

Bl. Henry Suso

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Henry was born in Switzerland—hence the epithet “Suso,” or “Swiss”—in 1290. The gentle Henry was a great disappointment to his military family. Gifted with a deep awareness of God’s presence within him, and drawn to a life of prayer, at the age of thirteen, he entered the Dominican convent at Lake Constance near the Alps on the Swiss-German border. His Dominican formation developed and matured his natural contemplative gifts, giving his prayer an outlet in a joyful zeal to share its fruits with others. Once ordained, he traveled constantly and widely, preaching and hearing confessions.

Bl. Henry Suso is known in the Order for his gentleness and slight eccentricity. For example, he once erected a Maypole, and danced around it in a joyful display of uninhibited love for the Lord. Having a great devotion to Our Lord as personified Wisdom, Henry wrote the spiritual classic *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, or *The Exemplar*.

From his teens, Henry had imposed severe penances on himself. However, his greatest sufferings were not of his own making. In his innocence, he was constantly misunderstood and taken advantage of. On one preaching tour, Henry was victim of the deceit of his lay companion, who lied about Henry’s poisoning a well in the town. The story was believed, and Henry was almost clubbed to death. In another situation, which found him in the middle of disputes between feuding families, he was falsely accused by a woman from one of them as being the father of her child.

Henry was a contemporary of John Tauler and Master Eckhart, Dominican theological writers of the Rhineland Mystics of Germany in the fourteenth century. Henry complemented their theology with his beautiful devotional poetry.

He died in Ulm, near Bavaria, in 1365. His body was later found incorrupt and emitting a fragrance reminiscent of that of his Holy Father Dominic 150 years before.

Feast: January 23