BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Wulfilaic the Stylite

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 21

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IN BRIEF

Saint Wulfilaic the Stylite

6th-century deacon from Lombardy, stylite and apostle of the Ardennes, founder of a monastery on Mont Saint-Walfroy.

Feast day	October 21
Born	6th century, Lombardy (Italy)
Died	c. 595-600, Mont Saint-Walfroy, near Margut (Ardennes, France)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	Ardennes

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Wulfilaic the Stylite

Saint Wulfilaic (Walfroy in French, also spelled Vulfilaic), who came from Lombardy in the 6th century, is regarded as the apostle of the Ardennes. A fervent devotee of Saint Martin, he lived for a time on a pillar, in the manner of the stylites of the East, to convert the pagans of the area of Yvois, today's Carignan. He then founded a monastery on the hill that bears his name, Mont Saint-Walfroy, where his tomb still draws pilgrims. He died toward the end of the 6th century and his feast day is October 21.

Who was Saint Wulfilaic?

Wulfilaic is one of the few saints of Merovingian Gaul for whom we have a direct testimony. The historian Saint Gregory of Tours met him around 585 and recorded his story in his *History of the Franks*. This is a precious stroke of luck: it is not a legend written centuries later, but the memory of a conversation between two churchmen. Wulfilaic appears in it as a man of extreme asceticism, driven by a burning zeal against idolatry, yet also able to obey his bishops. He is often presented as the only known stylite in the West, a form of life practiced mainly in Syria and the East.

Key dates in the life of Wulfilaic

- **6th century**: Born in Lombardy, according to his own account reported by Gregory of Tours.
- **Youth**: He becomes a deacon and goes on pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Martin in Tours.
- **After this pilgrimage**: He settles in the area of Yvois (Carignan), on a height where a pagan goddess was worshiped.

- **Next**: He sets up a pillar and lives on it, preaching to the inhabitants; the statue of the goddess is pulled down.
- **Later**: At the bishops' order, he gives up his pillar and founds a monastery on the hill.
- **c. 585**: Gregory of Tours visits him and records his testimony.
- **c. 595-600**: Death of Wulfilaic; he is buried in the church he built.
- **July 7, 979**: His relics are moved to the collegiate church of Yvois.

The pilgrim of Saint Martin

According to what he told Gregory of Tours himself, Wulfilaic was of Lombard origin. While still young, he heard of Saint Martin and went to Tours to pray at his tomb. He kept a great devotion to the bishop of Tours all his life, and according to the account he brought back a little dust from the tomb as a relic. Having become a deacon, he looked for a place to live for God and proclaim the Gospel. He found it in the area of Yvois, on the borders of the dioceses of Reims and Trier, on a hill that today overlooks the villages of Margut, La Ferté-sur-Chiers, Bièvres and Signy-Montlibert.

The stylite of the Ardennes

On this height, the inhabitants still worshiped a great statue of a goddess, whom Gregory calls Diana and who is often linked with Arduinna, the goddess of the Ardennes. To touch hearts, Wulfilaic imitated the stylites of the East: he set up a pillar and stood on it, day and night, to pray and preach. According to Gregory, he endured winters so harsh that his toenails fell off from the frost and ice hung from his beard. His words finally convinced the people: the inhabitants themselves pulled down the statue of the goddess, and many were converted.

But the bishops of the region judged that this kind of life did not suit the climate or the customs of Gaul. They asked him to come down and live with brothers. Wulfilaic obeyed, and while he was away, the pillar was torn down. Gregory reports that he wept over it, but accepted. He then built a monastery on the hill, which became a center of religious life and a starting point for the evangelization of the region. This obedience is perhaps the most remarkable feature of his holiness.

Death, devotion and pilgrimage

Wulfilaic died toward the end of the 6th century and was buried in the church he had built on the hill; the site of his tomb can still be seen. On July 7, 979, his relics were moved to the collegiate church of Yvois. The hill took his name: it is Mont Saint-Walfroy, often called the "inspired hill" of the Ardennes. The cult, very much alive in the 19th century, gave rise to a great pilgrimage that still gathers the faithful. Saint Wulfilaic is celebrated on October 21. He is shown as a monk or deacon, sometimes standing on his pillar; a recumbent effigy keeps his memory on the hill.

What can we learn from Saint Wulfilaic?

Wulfilaic shows us a burning zeal for Christ, ready to endure cold and hunger to free a people from its idols. But above all he shows us that holiness passes through obedience: when the Church asked him to give up his pillar, he did so, even in tears. His example invites us to unite generosity and humility. You can pray to him for the Ardennes, for those who proclaim the Gospel in lands that have lost the faith, and for those who are asked to give up a project close to their hearts.

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

Where to pray to Saint Wulfilaic

- **Mont Saint-Walfroy**, near Margut and Bièvres (Ardennes): the shrine, the site of his tomb and the hermitage.
- **Carignan** (Ardennes), the former Yvois: the town to which his relics were moved in 979.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Wulfilaic for the Ardennes and for Humility

Saint Wulfilaic (Walfroy), who came from Lombardy in the 6th century, lived on a pillar to convert the pagans of the Ardennes, then obeyed his bishops by founding a monastery on the hill that bears his name. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him the Ardennes, those who proclaim the Gospel and those who must give up a project.

Prayer to Saint Wulfilaic

Saint Wulfilaic,
pilgrim of Saint Martin and apostle of the Ardennes,
you endured cold and night
to free a people from its idols.
Give me a heart on fire for Christ
and the courage to prefer him to everything.

When the Church asked you to come down from your pillar,
you obeyed, even in tears.
Teach me the humility of those who give up
their own plans to follow the will of God,
and the peace of those who trust.

Watch over the Ardennes and their people,
over parishes whose churches are too empty,
over those who proclaim the Gospel today.
Make our lives places where God is sought,
like the hill where you rest.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Wulfilaic

- On his feast day, October 21, or during a pilgrimage to Mont Saint-Walfroy.
- For the Ardennes and their parishes.
- For those who proclaim the Gospel in places where faith has faded.
- When you must give up a project close to your heart.
- To grow in obedience and humility.

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Wulfilaic from October 13 to 21, and read the life of Saint Wulfilaic.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Wulfilaic the Stylite

This novena invites you to pray for nine days with Saint Wulfilaic (Walfroy), stylite and apostle of the Ardennes in the 6th century. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. To finish it on his feast day, October 21, begin on October 13. You can also pray it before a pilgrimage to Mont Saint-Walfroy, or at any other time.

How to pray this novena

Each day, make 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 Wulfilaic, pray for us." The episodes mentioned come from the account of Gregory of Tours, who met him.

Day 1: From far away

Wulfilaic was born in Lombardy. He left his country to seek God and make him known.

Prayer: Lord, let me not be afraid to set out when you call me.

Act of the day: Pray for the foreigners who live near you.

Day 2: At the tomb of Saint Martin

As a young man, he went to Tours to pray at the tomb of Saint Martin. The saints lead us to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the saints who draw me toward you. Give me a friend among them.

Act of the day: Read the life of a saint you know little about.

Day 3: A pagan hill

He settled on a height where a goddess was worshiped. He did not run from difficult places.

Prayer: Lord, send me where you are not known, and let me be your light there.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who does not believe.

Day 4: On the pillar

Like the stylites of the East, he set up a pillar and lived on it to pray and preach. His whole life became a sermon.

Prayer: Lord, let my life speak of you more than my words.

Act of the day: Do a discreet act of charity without saying anything.

Day 5: The cold of winter

Gregory tells that the frost made him lose his toenails and that ice hung from his beard. He endured everything out of love.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to bear the difficulties of my life without complaining.

Act of the day: Offer to God a discomfort of your day.

Day 6: Idols overthrown

Convinced by his words, the inhabitants themselves pulled down the statue of the goddess. Conversion comes from the heart.

Prayer: Lord, overthrow in me the idols that take your place: money, pride, fear.

Act of the day: Identify what takes up too much room in your life and give it up for a day.

Day 7: Obeying in tears

The bishops asked him to come down from his pillar. He obeyed, and the pillar was torn down. He wept, but he accepted.

Prayer: Lord, when I must give up what I love, help me to obey with trust.

Act of the day: Willingly accept a decision that costs you something.

Day 8: A monastery on the hill

Wulfilaic built a monastery. His prayer became that of a community, and the region opened to the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, bless religious communities, and make our parishes homes full of life.

Act of the day: Pray for a religious community or for your parish.

Day 9: The inspired hill

His tomb, on the hill that bears his name, still draws pilgrims. What he began goes on.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the faith sown in the Ardennes. Through the intercession of Saint Wulfilaic, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass and, if possible, plan a pilgrimage to Mont Saint-Walfroy.

Closing prayer

Saint Wulfilaic,
stylite of the Ardennes and obedient son of the Church,
you gave everything for Christ.
Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.
Keep me fervent and humble,
and watch over the land where you rest.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

PILGRIMAGE

Shrine of Mont Saint-Walfroy

Mont Saint-Walfroy is a hill in the Ardennes overlooking the villages of Margut, La Ferté-sur-Chiers, Bièvres and Signy-Montlibert, not far from Carignan and the Belgian border. It was here that Saint Wulfilaic (Walfroy), who came from Lombardy in the 6th century, lived on a pillar, then founded a monastery and was buried. The place, nicknamed the "inspired hill" of the Ardennes, remains a shrine and a goal of pilgrimage.

From a pagan hill to a Christian hill

Before Wulfilaic arrived, the height was dedicated to a pagan goddess, whom Gregory of Tours calls Diana and who is linked with Arduinna, the goddess of the Ardennes. Wulfilaic set up a pillar there and lived on it to pray and preach, until the inhabitants themselves pulled down the statue. At the bishops' request, he then gave up his pillar and built a church and a monastery on the hill, which became a center of religious life for the whole region. He died there toward the end of the 6th century and was buried there.

His relics were moved on July 7, 979 to the collegiate church of Yvois, today's Carignan. But the place of his life and of his tomb was never forgotten. In the 19th century, the cult enjoyed a great revival and the pilgrimage to Mont Saint-Walfroy drew crowds. Even today, hundreds of the faithful gather there for the main celebrations.

What you can see

On the hill, you can see the site of the saint's tomb in the church he built, as well as a recumbent effigy that represents him. The hermitage of Saint Walfroy, near Margut, recalls his life of solitude and prayer. The shrine, surrounded by the Ardennes countryside, invites silence and walking.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Wulfilaic, and above all the account of his meeting with Gregory of Tours. On the hill, entrust to him the Ardennes, those who proclaim the Gospel and those who must give up a project, then say the prayer to Saint Wulfilaic. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Wulfilaic

- **Carignan** (Ardennes), the former Yvois: the town to which his relics were moved in 979.
- **Tours** (Indre-et-Loire): the tomb of Saint Martin, which he came to venerate in his youth.

Practical information

Mont Saint-Walfroy is in the east of the Ardennes department, between Carignan and Margut. It can be reached by car along country roads. Pilgrimage dates, times of celebrations and possibilities for accommodation may vary: check with the Saint-Walfroy shrine or the parish before you come.

Credits and sources

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