman of the Frankish nobility, in the great monastic movement inspired by Saint Columbanus. For a princess from across the Channel, entering this monastery meant giving up her rank, her language and her land, to live in obedience, common prayer and poverty.

Abbess of Faremoutiers

The community trusted her so much that on the death of Saint Fara, in 655 or 657, it was Sæthryth who was chosen to succeed her. She thus became the second abbess of Faremoutiers. The sources say nothing precise about her government, which was brief, since she died around 660. But the simple fact that a foreigner was placed at the head of a great Frankish abbey, following its founder, says much about the esteem she enjoyed. After her, her half-sister Æthelburh took charge of the monastery.

Devotion

Sæthryth was venerated as a saint after her death, at Faremoutiers as well as in the memory of the Church in England, which honored the whole family of King Anna. Her feast is kept on January 10; some calendars place it on January

7. No early iconography of her own is known: she is most often recalled alongside Saint Fara and her half-sister Æthelburh, among the abbesses of Faremoutiers.

What can we learn from Saint Sæthryth?

We know little about Sæthryth, but that little speaks volumes. She left a royal court for a foreign monastery, she was recognized by her sisters, and she received the heavy task of succeeding a founder. Her life reminds us that holiness often unfolds in discretion, and that the Church was built by men and women ready to leave their homeland. You can pray to her for consecrated people, for those who live far from home and for those who must carry on the work of a founder.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Sæthryth and the novena to Saint Sæthryth.

Where to pray to Saint Sæthryth

- **Faremoutiers Abbey** (Seine-et-Marne, France): the monastery of which she was abbess, now home to a community of Benedictine nuns.
- In any church or chapel, on January 10, in union with the nuns of Faremoutiers.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Sæthryth for Consecrated People and Exiles

Saint Sæthryth, a princess of East Anglia, left her country to become a nun in Gaul, at the abbey of Faremoutiers, where she was the second abbess before dying around 660. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to her consecrated people, those who live far from home and those who take up a task after someone else.

Prayer to Saint Sæthryth

Saint Sæthryth,
you left the court of your country
to follow Christ, poor and humble,
in a monastery in a foreign land.
Teach me to leave everything
for the one thing necessary.

Your sisters entrusted you with the task
of succeeding Saint Fara, their mother.
Help those who take up the work of another
to serve with humility and faithfulness,
without seeking to shine.

Watch over monks and nuns,
over strangers and exiles,
and over all who serve God in secret.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Sæthryth

- On her feast day, January 10.
- For nuns, women religious and vocations to consecrated life.
- When you live far from your country or your family.
- When you receive a responsibility after someone else.
- For Christian families who pass on the faith to their children.

A short invocation

> *Saint Sæthryth, abbess of Faremoutiers,*
> *you who served God far from your homeland,*
> *pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Sæthryth from January 2 to January 10, and read the life of Saint Sæthryth.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Sæthryth

This novena accompanies Saint Sæthryth, an Anglo-Saxon princess who became a nun and then abbess of Faremoutiers, in Brie, in the 7th century. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, January 10, begin on January 2. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

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. End with: "Saint Sæthryth, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. We know little about her life: each day starts from what Bede the Venerable tells us.

Day 1: A family of saints

Sæthryth grew up at the court of King Anna of East Anglia, several of whose daughters are honored as saints. There, faith was handed on from one generation to the next.

Prayer: Lord, bless our families and make them places where we learn to love you.

Act of the day: Pray for each member of your family, naming them one by one.

Day 2: A blended family

Sæthryth was the king's stepdaughter, born of the queen's first marriage. Yet she shared the faith and the vocation of her half-sisters.

Prayer: Lord, bless blended families, and help each person find their place in them.

Act of the day: Show attention to a family member who feels left out.

Day 3: Leaving one's country

Because there were few monasteries in England, Sæthryth left for Gaul. She left her land and her language to follow God's call.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to leave what keeps me far from you.

Act of the day: Pray for people living far from their country, and welcome one of them.

Day 4: Entering the monastery

At Faremoutiers, the princess became one nun among others, subject to the rule and to the abbess. She chose the humility of common life.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to live with others in gentleness and service.

Act of the day: Do a quiet service without drawing attention to it.

Day 5: In the school of Saint Fara

Sæthryth was formed by Saint Fara, the founder, herself an heir of the movement of Saint Columbanus. We learn the Christian life from those who live it.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who taught me to know you. Help me in turn to be a witness.

Act of the day: Thank someone who helped you grow in faith.

Day 6: Receiving a charge

At the death of Saint Fara, her sisters chose Sæthryth to succeed her. Taking over from a founder requires humility and courage.

Prayer: Lord, help those who receive a responsibility after another to serve faithfully.

Act of the day: Pray for superiors of religious communities and for the leaders of your parish.

Day 7: Governing by serving

An abbess is a mother to her sisters. Her authority is a service, in the image of Christ who washed his disciples' feet.

Prayer: Lord, may any authority I exercise be a service and not domination.

Act of the day: Listen patiently to someone you are responsible for.

Day 8: A sister takes over

After Sæthryth's death, her half-sister Æthelburh became abbess in turn. God's work continues through those who come after us.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to prepare those who will follow me, and to make room for them.

Act of the day: Pass on to someone a useful skill or experience.

Day 9: A life hidden in God

History has kept only a few lines about Sæthryth. But God knows her whole life. Holiness is not measured by the noise it makes.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Sæthryth, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will, and help me to serve you in secret.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if you can, and pray for the nuns of Faremoutiers.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Sæthryth,*
> *princess who became a servant,*
> *you left your land to seek God*
> *and led your sisters with humility.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Keep me faithful in small things.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Sæthryth at any time, and read the life of Saint Sæthryth.

PILGRIMAGE

Faremoutiers Abbey

The abbey of Faremoutiers stands in Seine-et-Marne, in the Brie region, near the valley of the Grand Morin, east of Paris. Founded around 620 by Saint Fara, it welcomed in the 7th century several princesses from England, among them Saint Sæthryth, who became its second abbess. A community of Benedictine nuns prays there today.

A great abbey of the early Middle Ages

Fara, a young woman of the Frankish nobility, consecrated herself to God in the wave of monastic renewal brought to Gaul by Saint Columbanus. Around 620 she founded a monastery for women on her family's lands, and gave it her name: Faremoutiers, the "monastery of Fara". The community first followed the rule of Columbanus, then that of Saint Benedict.

In the middle of the 7th century, Bede the Venerable reports that English women came here in search of religious life, since there were few monasteries in their own country. Sæthryth, stepdaughter of King Anna of East Anglia, entered the community and later succeeded Saint Fara as abbess. Her half-sister Æthelburh succeeded her around 660. The abbey then lasted through the centuries until the French Revolution, which scattered the community. In the 20th century, Benedictine nuns returned to Faremoutiers and took up the life of prayer again.

What you will find

The present buildings are not those of the 7th century, but the place keeps the memory of fourteen centuries of monastic life. The community's church welcomes the faithful to the prayer of the nuns, who sing the Divine Office

throughout the day. In the neighboring village, the memory of Saint Fara and of the abbesses from across the Channel is still recalled. The Brie countryside, with its fields and woods, invites calm and recollection.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Sæthryth. At the abbey, join the prayer of the nuns and entrust to Saint Sæthryth consecrated people, those who live far from their country and those who carry a responsibility, then say the prayer to Saint Sæthryth. You can also remember Saint Fara and Saint Æthelburh, who lived in the same place. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Faremoutiers can be reached by car from Coulommiers or Meaux, in Seine-et-Marne. The abbey is a living monastery: modest dress and silence are requested, especially during services. Service times and hospitality arrangements may vary: check directly with the community before you come.

Credits and sources

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