

## **Saint Gall Feast day October 16<sup>th</sup>**

St Gall, an Irish monk of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries is better known in Continental Europe than in his own homeland. The city of St Gallen in Switzerland evolved from St Gall's hermitage. His humble hermitage developed into a monastery which in turn gave rise to the city and canton of St Gallen. The Abbey of St Gall in the city is a major tourist attraction and is in fact a Unesco World Heritage site. The present day Cathedral is a magnificent building and the library houses rare manuscripts from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

St Gall was among the early Irish pilgrim monks who went to Continental Europe. He accompanied St Columbanus who departed from the monastery of Bangor shortly before the year 600. This was the beginning of an extraordinary exodus of monks from Ireland to France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Italy with some monks going further afield to Eastern Europe. This extraordinary phenomenon was more motivated by asceticism than missionary zeal. These monks were 'peregrini' i.e. pilgrims for Christ. Their serious following of Christ was attractive to the locals in whose territories the monks arrived and this resulted in monasteries being set up all over Europe.

St Gall was a faithful companion to St Columbanus. Having set out from Ireland together with ten other companions they negotiated journeys by sea and land together and set up Christian communities in many places in France and Switzerland. Columbanus felt drawn to cross the Alps into Italy but Gall wanted to stay in Switzerland. It was a time of tension between the two men and they decided to go their separate ways. Gall who was not strong at the time recovered his health and through his holiness, learning and humility exercised great influence in a large area around Lake Constance. Reconciliation only happened between the two men as Columbanus was dying. He sent his staff to Gall as an expression of this reconciliation.

St Gall was involved in a movement that brought piety and learning back to Europe in the 'dark' Middle Ages. We pray to him now in our times when Europeans are seeking to be united and to work together peacefully.

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