BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Walstan

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 30

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IN BRIEF

Saint Walstan

English farm laborer who died in 1016, buried at Bawburgh (Norfolk), patron of farmers and farm animals.

Feast day	May 30
Born	late 10th century, Bawburgh (Norfolk) or Blythburgh (Suffolk), depending on the source
Died	May 30, 1016, Taverham (Norfolk)
Canonized	immemorial cult (popular medieval cult)
Era	11th century
Patron saint of	farmers, farm workers, livestock breeders, farm animals

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Walstan

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Walstan

Saint Walstan (or Walston) was an English farm laborer of the early 11th century, venerated in Norfolk as the patron of farmers, farm workers and farm animals. Born at Bawburgh, or at Blythburgh according to another tradition, he died in 1016 while mowing a meadow at Taverham and was buried at Bawburgh, near Norwich. His feast day is May 30.

Who was Saint Walstan?

Walstan is a popular saint of East Anglia, whose cult grew up in the countryside around Norwich. He was neither a monk, nor a priest, nor a martyr: he was a layman who chose to live the Gospel through humble, hard work in the service of others. His life is known to us through medieval accounts, including an anonymous Life kept in the library of Lambeth Palace, and through later hagiographers such as Alban Butler. These texts, written long after his death, mix memories with the marvelous; the sources even disagree about his birthplace.

Key dates in the life of Walstan

- **Late 10th century**: Born at Bawburgh (Norfolk) according to Alban Butler, or at Blythburgh (Suffolk) according to the Lambeth Life, into a well-off family.
- **Around the age of twelve**: He leaves his parents' home and goes to Taverham, where he hires himself out as a farm laborer.
- **Following years**: He lives in work, fasting and prayer, and makes a vow of celibacy without entering a monastery.
- **May 30, 1016**: He dies in a meadow, during haymaking, after having, according to the account, a vision of an angel.

- **Shortly after**: His body, carried on a cart drawn by two oxen, is buried at Bawburgh.
- **Middle Ages**: His shrine at Bawburgh draws pilgrims, farmers and farm workers.
- **1988**: A church is dedicated to him at Rongai, in Kenya.

Choosing a humble life

According to Butler, Walstan was the son of well-off parents, whom tradition names Benedict and Blitha. Around the age of twelve, he left his family to become a farmhand at Taverham, a few miles away. He chose the hardest work, in a spirit of penance and humility. He fasted and spent long periods in prayer; the accounts also show him generous to the poor. He made a vow of celibacy, but remained a layman in the middle of the fields. The stories stress his kindness toward the animals in his care.

A death in the hayfield

The account tells that Walstan, sensing his end approaching, was visited by an angel while he was mowing hay. He died on the spot, on May 30, 1016. He had asked that his body be laid on a cart drawn by two oxen, and that they be allowed to go wherever they wished. The oxen led the procession to Bawburgh, where he was buried. Tradition adds that springs gushed forth at the places where the team stopped. Saint Walstan's Well, at Bawburgh, can still be seen today.

Devotion and art

The cult of Walstan arose spontaneously, carried by the devotion of country people. A chapel was added to the church of Saint Mary at Bawburgh, which took the name of Saint Mary and Saint Walstan. Throughout the Middle Ages,

his shrine was a place of pilgrimage for farmers and farm workers, who came to entrust their animals and crops to him. The English Reformation put an end to this pilgrimage, but the memory of the saint did not disappear.

He is often shown crowned and holding a scepter, signs of the noble birth that legend gives him, but above all with a scythe in his hand and cattle beside him. Several painted rood screens in Norfolk and Suffolk show him this way. In modern times his cult has spread to Kent, Buckinghamshire and even Kenya. Every year at Bawburgh, a celebration in his honor takes place on the Sunday nearest to May 30.

What can we learn from Saint Walstan?

Walstan shows that one can become a saint in the most ordinary work. He founded neither a monastery nor any great work: he mowed, cared for animals, shared his bread and prayed. His life echoes that of Saint Isidore the Farmer, another layman made holy in the fields. You can pray to him for farmers, livestock breeders and farm workers, for those whose work is hard and little recognized, and for the care of creation.

Where to pray to Saint Walstan

- **Bawburgh** (Norfolk, England): the church of Saint Mary and Saint Walstan, now Anglican, and the well that bears his name.
- **Taverham** (Norfolk): the village where he worked and died.
- **Rongai** (Kenya): the church dedicated to him since 1988.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Walstan for Farmers and Animals

Saint Walstan, a Norfolk farm laborer who died in 1016 while mowing a meadow, is honored as the patron of farmers, farm workers and farm animals. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to him work in the fields, animals, and all who live from the land.

Prayer to Saint Walstan

Saint Walstan,
you who left a comfortable home
to serve humbly in the fields,
teach me to love work well done
and to offer it to God each day.

You shared your bread with the poor
and cared for the animals entrusted to you.
Give me a generous heart
and respect for all creation.

Watch over farmers and livestock breeders,
over their families, their herds and their harvests.
Support those whose work is hard and little recognized,
and keep us in the peace of the Lord.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Walstan

- On his feast day, May 30, at haymaking time.

- For farmers, livestock breeders and farm workers.
- For the health of livestock and the success of harvests.
- For those going through a period of exhausting work.
- To learn to live your faith in ordinary tasks.

A prayer for the fields

> *Lord, bless the land and those who work it,*
> *the animals and the harvests.*
> *Saint Walstan, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Walstan from May 22 to 30, and read the life of Saint Walstan.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Walstan

This novena walks with Saint Walstan, a Norfolk farm laborer who died in 1016 and patron of farmers. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, May 30, begin on May 22. You can also pray it at any other time, for example at the start of sowing or harvest.

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 Walstan, pray for us." The episodes recalled come from medieval accounts, which mix history and legend.

Day 1: Leaving comfort behind

Born into a well-off family, Walstan left his parents' home around the age of twelve to become a farmhand.

Prayer: Lord, free me from attachment to comfort, and let me follow you with a simple heart.

Act of the day: Give up a small comfort today and offer it to God.

Day 2: The hardest work

At Taverham, Walstan chose the most exhausting tasks, in a spirit of penance and humility.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to accept difficult tasks without complaining, and to live them with you.

Act of the day: Do without delay a task you have been putting off.

Day 3: Praying in the fields

Walstan fasted and spent long periods in prayer, without leaving his work as a layman.

Prayer: Lord, may my working day become a prayer, and may I think of you in the midst of my occupations.

Act of the day: Say a short prayer at the beginning and end of your work.

Day 4: Sharing with the poor

The accounts present Walstan as a man generous to the poor, he who had chosen to live poorly.

Prayer: Lord, open my hands and my heart to those who lack what they need.

Act of the day: Give clothing or food to a person in need.

Day 5: A heart given to God

Walstan made a vow of celibacy without becoming a monk. He belonged wholly to God, in the midst of the world.

Prayer: Lord, help each person to live their vocation faithfully, in marriage, consecrated life or single life.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who is seeking their vocation.

Day 6: Caring for animals

The accounts stress his kindness toward the animals in his care. Livestock breeders have always called on him.

Prayer: Creator God, teach me to respect all your creatures and to care for what you have entrusted to me.

Act of the day: Do something concrete for the care of creation.

Day 7: The angel at haymaking time

According to the account, an angel came to tell Walstan of his approaching death while he was mowing hay. He was ready.

Prayer: Lord, keep me watchful, so that your coming finds me at work and at peace.

Act of the day: Take a moment of silence to look over your life before God.

Day 8: The oxen and the springs

His body was drawn by two oxen to Bawburgh. Tradition says that springs gushed forth where they stopped.

Prayer: Lord, source of living water, make grace spring up in me, and quench the thirst of those who long for you.

Act of the day: Renew your baptism by making the Sign of the Cross with holy water.

Day 9: A saint for the countryside

For centuries, farmers and farm workers came to pray at Bawburgh. Walstan remains the saint of the people of the land.

Prayer: Lord, bless the farming world. Through the intercession of Saint Walstan, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Thank a farmer, or buy produce from a local grower.

Closing prayer

Saint Walstan,
humble servant of the fields,
you made holy the work of your hands.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Watch over those who till the land and care for animals,
and keep me faithful in the tasks of each day.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Walstan and read the life of Saint Walstan.

Credits and sources

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