

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Winwaloe of Landévennec

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: March 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Winwaloe of Landévennec

Breton monk of the 5th and 6th centuries, founder and first abbot of Landévennec according to tradition.

Feast day	March 3
Born	second half of the 5th century, Brittany (Ploufragan or Plouguin, according to different traditions)
Died	March 3, c. 532, Landévennec (Finistère)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century

In this booklet

Life

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Landévennec Abbey

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Winwaloe of Landévennec

Saint Winwaloe (Gwenole in Breton, Guénolé in French) was a Breton monk of the late 5th and early 6th centuries. A disciple of Saint Budoc, he is honored as the founder and first abbot of the abbey of Landévennec, at the head of the Bay of Brest, where he is said to have died around 532. His life is known only through texts written more than three centuries after him, mixed with legend. His feast day is March 3.

Who was Saint Winwaloe?

Winwaloe belongs to the generation of monks who came from Britain, or were born to families who had emigrated to Armorica, and who gave Brittany its first parishes and monasteries. What we know of him comes mainly from two texts written at Landévennec in the 9th century: a hymn of twenty-four stanzas composed by the monk Clement, and a great Life in three books written by Abbot Gurdisten toward the end of the same century. These accounts follow the rules of medieval hagiography: they aim to edify the monks and honor the founder of their abbey. They cannot be read as a biography in the modern sense. Still, they keep the memory of a real monk, whose cult is attested very early.



Saint Winwaloe, shown as an abbot with the goose, his attribute.

Key dates

- **Second half of the 5th century**: Born in Brittany, into the family of Fragan and Gwenn, who probably came from Wales; tradition hesitates between Ploufragan and Plouguin.
- **c. 470**: According to his Life, he is entrusted as a child to Saint Budoc, in his hermitage on the island of Lavret, in the Bréhat archipelago.
- **c. 485**: He wants to go to Ireland; Saint Patrick appears to him in a dream and asks him to stay in Armorica to found a monastery.
- **Shortly after**: With eleven companions, he settles on the island of Tibidy, in the river of Le Faou.
- **c. 490**: According to tradition, he founds the abbey of Landévennec, on the bank of the Aulne.
- **March 3, c. 532**: Dies at Landévennec, among his monks.

- **9th century**: The monk Clement, then Abbot Gurdisten, write his Life at Landévennec.
- **10th century**: Fleeing the Normans, the monks carry his relics to Montreuil-sur-Mer, where they remain until 1793.

The disciple of Saint Budoc

According to the Life, Fragan took his sons by boat to the island of Lavret to entrust them to Budoc, a master of monastic life. A storm broke out during the crossing and the young Winwaloe calmed it with the Sign of the Cross: this is one of the reasons sailors have called on him. With Budoc, he learned prayer, the study of Scripture and asceticism. The account already credits him with miracles as a child, such as the healing of his little sister Clervia, whose eye had been wounded by a goose: this is the origin of the goose that accompanies him in statues.

The founder of Landévennec

Around 485, Winwaloe dreamed of going to Ireland to venerate Saint Patrick, who had just died. The Life says that Patrick appeared to him and asked him to stay in Armorica. With eleven companions, he settled on the islet of Tibidy, at the head of the Bay of Brest. The place was harsh, exposed to the wind. After three years, according to the legend, the sea opened before him and his monks so that they could reach the other shore, at Landévennec, sheltered in the hollow of a bend of the Aulne.

The monastery became a great religious center of western Brittany. The monks first followed Celtic customs, before adopting the Rule of Saint Benedict on the order of Emperor Louis the Pious, in 818. The Life describes Winwaloe as an austere abbot who healed, consoled and converted. It also tells that an angel

came to announce that heaven awaited him: the day before his death, he named his successor, celebrated Mass and died among his brothers at prayer, like Saint Benedict.

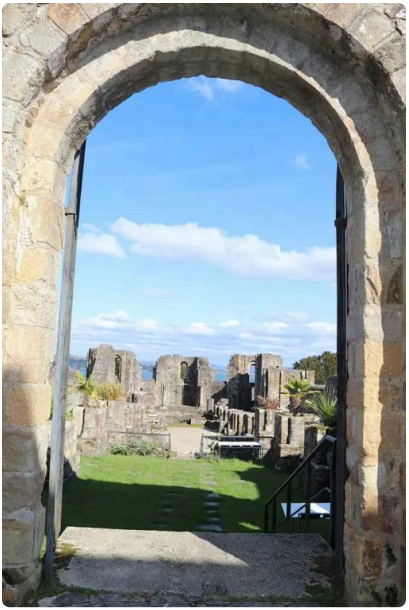
Winwaloe in the legend of the city of Ys

Popular Breton tradition made Winwaloe a character in the legend of the city of Ys. In it he reproaches King Gradlon for the luxury and disorder of his court, and urges him, when the city is submerged, to abandon his daughter Dahut. This story, which is not historical, shows the place the saint held in the Breton imagination: that of a man of God who calls to conversion.

Devotion and art

Saint Winwaloe is listed in the Roman Martyrology on March 3, the day of his death. The translation of his relics was also celebrated on April 28. In the 10th century, the monks of Landévennec, fleeing the Norman invasions, carried away his body; they stopped at Montreuil-sur-Mer, where the abbey of Saint-Walloy was born. His relics stayed there until 1793, when they were burned during the Revolution. This exile explains why his cult is widespread far beyond Brittany: in British Cornwall, the village of Gunwalloe bears his name.

In Brittany, many parishes and chapels are dedicated to him, often former priories of Landévennec: Locunolé, Locquénolé, Saint-Guénolé in Penmarc'h, Concarneau, the island of Sein, Batz-sur-Mer and many others. He is shown as a monk or abbot, with a crozier and the book of the rule, and often with a goose at his feet. Pardons (traditional Breton religious festivals) are held every year in several of these chapels.



The ruins of the old abbey of Landévennec.

What can we learn from Saint Winwaloe?

Behind the legends, the figure of Winwaloe is that of a founder. He gave up his personal plans, the journey to Ireland, to take root where God was calling him. He looked for a place of silence where men could pray together. Fifteen centuries later, monks still pray at Landévennec. You can pray to him for monastic life, for Brittany, for sailors, and for those who must give up leaving in order to serve where they are.

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

Where to pray to Saint Winwaloe

- **Landévennec** (Finistère): the ruins of the old abbey and the present Benedictine monastery, where monks still pray.

- **Locquénolé** (Finistère) and **Locunolé** (Finistère): parishes that bear his name.
- **Saint-Guénolé**, in Penmarc'h (Finistère): the chapel and the harbor dedicated to him.
- **Montreuil-sur-Mer** (Pas-de-Calais): the town where his relics were venerated from the 10th century until the Revolution.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Winwaloe for Brittany and for Those Who Seek God

Saint Winwaloe, a disciple of Saint Budoc, gave up going to Ireland in order to found a place of prayer in Brittany: the abbey of Landévennec, where he is said to have died around 532. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life and Breton tradition; it is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him the life of prayer, sailors and families, and all who are looking for their place.

Prayer to Saint Winwaloe

Saint Winwaloe,
child entrusted to Saint Budoc,
on an island in the sea you learned
to listen to God in silence.
Teach me to make silence within me
so that I may hear his word.

You dreamed of going far away,
and you agreed to stay
to found a place of prayer in the land of Brittany.
Help me to take root where God calls me,
and to serve there faithfully.

You whom sailors called on in the storm,
watch over those who work at sea,
and over their wives and children who wait for them.
Bless the monks who still pray at Landévennec,
and keep our families in the faith.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Winwaloe

- On his feast day, March 3, or at a pardon in one of his chapels.
- For sailors, fishermen and their families, especially in rough weather.
- When you must give up a project to stay faithful to your commitments.
- For monks, nuns and vocations to religious life.
- When you are about to found or begin a new work.

A prayer for the sea

You can say this while thinking of those at sea:

> *Lord, you who command the winds and the sea,*
> *keep those who sail and bring them back to harbor.*
> *Saint Winwaloe, pray for them. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Winwaloe from February 23 to March 3, and read the life of Saint Winwaloe.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Winwaloe of Landévennec

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Winwaloe, a Breton monk and, according to tradition, the founder of the abbey of Landévennec. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, March 3, begin on February 23 (February 24 in leap years). 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 Winwaloe, pray for us." The small act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come from the Life written in the 9th century, which mixes history and legend.

Day 1: A family from across the sea

According to tradition, Winwaloe's parents, Fragan and Gwenn, had crossed the sea to settle in Armorica. Winwaloe was born into a family of exiles who passed on the faith to their children.

Prayer: Lord, bless families who have had to leave their country. Make our homes places where faith is handed on.

Today: Pray for a migrant family, or help a family that has recently arrived.

Day 2: Entrusted to a master

As a child, Winwaloe was entrusted to Saint Budoc, on the island of Lavret. There he learned prayer, Scripture and life in community. No one becomes a disciple without a teacher.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who taught me to pray. Give our children good teachers in the faith.

Today: Thank, with a word or a prayer, someone who helped form you.

Day 3: The calmed storm

The Life tells that on the way to the island, a storm surprised the boat, and Winwaloe calmed it with the Sign of the Cross. Breton sailors long called on him.

Prayer: Jesus, you who calmed the storm, calm the storms of my life and protect those at sea.

Today: Make the Sign of the Cross attentively at the start of each activity of your day.

Day 4: Giving up Ireland

Winwaloe wanted to go to Ireland in the footsteps of Saint Patrick. According to the Life, Patrick appeared to him to ask him to stay in Armorica. He obeyed.

Prayer: Lord, when my plans are not yours, help me to obey with trust.

Today: Willingly accept a change of plans.

Day 5: Twelve on an island

With eleven companions, Winwaloe settled on the islet of Tibidy. Twelve men, like the apostles, for a life of common prayer in a poor place beaten by the wind.

Prayer: Lord, bless communities of monks and nuns. Make our parishes fraternal communities.

Today: Pray for a religious community you know.

Day 6: A passage through the sea

Legend says that after three years, the sea opened to let Winwaloe and his monks reach Landévennec. This story recalls the crossing of the Red Sea: God opens a path where there is none.

Prayer: Lord, open a way through what seems to have no way out, and give me the courage to move forward.

Today: Entrust a blocked situation to God, and take one small concrete step.

Day 7: Building a house of prayer

At Landévennec, Winwaloe founded a monastery that became a great center of faith for Brittany. Monks still pray there today.

Prayer: Lord, make my life a house of prayer, and bless all who build places where you are sought.

Today: Choose a prayer corner at home and pray there for a few minutes.

Day 8: Calling to conversion

In the legend of the city of Ys, Winwaloe reproaches King Gradlon for the luxury of his court. He is the voice that calls us to return to God before it is too late.

Prayer: Lord, free me from what weighs me down and turns me away from you. Give me a sober heart.

Today: Give up an unnecessary purchase today and give the money to a charity.

Day 9: Dying among his brothers

According to the Life, Winwaloe learned from an angel that heaven awaited him. He named his successor, celebrated Mass and died among his monks at prayer, around 532.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to live and die in your peace. Through the intercession of Saint Winwaloe, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for the departed members of your family and, if possible, attend Mass.

Living the novena with Saint Winwaloe

Winwaloe belongs to the Christian origins of Brittany. His life, handed down in accounts full of wonders, says what matters: a man sought God in silence and community life, and left behind a place where people still pray. During these nine days, you can carry sailors and their families, monastic communities, and all who must give up a dream in order to stay faithful. If you can, visit a chapel of Saint Winwaloe or Landévennec.

Closing prayer

Saint Winwaloe,
monk of Brittany and father of Landévennec,
you sought God in the silence of the islands
and built for him a house of prayer.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me faithful where he has placed me,
and watch over those at sea.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

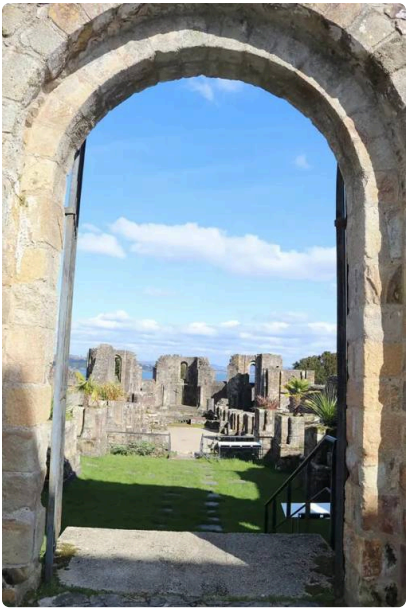
Landévennec Abbey

The abbey of Landévennec stands in Finistère, at the head of the Bay of Brest, on a peninsula sheltered by a bend of the Aulne. According to tradition, Saint Winwaloe (Guénolé) founded a monastery here toward the end of the 5th century and died here around 532. Today you can see the ruins of the old abbey and, close by, the monastery where a community of Benedictine monks still prays.

Fifteen centuries of monastic history

According to the Life written in the 9th century by Abbot Gurdisten, Winwaloe and his companions left the islet of Tibidy to settle at Landévennec. The monastery became one of the great religious and intellectual centers of Brittany. In 818, Emperor Louis the Pious had the Rule of Saint Benedict adopted there. It was at Landévennec that the Lives of Winwaloe were written and, in the 11th century, the abbey's cartulary was compiled.

In the 10th century, the Norman invasions forced the monks to flee with the relics of their founder. The abbey was later rebuilt and lasted until the Revolution, which scattered the community. In the 20th century, Benedictine monks returned to Landévennec and built a new monastery near the ruins.



The ruins of the old abbey of Landévennec.

Visiting Landévennec

The ruins of the old abbey make it possible to read the successive plans of the churches and monastic buildings. A museum on the site presents the history of the abbey and the discoveries made during the excavations. Visitors can also go to the church of the present monastery to join the monks in prayer. The village, on the water's edge, offers a fine view of the Aulne and the bay.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Winwaloe. At the site of the old abbey, entrust to him Brittany, sailors and religious communities, then say the prayer to Saint Winwaloe. Taking part in a service with the monks is the best way to join the prayer he began here. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Winwaloe

- **The island of Lavret** (Bréhat archipelago, Côtes-d'Armor): the place where, according to tradition, he was trained by Saint Budoc.
- **Tibidy** (L'Hôpital-Camfrout, Finistère): the islet where he lived with his first companions.
- **Saint-Guénolé** (Penmarc'h), **Locquénolé** and **Locunolé** (Finistère): places that bear his name.
- **Montreuil-sur-Mer** (Pas-de-Calais): the town where his relics were kept until 1793.

Practical information

Landévennec is on the Crozon peninsula, at the mouth of the Aulne, and can be reached by car. The monastery is a place of prayer: modest dress and silence are requested, especially during services. The times of services, as well as the hours and conditions for visiting the museum and the ruins, may vary by season: check with the abbey or the Crozon peninsula tourist office before you come.

CREDITS

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