

A STUDY OF "THE SAINTS THROUGH THE CENTURIES"

By Richard Thornton

SAINT WOLFGANG (924-994) – TENTH CENTURY

Born in Swabia, Germany, Saint Wolfgang studied at Reichenan under the Benedictines and at Wurzburg before serving as a teacher in the cathedral school of Trier. He soon entered the Benedictines in 964 and was appointed head of the monastery school. He received his ordination in 971. He then set out with a group of monks to preach among the Magyars of Hungary but the following year (972) was named Bishop of Regensburg.

As Bishop, he distinguished himself brilliantly for his reforming enthusiasm. He brought the clergy of his diocese into his reforms, restored monasteries, promoted education, preached enthusiastically, and was known for his charity and aid to the poor, receiving the title "Eleemosynarius Major (Grand Almoner), meaning "the Great Dispenser of Alms".

Saint Wolfgang wore the habit of a Monk and lived a very simple lifestyle. The draw to the monastic life never left him, including the desire for a life of solitude. At one point he left his diocese so that he could devote himself to prayer, but his responsibilities as Bishop called him back.

Soon after Saint Wolfgang's death many churches chose him as their patron saint and various towns were named after him. After his death there were numerous reportings of healing in Regensburg.

In Christian art Saint Wolfgang has been especially honored by the great medieval painter, Michael Pacher (1430-1498) who created an imperishable memorial to him, "The High Altar Of Saint Wolfgang". In the panel pictures which are exhibited in Munich are depicted in an artistic manner the chief events in the Saint's life.

A modern picture by Schavind is in the Schoch Gallery at Munich. The painting represents the legend of Saint Wolfgang forcing the devil to help him build a church.

In other paintings he is generally depicted in Bishop attire, and axe in the right hand and the crosier(Bishops staff) in the left, or as a hermit in the wilderness being discovered by a hunter.

The axe refers to an incident in the life of the Saint. After having selected a solitary spot in the wilderness, he prayed and then threw his axe into the thicket. The spot on which the axe fell he regarded as the place where God intended he should build his cell. This axe is still shown in the little market town of St. Wolfgang which sprang up on the spot of the old cell.

I think Saint Wolfgang could be pictured as a very humble man with “rolled-up shirt sleeves”. He even tried retiring to solitary prayer, but taking his responsibilities seriously led him back into service in his diocese. Doing what had to be done was his path to holiness – and ours.