BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Serenicus (Céneri)

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 7

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Serenicus (Céneri)

7th-century Italian hermit, founder of a small monastery at Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei, in the Orne.

Feast day	May 7
Born	between 620 and 625, Spoleto (Umbria, Italy)
Died	c. 669, Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei (Orne)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	sick children, skin diseases

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Serenicus for Sick Children and Those Who Seek God

Novena to Saint Serenicus (Céneri)

Church and Chapel of Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Serenicus (Céneri)

Saint Serenicus (Céneri in French, also called Sérénic, Cérénic or Sénery) was a 7th-century Italian hermit, born in Spoleto, who came to live in solitude on the borders of Maine and Normandy with his brother Saint Serenidus (Cénéré). He settled in a bend of the river Sarthe, near Alençon, where he founded a small monastery and died around 669. The village of Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei, in the Orne, bears his name. His feast day is May 7.

Who was Saint Serenicus?

Serenicus is one of the monks and hermits who brought the Gospel to the countryside of western Gaul in the Merovingian period. What we know of him comes from an old hagiographical tradition taken up by Norman writers: it is sober, but already mixes history and piety. Dates vary according to the sources: he is said to have been born between 620 and 625 and to have died around 669. His memory remains attached to the place he chose, a rocky spur above the Sarthe, where a church and a chapel are dedicated to him and where pilgrims still come to pray.

Key dates in the life of Serenicus

- **Between 620 and 625**: Born in Spoleto, in Umbria, into a noble family, according to tradition.
- **Youth**: He is ordained a deacon in Italy.
- **c. 649**: With his brother Serenidus, he leaves Italy and arrives in Maine to live a life of penance.
- **Following years**: The two brothers live together as hermits near Saulges, in present-day Mayenne.

- **Later**: Serenicus withdraws alone to a bend of the Sarthe, in the diocese of Sées, at the place that will become Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei.
- **Shortly after**: He welcomes disciples and begins a church dedicated to Saint Martin and a monastery; the bishop of Sées, Saint Milehard, completes the church.
- **c. 669**: Death of Serenicus, in his hermitage on the banks of the Sarthe.
- **903**: The monastery is destroyed during the Norse invasions.
- **11th century**: The present Romanesque church of Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei is built.

From Spoleto to Maine

According to tradition, Serenicus was born in Spoleto, in Umbria, into a noble Christian family. He became a deacon, in the service of the Church. But, like his brother Serenidus, he longed for a poorer and more hidden life. Around 649, the two brothers left Italy and crossed Gaul as far as Maine, under the Merovingian kings. They first settled together near Saulges, in a region still marked by pagan cults, to live as hermits in fasting and prayer.

The hermit of the bend of the Sarthe

After some time, Serenicus left his brother at Saulges and went further north in search of greater solitude. He found it in a meander of the Sarthe, at the foot of the hills now called the Alpes mancelles, in the diocese of Sées. The place was wild and steep. Yet the hermit's reputation drew men who wanted to live near him. In the end he accepted them, and began to build a church dedicated to Saint Martin of Tours, the great model of the monks of Gaul, with a few buildings for the small community. The bishop of Sées, Saint Milehard, completed the church.

Serenicus died around 669, among his disciples. His monastery survived him by more than two centuries, before being destroyed by the Vikings in 903. The church then came under the abbey of Saint-Évroult.

Devotion and art

Saint Serenicus is celebrated on May 7, the same day as his brother Saint Serenidus. The village that grew up around his hermitage took his name: Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei, now listed among the most beautiful villages of France. The 11th-century Romanesque church, built on the rocky spur, preserves 14th-century wall paintings. Below, by the river, a small 15th-century chapel keeps the memory of his hermitage; a stone called the "saint's bed" is shown there. A spring on the opposite bank has long been venerated.

Popular Norman devotion calls on him for skin diseases, for colic in small children and to obtain the gift of children.

What can we learn from Saint Serenicus?

Serenicus left his homeland and its honors to seek God in silence. He parted from his brother to go further still, then accepted that others should come and share his life: solitude did not close him off from others. You can pray to him for those who seek silence, for brothers and sisters separated by life, for sick children and for couples hoping for a child.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Serenicus and the novena to Saint Serenicus.

Where to pray to Saint Serenicus

- **Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei** (Orne): the Romanesque church dedicated to him, the chapel of the "saint's bed" and the spring, by the Sarthe.

- **Saulges** (Mayenne): the area where he first lived with his brother Saint Serenidus.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Serenicus for Sick Children and Those Who Seek God

Saint Serenicus (Céneri), who came from Spoleto with his brother Saint Serenidus, sought God in the solitude of a bend of the Sarthe, where he died around 669. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him those who seek silence, sick children and families who hope for new life.

Prayer to Saint Serenicus

Saint Serenicus,
you left your homeland and its honors
to seek God in poverty and silence.
Teach me to let go of what weighs me down
so that I may find what matters most.

You withdrew to the banks of the Sarthe,
and yet you opened your door
to those who wished to pray with you.
Keep me from a closed solitude,
and make my life a place of welcome.

You who are called upon for little children and for the sick,
watch over those who suffer in their bodies,
and over the homes that are waiting for a child.
Bless brothers and sisters whom life has separated,
and lead us all to the Father.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Serenicus

- On his feast day, May 7, together with his brother Saint Serenidus.
- For a sick child, especially the very young.
- For people suffering from skin diseases.
- For couples who long for a child.
- When you are looking for a time of retreat and silence.

A short invocation

> *Saint Serenicus, hermit of the Sarthe,*
> *pray for us and for our children. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Serenicus from April 29 to May 7, and read the life of Saint Serenicus.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Serenicus (Céneri)

This novena accompanies Saint Serenicus (Céneri), a hermit who came from Italy in the 7th century and founded a small monastery on the banks of the Sarthe. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, May 7, begin on April 29. 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 Serenicus, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes mentioned come from tradition, which has reached us through old and sober accounts.

Day 1: A Christian family of Spoleto

Serenicus was born in Umbria, into a noble family that handed on the faith to him. His vocation began in this home.

Prayer: Lord, bless the families who hand on the faith to their children.

Act of the day: Pray with a member of your family, or for them.

Day 2: The service of a deacon

Having become a deacon, Serenicus put himself at the service of the Church. A deacon is one who serves, at the altar and among the poor.

Prayer: Lord, give me the heart of a servant, in the image of your Son.

Act of the day: Do a discreet service without expecting thanks.

Day 3: Leaving one's homeland

Around 649, Serenicus left Italy with his brother. Like Abraham, he set out without knowing exactly where God was leading him.

Prayer: Lord, give me the trust to set out when you call me.

Act of the day: Pray for people who have had to leave their country.

Day 4: Two brothers in prayer

At Saulges, Serenicus and Serenidus lived together as hermits. Brotherhood by blood became brotherhood in Christ.

Prayer: Lord, bless my brothers and sisters, and keep us united in your love.

Act of the day: Get in touch with a brother, a sister or someone close to you.

Day 5: Going further

Serenicus left his brother to seek greater solitude. Separations can also be a way of following God.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live separations in peace and trust.

Act of the day: Entrust to God someone you are separated from.

Day 6: Silence by the water

In a bend of the Sarthe, Serenicus found a wild place to pray. The murmur of the river accompanied his prayer.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to recognize you in the beauty of your creation.

Act of the day: Take a moment of prayer outdoors, in nature.

Day 7: Opening the door

Disciples came to him. Serenicus, who was seeking solitude, agreed to welcome them and share his life.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from shutting myself away. Make me a welcoming person.

Act of the day: Welcome into your home, or to your table, someone who is alone.

Day 8: Building for God

Serenicus began a church dedicated to Saint Martin, which the bishop of Sées would complete. He built for those who would come after him.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who build and care for our churches.

Act of the day: Visit a church and pray there for a few minutes.

Day 9: A peaceful death

Serenicus died around 669, among his disciples. Since then, people have come to pray at the site of his hermitage, for the sick and for children.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Serenicus, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will, and give health to sick children.

Act of the day: Pray for a sick child or for a family hoping for a child.

Closing prayer

Saint Serenicus,
pilgrim from Italy and hermit of the Sarthe,
present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me in simplicity and prayer,
and watch over children and the sick.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church and Chapel of Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei

Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei is a village in the Orne, about ten kilometers southwest of Alençon, perched on a granite spur in a bend of the river Sarthe. It owes its name to Saint Serenicus (Céneri), a hermit from Spoleto who settled here in the 7th century, welcomed disciples and died here around 669. Today people pray in two buildings: the Romanesque church on the rock, and the small chapel by the water, on the site of his hermitage.

From monastery to village

According to tradition, Serenicus began a church dedicated to Saint Martin here, with a few buildings for his companions; the bishop of Sées, Saint Milehard, completed the church. The small monastery lasted until 903, when it was destroyed during the Norse invasions. The church then came under the abbey of Saint-Évroult. In the 11th century, the Giroie family built a castle on the rock, of which a few sections of wall remain, and the present church was built. In the 19th century, the beauty of the site drew many painters, and the village is now one of the most beautiful villages of France.

What you can see

The church of Saint-Céneri, in Romanesque style, has been a listed historic monument since 1886. It preserves 14th-century wall paintings and a carved Way of the Cross. A local legend says that at the time of the invasions, a swarm of bees living in a wall of the church drove off the attackers; a plaque recalls the story near a hole in the wall where bees still live.

Below, in a meadow by the Sarthe, stands the 15th-century chapel of Saint-Céneri, also a listed monument. It marks the traditional site of the hermitage. Inside are a statue of the saint and a stone called the "saint's bed". On the opposite bank, a spring has long been venerated. This small group of buildings, often painted by artists, is the heart of the memory of Saint Serenicus.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Serenicus. In the chapel, entrust to him sick children, people who suffer in their bodies and couples hoping for a child, then say the prayer to Saint Serenicus. The path between the church and the chapel, along the river, lends itself well to a prayerful walk. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei lies in the Normandie-Maine regional nature park, northeast of the Alpes mancelles, and can be reached by the D101 road from Alençon. The village is very busy in fine weather. The church now belongs to the parish of Saint-Pierre au pays d'Alençon, in the diocese of Séez: check with the parish or the town hall for opening days and any celebrations in honor of the saint.

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com