Saint Louis of France
Patron of Rathkenny Parish

A visitor to Rathkenny, a rural parish of Ireland, might be surprised at the choice of its patron saint, Louis IX, King of France, (1214-1270), and behind this choice lies another tale. But, for now, what manner of man was he?



Louis was the son of Louis VIII and Blanche of Castile (Spain), and was only 11 when he became king on his father's death in 1226. For the next 10 years he ruled under his wise mother's guardianship until her death in 1252. At 19 he married Marguerite de Provence and they had 11 children. Louis proved a devoted husband and father.

By nature and upbringing Louis was deeply religious. His mother, Blanche, played a vital role in his formation. One day his mother said to him: "I would rather see you dead at my feet than guilty of one mortal sin". It made a deep impression on the young man. Each day he took time to attend two Masses, to recite the Divine Office, and spent long hours in prayer and acts of penance. Louis was indifferent to his own personal comfort. His concern was more for the poor and less fortunate. He founded several hospitals and a home for the blind. Each day he fed the poor and ministered to the lepers.

As an administrator, Louis reformed the system of justice, requiring proofs from competent witnesses, and set up a court of royal appeal. He blended his holiness with a strong will. He had the character of a true knight with a high sense of Christian morals. He would not permit any obscenity or scandalous language in his court. He encouraged the Franciscan and Dominican orders to develop in France. In the political field he was able to end the Albigensian war in the South of France, to put down rebellion among the barons when it arose, and to conclude The Treaty of Paris, between France and England over territory, in 1259, allowing Henry III to keep Aquitaine and neighboring lands, but obliging Henry to declare himself to be the vassal of Louis. Such was Louis' reputation for justness and integrity that he was called to act as peacemaker between the Pope and the Emperor.

An able, some would say gifted, administrator and diplomat, Louis gave France forty four years of relative peace in a turbulent and fractious age. However, his great ambition, to recapture the

holy places in Palestine from the Turks, led him to the Seventh Crusade and to imprisonment and ransom in Egypt. Twenty years later, undaunted, even though in bad health, he embarked once more on the last of the crusades, this time to Tunis, and to his death of a fever, or perhaps of dysentery. As he lay dying, Louis repeated aloud the words of the psalmist: "*Lord, I will enter thine house; I will worship in thy holy temple, and will give glory to thy name.*
" (Butler's
Lives of the Saints
). His bones and heart were brought back and laid in the Abbey-Church of St Denis, in Paris; later his remains were desecrated and scattered by the Revolution.



In all his deeds, as leader of the richest and most powerful Christian power of Europe, Louis IX tried to fulfil the duty of France, which was seen as "the eldest daughter of the Church" (*la fille aînée de l'Église*
), a tradition of protector of the Church going back to the Franks and Charlemagne, who had been crowned in Rome in 800.

Louis IX is often considered the model of the ideal Christian monarch**.** The aura of holiness attaching to the memory of Louis IX ensured that many subsequent Kings of France would be called Louis. Louis was canonised in 1297 by Pope Boniface VIII. His feast day is celebrated on
August 25th
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Louis is patron saint of, and intercessor for, the Parish of Rathkenny. He challenges us by his life to invite God into
our lives
. His story demonstrates the power of God to embellish a human life, be it that of prince or commoner, priest or parishioner.

'Be always ready rather to suffer all manner of torments than to commit any mortal sin' (
St. Louis
)



'The custom of genuflecting during the Creed (at the
homo factus est
) and at the passages in the Gospels pertaining
to the Lord's death on the Cross,
owed its origin to Louis.