Winfrid

Saint Name: Saint Boniface
Dates: 675 AD – June 5, 754
Location: England
Feast Day: June 5

Boniface, whose baptismal name was Winfrid, was born in the year 675 AD in Devonshire, England to a respected and prosperous family. At age thirteen, against his father's wishes, Winfrid devoted himself to the monastic life. He was educated in the Benedictine monastery of Exeter where he later became a monk and minster of Nhutscelle (aka Nursling- a village in Hampshire, England). By age thirty, Winfrid was ordained to the priesthood. Around 716, when upon the death of the Abbot of Nursling Winfrid was to assume the position, he respectfully declined, and instead he went to Friesland (Germany) to spread the Lord's message. He traveled to Utrecht, where Willibrord (a Northumbrian missionary later awarded sainthood) had been working since the 690's. He spent a year with Willibrord, but because of war against Christians, Winfrid was forced to return to England. His heartfelt wish was to return to Germany, so he traveled to Rome and presented himself to Pope Gregory II. He pleaded to the Pope to allow him to return to Friesland to preach the faith. Pope Gregory II granted Winfrid his wish, renamed him Boniface (after the fourth-century martyr Boniface of Tarsus), and appointed him the missionary bishop for Germania. He thus became a bishop without a diocese for an area that lacked any church organization, as Paganism was the way of Germanian life. What Christianity Boniface did find had either lapsed into paganism or was mixed with both. People were attracted to Christianity but hesitant to give up their old religion and superstitions. Knowing that the people needed a reason to let go of their Pagan ways, Boniface called the tribes together to watch him fell the reverent giant oak of Geismar, a sacred tree dedicated to Thor. The tribes people grew fearful with each stroke of the axe, and with the final swing the tree split in four pieces and fell to the ground in the shape of the cross. There stood Boniface unharmed by the pagan gods, strong in the power of the One God. His point was made, and the tribes of Germany began to question their old faith. The Pope instructed him to reform the Germanic Church. To restore the Germanic Church and to convert the pagans, Boniface was guided by two principles: the first, to restore the obedience of the clergy and the second, to establish monasteries. Several Anglo-Saxon monks and nuns followed him as he introduced the Benedictine nuns to the active apostolate of education. Through his efforts to reorganize the church, he invertly helped shape the Latin Church in Europe, and many of the dioceses he proposed remain today. Tragically, his mission ended eight years later in Friesland, where he had gone to preach. Boniface was 73 when he and 53 companions were massacred while he was preparing converts for confirmation.

Veneration of Saint Boniface began immediately after his death. His feast day is celebrated June 5