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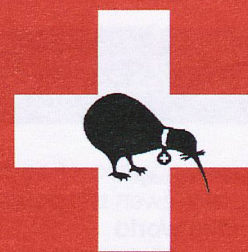
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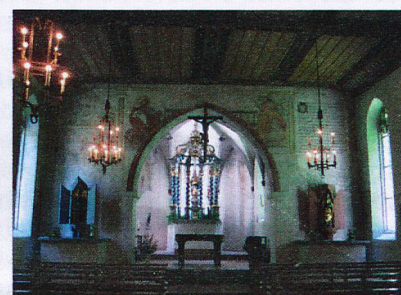
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600 Years Celebration of Life of Bruder Klaus



"The name of Jesus be your greeting and we wish you much good and may the Holy Spirit be your last reward"



With these words greets us a mystic and politician who began life 600 years ago and is still revered in Switzerland as peacemaker and saint. His name: Nicholas of Flüe (1417-1487). Till his fiftieth year he lived as a respected member of his village in the canton of Obwalden, taking an active part in the political life of the time. After a deep spiritual crisis he withdraws from public life and spends the remaining 20 years as a hermit, praying and fasting. Men from near and far come to him seeking counsel. They call him lovingly Brother Claus. The mystic becomes more and more a political adviser and his fame spreads over all Europe.

His early life

Nicholas of Flüe, son of Heini of Flüe and Hemma Ruobert, is born in 1417 and baptized in the neighbouring village. Later he says that he could remember his birth and his baptism. Already in his mother's womb he had seen a

star which lit up the whole world, as well as a great rock and an oil-jar. This vision recalls Jeremiah 1,5: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you for my own: before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations." At 16 Nicholas sees a high tower at the place where later his cell and his chapel will stand. Thus from his youth he is prepared to seek a "mystical union with God" ("einig wesen", church book 1488).

Nicholas becomes a farmer. In his youth he is also a soldier, but "he had always loved moderation, punished injustice and in war caused little injury to his enemies but had rather, as far as possible, protected them" (church book 1488).

Switzerland at the time

In the 15th century Switzerland goes through a stormy period of development: wars at home and abroad. Corruption and bribery are rife. The situation in the church is disastrous, foreshadowing the reformation. In Sachseln, Nicholas of Flüe's parish, there is neither priest nor church service from 1415 – 1446. Nor are there any schools in the country. Nicholas of Flüe is a self-educated man, he learns from life. At decisive moments of his life occur dreams and visions revealing to him the inner way and helping him to interpret prophetically the needs of his time.

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Life in the world

At almost 30 he builds a house and marries the 16 year old Dorothee Wyss. Five sons and five daughters are born to them. Nicholas is councillor and judge. He has a special gift to arbitrate between contending parties. 1457 he conducts a law-suit for his villagers against a priest who demands too much tribute. 1462 he arbitrates between the people of Stans and the cloister Engelberg and he pleads for the rights of the people to elect priests. Nicholas has experienced that judges and councillors are also bribable. He withdraws from all civil posts and experiences a deep inner crisis. More and more he seeks solitude and fasts.

Crisis and parting

Nicholas wrestles with the problem of his future. On the one hand he is bound to his family, on the other hand the urge to relinquish all earthly goods grows. After two years of tormenting doubt, Dorothee gives him her liberating "Yes" and/as they step into an uncertain future. On the 16th October 1467, the anniversary of Saint Gall, Nicholas leaves house and farm dressed in a penitential robe. Many people cannot understand how Nicholas could leave his wife and ten children. Nicholas often says it was by the great grace of God "that he received the consent of his wife and children to his hermit's life" (Church book).

Brother Claus

In his brown penitential robe Brother Claus sets off towards Basle. At Liestal, near Basle, he is called to a halt: The town seems to be on fire. A peasant coming along the way advises Nicholas not to go abroad but to serve God at home. Nicholas spends the night in the open. A flash of lightening strikes him causing a pain as if his body were being cut open with a knife. Nicholas turns back. Without food and drink he is found by huntsmen in the mountains near his home and he seeks further till four lights show him the place where he should settle: on his own land only a few hundred metres away from his house and family on the bank of the stream in the deep gorge of the Ranft. He spends the winter in cold and poverty. Next winter peasants build him a small house and a chapel. The farmer Nicholas of Flüe becomes the hermit Brother Claus.

Prophetic fasting

Since the night near Liestal Brother Claus lives without bodily nourishment.

To curious questioners about his fasting he answers with reserve: "God knows", but once he says, "when he attends mass and the priest takes the sacrament he receives such a strengthening that he wishes to be without food and drink, otherwise he could not endure it" (Church book 1488). With his fasting Nicholas stands out favourably against the pleasure-loving and miracle-seeking people of the time. Fasting is for him actually nothing extraordinary, he has always wished for it. His son Hans reports: "as long as he remembers his father has always fled the world. Also he has fasted four days every week and during Lent every day never eaten more than a small piece of bread and a few dried pears" (Church book 1488).

Yet hermit Brother Claus is still very much in the world. The ambassador of Milan, Bernardo Imperiali, writes on 27th June 1483 to his Duke about Brother Claus: "lo trovato informato del tutto." (I found him informed about everything). The hermit is abreast of current developments. He has an alert mind and goes to the root of problems. Through one window of his cell the light shines onto the altar of the chapel. The other window opens out to the people. All that is brought from the world outside to Brother Claus he brings before God in prayer. All that he receives in prayer he gives back to the people. His counsel comes from the depths.

The peacemaker

Many people come to Brother Claus seeking advice: men and women, young and old, rich and poor. The Dukes of Austria, Milan and Venice keep in contact with him, likewise the cantons. In a time full of intrigues Brother Claus stands above all parties. His convincing life lends him the highest moral authority. After the victory over Burgundy when the confederation stands on the brink of civil war because of the rich booty and political rivalry, Brother Claus makes a decisive contribution to peace. (Treaty of Stans 1481). From that time he is recognized as a peacemaker and is more and more often called upon to arbitrate in political and ecclesiastical disputes such as, in the reform conflict about the renewal of the cloister Klingental in Basle (1482) or in the disagreement between the town of Constance and the Confederacy (1482).

Peace in justice

Thanks to Brother Claus the quarrelling cantons came to a lasting confederal agreement in 1481. You cannot

command peace, it is a gift. Conflicts can only be fruitfully resolved in mutual respect and mutual obedience. This calls on the deepest in men and demands our greatest effort. There is no peace without justice. Ultimately peace is founded in mystical union with God (einig wesen). Since 1981 there is a Peace Village at Flüeli, near the saint's cell: a place where young and old seek to learn peace.

The ecumenical Saint

Brother Claus lived before the Reformation and he warns our church not primarily to watch over the frontiers, but to concentrate on the centre. The important thing is that we really live by faith. The Zürich Reformer Huldrych Zwingli sometimes cites Brother Claus, especially in connection with the struggle against mercenaries. Brother Claus stands above Parties. "He brings together the different confessions and cultures: he is the better self of Switzerland." On the occasion of the canonization in 1947 Karl Barth wrote: "In spite of the canonization, which we absolutely refuse, Brother Claus is still our saint."

Brother Claus belongs to the whole world

Already during his lifetime his contemporaries call the hermit "a living saint". His fame spreads over all Europe. Probably the most impressive account of a journey to Brother Claus is from Hans Waldheim from Halle in Sachsen. On the 25th May 1474 he meets the hermit with his wife Dorothee and their youngest son. In 1487 an illustrated book about the wheel picture of Brother Claus appears in Nürnberg. Amongst the first pilgrims who seek the grave of the hermit after his death are a fisherman from Denmark and a goldsmith from Erfurt. Both come from Santiago de Compostela to Sachseln and are healed from their sickness. The Swiss poet Heinrich Federer writes in 1921: "Brother Claus is much too great to belong to Switzerland only... he belongs to the whole world." In four continents today there are hundreds of churches, chapels and schools consecrated to the peace-saint Nicholas of Flüe.

www.bruderklaus.com

My brother Peter was invited to open the 2 evening Masses held at Flüeli Ranft Hall (church too small) to commemorate 600th Year of Bruder Klaus.

He performed his own composition "Echo von Fern" which was extremely well received. The packed celebrations were emotional experiences for both performers and attendees. Ed.