

Dead for 1600 years but still relevant today:

Paderborn's Patron Saint Liborius

June 9, 1997 marks the 1600th anniversary of the death of Saint Liborius, patron saint of the city and the archbishopric Paderborn.

In the fourth century, Liborius, whose ancestry is unclear, lived in the former Roman province of Gaul during. He was a contemporary and friend of Saint Martin of Tours, one of the best-known saints of the Catholic Church. In 348, Liborius succeeded Bishop Pavacius in Le Mans in west-France. After a long and fulfilled life, Liborius died presumably on June 9, 397. As recognition for his life's work, Liborius was sainted.

In 836, Badurad, the second Bishop of Paderborn who was in charge of doing missionary work among the Saxons, received the bones of Saint Liborius from Le Mans. Badurad hoped that the bones' ability to work wonders would be more convincing for people than sermons. The legation, led by a peacock flying ahead of them, arrived in Paderborn on July 23, 836. Since then, the annual 9-days-long Libori festival is celebrated, one of the biggest festivals in North-Rhine Westphalia.

The Libori festival expresses the "Union of eternal Brotherhood" which was formed by the churches of Paderborn and Le Mans on the transfer of the bones. This bond is one of the oldest town twinnings of the world.

The bones of Saint Liborius are still being kept in the cathedral of Paderborn. In 1622, during the Thirty Years' War, lansquenets plundered the Cathedral und stole the valuable reliquary casket containing the Saint's remains as well as several other art treasures. Five years later, on October 25, 1627, the bones were returned to Paderborn due to fortunate circumstances. Since then, each year a second festive day in the name of Liborius, called "Little Libori", is being celebrated on the October 25.

In the Paderborn Cathedral and in the churches in the city's surroundings, numerous images of the Saint can be found. The eldest depiction, which was found on a portable altar, dates back to 1100.

The depiction of saints had to follow certain compositional rules in order to enable the illiterate population to identify the saints according to their attributes. Thus, Saint George was always depicted with a dragon, Saint Maurice as a colored man and Saint Boniface with a book pierced through by a sword. Saint Liborius, who is prayed to in order to help with gallstones and other things since the 13th century, is depicted with a book carrying three small stones. He is also often accompanied by a peacock: legend has it that a peacock guided the way to Paderborn while the remains of Liborius were brought to the city. The bird dropped down dead above the cathedral.

Further information about the annually celebrated Libori festival can be acquired at the Tourist Information Center of Paderborn (phone: +49 5251 882980, address: Marienplatz 2a, 33098 Paderborn, Germany) and on the internet www.libori.de

