BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Teilo

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint Teilo

Welsh monk and bishop of the 6th century, founder of Llandeilo Fawr, venerated in Wales and Brittany.

Feast day	February 9
Born	c. 485, south Wales (near Monmouth, according to one tradition)
Died	c. 560, Llandeilo Fawr (Wales)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Breton horsemen (popular tradition)

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Teilo

Saint Teilo (Teliaw in Welsh, Théleau, Telo or Thélo in Brittany) was a Welsh monk and bishop of the 6th century. Born in south Wales around 485, he is said to have spent several years in Brittany with Saint Samson of Dol, before returning home to found the monastery of Llandeilo Fawr, where he died around 560. Honored both in Wales and in Brittany, where he is shown riding a stag, he is celebrated on February 9.

Who was Saint Teilo?

Teilo belongs to the great generation of Breton and Welsh saints who, in the 5th and 6th centuries, traveled between Britain and Armorica, founding monasteries and parishes on both sides of the Channel. What we know of him comes from two late Latin Lives: one, in the form of a homily, is attributed to a priest named Geoffrey of Llandaff; the other is found in the Book of Llandaff, compiled in the 12th century under Bishop Urban. These texts were written above all to enhance the prestige of the Church of Llandaff, of which Teilo is one of the patrons. They must therefore be read with caution: the dates and several episodes remain uncertain, and Breton tradition has added its own legends. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on February 9.

Key dates in the life of Teilo

- **c. 485**: Born in south Wales, according to one tradition near Monmouth; his parents are said to have been Ensic and Guenhaff.
- **c. 549**: According to tradition, fleeing the "yellow plague" that was ravaging his country, he goes to Armorica and joins Saint Samson at Dol.
- **The following years**: He governs the monastery of Dol during Samson's absences; legend says the two planted a huge orchard together to feed the

poor.

- **After about seven years**: Return to Wales with his nephew Oudoceus; foundation of the monastery of Llandeilo Fawr, in the kingdom of Dyfed.
- **Afterwards**: According to the Book of Llandaff, he succeeds Saint Dubricius in the see of Llandaff.
- **c. 560**: Dies in his monastery at Llandeilo.
- **12th century**: His Life is included in the Book of Llandaff.
- **1703**: First known mention of the procession of his relics, the troménie, at Landeleau (Finistère).

A Welsh monk with Saint Samson

According to the Lives, Teilo was the son of Ensic and Guenhaff and grew up in Wales, where he embraced monastic life; the details of his training vary from one account to another. When a severe epidemic, called the "yellow plague", struck the country in the middle of the 6th century, he crossed the sea with other monks. He was welcomed in Armorica by Saint Samson, at Dol. One of his sisters, Anauued, is said to have married Budic, a prince of Breton Cornouaille, which also explains his ties with the peninsula.

The two men became very close. Samson, often kept far from his monastery, especially at the court of the Frankish king Childebert I, entrusted it to Teilo during his absences. Tradition says that together they planted, in the valley of Dol, an orchard three miles long to feed the poor; a place called "the orchard of Teilo and Samson" still keeps the memory of it. Teilo is said to have stayed about seven years in Brittany.

Founder of Llandeilo and bishop of Llandaff

Back in Wales with his nephew Oudoceus, Teilo founded the monastery of Llandeilo Fawr, in Dyfed, in the south-west of the country. The very name Llandeilo means "the holy enclosure of Teilo". The Book of Llandaff makes

him the successor of Saint Dubricius in the see of Llandaff, and Oudoceus his own successor. Historians debate this point, since the 12th-century authors had an interest in linking the great saints of south Wales to Llandaff. What remains is that Teilo was very probably an influential abbot and bishop, at the head of a network of churches: twenty-five places in Wales still bear his name.

He died around 560 in his monastery at Llandeilo. A charming legend tells that at his death three churches, Penalun, Llandeilo Fawr and Llandaff, disputed his body, and that the body multiplied so as to satisfy all three.

The saint on the stag in Brittany

In Brittany, the memory of Teilo took on very popular colors. According to one legend, he wanted to settle in the forest of Landeleau, but the dogs of the lord of Châteaugal attacked him. To make amends, the lord promised him all the land he could go around in a given time; a stag then appeared, and the saint, mounted on the animal, went around a vast estate. This is why he is almost always shown riding a stag. Another tradition, recorded in the 20th century, made him the patron of Breton horsemen. Some authors have seen in this image the legacy of ancient Celtic cults linked to the stag; this is a hypothesis that the sources do not allow us to verify.

It is not certain that Teilo himself ever came to Lower Brittany, but he has long been venerated there. Landeleau bears his name and keeps relics attributed to him; no one knows how they got there. The 14th-century church of Leuhan and the fine 16th-century chapel of Saint-Théleau at Plogonnec are dedicated to him in Finistère, as is a former chapel at Dinéault. The abbey of Daoulas keeps a 13th-century painted wooden statue of him, and the Grande Troménie of Locronan passes by a cross of Saint Teilo. He is also found at Saint-Thélo and Plédéliac (Côtes-d'Armor), and at Landaul and Montertelot (Morbihan), where local tradition credits him with defeating a dragon.

Devotion and relics

In Wales, Teilo is one of the patrons of Llandaff Cathedral, near Cardiff. His tomb is thought to be the one south of the high altar: during an inquiry in 1736, the remains of a bishop, recognizable by his crozier, were reportedly seen there, and the tomb was reopened in 1850. Near Llandeilo, a well of Saint Teilo once drew pilgrims, who drank its water, said to heal paralysis; at the end of the 19th century, the water was still drawn in a skull attributed to the saint. The well is no longer in use today.

In Brittany, the great expression of his cult is the troménie of Landeleau, attested as early as 1703: at Pentecost, a long procession, the "tour of the relics", carries the saint's reliquary through the countryside, and the faithful pass beneath the relics at each stage. At Plogonnec, the pardon of the chapel of Saint-Théleau is held in summer.

What can we learn from Saint Teilo?

Teilo is a man of both shores. Driven into exile by an epidemic, he found in Brittany a brother in faith, Saint Samson, and served him faithfully before returning home to build. The legend of the orchard planted for the poor expresses the spirit of these monks well: to pray, to work the land, and to feed the hungry. Behind the wonder of the stag, we find a pastor who traveled his country to found communities. You can pray to him for exiles and refugees, for friendship between the Celtic peoples, for rural parishes and for horse riders.

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

Where to pray to Saint Teilo

- **Landeleau** (Finistère): the church of Saint-Théleau, which keeps his relics, and the Pentecost troménie.

- **Plogonnec** (Finistère): the chapel of Saint-Théleau, a listed historic monument, and its calvary.
- **Leuhan** (Finistère): the parish church dedicated to him.
- **Llandeilo** and **Llandaff** (Wales): the site of his monastery and the cathedral where his tomb is located.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Teilo for Exiles and Country Parishes

Saint Teilo, a Welsh monk and bishop of the 6th century, knew exile in Brittany with Saint Samson before founding the monastery of Llandeilo. Bretons show him riding a stag. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him exiles, the poor and country parishes.

Prayer to Saint Teilo

Saint Teilo,
driven from your country by sickness,
you found across the sea
a brother to welcome you.
Watch over those who flee epidemics, war and poverty,
and open our hearts to their coming.

With Saint Samson you planted an orchard
so that the poor might have food to eat.
Teach me to work with my hands
and to share the fruit of my work
with those who have nothing.

Shepherd of Llandeilo and Llandaff,
you whom Brittany honors on your stag,
keep our country parishes,
their priests and their families,
and lead us all to Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Teilo

- On his feast day, February 9, or during the troménie of Landeleau, at Pentecost.
- For refugees, exiles and those who must leave their country because of an epidemic or a disaster.
- For the sick, especially those suffering from paralysis.
- For farmers, gardeners and those who feed the poor.
- For riders and those who work with horses.

A short invocation

> *Saint Teilo, friend of Saint Samson,*
> *you who served God on both shores of the sea,*
> *pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Teilo from February 1 to February 9, and read the life of Saint Teilo.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Teilo

This novena spends nine days with Saint Teilo, a Welsh monk and bishop of the 6th century, friend of Saint Samson and founder of Llandeilo. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, February 9, begin on February 1. You can also pray it at any other time of the year, for example before the troménie of Landeleau.

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 Teilo, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from Lives written several centuries after him and from Breton tradition, which mix history and legend.

Day 1: A Welsh childhood

Teilo was born in Wales around 485, in a land that was already Christian. There he received the faith and was formed in monastic life by the great teachers of his time.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the faith I have received. Bless those who handed it on to me, and help me to hand it on in turn.

Act of the day: Pray for the person who made Christ known to you.

Day 2: The trial of the epidemic

A severe epidemic ravaged Wales. Teilo had to leave. Exile was not his choice, but it became the path to a new fruitfulness.

Prayer: Lord, support those struck by illness, and those who must leave everything to survive.

Act of the day: Check in on someone who is ill or alone.

Day 3: Welcomed by a brother

At Dol, Saint Samson opened his door to the exiled monk. A friendship grew between the two men, rooted in prayer and shared service.

Prayer: Lord, give me a welcoming heart. Thank you for the friends you have placed on my path.

Act of the day: Welcome someone into your home, or write to a friend in the faith.

Day 4: An orchard for the poor

Tradition says that Teilo and Samson planted an orchard three miles long to feed the poor. Prayer goes on into work and sharing.

Prayer: Lord, may my work bear fruit, and may that fruit be shared with those who are hungry.

Act of the day: Give food to a food bank or to someone in need.

Day 5: Serving while the master is away

When Samson was away, he entrusted his monastery to Teilo. Teilo faithfully served a work that was not his own, without seeking to put himself forward.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve humbly wherever I am trusted.

Act of the day: Do a discreet service, without waiting for thanks.

Day 6: The return home

After about seven years, Teilo returned to Wales with his nephew Oudoceus. He came back enriched by what he had lived, to build at home.

Prayer: Lord, make my past trials a strength for serving today.

Act of the day: Give thanks for a trial that helped you grow.

Day 7: Founding Llandeilo

Teilo founded the monastery of Llandeilo Fawr. Churches sprang up around him: twenty-five places in Wales still bear his name.

Prayer: Lord, bless our parishes, especially the smallest, and raise up shepherds after your own heart.

Act of the day: Pray for your parish priest and for a rural parish.

Day 8: The saint on the stag

In Brittany, Teilo is shown riding a stag. Legend says that in this way he went around, in a short time, the land a lord had promised him. God gives his servants the means for their mission.

Prayer: Lord, when the task seems too great for me, give me the strength and the energy I need.

Act of the day: Begin a task you have long been putting off.

Day 9: A shepherd called home to God

Around 560, Teilo died in his monastery at Llandeilo. The Welsh and the Bretons keep his memory and still carry his relics in procession.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to end my life in your peace. Through the intercession of Saint Teilo, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass, or pray for the departed members of your family.

Closing prayer

Saint Teilo,
monk of Wales and friend of Brittany,
you knew exile and brotherly welcome,
the work of the land and the care of the poor.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Watch over exiles and over our parishes,
and keep us faithful to the end.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Théleau, Landeleau

Landeleau is a village in central Finistère, in the Poher country, not far from the sources of the Aulne. Its Breton name combines the word *lann*, "holy place, hermitage", with the name of Saint Teilo (Théleau). The parish church of Saint-Théleau, or Saint-Thélo, keeps relics attributed to the saint, and every year the parish carries them in procession during the troménie, the "tour of the relics".

A place linked to Saint Teilo

According to local tradition, Saint Teilo, a Welsh monk who came to Armorica in the 6th century, set up a hermitage here. Legend tells that, attacked by the dogs of the lord of Châteaugal, he received as compensation the land he could go around, and that a stag served as his mount. It is not certain that the saint himself ever came this far, and no one knows how his relics reached Landeleau; but devotion here is old. As early as 1703, a parish priest, Jean Caillibotte, mentions the procession of the relics of Saint Thélo at Pentecost.

What you can see at Landeleau

The present church was built from 1896 and consecrated on November 16, 1897 by the bishop of Quimper; it replaces a church of 1540. It keeps the bell tower of the earlier building, raised in 1719. It houses old statues of Saint Teilo on his stag, of Saint Roch and of Saint John the Baptist, as well as a 16th-century reliquary. Set into the walls are carved coats of arms that come from the former tomb of the lords of Châteaugal.

In front of the porch lies a hollowed block of granite called the "bed of Saint Thélo". It is a stone from Roman times, turned into a sarcophagus in the early Middle Ages. Tradition said that the saint slept in it as a penance, and people

used to come and lie on it to be relieved of rheumatism and back pain. A fountain of Saint Thélo is located near the church.

The Pentecost troménie

The troménie of Landeleau, or *Tro ar relegoù*, is a long procession of about eighteen kilometers. It leaves the church, stops at the site of the Châteaugal oak, which according to legend had sheltered the saint (the tree fell in 2006), reaches the chapel of Pénity-Saint-Laurent, where Mass is celebrated, then returns to the village by other stages. At each station, the pilgrims pass beneath the stretcher carrying the relics. At the beginning of the 20th century, it gathered more than two thousand men.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Teilo. In the church, before his statue, entrust to him exiles, the sick and rural parishes, then say the prayer to Saint Teilo. Taking part in the troménie is the best way to join the prayer of the generations who came before. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Landeleau lies between Châteauneuf-du-Faou and Carhaix and can be reached by car. The church is a place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested during services. The dates of the troménie, Mass times and the church's opening hours may vary: check with the parish or the town hall before you come.

Credits and sources

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