BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Sebbi of Essex

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: August 29

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IN BRIEF

Saint Sebbi of Essex

7th-century king of the East Saxons (Essex) who became a monk at the end of his life.

Feast day	August 29
Born	first half of the 7th century, kingdom of Essex (England)
Died	c. 694, London
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Sebbi

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Sebbi of Essex

Saint Sebbi (or Sæbbi) was a king of the East Saxons in 7th-century England. He came to the throne of Essex around 664, stayed faithful to Christ when part of his people returned to idols, and at the end of his life gave up the crown to become a monk. He died around 694 in London and was buried in the church of Saint Paul. His feast day is August 29.

Who was Saint Sebbi?

Sebbi belonged to the royal line of Essex, the kingdom of the East Saxons, which then included London. He was the son of King Seaxred, who had driven Bishop Mellitus out of London. His story is known to us almost entirely through Bede the Venerable, who devotes a chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* to him, written some thirty years after his death. Bede presents him as a very devout king, more suited to the monastery than to the throne. The details of his life are therefore few, and the dates are known only approximately.

Key dates in the life of Sebbi

- **First half of the 7th century**: Born into the royal family of Essex; he is the son of King Seaxred.
- **c. 664**: On the death of King Swithhelm, he becomes king of the East Saxons and shares power with his kinsman Sighere.
- **c. 665**: During a great epidemic, Sighere and part of the people return to paganism; Sebbi remains a Christian.
- **Shortly after**: King Wulfhere of Mercia sends Bishop Jaruman, who brings the apostates back to the faith.
- **c. 675**: Saint Erkenwald becomes bishop of London, in Sebbi's kingdom.

- **c. 690**: After Sighere disappears, Sebbi reigns alone.
- **c. 694**: Gravely ill, he receives the monastic habit from Bishop Waldhere, then dies shortly afterward in London.
- **1666**: His tomb, in old Saint Paul's Cathedral, is destroyed in the Great Fire of London.

A faithful king in a time of trial

Sebbi's reign began in difficult years. Around 665, an epidemic struck England. According to Bede, Sighere, who ruled part of the kingdom alongside Sebbi, then abandoned the faith with his subjects, reopened the temples and went back to the old cults, as if the pagan gods could protect them from the disease. Sebbi, for his part, remained attached to Christ with his people. Each of the two kings sought the support of a powerful neighbor, and it was Wulfhere, king of Mercia, who sent Bishop Jaruman into Essex. Jaruman traveled through the land and brought the apostates back to the Christian faith. A few years later Erkenwald, founder of the monasteries of Chertsey and Barking, became bishop of London: the Church of Essex, founded by Saint Mellitus and later restored by Saint Cedd, found lasting stability.

The king who wanted to be a monk

Bede reports that Sebbi loved prayer, almsgiving and works of piety, so much that many said he would have made a better bishop than king. For a long time he wished to leave power and enter religious life, but his wife refused to be separated from him. After some thirty years on the throne, having fallen gravely ill, he at last received the monastic habit from Waldhere, Erkenwald's successor as bishop of London, and handed him a large sum of money to be given to the poor.

Still according to Bede, Sebbi feared that the pain of death might make him say or do something unworthy of his former rank. He asked to die with only the bishop and two attendants present. Bede tells that a vision reassured him, and that he died peacefully, around 694. His sons Sigeheard and Swæfred succeeded him on the throne of Essex.

Burial and devotion

The king was buried in London, in the church of Saint Paul, founded at the beginning of the 7th century. Bede mentions a sign reported about his burial: the stone coffin prepared for him is said to have proved too short, and then to have been found the right length. His tomb remained visible in the medieval cathedral, beside that of King Æthelred, until the fire of 1666 destroyed it. Sebbi has been honored as a saint since the early Middle Ages, in the tradition of the pre-Reformation Church in England, and his memory is kept on August 29. His cult has remained modest and local, and no known relics survive today.

What can we learn from Saint Sebbi?

Sebbi shows that it is possible to stay faithful when everything around us is shaking. At the time of the epidemic, he did not look for protection anywhere but in Christ. All his life he carried the desire for a life given to God, without being able to fulfill it, out of respect for his wife and for his office, and he accomplished it only at the very end. His example speaks to those who hold responsibilities, to those who wait a long time for a calling to be fulfilled, and to those who fear the suffering of death.

Where to pray to Saint Sebbi

- **London**: Saint Paul's Cathedral, rebuilt after the fire of 1666 on the site of the church where he was buried; his tomb no longer exists, but the place

keeps his memory.

- **In any church**: on August 29, entrusting to God those in public office and those who are close to death.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Sebbi, Faithful King and Monk

Saint Sebbi, king of the East Saxons in the 7th century, stayed faithful to Christ when part of his people returned to idols, then left his crown to die as a monk, around 694. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him those who govern, those who wait for a calling to be fulfilled and those who are close to death.

Prayer to Saint Sebbi

Saint Sebbi,
king of the East Saxons,
when the epidemic spread fear
and many abandoned the faith,
you remained faithful to Christ.
Obtain for me the grace to seek my security
in God alone in days of trial.

You governed your people with justice,
in prayer and almsgiving,
and for many years you carried in your heart
the desire for a life wholly given to God.
Teach me patience in waiting,
and faithfulness to the duties of my state.

At the end of your life you laid down your crown
to put on the habit of a monk.
When my hour comes,
help me to place my life in the hands of the Father,
without fear and in peace.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Sebbi

- On his feast day, August 29.
- For those in public office and all who exercise authority.
- In times of epidemic or collective fear, to ask for faithfulness.
- When a call from God is slow to be fulfilled.

- Beside a sick person who is close to death, or for yourself in the face of suffering.

A short invocation

> *Saint Sebbi, faithful king and humble monk,*
> *keep us in the faith and obtain for us a holy death. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Sebbi from August 20 to 28, and read the life of Saint Sebbi.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Sebbi

This novena offers nine days with Saint Sebbi, king of the East Saxons in the 7th century, who stayed faithful to Christ and became a monk at the end of his life. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on August 20; to finish it on the day itself, August 29, begin on August 21. You can also pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, make 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 Sebbi, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from the account of Bede the Venerable, our main source.

Day 1: A fragile inheritance of faith

Sebbi's father had driven Bishop Mellitus out of London. The son, however, chose Christ. Faith is not only an inheritance: each person is called to receive it for himself.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gift of faith. Let me choose it freely each day.

Act of the day: Renew your baptismal promises by praying the Creed.

Day 2: Reigning in order to serve

King from around 664, Sebbi governed his people for nearly thirty years. Bede describes him as a praying king, generous toward the poor.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who govern. Give them wisdom and care for the least.

Act of the day: Pray by name for the leaders of your town and your country.

Day 3: Faithful in the epidemic

When the epidemic struck, many thought they could find protection with the old gods. Sebbi stayed faithful to Christ. Fear can make us seek false securities.

Prayer: Lord, in days of anguish, keep me attached to you alone.

Act of the day: Check on someone who is sick or isolated.

Day 4: The Church restored

Bishop Jaruman, sent by the king of Mercia, traveled through Essex to bring back to the faith those who had left it. Sebbi supported this patient work.

Prayer: Lord, bring back to you those who have drifted away, and make me a gentle witness.

Act of the day: Pray for someone close to you who has left the faith.

Day 5: Alongside the shepherds

During his reign, Saint Erkenwald became bishop of London and founded monasteries. King and bishop worked together to root the Gospel in the land.

Prayer: Lord, bless our bishop and our priests. Help us to support them in their mission.

Act of the day: Say a prayer for your parish priest or send him a word of thanks.

Day 6: Prayer and almsgiving

People said that Sebbi would have made a better bishop than king, so much did he love prayer and works of charity. His piety was not a facade, but a way of life.

Prayer: Lord, let my prayer flow into charity, and my charity into prayer.

Act of the day: Give alms discreetly, without telling anyone.

Day 7: A desire that waits

For years Sebbi wished to become a monk, but his wife did not want to be separated from him. He respected that bond and waited. Some callings take a long time to ripen.

Prayer: Lord, teach me patience when my deepest desires are slow to be fulfilled.

Act of the day: Entrust to God a plan that is not working out, and faithfully do the duty of the day.

Day 8: Laying down the crown

Gravely ill, Sebbi received the monastic habit and had his wealth given to the poor. He stripped himself of everything to come before God with empty hands.

Prayer: Lord, free me from what weighs me down, and give me a poor heart.

Act of the day: Give something you value to someone who needs it.

Day 9: A peaceful death

According to Bede, Sebbi feared the pain of death, but a vision reassured him and he died in peace, around 694. God does not ask us to be without fear, but to trust him.

Prayer: Lord, at the hour of my death, take me by the hand. Through the intercession of Saint Sebbi, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Pray for those who are dying today and, if you can, attend Mass.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Sebbi,*
> *faithful king in the time of trial,*
> *monk at the evening of your life,*
> *present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Keep me faithful in the faith,*
> *generous toward the poor,*
> *and at peace at the hour of death.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

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