

Ivo Hélorý of Kermartin

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Ivo, a Breton judge known for his honesty, pragmatism and impartiality, is touted by jokers as the lone attorney who made it into heaven. But his ability to avoid the traps of his profession is a lesson to us all. What occupation doesn't have its temptations?



Ivo (1253-1303), born near Tréguier in Brittany and educated in Paris, dispensed justice with such fairness that he was lauded even by those who lost cases before him. An early proponent of pro bono work and mediated settlements, he paid the court costs of poor defendants, visited them in prison, and refused the bribes that were typical of his day.

According to legend, when a rich merchant sued a poor man who stood near his kitchen every day to enjoy the aroma of the cooking food, Ivo held a coin to the rich man's ear, tapped his finger against it and announced his verdict: "The sound pays for the smell." At the age of 38, following in the steps of Francis of Assisi, Ivo gave away most of his possessions and committed himself to a simple life of asceticism.

Ivo, known also as Ives and Yves, took in the poor, built a hospital for his village and nursed the sick. His privations eventually caught up with him – he died at the age of 50 of failing health. He is remembered as the patron saint of lawyers and of Brittany. Every year on the anniversary of Ivo's death, attorneys make a pilgrimage to Tréguier to honor him. "He was the most ideal saint," Alfred Helary, an 82-year-old pilgrim, told *The New York Times* in 1991. "He was very close to the people."



"Lawyers worship him, but we don't try to imitate him so much. You would have to be a real hero to live like him. Can you imagine a judge nowadays giving his robes to a poor man, and showing up in court in jeans?"

Attorney Jean Le Mapillan of Nantes on the annual pilgrimage to Tréguier
Quoted in *The New York Times*, June 7, 1991

"[Pentecost] leads us right to the deep root of the varied activities of the saints of all eras, right to the source of energy of the life of St. Ives. What the event of Pentecost presents to us in images: the fire, the wind, the gift of tongues, the boldness of the apostles who until now have been fearful – all [of this] is the sign and the source of everything which is going to unfold in the life of humanity, in order to show the love of God until the end of time. ... If we know how to make this link between the spirit of Pentecost and the holy life of Ives of Tréguier, we understand how much Ives is united with us. It is a manifestation of the same spirit who makes us live today, the spirit we received at our baptism, at our confirmation, in order that, in our turn, we may make his gifts bear fruit."

From the homily of Msgr. Lucien Daloz, Emeritus Archbishop of Besançon
On Ivo's feast day in 2005, which coincided with Pentecost

"He'll help you. Just open your heart to him."

Posted in a New York real estate lawyers' blog
October 31, 2006

"St. Ivo invites people of good will to build a world of peace founded on respect for the law and on the service of the truth. This lawyer, a champion of the poor, encourages [us] to exercise solidarity and fairness to guarantee the rights of the weakest whose inalienable dignity will be fully recognized."

Pope John Paul II, May 31, 2003
Addressing pilgrims to Rome from St. Brieuc and Tréguier in Brittany

Ivo was canonized in 1347. His feast day is May 19.

'A good specimen of a Breton dwelling'

Fanny Bury Pallister described Ives' one-room house – and life in 13th century Brittany – in a travelogue published in 1869:

"The house is a good specimen of a Breton dwelling; by the side of the fire, in the one room of which most of these cottages consist, fixed against the wall like the berth of a ship, stands the bedstead or 'lit clos' of old oak, shut in by carved and well-waxed sliding panels, often inscribed with the sacred monogram. The two mattresses, paillasse, and 'cossette de plume,' are piled up to such a height as barely to admit of its tenants creeping into the bed. In front is the customary chest, containing the family wardrobe, answering the double purpose of a seat and the means of ascending into the bed. ...

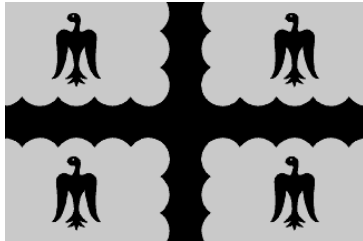
"Forms and a polished table complete the furniture; the last has frequently little wells hollowed in the top, used, instead of plates, to hold the soup. Over the table, suspended by pulleys, are two indispensable articles in a Breton dwelling – a large circular basket to cover the bread, and a kind of wooden frame or rack, round which the spoons are ranged. Forks they do not use. Festoons of sausages, with hams, bacon, candles, skins of lard, onions, horse-shoes, harness, all hang suspended from the ceiling, which consists of fagots of hazel suspended by cross-poles.

"The floor is of beaten earth. One narrow window admits the light, and there are no outhouses. The manure-heap is generally at the house-door, and the pigs and poultry seem on an equally intimate footing as they are in our Irish cabins. The Breton's cottage has often no garden, to occupy his leisure hours; and the men, after their daily work, resort to the cabaret to spend their time and their earnings. Agriculture is very backward in Brittany, but the land produces abundance of corn. It is thrashed out direct from the field, on a clay floor. Beet-root and clover grow very luxuriantly, and in some fields the pretty red clover carpets the country with its crimson flowers."



"What's important is that he remains a beacon, and by coming here, we hope to be drawn a little closer to his light."

Mireille Bergiers, a Brussels lawyer
Quoted in *The New York Times*, June 7, 1991



Banner of the Hélor family

"I have never been totally sure of myself when I pronounce a judgment. This conference and the [pilgrimage to Tréguier] have made me understand that I must change the way I look at the people who are before me and that I must first, as St. Ives did, love them, understand them and feel solidarity with them no matter what the reasons for their being before me."

A French judge, reflecting on the pilgrimage marking the 700th anniversary of Ives' death

"St. Yves remains a symbol because people have an inner need for justice. People feel attached to him because he helped the meekest, the poorest, those who were never listened to."

Tréguier's priest, Yves Le Gueut
Quoted in *The New York Times*, June 7, 1991

Questions for contemplation

1. What are the trappings or temptations of your profession or the profession you plan to enter? How will you avoid them?
2. Like many saints of his era, Ivo led a painfully ascetic life: he slept on straw, fasted regularly and wore a hair shirt. That type of extremism is now generally seen as not in keeping with the joyous message of Christ – and not respectful of God's creation, which includes our bodies. Do less punishing privations have merit, though, particularly during Lent? Where do you draw the line?