

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Winefride

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Winefride

Seventh-century Welsh virgin and abbess, venerated at the holy well of Holywell (Treffynnon).

Feast day	November 3
Born	7th century, Tegeingl (Flintshire, Wales)
Died	Late 7th century, Gwytherin, Wales
Canonized	Immemorial cult
Era	7th century
Patron saint of	Holywell, the sick seeking healing, women who have suffered violence

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Winefride, Virgin of the Well

Novena to Saint Winefride

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Winefride

Saint Winefride, in Welsh *Gwenfrewi*, was a seventh-century Welsh virgin. According to her legend, a prince beheaded her because she refused his advances; a spring gushed out where her head fell, and her uncle Saint Beuno restored her to life. She became a nun and later abbess at Gwytherin, where she died in peace. The spring of Holywell, in Welsh Treffynnon, "the town of the well," became one of the oldest pilgrimages in Britain and was raised to the rank of national shrine in 2023. Her feast day is November 3.

Who was Saint Winefride?

Winefride is one of the most popular saints of Wales and of Catholic England. The oldest accounts of her life date from the twelfth century: an anonymous *Life* and another written by Robert, prior of Shrewsbury Abbey, at the time her relics were moved there. These texts, written five centuries after the events, are strongly shaped by legend. But the existence of a holy virgin venerated at Holywell and Gwytherin, linked to Saint Beuno, belongs to an ancient and constant Welsh tradition.

Her name has been spelled in many ways: Winefride, Winifred, Wenefrida, Gwenfrewi. She is sometimes called the saint of the well, and Holywell has been nicknamed "the Lourdes of Wales."

Key dates in the life of Saint Winefride

- **7th century**: Born into a noble family of Tegeingl, in present-day Flintshire, in northeast Wales.
- **Youth**: She is taught the faith by her uncle, the abbot Saint Beuno, who settles near her parents' home.

- **According to tradition**: Prince Caradog beheads her; a spring bursts forth, and Beuno brings her back to life.
- **Afterward**: She becomes a nun, then abbess of a community at Gwytherin, in present-day Conwy County.
- **Late 7th century**: Dies at Gwytherin, where she is buried.
- **1138**: Her relics are moved from Gwytherin to the Benedictine abbey of Shrewsbury.
- **c. 1500**: The Gothic chapel sheltering the well at Holywell is built.
- **2023**: The Catholic bishops of England and Wales make Holywell a national shrine.

The spring born of martyrdom

The story has remained famous. One Sunday, while her parents were at Mass in Beuno's church, Winefride stayed home alone. Caradog, son of a neighboring prince, arrived and pressed her to give in to his desires. She escaped by saying she needed to get ready and ran toward the church. Enraged, he caught her at the foot of the hill and cut off her head with his sword. Where her head rolled, an abundant spring burst from the ground.

Beuno came out of the church, took up the head, set it back on the body and prayed. Winefride rose, alive, keeping only a thin white scar around her neck. Caradog, who did not repent, fell dead; tradition says the earth swallowed him. The stones of the well bear red marks that popular piety saw as the saint's blood, and the fragrant moss that grows there was long called "Winefride's hair."

Nun and abbess

After these events, Winefride consecrated herself to God. Before leaving for Clynnog Fawr, Beuno is said to have asked her to remain near the spring. Later she joined other consecrated women and became abbess at Gwytherin, in the

hills, where she died in peace many years later. The site of the church and graveyard where she rested can still be seen at Gwytherin.

A pilgrimage across the centuries

In 1138 the monks of Shrewsbury obtained the transfer of her body to their abbey. Her shrine became one of the most visited in England. But it was above all the well at Holywell that drew the sick. According to tradition, King Henry V came there as a pilgrim in 1416. Around 1500 an elegant Gothic chapel was built over the spring, probably thanks to Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII.

At the Reformation the shrine at Shrewsbury was destroyed. Yet the Holywell pilgrimage never died out: despite the penal laws against Catholics, the faithful kept coming, often accompanied by priests working in secret, especially Jesuits. In 1686 King James II and Queen Mary of Modena came to pray there for an heir. It is one of the few places of pilgrimage in Britain visited without major interruption since the Middle Ages.



The well and pool of Saint Winefride, in Holywell.

Saint Winefride in literature

The Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, who studied nearby, began a drama about the saint, *St Winefred's Well*, which includes his famous poem *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo*. More recently, Ellis Peters's medieval mysteries featuring Brother Cadfael made the translation of her relics known to a wide audience.

Why is Saint Winefride the patron saint of the sick and of women who suffer violence?

Winefride is a figure of purity defended at the cost of life, and of life given back by God. For centuries the sick have come to bathe in her well, and many have left crutches and thanksgiving offerings there; this is why she is invoked by

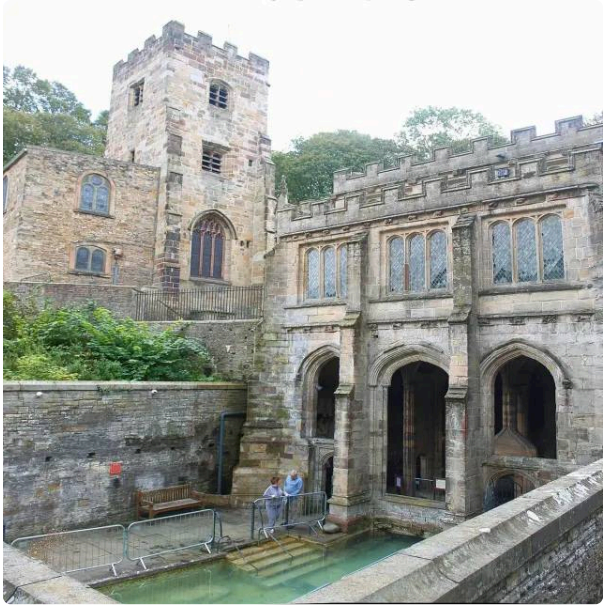
those seeking healing. Because she was attacked by a man who wanted to possess her, she is also prayed to by girls and women who have suffered violence or harassment. She is, naturally, the patron of Holywell.

Her spring speaks of healing, of baptism and of resurrection. Her pilgrimage, kept alive through persecution, bears witness to the faithfulness of Welsh and English Catholics. She can be invoked for the sick, for young women and victims of violence, for chastity and for Wales.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Winefride and follow the novena to Saint Winefride, from October 26 to November 3.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Winefride in art

- **A thin scar around her neck**, the mark of her beheading in the legend.
- **The palm** of martyrdom.
- **The abbess's crozier** and religious veil.
- **A spring or well** at her feet, sometimes with her head and the sword of Caradog.



The well chapel at Holywell.

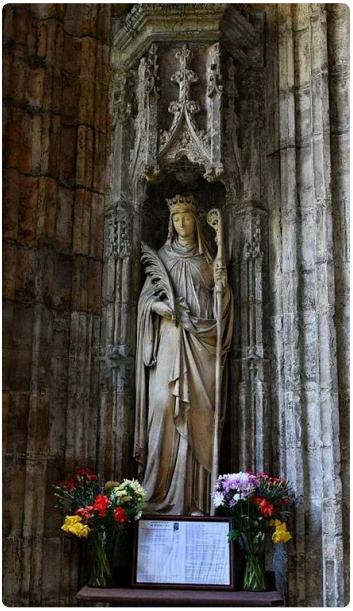
Where to pray to Saint Winefride

- **Holywell / Treffynnon** (Flintshire, Wales): the Shrine of Saint Winefride's Well, a national shrine, where pilgrims may still bathe in the outdoor pool.
- **Gwytherin** (Conwy): the place of her religious life and first burial.
- **Shrewsbury** (England): the former abbey where her relics were moved in 1138.
- **Clynnog Fawr** (Gwynedd): the church of Saint Beuno, her uncle.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Winefride, Virgin of the Well

For more than a thousand years, pilgrims have come to Holywell, in Wales, to pray to Saint Winefride and to bathe in the spring that, according to tradition, burst forth where she was martyred. She is invoked for the sick, for purity of heart and for those who have suffered violence. Old hymns and litanies in her honor exist in English and Welsh; this page offers an original prayer.



Statue of Saint Winefride, at Holywell.

Prayer to Saint Winefride, virgin of the well

Saint Winefride, you preferred death to defilement, and God gave you back your life through the prayer of Saint Beuno. Keep my heart pure and faithful to Christ.

According to tradition, your blood made a healing spring flow from the earth. Intercede for the sick who hope for health of body and peace of soul. May the living water of grace wash our wounds and renew our baptism.

You knew the violence of a man who wanted to possess you. Protect girls and women in danger, comfort those who have been hurt, and help them find again trust and dignity.

You served God as abbess in the peace of Gwytherin. Teach me faithful prayer and charity toward my sisters and brothers.

Saint Winefride, I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Carry it to the Lord, the source of all life. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

Short invocation

Saint Winefride, virgin and martyr, pray for us and for all the sick.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Winefride

- The sick, especially those waiting for healing.
- Women who have suffered violence or harassment.
- Young people who want to live chastity.
- Wales and the pilgrims of Holywell.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Winefride is celebrated on November 3. At Holywell the translation of her relics is also celebrated, in June. You can pray to her before a pilgrimage, at the bedside of a sick person, or when using holy water. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Winefride, and read the life of Saint Winefride.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Winefride

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and legend of Saint Winefride, the seventh-century Welsh virgin venerated at the well of Holywell. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, November 3, begin it on October 26. It can also be prayed before a pilgrimage to Holywell or for a sick person at any time of year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. If you can, make the sign of the cross with a little holy water, in memory of the spring of Holywell. The small act suggested each day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. You may pray it alone, with your family, or with a group preparing a pilgrimage to the well.

Day 1: A childhood in the faith

Winefride grew up in a noble family of northeast Wales and received the faith from her uncle, the abbot Beuno. Faith is often passed on through family and through patient teachers. We owe much to those who first spoke to us of God.

Prayer: Lord, bless the parents, grandparents and teachers who pass on the faith, and make me a faithful witness in my turn.

Today: Give thanks for the person who first taught you to pray.

Day 2: A heart given to God

Very young, Winefride wished to belong entirely to Christ. Her desire was not a refusal of life but a choice of love. Every Christian is called to give God the first place in the heart.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, take first place in my heart, and help me give you what I am holding back.

Today: Set aside ten minutes of silent prayer.

Day 3: The courage to say no

When Caradog pressed her to give in, Winefride refused and ran toward the church. It takes courage to say no to what degrades us, even under pressure. Her flight toward the church shows where she looked for strength.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to refuse evil and to run to you when I am tempted.

Today: Turn away from one thing that pulls you away from God.

Day 4: For victims of violence

Winefride suffered the violence of a man who wanted to possess her. Many women and girls today carry similar wounds, often in silence. Christ is close to them, and the Church is called to be a place of refuge and justice.

Prayer: Lord, protect women and girls in danger, heal those who have been wounded, and bring the truth to light.

Today: Pray for a woman who suffers, or support an organization that helps victims of violence.

Day 5: The spring that flows

Where Winefride's head fell, the legend says, a spring burst forth. From suffering, God brought forth a source of life. The water of Holywell recalls the water of our baptism, which washes and renews.

Prayer: Lord, renew in me the grace of my baptism, and make my life a source of life for others.

Today: Bless yourself with holy water, renewing your baptismal promises.

Day 6: Raised by prayer

Beuno came out of the church, set the head back on the body and prayed, and Winefride rose up alive. The legend speaks of the power of prayer and of the hope of resurrection. Nothing is impossible to God.

Prayer: Lord, raise up what is dead or wounded in me, and strengthen my trust in the power of prayer.

Today: Pray for someone who seems to have lost all hope.

Day 7: For the sick

For centuries, sick people have come to bathe in Winefride's well. Some received healing, others the strength to carry their illness. God listens to the cry of those who suffer.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Winefride, heal the sick who are dear to me, and give them peace.

Today: Visit or call a sick person.

Day 8: Faithfulness in times of trial

After the Reformation, Catholics kept coming to Holywell, despite the laws against them, often with priests working in secret. Their faithfulness kept the pilgrimage alive. Perseverance in faith is also a grace to ask for.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen persecuted Christians and keep me faithful when believing becomes difficult.

Today: Pray for Christians who cannot practice their faith freely.

Day 9: Abbess in peace

Winefride ended her life as abbess at Gwytherin, among the hills, in prayer and service. After the drama of her youth came long years of hidden fidelity. Holiness also grows in the quiet of daily life.

Prayer: Lord, grant me peace of heart and faithfulness in the small things of each day.

Today: Give thanks for the graces of this novena and offer one humble service to someone close to you.

Closing prayer

Saint Winefride, virgin of the well, you chose Christ above all and God gave you back your life. Intercede for me and for the intention I have carried during these nine days. Obtain healing for the sick, comfort for victims of violence and purity of heart for the young. Watch over Wales and over all the pilgrims of Holywell. May the living water of grace flow in my life, until the day I see the Lord, the source of all life. Amen.

To continue praying with her, see the prayer to Saint Winefride.

Credits and sources

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