

Gniezno. Today saint Adalbert has two elaborate shrines claiming to contain his remains, in the cathedrals of Prague and Gniezno, and which bones are authentic is not clear.

In April 1977, commemorating the one thousandth anniversary of Saint Adalbert's martyrdom, representatives from the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Russia and several other countries, including representatives of catholic, Greek orthodox, and Evangelical churches pilgrimaged to Gniezno, to the saints tomb. Pope John Paul II visited Gniezno and held a ceremonial divine service in which heads of seven European states and about one million believers took part.

*(excerpted from: en.wikipedia.org; www.newadvent.org; saints.sqpn.com)

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Saint Adalbert

Feast Day: April 23



Canonized in 999 by Pope Sylvester II

St. Adalbert

*Saint Adalbert, original name Vojtěch, was born in c. 956, to Prince Slavnik and his wife Střezislava in Libice nad Cidlinou, Bohemia. He died on April 23, 997, at Truso (Elbląg) or Kaliningrad Oblast. He was canonized in 999 at Rome by Pope Sylvester II. His feast day is April 23. He was a bishop of Prague and a missionary who was martyred in his efforts to convert the Baltic Prussians.

His father was a rich and independent ruler of the Zličan principedom that rivaled Prague. Adalbert had five brothers and a half-brother from his father's liaison with another woman. Being descended from the Slavnik princes of Bohemia, he was a well educated man and studied theology (970-980) at Magdeburg (Germany) under the guidance of Saint Adalbert of Magdeburg. Upon the death of his mentor, he himself took the name Adalbert.

In 980 Adalbert finished his studies at Magdeburg school and returned to Prague, where he became a priest. In 981 his father, Prince Slavnik and his mentor both died. In 982, Adalbert became the Bishop of Prague. Although descended from a rich family, he led a very austere life of his own free will. He was also noted for his charity and zealous service to the Church.

He tried to improve the standards of church life but found little understanding among his countrymen for his lofty ideals. The pagan creed was deeply embedded in the people's minds. Adalbert complained of polygamy and idolatry, which still were not unusual among the Czechs. He also strongly resented the participation of baptized Christians in the slave trade.

In 989, he resigned from his bishop's cloth and left Prague. He went to Rome and lived as a hermit in St. Alexis Benedictine monastery. Four years later, in 993, Pope John XV sent him back to Bohemia. Where he became the Bishop again. He founded a monastery in Břevnov, near Prague, the first one in the Czech lands. The nobility, however, continued to oppose his ministry and in 994 he offered his high clerical office, which he considered a burden, to someone else (Strachkvas, brother of Přemysl and Duke Boleslav's brother), who refused the position.

In 995 an uprising took resulting in the storming of Libice led by Boleslaus II the Pious which resulted in the murders of Adalbert's brothers. After the tragedy, he could no longer stay in Bohemia and escaped from Prague, despite the Pope's call for him to return to his episcopal see. Strachkvas was eventually appointed to be his successor. However, when he was going to assume the Bishop office in Prague, Strachkvas suddenly died during the ceremony. Circumstances of his death are still unclear.

Meanwhile, Adalbert went to Hungary and baptized Géza of Hungary and his son Stephen in the city of Wsztergom. Then he went to Poland where he was cordially welcomed by Boleslaus I the Brave. After the short visit, Adalbert went to Prussia with a Christian mission.

In 977, Adalbert had entertained the idea of becoming a missionary in Prussia. After he had converted Hungary, he was sent by the Pope to convert the heathen Prussians. Boleslaus sent soldiers with Adalbert. The bishop and his soldiers entered Prussian territory and went along the Baltic Sea coast to Gdańsk.

It was a standard procedure of Christian missionaries to try to chop down sacred oak trees, which they had done in many other places, including Saxony. Because the trees were worshipped and the spirits who were believed to inhabit the trees were feared for their powers, this was done to demonstrate to the non-Christians that no supernatural powers protected the trees from the Christians.

When the missionaries did not heed warnings to stay away from the sacred oak groves, Adalbert was martyred in April 977 on the Baltic Sea coast east of Truso (currently Elbląg, Elbing), or near Tenkitten and Fischhausen. It is recorded that his body was brought back for its weight in gold by Boleslaus the Brave.

A few years later Adalbert was canonized as Saint Adalbert of Prague. His life has been written about in *Vita Sancti Adalberti Pragensis* by various writers, the earliest being traced to imperial Aachen and Liège. It was assumed for many years that the Roman monk John Canaparius wrote the first *Vita* in 999. Another famous biographer of Adalbert was Saint Bruno of Querfurt who wrote his hagiography in 1001-1004.

Bohemian rulers initially refused to ransom Saint Adalbert's body from the Prussians who murdered him, so it was purchased by the Poles. This fact may be explained by Saint Adalbert's belonging to the Slavniks family and highlights the strength of the two clans' conflict which led to the uprising that murdered his brothers. Thus the saint's bones were stored in Gniezno and helped Boleslaus the Brave to improve Poland's position in Europe.

According to Bohemian accounts, in 1039 the Bohemian duke Břetislav I looted the bones of Saint Adalbert from Gniezno in a raid and moved them to Prague. According to Polish accounts he took the wrong relics, those of Saint Gaudensius, while Saint Adalbert's relics were hidden by the Poles and remain in Gniezno. In 1127, the decapitated head, which was not in the original purchase (according to *Roczniki Polskie*) was found and moved to Gniezno. In 1928, one of the arms of Saint Adalbert, which Boleslaus had given to Otto III in the year 1000, was added to the bones preserved in