BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Solange

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 10

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IN BRIEF

Saint Solange

Shepherdess of Berry, virgin and martyr around 878, patron saint of Berry.

Feast day	May 10
Born	9th century, Villemont, parish of Saint-Martin-du-Crot (now Sainte-Solange, Cher)
Died	May 10, c. 878, Saint-Martin-du-Crot (now Sainte-Solange, Cher)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	9th century
Patron saint of	Berry

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Solange

Sainte-Solange (Cher), Village of the Patron Saint of Berry

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Solange

Saint Solange was a young shepherdess of Berry, born at Saint-Martin-du-Crot, the village that now bears her name, near Bourges in central France. According to tradition, she was killed around 878 for refusing to give herself to a lord who tried to carry her off. Honored as virgin and martyr, she is the patron saint of Berry. Her feast day is May 10.

Who was Saint Solange?

Solange belongs to those popular saints whose memory has been kept by a village and a region rather than by documents of her own time. Her story is known through local tradition and through accounts written much later, such as the *History of Berry* by Gaspard Thaumas de La Thaumassière (1689) or lives of the saint published in Bourges in the 18th and 19th centuries. These accounts mix piety and marvels, and some historians have stressed the part of legend they contain. But the figure of Solange has remained alive for more than a thousand years: that of a humble, prayerful young girl who preferred to die rather than give up her purity. She is often compared to Saint Maria Goretti.

Key dates in the life of Solange

- **9th century**: Born at the hamlet of Villemont, in the parish of Saint-Martin-du-Crot, in Berry, into a family of shepherds.
- **Childhood and youth**: She tends her father's sheep and spends her days in prayer.
- **c. 878**: A young lord, whom tradition identifies as Bernard, son of the count of Poitiers, tries to carry her off; she resists.
- **May 10, c. 878**: In a rage, he kills her by beheading her; according to legend, her head pronounces the name of Jesus three times.

- **After her death**: She is venerated as virgin and martyr; the village of Saint-Martin-du-Crot takes her name.
- **16th century**: A statue of the saint, preserved to this day, bears witness to the vitality of her cult.
- **1689**: La Thaumassière records her story in his *History of Berry*.
- **Since the 1960s**: Portuguese immigrants settled in the region join the annual pilgrimage and help keep it alive.

A shepherdess who prayed

According to tradition, Solange was the daughter of a shepherd of Villemont. She tended her father's sheep in the meadows of Berry and spent her days in prayer. The accounts say that she consecrated herself to God at a very young age. Legend also tells that a bright star lit her way at night, that she drove out evil and healed the sick by her mere presence, and that she obtained rain in times of drought or stopped it when it threatened the harvest. These marvelous features, typical of rural saints, show how much the peasants of Berry saw in her a protector close to their daily lives.

Martyr of purity

When she became a young woman, very beautiful according to the accounts, Solange caught the eye of a young lord, whom tradition names Bernard and presents as the son of the count of Poitiers. One day he surprised her in the fields and forced her onto his horse to take her away. Solange struggled so fiercely that they both fell into a stream. Mad with rage, the young man cut off her head.

Legend adds that Solange's head pronounced the name of Jesus three times, and that the saint, carrying her head, walked to the cemetery of the church of Saint-Martin-du-Crot. Solange thus joins the list of "cephalophore" saints, like

Saint Denis, whom medieval piety depicts carrying their heads in their hands. She is also counted among the "martyrs of purity", young women killed for defending their integrity.

Patron saint of Berry

The cult of Solange quickly spread throughout Berry, of which she became the patron saint. The village of Saint-Martin-du-Crot took the name Sainte-Solange. In the past, in difficult times, her relics were carried in procession to Bourges, amid great popular celebrations. Processions in her honor took place as far as the neighboring Nièvre, at Nolay, on Pentecost Monday, until the 1970s.

The annual pilgrimage to Sainte-Solange still exists. Since the 1960s, Portuguese families settled in the region have taken part in large numbers and today share in its organization. On the Field of the Martyr, where a chapel stands, villagers perform every summer scenes inspired by local history. Solange is depicted as a young shepherdess at prayer, sometimes with a crook and sheep, or holding her head.

What can we learn from Saint Solange?

Saint Solange reminds us that holiness can flourish in a very simple life, that of a shepherdess praying in the middle of the fields. She bears witness to the dignity of the body and to the freedom of a young woman who refused the violence of a powerful man. She is a sister to all victims of violence, and a protector for the farmers and families of Berry. We can pray to her for young people, for women who are victims of violence, for shepherds and farmers, and for the weather.

Where to pray to Saint Solange

- **Sainte-Solange** (Cher, France): the village church, site of the annual pilgrimage, and the chapel of the Field of the Martyr.
- **Bourges** (Cher): Saint Stephen's Cathedral, at the heart of Berry, of which she is the patron saint.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Solange for Young People and for Berry

Saint Solange, a young shepherdess of Berry, prayed while tending her father's sheep. According to tradition, she was killed around 878 for resisting a lord who tried to carry her off. She is the patron saint of Berry. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to her young people, victims of violence, families and those who work the land.

Prayer to Saint Solange

Saint Solange,
humble shepherdess of Berry,
you prayed in the middle of the fields
and your heart belonged to God.
Teach me to pray in the simplicity of my days.

You refused the violence of a powerful man
and gave your life rather than betray your purity.
Protect young people, keep them pure and free,
and comfort all who are victims of violence.
Help them find peace and dignity again.

Patron saint of Berry,
watch over our families and our villages,
bless those who work the land and tend the flocks,
and obtain for us weather favorable to the harvest.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Solange

- On her feast day, May 10, or during the pilgrimage of Sainte-Solange.
- For young women and young men, especially in times of trial.
- For people who are victims of violence or abuse.
- For farmers, shepherds and the harvest, in times of drought or too much rain.
- For Berry and its people.

A prayer for young people

> *Lord, keep our young people in your light*
> *and protect them from all violence.*
> *Saint Solange, pray for them. Amen.*

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

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Solange

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Solange, shepherdess and martyr of Berry in the 9th 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, May 10, begin on May 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 Solange, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come from the tradition of Berry, which mixes history and legend.

Day 1: A simple childhood

Solange was born into a family of shepherds, at Villemont. There was nothing extraordinary in her life, except the love of God that dwelt in her.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to find you in the simplicity of my life.

Act of the day: Thank God for three simple things in your day.

Day 2: Praying while working

While tending the sheep, Solange prayed. Work in the fields became for her a place of meeting with God.

Prayer: Lord, may my work today be filled with your presence.

Act of the day: Offer each task you begin to God with a short prayer.

Day 3: A star on her path

Legend tells that a star lit her way at night. God guides those who seek him, even in darkness.

Prayer: Lord, light my way when I no longer know where to go.

Act of the day: Take a moment of silence in the evening to look back over your day with God.

Day 4: Protector of the harvest

According to tradition, Solange obtained rain in times of drought and stopped it when it threatened the harvest. The peasants saw in her a close friend.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who work the land and give us our daily bread.

Act of the day: Pray for farmers, or buy your food from a local producer.

Day 5: A heart given to God

Solange consecrated herself to God at a very young age. Her heart was not divided.

Prayer: Lord, make my heart wholly yours, without reserve.

Act of the day: Give up a distraction and spend that time in prayer.

Day 6: Resisting violence

A young lord tried to carry her off by force. Solange struggled with all her strength. Her resistance expresses the dignity of her body and of her freedom.

Prayer: Lord, protect people threatened by violence and give them the courage to defend themselves.

Act of the day: Pray for victims of violence, or support an organization that helps them.

Day 7: The name of Jesus

Legend says that her head pronounced the name of Jesus three times. To the very end, that name was her strength.

Prayer: Jesus, may your name be on my lips and in my heart, in joy and in trial.

Act of the day: Repeat often during the day: "Jesus, I trust in you."

Day 8: Patron of a land

Berry chose Solange as its patron saint. A village bears her name, and people have come there on pilgrimage for centuries.

Prayer: Lord, bless our region, our villages and our parishes.

Act of the day: Pray for your parish and for those who live there.

Day 9: Pilgrims from many places

Today, people of Berry and Portuguese families gather together at the pilgrimage of Sainte-Solange. The saint brings different peoples together in a single prayer.

Prayer: Lord, make us one people. Through the intercession of Saint Solange, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it be your will.

Act of the day: Welcome kindly someone who has come from elsewhere, and attend Mass if you can.

Closing prayer

Saint Solange,
shepherdess of Berry and martyr of purity,
you who kept your heart for God to the end,
present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Protect young people and victims of violence,
and bless those who work the land.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Sainte-Solange (Cher), Village of the Patron Saint of Berry

Sainte-Solange is a village in the Cher, not far from Bourges, in the heart of Berry in central France. It was once called Saint-Martin-du-Crot and took the name of the young shepherdess who, according to tradition, was born and killed there around 878. Its church and the chapel of the Field of the Martyr welcome every year the pilgrimage in honor of the patron saint of Berry.

The village of Saint Solange

According to tradition, Solange was born at the hamlet of Villemont, in the parish of Saint-Martin-du-Crot. She tended her father's sheep in the nearby meadows and spent her days in prayer. It was in these fields that a young lord tried to carry her off and, faced with her resistance, killed her. Legend says that the saint, carrying her head, walked to the cemetery of the village church. The cult that grew up around her memory ended by giving its name to the parish.

For centuries, Sainte-Solange was a place of pilgrimage for all of Berry. In times of calamity, the saint's relics were carried in procession to Bourges, amid a great crowd. The church also lies on one of the routes to Santiago de Compostela, and many pilgrims stop there.

What you can see

The village church is the heart of the cult of Saint Solange and the place where pilgrims gather. A short distance away, the Field of the Martyr, where tradition places her death, is marked by a chapel. There, every summer, a large open-air show is performed by people from the village and the surrounding area, staging episodes from local history and from the history of France.

The pilgrimage

The annual pilgrimage of Sainte-Solange has continued for centuries. Since the 1960s, Portuguese families settled in Berry have taken part with fervor, to the point of being today among its main supporters. This meeting between the piety of Berry and that of Portugal gives the pilgrimage a particular character, both local and open.

Praying there

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Solange. In the church or at the Field of the Martyr, entrust to her young people, victims of violence, families and those who work the land, then say the prayer to Saint Solange. If you can, join the annual pilgrimage. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

The village of Sainte-Solange is in the Cher, a short distance from Bourges, and is easily reached by car. The church is a place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested during services. The dates of the pilgrimage, the church opening hours and Mass times may vary: check with the parish or the diocese of Bourges before your visit.

Credits and sources

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