BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Tanguy

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 19

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IN BRIEF

Saint Tanguy

Breton monk of the 6th century, disciple of Saint Paul Aurelian, founder of the abbey of Saint-Mathieu de Fine-Terre according to tradition.

Feast day	November 19, March 12
Born	6th century, Trémazan, in Landunvez (Finistère), according to tradition
Died	c. 594 (592 according to some sources), Pointe Saint-Mathieu, Plougonvelin (Finistère)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Tanguy

Saint Tanguy (first named Gurguy) was a Breton monk of the 6th century, honored as the founder of the abbey of Saint-Mathieu de Fine-Terre, at the Pointe Saint-Mathieu (*Lokmazhe* in Breton), at the western tip of Finistère. A disciple of Saint Paul Aurelian, he is said to have died around 594. His life, recorded in late accounts, belongs largely to legend. His feast day is November 19, and sometimes March 12, together with Saint Paul Aurelian.

Who was Saint Tanguy?

Tanguy belongs to the crowd of Breton saints of the early Middle Ages whose memory has been passed on through place names, chapels and popular tales. The fullest text about him is that of Albert Le Grand, a Dominican who published the *Lives of the Saints of Armorican Brittany* in 1637. Historians have shown, however, that the story of Tanguy and his sister Haude was probably written, or rewritten, in the 15th century by the du Chastel family, lords of Trémazan, to honor the antiquity of their line; several members of that family were in fact named Tanguy. The account seems to merge two different Lives. It should therefore be read as a pious legend, while recognizing behind it a real monk, venerated for a long time in the Léon country.

Key dates in the life of Tanguy

- **6th century**: Born, according to tradition, at the castle of Trémazan (Landunvez), into the family of Galon and Florence; he is first called Gurguy.
- **Youth**: Mistreated by his stepmother, he leaves home and spends, according to the story, twelve years at the court of King Childebert.

- **Return to Trémazan**: Deceived by his stepmother's slanders, he kills his sister Haude; legend says she came back to life long enough to forgive him.
- **After this tragedy**: He goes to Saint Paul Aurelian, bishop of Léon, who imposes on him forty days of fasting and gives him the name Tanguy.
- **Then**: He becomes abbot of the monastery of Gerber, today's Le Relec, according to tradition.
- **Late 6th century**: He founds a monastery at the point of Fine-Terre, which will become the abbey of Saint-Mathieu.
- **c. 594**: Death of Tanguy (some sources give 592); he is buried at the Pointe Saint-Mathieu.
- **15th century**: The du Chastel family has the story of Tanguy and Haude written down, or rewritten.
- **1637**: Albert Le Grand publishes his Life in the *Lives of the Saints of Armorican Brittany*.

The tragedy of Trémazan

According to Albert Le Grand, Galon, lord of Trémazan, had married Florence, daughter of a prince of Brest. They had several children, among them Haude and Gurguy. Florence died young, and Galon remarried a woman from Britain, who mistreated the children. Gurguy left for the court of the Frankish king Childebert. Haude stayed, bore the humiliations patiently and gave part of her food to the poor.

Years later, Gurguy came back without making himself known. His jealous stepmother made him believe that his sister was leading a disorderly life. In a rage, he looked for her, found her near a spring and, seeing her flee, cut off her head. The neighbors then told him how virtuous Haude was. Legend says that Haude appeared, holding her head in her hands, told her brother that the Virgin Mary had obtained his pardon, and died after forgiving him herself.

This story, which makes Haude a cephalophore saint, belongs to medieval wonder tales; it powerfully expresses the gravity of sin, the power of forgiveness and the possibility of conversion.

The penitent who became abbot

Shaken, Gurguy went to Saint Paul Aurelian, bishop of Léon. The bishop imposed on him a fast of forty days, in a wood that still bears his name, Coat-Tanguy, near Brignogan. Then he gave him a new name, Tanguy, which is linked to the Breton word *tan*, "fire". The penitent became a monk, then abbot of the monastery of Gerber, at Le Relec. He received from his father land at the point of Pen-ar-Bed. According to tradition, a ship bringing relics of the apostle Saint Matthew from the East was saved from shipwreck there. Tanguy built a monastery on the spot, and the cape took the name Loc-Mazhé, the "place of Matthew". He died there around 594 and was buried there.

Devotion and art

Saint Tanguy is greatly venerated in the Léon country. The lords of du Chastel built a chapel to him and to his sister Haude at Kersaint, in Landunvez, near the ruins of the castle of Trémazan. Its stained glass windows, installed at the start of the 20th century, tell their story: Haude's murder, the forgiveness, then Saint Paul Aurelian giving the monastic habit to Tanguy. A spring of Saint Haude is close by. At the Pointe Saint-Mathieu, the ruins of the abbey rebuilt in the 12th and 13th centuries keep his memory. Tanguy is shown as a monk or abbot. He is celebrated on November 19, the day after Saint Haude, and sometimes on March 12, the day of Saint Paul Aurelian.

What can we learn from Saint Tanguy?

Beyond the legend, Tanguy's story is that of a man who did the worst, let himself be touched by forgiveness and rebuilt his life in penance and the service of God. It reminds us that no fault is greater than mercy, and that conversion can make a guilty man into a father for others. You can pray to him for those who carry a heavy fault, for reconciliation in divided families, for the sailors of the Iroise Sea and for Brittany.

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

Where to pray to Saint Tanguy

- **Abbey of Saint-Mathieu de Fine-Terre** (Plougonvelin, Finistère): the ruins of the monastery he is said to have founded, where he is said to be buried.
- **Chapel of Kersaint** (Landunvez, Finistère): a chapel dedicated to Saint Tanguy and Saint Haude, with its stained glass and the spring of Saint Haude.
- **Le Relec** (Plounéour-Ménez, Finistère): the site of the former monastery of Gerber, of which he is said to have been abbot.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Tanguy, Penitent and Abbot of Saint-Mathieu

Saint Tanguy, a Breton monk of the 6th century, is honored as the founder of the abbey of Saint-Mathieu, at the tip of Finistère. According to legend, after a terrible crime, he received the forgiveness of his sister Haude and became, with Saint Paul Aurelian, a penitent and then an abbot. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him those who carry a fault, divided families and sailors.

Prayer to Saint Tanguy

Saint Tanguy,
you who knew anger and crime,
then tears and forgiveness,
teach me never to despair
of the mercy of God.

You received your sister's forgiveness
and accepted the penance
that Saint Paul Aurelian imposed on you.
Give me a humble heart
to recognize my faults
and the courage to repair the harm I have done.

Abbot of the Pointe Saint-Mathieu,
you who prayed facing the ocean,
watch over sailors and those who wait for them.
Reconcile divided families,
and keep Brittany in the faith.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Tanguy

- On his feast day, November 19, or on March 12, with Saint Paul Aurelian.
- When a grave fault weighs on your conscience, before receiving the sacrament of reconciliation.
- For reconciliation between brothers and sisters, or in a blended family.
- For sailors and seafarers at the tip of Brittany.
- For those tempted by anger or violence.

A short invocation

> *Saint Tanguy, forgiven penitent,*
> *obtain for us a new heart. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Tanguy from November 11 to 19, and read the life of Saint Tanguy.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Tanguy

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Tanguy, a Breton monk of the 6th century and, according to tradition, founder of the abbey of Saint-Mathieu. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, November 19, begin on November 11. 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 Tanguy, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from a legendary account written down long after the saint's death.

Day 1: A wounded childhood

Having lost his mother, Gurguy was mistreated by his stepmother. From this childhood he kept wounds that only God could heal.

Prayer: Lord, heal the wounds of my childhood, and protect children who suffer in their families.

Act of the day: Pray for an abused child or support a child protection charity.

Day 2: Going far away

Gurguy left home for the court of King Childebert. He fled suffering, but he also moved away from his own people.

Prayer: Lord, accompany those who have had to leave, and do not let distance put out love.

Act of the day: Send news to a family member who lives far away.

Day 3: The poison of slander

On his return, he believed his stepmother's lies about his sister. Slander destroys even before the hand strikes.

Prayer: Lord, keep my tongue from gossip and my heart from hasty judgments.

Act of the day: Refuse today to speak ill of anyone who is absent.

Day 4: The crime

Blinded by anger, Gurguy killed his sister Haude. The story hides nothing of the horror of sin.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the anger that blinds, and teach me to be silent before I act.

Act of the day: When anger rises, take time to breathe and pray before answering.

Day 5: Haude's forgiveness

Legend says that Haude, brought back to life for a moment, forgave her brother and told him that the Virgin Mary had obtained his pardon.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to forgive those who have hurt me, as you forgive me.

Act of the day: Pray for someone you find it hard to forgive.

Day 6: Confiding in a bishop

Tanguy went to Saint Paul Aurelian and confessed his fault. He did not stay alone with his sin.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to go to confession, and bless the priests who give your forgiveness.

Act of the day: Prepare for or receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

Day 7: Forty days and a new name

After a fast of forty days, Gurguy received the name Tanguy. God made him a new man.

Prayer: Lord, renew me by your grace, and make me a new creation.

Act of the day: Give up something pleasant today, in a spirit of penance.

Day 8: A monastery at the end of the world

Tanguy founded a monastery at the point of Fine-Terre, facing the ocean. The man who had destroyed a life became a builder.

Prayer: Lord, make my weaknesses serve your glory, and bless the sailors who pass offshore.

Act of the day: Pray for sailors and fishermen, and for their families.

Day 9: Dying in peace

Tanguy died around 594 and rests at the Pointe Saint-Mathieu. The forgiven sinner became a saint whom Brittany calls upon.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Tanguy, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will, and grant that I may die in your peace.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if you can, and entrust a divided family to God.

Closing prayer

Saint Tanguy,
forgiven sinner and abbot of Saint-Mathieu,
you knew the depth of evil
and the greatness of mercy.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Reconcile what is divided in me and around me,
and watch over those at sea.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Abbey of Saint-Mathieu de Fine-Terre

The ruins of the abbey of Saint-Mathieu de Fine-Terre stand on the Pointe Saint-Mathieu (*Beg Lokmazhe* in Breton), in the commune of Plougonvelin, at the western tip of Finistère. According to tradition, Saint Tanguy founded a monastery here in the 6th century and was buried here. Facing the Iroise Sea, beside a lighthouse, it is one of the most striking places of Christian Brittany.

An abbey at the end of the world

Reliable sources on the origins of the monastery are lacking. Tradition says that Tanguy built an abbey on the land his father had left him, after a ship bringing relics of the apostle Saint Matthew had been saved from shipwreck off the point. Old writings state that the abbey already existed in 555. The cult of Saint Matthew, whose head was said to be kept here, made the place famous.

The ruins visible today are not those of the 6th century: they are the remains of the Benedictine abbey church built between 1157 and 1208, then altered in the 14th and 15th centuries. In the Middle Ages, a small town of more than two thousand inhabitants lived around the abbey. Plundered several times during wars, the abbey declined before being restored in 1655 by the Benedictines of the Congregation of Saint Maur. The monks left at the Revolution. The ruins have been listed as a historic monument since 1875.

What you can see

You walk through the remains of the nave, transept and choir of the abbey church, open to the sky. Close by stand the Saint-Mathieu lighthouse, brought into service in 1835 beside the monks' old beacon tower, and the chapel of

Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. The site also hosts the national memorial to sailors who died for France. On a clear day, the view takes in the islands of the Iroise Sea and the entrance to the Bay of Brest.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Tanguy. In the ruins of the abbey church, entrust to him sailors and their families, those who carry a fault and divided families, then say the prayer to Saint Tanguy. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Tanguy

- **Chapel of Kersaint** (Landunvez, Finistère): dedicated to Saint Tanguy and Saint Haude, near the ruins of the castle of Trémazan.
- **Le Relec** (Plounéour-Ménez, Finistère): the site of the former monastery of Gerber.

Practical information

The Pointe Saint-Mathieu is about twenty kilometers west of Brest, on the road to Le Conquet, and can also be reached by the coastal path. The site is exposed to the wind: bring suitable clothing. Visiting conditions for the ruins, the lighthouse and the memorial may vary by season: check with the town of Plougonvelin or the tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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