

# CITYDESSERT

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## Meinrad of Einsiedeln, Hermit of The Dark Wood

Saint Meinrad (c. 797 – 21 January 861) was a hermit and a Roman Catholic saint.



Meinrad was born into the family of the Counts of Hohenzollern and was educated at the abbey school of Reichenau, an island in Lake Constance, under his kinsmen Abbots Hatto and Erlebald. There he became a monk and was ordained. After some years at Reichenau, the dependent priory of Benken, St. Gallen near Lake Zurich, he embraced an eremitical life and established his hermitage on the slopes of Etzel Pass, taking with him a wonder-working statue of the Virgin Mary which he had been given by the Abbess Hildegarde of Zurich. He was killed in 861 by the thieves Richard and Peter who wanted the

treasures which pilgrims left at the shrine. Meinrad is known as the Martyr of Hospitality...

The location was occupied by a series of others for the next eighty years. One of them, named Eberhard, previously Provost of Strasburg, erected a monastery and church there, of which he became first abbot. This monastery is Einsiedeln Abbey.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meinrad\\_of\\_Einsiedeln](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meinrad_of_Einsiedeln)



“Early in the ninth century, a saintly, quiet-loving young Benedictine monk named Meinrad, while passing through the city of Zurich on his way to become a teacher at the small monastery of Bollingen, was deeply thrilled when the Abbess-Princess Hildegarde gave him a lovely three-foot wooden statue of the Mother of God holding the Child Jesus in her arms. In the Abbey Church of the Benedictines, Our Lady of the Hermits, Die Schwarze Madonna, Madonna in the Dark Wood, Our Dear Lady of Einsiedeln (hermits), c 1466, wood. Island of Mainau, Lake Constance.

Very often during his several years at Bollingen, young Father Meinrad used to gaze out of the window of his cell with ever-increasing longing at a forest-clad mountain on the other side of the lake, for he wished more than anything else to become a hermit and to live a life of prayer, penance and meditation all

alone in those woods, like the great hermit-saints of old. Having at last obtained his superiors' permission, one day in the year 828 he took up in his arms his cherished statue of Mary and set out in a wide flat-bottomed boat to cross the lake and become a hermit in the Dark Wood on the slopes of Mount Etzel.



Soon after settling in a solitary retreat he found a nest with two young ravens, which he gladly adopted and tamed, perhaps because the Child Jesus of his statue held a small bird in one hand. Meinrad spent seven years on this mountain, and he was a happy young hermit except for one thing: more and more pilgrims were coming to visit him, attracted by his growing reputation as a saint.

Therefore he fled from his tiny cell, taking his statue and his two friends, the ravens, with him. He went still farther into the depths of the Dark Wood until one day he found, in the midst of the lofty pine trees on a small table-land surrounded by hills on three sides, a bubbling spring giving forth sparkling, fresh mountain water. Here he built himself a little log hut and a chapel, in which he reverently placed Our Lady's statue. His faithful ravens often perched on either side of a crucifix on the gable and watched the holy hermit as he worked and prayed. He was completely happy in this solitude.

But one day a woodcutter discovered Meinrad's retreat, and

soon pilgrims were again flocking to receive his blessing and advice. Once some of his Brothers in religion came to visit him, and during the night one of them saw and heard Meinrad reciting his Office with a beautiful seven-year-old boy all dressed in white, who approached the astonished monk and secretly foretold many events which later occurred.



After more than twenty years of prayer and penance, while he was saying Mass in his little chapel on the morning of January 21, 861, the Feast of the Martyr St. Agnes, Meinrad learned by a divine revelation that this was to be his last Mass. With perfect resignation to the will of God, he devoutly received Holy Communion as if it were Holy Viaticum. Then with tears of love in his eyes, the old hermit looked up at his beautiful statue of Mary and begged Our Lady to strengthen him, asking her to offer to her Son the death which he was about to suffer for His glory.



During all the years which Meinrad had spent alone in the Dark Wood, he had never been harmed by the mountain bears or wolves or other wild animals who dwelt there. Now, however, two human beasts of prey, two hardened criminals, hearing that people made pilgrimages to the hermit, were tempted by the idea that he must have precious gifts and rich treasure hidden away in his lonely hermitage. And so this cold winter night they made their way through the deep snow to his retreat in the forest.

Meinrad was just finishing his Mass as they approached, and he now heard the shrill screams of warning of his faithful ravens. With a smile of heavenly joy on his lips, he went out and welcomed the two men with loving kindness and hospitality, setting before them some bread and wine. When they roughly demanded that he show them his hidden treasure he humbly led them into the little chapel, and pointing to the plain wooden statue above the altar, he said, "I have no other treasure." Then with a last loving look at Mary, he folded his hands on his chest, bowed his head, and added calmly, "That for which you have come, do..."

In a mad rage the two robbers seized and brutally beat the saintly old hermit to death with a heavy club, while his two

ravens flew wildly about, screaming and trying in vain to help their good friend by pecking at the murderers' foreheads.



Then the criminals dragged the Saint's body to his couch of dry leaves in his hut and were about to begin their search for the supposedly hidden treasure when all of a sudden they noticed that a strange yet delicious odor pervaded the place. When they perceived that two candles standing by the hermit's bed had somehow just been lighted without human hand, the two assassins fled in terror all the way to Zurich. But like the accusing finger of God, Meinrad's two ravens persistently followed and attacked the murderers until they were arrested and had confessed the crime.

The body of the holy martyr was taken by his Brothers to the great Abbey of Reichenau near Constance, in which he had entered the Order and been ordained priest.





In the years that followed, pilgrims kept coming to the abandoned little chapel in the Dark Wood, and a few hermit-monks settled there. In the year 906, St. Benno of Strasbourg began to restore and add to the old structures.



And in 934, St. Eberhard, also from Strasbourg, arrived and set about building a large monastery and church, the latter enclosing and protecting Meinrad's holy little chapel, which was only eight and a half yards long by six yards wide. When this work was completed in the summer of 948, Eberhard, having become the first Abbot of Einsiedeln, invited St. Conrad, the Bishop of Constance, to consecrate and dedicate the Chapel of Our Lady of the Hermits."

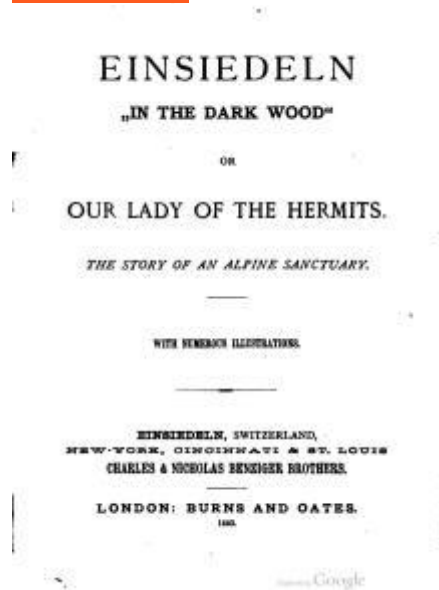
[http://www.tanbooks.com/doct/saints\\_mary.htm](http://www.tanbooks.com/doct/saints_mary.htm)



The Shrine of St Meinrad (with scenes from his life) in St. Meinrad Archabbey, Indiana (USA)

See further:

<http://www.saintmeinrad.edu/the-monastery/life-of-st-meinrad/>



A.R. [Anne R.] Bennett "Einsiedeln 'in the dark wood'; or, Our Lady of the hermits" [Burns and Oates, London, 1883] – available on-line

at: <https://archive.org/details/einsiedelnindar00benngoog>



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