

## A Souvenir of Your Visit to the Tomb of Saint Boniface

Dear Visitors and Pilgrims,

You are here at the burial place of St. Boniface, apostle to the Germans. Following his martyr's death on June 5, 754 in Dokkum, North Friesland, he was buried on July 5, 754 in Fulda. A non-Catholic historian said of him: "Everything that has since developed politically, theologically, and intellectually in Germany stands on the foundation that Boniface laid. Boniface' grave in Fulda must be holier to us than the graves of the patriarchs were to the Israelites, for he is the intellectual father of our people. Boniface has given to us and to our grandchildren more than any of our great emperors and kings could." (Heinrich Leo, Readings on German History I, pp. 487-8).

Who was he?

Born about 675 in Crediton, near the south coast of England, and baptized Winfried, he entered the Benedictine monastery at Nursling, becoming a monk and priest. A strong missionary zeal never left this young man. Finally in 716 the Abbot gave him permission to work in the missions of Friesland, where the missionary Willibrord had been working for some years. But the turmoil of war and the ill will of the heathen Friesians left Wilfried unsuccessful. After some months he returned to his monastery for two more years of preparation. In 718 he departed again, never to return. He traveled to Rome to ask the Holy Father for his commission and blessing. On May 14, 719 Winfried knelt at the feet of Pope Gregory II. This was the day the Roman church celebrated the feast of the holy martyr Boniface. Gregory II renamed the Benedictine monk Winfried accordingly; from this day on this missionary of the Pope bore the name Boniface.

He crossed the Alps and began his missionary work in Thuringia but returned to Friesland to see Willibrord; in 721 he went to Hesse, and was called back to Rome in

722 to be consecrated a regional bishop on November 30. In 723 he felled the oak of Donar and in 725 returned to Thuringia. He stayed in continuous touch by mail with Rome and England. Gregory III made him an archbishop. In 738 on his third trip to Rome he was named papal legate to France, founded dioceses (Büraberg, Erfurt, and Würzburg), organized the dioceses in Bavaria and provided good bishops, taking upon himself the see of Mainz, and held many church councils with the rulers of France.

Through his student Sturmus he founded the monastery of Fulda in 744; it was his favorite, he went back there to rest (Bischofsberg, now Frauenberg) and designated Fulda for his burial.

When he was nearly eighty he was dawn back once again to Friesland, to the place of his first apostolic work, where on Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 754 he was killed along with fifty-two companions. Both Utrecht and Mainz wanted to enshrine the saint's body, but the Martyr's last wish, to be buried at Fulda, was fulfilled on July 9, 754.

The quiet tomb in the crypt of the Fulda cathedral, which was built in the years 1704-1712, largely on the foundations of the Carolingian basilica of Bishop Ratgar, preserves the saint's remains. This is the destination of many pilgrims, and for a hundred and twenty-five years (since 1867) the German bishops have met here for consultation. Here is the true center, the heart of Catholic Germany.

Pope John Paul II said, when he visited Fulda on Nov. 17-18, 1980: "Let me first of all honor him, to whose grave we have come as pilgrims, here to Fulda, the sanctuary of your country."

The Church sails the sea of this world like a great ship tossed to and fro by the waves, the difficulties of this life. We must never leave our ship but guide it on. (from a letter of St. Boniface)

Publisher: The Cathedral Chapter in Fulda

(Translated for St. Boniface in Sublimity by Henry Strobel, June 2004)