

Saint Kilian also spelled **Killian** (or alternatively Irish: *Cillian*)

Irish Franconian Apostle **Born** - 640 AD **Died** - 8 July 689

Venerated in the Roman Catholic & Eastern Orthodox Churches

Feast Day - July 8th

Attributes – Usually depicted wearing a bishop's mitre and wielding a sword

Patron St of - sufferers of rheumatism!



Statue of Saint Kilian (with the Fortress at Marienberg in the background)

Saint Kilian, also spelled **Killian** (or alternatively Irish: *Cillian*), was an Irish missionary bishop and the **Apostle of Franconia** (nowadays the northern part of Bavaria), where he began his labours towards the end of the 7th century. His feast day is July 8.

Background, History & Story

There are several biographies of him. The oldest texts which refer to him are an 8th century necrology at Würzburg and the notice by Hrabanus Maurus in his martyrology. The name has several variations in spelling (*e.g. Chillian, Killian, Cilian, Kilian*). In Ireland, the preferred spelling is Cillian; the name appears thus in the Irish liturgical calendar.

Originally in born in Ireland in the 7th century, St Kilian had a major role in the growth of Würzburg into a city, as his rediscovered remains became a point of pilgrimage to the settlement. St Kilian is the patron saint of Würzburg and the Würzburg Cathedral is dedicated to him. St Kilian settled in this part of Franconia in the middle of the 7th century and started preaching his message of Christianity.

He managed to convert the local ruler, Count Gosbert, but mixed himself too far into marital (and political) matters. In the Franconian area it was customary for a widow to be remarried to the brother of her dead husband, so that she could be cared for and this is what Gosbert and his sister-in-law had done in the past. However, this apparently didn't agree with Christian teachings of the time and St Kilian told Gosbert that he had to separate from his former sister-in-law. The irate Countess Gailana waited until her husband was off on a military campaign and ordered the assassination of the troublesome missionaries, who were stabbed while praying and whose bodies were then buried in the count's stables.

However, at least according to official Catholic records, the Countess went mad and died; the murderer committed suicide; and Gosbert was also later killed. Following that the local population may have decided that it was a wise move to convert from their old beliefs. Around 70 years later the bones were rediscovered. Supposedly, horses would paw at the ground in the stables in a particular place and, when the area was excavated, three skeletons were discovered.

After the miraculous cure from blindness of a local philosopher who visited the grave, the location was declared holy, the skeletons were declared to be those of the martyrs and the three monks were raised to sainthood. Perhaps not coincidentally the location also became a place of pilgrimage (*a good source of income in those days*) and the site of the first Würzburg Cathedral (*which was a wooden structure*) and a later more imposing stone building (*although it is not sure these days where the original cathedral was exactly situated*). The current cathedral is the third cathedral and even this also had to be rebuilt after the bombing damage from the Second World War.



Relics of Kilian, Colman and Totnan

The Feast Day of St Kilian is on July 8 and the bones (*which are kept in a crypt in the Neumünster*) are paraded through the streets of the city. According to the local farmers' almanac St Kilian's Day is also the start of the harvest time - "Kilian, the holy man, marks the first days of cutting" (*it rhymes in German!*).

The **Kiliani-Volksfest** is one of the biggest festivals in Franconia, with rides, stands, processions and beer tents and is held over a fortnight around St Kilian's Day!



Patronage

St. Kilian is one of the patron saints for sufferers of rheumatism. He is the patron saint of the parish of Tuosist, near Kenmare in County Kerry, where he is believed to have resided before travelling to Germany. A church and holy well are named after him and his feast day, July 8, is traditionally celebrated with a *pattern* when crowds visit the well for prayers, followed by evening social events. He is also the patron saint of Paderborn, Germany.

Iconography - Kilian is usually portrayed, as in his statue at Würzburg, bearing a bishop's mitre and wielding a sword!



This special Joint Irish/German stamp was issued on June 15th 1989 and features the illustration of the three Irish martyrs Cillian (Killian), Colman and Totnan, taken from the "Passionate aus Hirsau".. It was designed by Paul Effert from Germany.