

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Tewdrig

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 1

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IN BRIEF

Saint Tewdrig

King of Gwent in Wales who became a hermit, died defending his people and is venerated as a martyr.

Feast day	April 1, January 3
Born	5th or 6th century, Wales
Died	Mathern, near Chepstow (Wales)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Tewdrig

Saint Tewdrig (in Latin *Theodoricus*, sometimes called Theodoric or Tewdric) was a king of Gwent, in southeast Wales, who lived between the 5th and 6th centuries. According to tradition, he gave up the throne to live as a hermit near Tintern, then took up arms again to defend his people against the pagan Saxons. Mortally wounded, he died at Mathern, near Chepstow, where he was buried. He is celebrated on April 1, and sometimes on January 3.

Who was Saint Tewdrig?

Tewdrig belongs to that very ancient world of Christian Wales, between the end of the Roman Empire and the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. His story is known mainly from the *Book of Llandaff*, a collection compiled in the 12th century, and from Welsh royal genealogies. The dates of his reign are very uncertain: historians place him in the 5th, the 6th, or even the early 7th century. His account therefore mixes history and tradition. He has been honored as a saint and martyr since the Middle Ages, because he died defending a Christian people against pagan invaders.



St Tewdric's Church in Mathern, near Chepstow.

Key dates

- **5th or 6th century**: He reigns over the kingdom of Gwent, which, according to tradition, he makes one of the most powerful in south Wales.
- **Unknown date**: He abdicates in favor of his son Meurig and retires as a hermit near Tintern, on the Wye.
- **Uncertain date**: Faced with a Saxon offensive, he leaves his retreat and leads his people into battle near a ford of the Wye; the Saxons are driven back, but he is mortally wounded.
- **Shortly after**: He dies at Mathern, near the Severn estuary, and is buried there.
- **c. 1615**: Bishop Francis Godwin of Llandaff says he found his stone coffin in the church of Mathern and has a plaque put up.

A king who chose prayer

According to Welsh traditions, Tewdrig was a warrior king who strengthened the kingdom of Gwent and fought the peoples from Ireland who had settled in the west of the country. But at the height of his power he made a surprising choice: he left the crown to his son Meurig and withdrew into solitude, on the rocks overlooking the Wye, near present-day Tintern. The man who had commanded armies wanted to live alone with God, in prayer and penance.

A king giving up power to become a hermit is not rare in the history of the saints of the British Isles. It expresses a deep conviction: earthly kingship passes away, God alone remains.

The last battle

The *Book of Llandaff* tells what follows. The Saxons, still pagan, threaten Meurig's kingdom. The old king is told that he will win the victory but be mortally wounded in it. Even so, he leaves his hermitage and takes up arms to protect his people. At the ford of the Wye, near Tintern, the Saxons are put to flight. Tewdrig himself is struck a fatal blow to the head.

He had asked to be buried on the island of Flat Holm, in the Bristol Channel. But according to tradition, the cart carrying him, drawn by two stags, stopped at Mathern, on the edge of an arm of the Severn estuary. A spring gushed forth where his wounds were washed. He died there, and his son had a church built over his tomb. The old name of the place, *Merthyr Tewdrig*, is often understood as "the martyr Tewdrig."



St Tewdric's Well at Mathern.

Veneration and memory

Tewdrig has been venerated as a saint and martyr since the Middle Ages, in the Church of Llandaff, without any canonization process: his is an immemorial cult, older than the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches. His cult has remained local, but his memory has stayed alive in Christian Wales, and he is also honored by the Orthodox. His feast is most often celebrated on April 1; some calendars commemorate him on January 3.

In the early 17th century, the Anglican bishop of Llandaff, Francis Godwin, reported that while restoring the church of Mathern he had discovered near the altar a stone coffin containing a skeleton with a fractured skull, which he identified as Tewdrig's. A plaque, put up at his request, still recalls this discovery. Near the church, St Tewdric's Well is mentioned as early as the early Middle Ages.

What should we remember about Saint Tewdrig?

Tewdrig knew how to give up power to seek God, and he also knew how to leave his retreat when his people needed him. He reminds us that prayer does not take us away from our responsibilities: it frees us to serve. We can pray to him for those who exercise authority, for those who defend others at the risk of their lives, and for those who must know when to hand over the reins.

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

Where to pray to Saint Tewdrig

- **Mathern** (Monmouthshire, Wales): St Tewdric's Church, where tradition places his tomb, and the well that bears his name.
- **Tintern** (Monmouthshire): the Wye valley, where he lived as a hermit and fought his last battle.
- **Llandaff** (Cardiff): the cathedral, whose *Book of Llandaff* has kept his story.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Tewdrig for Those in Positions of Responsibility

Saint Tewdrig, king of Gwent in Wales, gave up the throne to live as a hermit near Tintern. According to tradition, he left his retreat to defend his people and died of his wounds at Mathern. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to his intercession those who exercise responsibility, those who protect others and those who must know when to hand over the reins.

Prayer to Saint Tewdrig

Saint Tewdrig,
king of Gwent and hermit of the Wye,
you wore the crown,
then laid it down to seek God alone
in the silence of the rocks.

When your people were threatened,
you left your solitude without counting the cost,
and gave your life for those you loved.

Pray for those who govern and command:
may they serve the common good and not their own glory.
Pray for those who protect others at the risk of their lives,
for the wounded and for those who die far from their loved ones.
Help us to give up what we must,
and to rise when we are needed.

Keep Wales and all Christian lands
faithful to Christ, the one true King.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Tewdrig

- On his feast day, April 1, or January 3.
- When you must pass a responsibility on to someone else.
- For political leaders, soldiers, police officers and first responders.
- For a person who is wounded or in danger.
- When you must choose between your own rest and the service of others.

A short invocation

You can repeat during the day:

> *Christ, King of the universe, reign in my heart.*
> *Saint Tewdrig, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Tewdrig from March 24 to April 1, and read the life of Saint Tewdrig.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Tewdrig

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Tewdrig, king of Gwent who became a hermit, then died defending his people. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, April 1, begin on March 24. It is suited to those who carry responsibility or are going through a struggle, and it can be prayed at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Finish with: "Saint Tewdrig, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena in a concrete way.

Day 1: A Christian king

Tewdrig ruled over Gwent, in a Wales that was already Christian. According to tradition, he strengthened his kingdom and protected his people. Power is a service, not a privilege.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who govern. May they seek the good of all, and especially of the weakest.

Today: Pray for the leaders of your town and your country.

Day 2: Laying down the crown

At the height of his power, Tewdrig left the throne to his son Meurig. He knew that nothing truly belonged to him. Knowing when to hand over the reins is a form of humility.

Prayer: Lord, teach me not to cling to my place. Give me the freedom to pass on what I have received.

Today: Entrust a task to someone else, and trust them with it.

Day 3: The hermit of the Wye

Tewdrig withdrew into solitude near Tintern, above the river. The king became a man of prayer. Silence with God gives life its true weight.

Prayer: Lord, give me a taste for silent prayer. May I seek your presence more than busyness.

Today: Take a time of prayer in nature or in an empty church.

Day 4: Penance

The man who had waged wars chose penance. He carried before God the weight of his past battles. Conversion is never too late.

Prayer: Lord, I bring you my past sins. Purify my heart and give me your peace.

Today: Make an examination of conscience and, if possible, receive the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Day 5: The call of the people

When the Saxons threatened the kingdom, Tewdrig heard the call of his people. Prayer had not made him indifferent: it had made him available.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to the needs of those around me. May my prayer move me to act.

Today: Answer a request for help that you had ignored.

Day 6: The courage to give

According to tradition, Tewdrig knew he would be mortally wounded, and he went anyway. Jesus says: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for those one loves."

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to serve even when it costs me.

Today: Pray for soldiers, police officers, firefighters and first responders.

Day 7: The wounded

Struck on the head, Tewdrig was carried away from the battlefield. Tradition tells that a spring gushed forth where his wounds were washed. God brings forth life even in the heart of suffering.

Prayer: Lord, heal the wounded and console those who suffer. May your grace spring up in our wounds.

Today: Pray for a sick or injured person, or visit them.

Day 8: Accepting God's will

Tewdrig wanted to be buried on the island of Flat Holm, but he died at Mathern. He accepted that his road should end where God willed.

Prayer: Lord, when my plans do not come to pass, teach me to surrender them to you.

Today: Accept a change of plans with peace.

Day 9: The martyr king

Tewdrig died at Mathern, and Christians venerated him as a martyr, killed defending a Christian people. His memory crosses the centuries, like the spring that still flows near his church.

Prayer: Lord, King of the universe, keep me faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Tewdrig, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for persecuted Christians around the world.

Living the novena with Saint Tewdrig

The life of Saint Tewdrig has come down to us through tradition, with its share of legend. But his message is clear: seek God first, then give yourself without reserve when others need you. During these nine days, ask for the grace of that balance. If you carry a heavy responsibility, or if you hesitate between your own rest and a service, entrust it to God with simplicity.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Tewdrig,*
> *king who laid down your crown for God*
> *and gave your life for your people,*
> *present to the Lord the intention I have carried through these nine days.*
> *Teach me to seek God in silence,*
> *to serve with courage,*
> *and to place my life in his hands.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

St Tewdric's Church in Mathern

St Tewdric's Church in Mathern stands in a small village in Monmouthshire, near Chepstow, in southeast Wales, not far from the Severn estuary. According to tradition, it is here that King Tewdrig died of his wounds after his last battle against the Saxons, and here that he was buried. The church bears his name, and a nearby well recalls his memory.

A church over a king's tomb

The *Book of Llandaff* tells that Meurig, Tewdrig's son, had a church built where his father had died. The present church, remodeled several times, dates mostly from the Middle Ages. It stands near the old palace of Mathern, which was for a long time the residence of the bishops of Llandaff.

In the early 17th century, Bishop Francis Godwin, while having the church restored, said he had found near the altar a stone coffin holding the remains of a man with a fractured skull, whom he identified as Tewdrig. He had a plaque put up recording the discovery, and it can still be seen in the church.



Bishop Godwin's plaque in the church of Mathern.

Visiting the church

The church is today a parish church of the Church in Wales (Anglican). Bishop Godwin's plaque is there to see. Nearby is St Tewdric's Well, mentioned as early as the early Middle Ages, where tradition says the king's wounds were washed. The village, quiet and rural, lends itself to a stop for prayer, along with a visit to the Wye valley and Tintern.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Tewdrig. In the church or by the well, entrust to him those who carry responsibility, those who protect others and the wounded, then recite the prayer to Saint Tewdrig. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Tewdrig

- **Tintern**: the Wye valley, where he lived as a hermit and fought his last battle.
- **Llandaff** (Cardiff): the cathedral, in the heart of the old diocese that has kept his story.
- **Flat Holm**: the island in the Bristol Channel where he wished to be buried.

Practical information

Mathern is a few miles southwest of Chepstow, close to the bridges that cross the Severn between England and Wales. The church is a working place of worship: please respect silence and services. Opening hours may vary: check with the parish or the Chepstow tourist office before you come.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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