

16. November 2025

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

Saint Otmar, abbot: slandered and exiled

Today we commemorate a saint closely linked to the Lake Constance region, where the motherhouse of the Agnus Dei Community is located.

Otmar was born around 690, likely into a noble Alemannic family. Thanks to his brother, he was welcomed as a child into the court of Count Victor in Chur (Switzerland), where he received a good education and stood out not only for his talent and diligence, but above all for his devotion and piety.

He was ordained a priest and, for a time, served in the church of St. Florin. Soon after, however, Tribune Waltram placed him in charge of the hermitage of St. Gall, where the monastery of St. Gall now stands. The hermitage of this Irish missionary, who had brought the faith to that region, was on the verge of falling into ruin barely a century after its construction. The small Christian community that gathered around the tomb of St. Gall was close to extinction. Otmar founded a monastic community there, replacing the saint's wooden cell with a stone church.

As abbot, Otmar practiced fasting, meditation, night vigils, and total self-denial with iron perseverance, serving as a model and beacon for his brothers. His tireless work bordered on the miraculous. He rebuilt destroyed buildings, directed workers, managed the economy, gathered scattered monks, and increased their number by welcoming young Alemanni and Swiss into the monastic community. He also introduced the Rule of St. Benedict, taught both science and spiritual life, maintained impeccable order, cared for the poor and sick, and secured many benefactors. Within a few years, the monastery of St. Gall had achieved such splendor and renown that a newly built monastery in Bavaria asked Otmar to send monks.

Otmar himself led an exemplary religious life. Near the monastery, he built a large hospice for the poor and a hospital for the most needy—the lepers, whom he cared for personally at night. He washed their heads and feet, cleaned their festering sores, and gave them food to strengthen them. During the day, he was the lifeblood of the monastery, directing all its activities. He also founded a boarding school for young

people that, for centuries, set the standard throughout Germany in art, science, culture, and customs.

Although the monastery prospered and grew wealthy thanks to various donations, Otmar maintained his simple way of life and was not dazzled by external splendor. However, the increase in the monastery's properties aroused the greed of Frankish officials. At that time, the Alemannic people were under Frankish rule. Two of their counts usurped several properties belonging to the monastery.

To ensure the monastery's survival, Otmar appealed to King Pepin, who ordered the counts to return the stolen goods. The counts, however, ignored the royal order and kept the spoils.

In his biography of St. Otmar, the monk Walafrido writes that when the man of God sought to return to the king, the counts secretly sent armed men to capture him and bring him back by force. They also persuaded Lambert, a man considered a monk because he had taken vows but did not lead a pious life, to accuse the man of God of lust, in order to cast doubt on his holiness and dismiss him when the opportunity arose.

An assembly was convened, and the venerable old man—respected for his pure customs, mature character, and advanced age—was seated in the center next to Lambert, the servant of falsehood, who presented himself as his accuser. When given the floor, this confessor of lies, who had forgotten the truth, claimed to know a woman who had been raped by the man of God. Otmar did not respond to this accusation. When pressed for a response, he said only: *"I confess that I have sinned excessively in many things, but as for the accusation of this crime, I call upon God, who sees my heart, as my witness."* Having said this, he remained silent, knowing full well that the judges had already decided to condemn him. And so it came to pass.

His biographer continues: *"After concluding the assembly, which had begun unjustly and ended even more unjustly, the man of God, Otmar, was locked up in a dungeon in Bodman. No one was allowed to enter or speak to him, and he spent several days without food."*

It is here that the story of St. Otmar begins to relate directly to our community. Our monastery is located on a hill in Bodman and is owned by the Count of Bodman. Formerly, it was a castle belonging to the ducal family. Some speculate that, if Otmar

were imprisoned in the royal palace of Bodman, he could have been held in one of the old castle's dungeons, which is now our monastery. If so, his prison would have been the very grotto where we have built a memorial to honor children deprived of the right to live: Rachel's Grotto (<https://grutaraquel.harpadei.com/en/>).

In any case, it is moving that a holy abbot, through whom God worked many miracles, was unjustly imprisoned in the lands of Bodman and may have been held in the very place where our monastery now stands.

Following his captivity in Bodman, St. Otmar was exiled to an island, where he died on November 16, 759, due to the mistreatment he endured. A decade later, his intact body was transferred to the monastery of St. Gall, and a century later, in 864, Otmar was canonized. Since then, he has been venerated as the patron saint of the slandered and persecuted, and of pregnant women, and imitated as a model in the care of the sick.

Saint Otmar, pray for all who suffer persecution and slander for the sake of the Lord!

Meditation on the Gospel of the Day: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-end-of-time/>