

4. November 2025

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

Blessed Henry of Zwiefalten: An unknown saint

Today, November 4, we commemorate St. Charles Borromeo, a great bishop and church reformer. The liturgy rightly praises God for this servant's witness. However, I think it is important to make known certain saints who have fallen into oblivion, so that we may rejoice in them and give thanks to the Lord for their lives. We can also hope that they rejoice when we remember them.

One of these somewhat forgotten saints is Blessed Henry of Zwiefalten, whose tomb is unknown and in whose honor no altar or chapel has been erected—or if there are any, they are very obscure. Yet he is engraved in God's memory, and ancient chronicles tell his moving story.

Blessed Henry was born in Zwiefalten Castle around the year 1200. He was gifted with many natural talents, and his parents were wealthy. He grew up pampered by everyone. However, this did not serve him well, and he began to enjoy a “sweet life” full of parties, dancing, and wine—much to the concern of his parents, who saw their son beginning to squander his abundant gifts. But this unworthy life captivated him! He neglected his studies and devoted himself to increasingly extravagant pleasures, turning the castle into a meeting place for all kinds of activities that undoubtedly displeased the Lord.

Then came the day when God intervened and put a stop to Henry's life of dissipation. One day, in the midst of his wild dancing, Henry had a vision of Jesus drenched in sweat and blood, with a cross on His shoulders. Exhausted, the Lord lifted His holy face and looked at Henry with seriousness and sadness.

That was the experience that changed Henry's life. His eyes filled with tears as he exclaimed with determination, *“I am going to the monastery.”* Despite the misunderstandings and ridicule he faced, he threw on his cloak and set out on the long journey to the monastery in Ochsenhausen. Henry had seen the Lord and knew he had to follow Him. The Lord had called him with His gaze, and of that he had no doubt. When he arrived at the monastery, however, the prior rejected him. Henry's bad reputation preceded him, and the prior doubted his monastic vocation. But Henry

begged with such sincerity and humility to be placed in the lowest position—just please not to be sent back to the world he had just renounced.

Finally, the prior relented—a decision he would never regret. Henry was so fervent in his life of penance—hard on himself, yet kind to his brothers—that he was able to overcome all the trials he faced. It was said that *“with his loving virtue he drew everyone to imitate his example of kindness and piety, so that in that monastery it was rarely necessary to exhort people to do good with words.”*

The monks did not fail to notice that there was a saint among them. The chronicle recounts the following: *“God soon showed these monks of good will that they should venerate as a saint the one they loved as a father. Miraculous answers to prayers for the monastery’s and its surroundings’ various needs repeatedly aroused the amazement and reverence of monks and laypeople alike.”*

After thirteen years in the monastery, Henry was elected prior. One of the most remarkable miracles occurred when a fire broke out in the church. Henry prostrated himself at the foot of the altar, and the fire was immediately extinguished. Many other miracles occurred, and more and more people came to seek help or support the monastery.

Henry had a special relationship with the blessed souls in purgatory, for whom he prayed. Through prayer and mutual support, it is said that he maintained a constant connection with the blessed souls of those who had preceded him into eternity, and those around him often experienced the mysterious effect of his sincere compassion for them.

In short, after the Lord looked upon him, Henry led a holy life. His magnanimous response lasted until the end. He died on November 4, 1262, in the odor of sanctity.

Through faith, we know that the Lord directs that same gaze toward those who live without true meaning in their lives and are trapped in sin. Not everyone receives the grace to see Jesus as our blessed one did. However, God has mapped out a specific path for each person. Undoubtedly, people prayed for Henry’s conversion, and one day, their prayers were answered. We can always hold on to this hope, no matter how far from God people may be, or how impossible it may seem for them to convert.

Thus, Henry of Zwiefalten's testimony shines brightly as his story is uncovered. I would like to conclude this meditation with words written by his contemporaries about him:

*He made Zwiefaltach famous
Through a good life in Christ,
Which he devoted to his brothers:
"Here I lived as a monk and prior,
I extinguished the burning temple,
The blind, the lame, those tormented by demons,
The shadows in the flames
I led to salvation."*

Blessed Henry, intercede so that many people may see the face of Christ and be converted to Him!

Meditation on the reading of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/using-gods-gifts-in-truth-and-love/>

Blessed Henry, pray that many people may see the face of the Lord in their own way and turn to Him!