BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Chaffre (Theofrid)

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 18

IN BRIEF

Saint Chaffre (Theofrid)

Monk from Orange, second abbot of Le Monastier in the Velay, martyred in the early 8th century according to tradition.

Feast day	November 18
Born	7th century, Orange (Vaucluse), according to tradition
Died	October 19, 728 or 732, according to the sources, Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille (Haute-Loire)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Patron saint of	Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille

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Abbey Church of Saint-Chaffre, Le Monastier

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Chaffre (Theofrid)

Saint Chaffre, whose Latin name is Theofrid (Theofredus), was an abbot of the monastery of Le Monastier, in the Velay, today's Haute-Loire, who died a martyr in the early 8th century. According to tradition, this monk from Orange succeeded his uncle Eudes at the head of the abbey, and died of the blows he received during a Saracen raid, after protecting his brothers. The abbey took his name and became one of the great monasteries of southern France. His feast day is November 18.

Who was Saint Chaffre?

The name Chaffre is the popular form of Theofrid, a name of Germanic origin that became Théoffroy, then Chaffre, and "santz Chafrès" in Occitan. He is also called Theofrid of Orange or Theofrid of Carméri. His life is known through a hagiographic tradition that mixes historical and symbolic elements. Historians note confusions of persons and dates in it: his death is placed in 728 or 732, and another tradition even has him come from Troyes. What remains is the figure of a faithful abbot, whose memory eventually eclipsed that of the founders of his monastery.

Key dates in the life of Chaffre

- **7th century**: Born at Orange, in Provence, into a wealthy Gallo-Roman family; his father, Leufredus, is said to have been prefect of Orange.
- **Youth**: He joins his uncle Eudes, a former monk of Lérins who had become the first abbot of the monastery of Saint-Pierre de Calmiliac, in the Velay.
- **Monk at Le Monastier**: He is put in charge of the community's material affairs and welcomes the future Saint Menelaus.
- **At the death of Eudes**: He becomes the second abbot of the monastery.

- **October 19, 728 or 732**: Wounded during a Saracen raid on the abbey, he dies a few days later, according to tradition.
- **817**: The monastery adopts the Rule of Saint Benedict.
- **1074**: Construction begins on the present abbey church, which will bear his name.
- **1492**: Abbot François d'Estaing commissions a series of twenty-eight paintings telling his life.

From Orange to the Velay

According to tradition, Theofrid came from a wealthy Gallo-Roman family of Orange. His uncle Eudes, a former archdeacon of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and then a monk of the abbey of Lérins, had been chosen by the superior of Lérins to become the first abbot of a monastery founded in the Velay by a lord named Calminius, at a place called Le Villars. This monastery, then called Calmiliac, would become Le Monastier. The young Theofrid joined his uncle and embraced monastic life.

At the monastery, he faithfully observed the rule and was given charge of temporal affairs, what was then called "the outside." Tradition describes him as a father attentive to all the needs of the monks, but also watchful to protect their silence and solitude. He welcomed and encouraged Saint Menelaus, future abbot of Menat. A chronicler reports that he allowed women, who could not enter the monastery church, to come to its door to receive teaching in the faith.

The martyr abbot

At the death of Eudes, Theofrid succeeded him and became the second abbot. According to the account of his martyrdom, a band of Saracens approached the monastery. The abbot ordered his monks to hide in the nearby forest and stayed alone in the abbey. When the attackers came in, they found him

prostrate in the church. They beat him cruelly and left him dying. The next day, as they were preparing to celebrate a ritual feast, Theofrid rose and rebuked them for their idolatry. Enraged, they struck him again on the head. A storm then broke out and put them to flight, so that they could not set fire to the monastery. The abbot died a few days later, on an October 19.

Historians see in this account an echo of the troubles that shook southern Gaul in the early 8th century, when armies from Al-Andalus moved up the Rhône valley. Another tradition, reported by historians of the diocese of Le Puy, makes Theofrid a monk from Troyes, killed by people who were still pagan. Whatever the share of history, the account presents a shepherd who gave his life for his brothers.

The abbey of Saint-Chaffre and its influence

First dedicated to Saint Peter, then to Saint Martin, the abbey finally took the name of Saint Chaffre. It adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict in 817 and became very prosperous. It extended its influence over another abbey, at Cervere in Piedmont, over twenty-five priories and over more than two hundred and seventy churches in nineteen dioceses, in France, Switzerland and Italy. In this way the cult of Saint Chaffre spread beyond the Alps, where he was linked with San Chiaffredo, a saint honored at Crissolo, in the Po valley. The abbey was attached to Cluny, then suppressed at the end of the 18th century. Its church is now used as a parish church.

Reliquary and art

The treasury of the abbey church keeps a precious reliquary bust of Saint Chaffre, dating from the 11th century: an oak core covered with embossed and gilded silver plates, enhanced with cabochons and semi-precious stones. It belongs to the family of Auvergne reliquary statues, like the famous statue of Saint Faith at Conques. The treasury also keeps the last two paintings of a

series of twenty-eight commissioned in 1492 by Abbot François d'Estaing to tell the saint's life: one shows Eudes naming Chaffre as his successor, the other his martyrdom.

What can we learn from Saint Chaffre?

Saint Chaffre was first of all a monk who served his brothers in material tasks, with a father's heart. Once abbot, he chose to remain alone in the face of danger so that his monks would be spared. His life reminds us that authority, in the Church, is a service that can go as far as the gift of self. You can pray to him for leaders of communities, for those who manage the goods of a work, and for those who must protect others at the risk of their own safety.

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

Where to pray to Saint Chaffre

- **Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille** (Haute-Loire): the abbey church of Saint-Chaffre, his reliquary bust and the paintings of his life.
- **Orange** (Vaucluse): the town tradition names as his birthplace.
- **Crissolo** (Piedmont, Italy): where San Chiaffredo, the saint he was linked with, is venerated.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Chaffre for Those Who Serve and Those Who Protect

Saint Chaffre, or Theofrid, was a monk and then abbot of Le Monastier, in the Velay. According to tradition, he stayed alone in his abbey before the attackers to save his monks, and died of his wounds. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him leaders of communities, those who serve unseen, and all who protect others.

Prayer to Saint Chaffre

Saint Chaffre,
faithful monk and attentive father,
you served your brothers in everyday tasks
and watched over their silence and their prayer.
Teach me to serve humbly
in simple and hidden things.

Shepherd with a brave heart,
you sent your monks away from danger
and stayed alone before violence,
prostrate before God.
Give me the courage to protect the weakest
and not to run away when I am needed.

Bless those who are in charge of a community,
a family or a work,
and keep them in peace.
Obtain for me the grace I entrust to you,
if it is according to God's will.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Chaffre

- On his feast day, November 18, or on October 19, the anniversary of his death according to tradition.
- For abbots, superiors and all leaders of communities.
- For those who manage the material goods of a parish, an association or a family.
- When others must be protected in a dangerous situation.

- For monasteries and communities threatened by violence.

A short invocation

> *Saint Chaffre, abbot and martyr,*
> *protect those entrusted to me and pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Chaffre from November 10 to November 18, and read the life of Saint Chaffre.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Chaffre

This novena is inspired by the life of Saint Chaffre, or Theofrid, abbot of Le Monastier in the Velay and a martyr according to tradition. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, November 18, begin on November 10. 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 Chaffre, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recalled come from tradition, which mixes history and legend.

Day 1: A family and a call

Born at Orange, into a wealthy family, Theofrid joined his uncle Eudes at the monastery. A vocation sometimes passes through a relative who opens the way.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who opened the way of faith to me. Bless the vocations born in our families.

Act of the day: Pray for a member of your family who passed on the faith to you.

Day 2: Faithful to the rule

At the monastery, Theofrid faithfully observed the rule. Faithfulness in small things prepares for great ones.

Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the small things of each day.

Act of the day: Pray at a set time today, even briefly.

Day 3: In charge of the outside

Theofrid was given charge of the monastery's material affairs. He served his brothers in practical tasks, without losing sight of what matters most.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who serve unseen, and make my work a prayer.

Act of the day: Carefully do a practical task in the service of others.

Day 4: A father's heart

Tradition describes Theofrid as attentive to all his brothers' needs, and watchful to guard their silence.

Prayer: Lord, give me a heart attentive to the needs of those around me.

Act of the day: Sincerely ask someone close to you how they are, and listen.

Day 5: Welcoming

Theofrid welcomed and encouraged the young Menelaus, future abbot of Menat. To encourage someone is to help them become what God expects of them.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to encourage those who are beginning their journey.

Act of the day: Send a word of encouragement to a young person.

Day 6: At the church door

Theofrid allowed women to come to the church door to receive teaching in the faith. He sought to reach those who stay on the threshold.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to those who stand on the threshold of the Church.

Act of the day: Invite someone to come with you to Mass or to a time of prayer.

Day 7: Becoming abbot

At the death of Eudes, Theofrid succeeded him. The office of abbot is a service: guiding one's brothers toward God.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who exercise authority, and make them servants.

Act of the day: Pray for those in charge at your work, in your town and in the Church.

Day 8: Alone before danger

When the Saracens approached, Theofrid sent his monks to hide and stayed alone, prostrate in the church. The shepherd protects his flock.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to protect those entrusted to me.

Act of the day: Pray for Christian communities threatened by violence.

Day 9: Faithful to the end

Wounded, Theofrid still denounced idolatry, then died a few days later. His abbey was spared. His life, given away, bore fruit for centuries.

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

Act of the day: Attend Mass and entrust to God those who risk their lives for others.

Living the novena with Saint Chaffre

Saint Chaffre shows us that a faithful servant in small things can become a shepherd able to give his life. During these nine days, you can carry leaders of communities, people who serve unseen, and those who protect others at the risk of their lives. If you can, visit Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille, in the abbey church that bears his name.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Chaffre,*
> *monk of the Velay and martyr abbot,*
> *you served your brothers with a father's heart*
> *and gave your life to protect them.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Keep me humble in service*
> *and brave in trial.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Abbey Church of Saint-Chaffre, Le Monastier

The abbey church of Saint-Chaffre stands in the heart of Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille, in Haute-Loire, in the uplands of the Velay. It is the church of the former abbey where, according to tradition, Saint Chaffre (Theofrid) was a monk and then abbot, before dying a martyr in the early 8th century. Listed as a historic monument as early as 1840, it now serves as a parish church and keeps the saint's reliquary bust.

An abbey at the crossroads

The town of Le Monastier grew up around a hermitage founded at a place called Le Villars by a lord named Calminius. In the 7th century, under the influence of Eudes and then of his nephew Theofrid, who became Saint Chaffre, the community joined the monastic tradition of Lérins. It adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict in 817. Located on the road linking the Massif Central to the Rhône valley, the abbey became very powerful: it had more than two hundred dependencies, west and east of the Rhône and as far as Italy. First dedicated to Saint Peter, then to Saint Martin, it finally took the name of Saint Chaffre. Attached to Cluny, it was closed at the end of the 18th century.

Several churches followed one another and collapsed because of the unstable ground. The present church was built from 1074, under Abbot William III. In the 15th century, the choir collapsed and was rebuilt in the Gothic style by Abbots Vital Hérailh and François d'Estaing.

What to see

The abbey church is one of the fine examples of Romanesque art in Auvergne. Its polychrome facade combines black and red volcanic scoria, sandstone and orange-colored stones, and is crowned by an unusual frieze. Inside, the organ, commissioned in 1518, is among the oldest in Europe; its painted case is protected as a historic monument.

The treasury keeps the reliquary bust of Saint Chaffre, from the 11th century: an oak core covered with embossed and gilded silver plates, adorned with cabochons and stones. You can also see the last two paintings of a series of twenty-eight commissioned in 1492 by Abbot François d'Estaing to tell the saint's life, one of which shows his martyrdom.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Chaffre. Before his reliquary, entrust to him leaders of communities, those who serve unseen and those who protect others, then say the prayer to Saint Chaffre. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille lies southeast of Le Puy-en-Velay, in the Velay hills, and can be reached by road. The abbey church is a parish church: modest dress and silence are requested, especially during services. Opening hours, Mass times and visits to the treasury may vary by season: check with the parish or the town hall of Le Monastier before you come.

Credits and sources

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