

## **Bavo of Ghent, OSB Hermit (RM)**

**(also known as Allowin, Bavon)**

Born in Brabant near Liege, c. 589; died near Ghent in 654 (according to the majority; dates range from 624 to 654).

The young Bavo, christened Allowin, led a wild life as a wealthy landowner. He married and fathered a daughter; otherwise, his life was totally disordered. His sole object was to satisfy his every desire without regard to justice or truth. When he needed more money, he would sell his servants as serfs to neighboring landowners. Then his beloved wife died. Only thereafter did he realize how selfish his life had been.

Upon hearing a sermon of [Saint Amandus](#), his heart convicted of his sin. Bavo began his conversion to Christ by giving away all his property, including his estate at Ghent which he offered to Saint Amandus, who built a monastery there. Bavo begged to enter it, and began a course of canonical penance. So great was his self-mortification that after his death the name of the abbey was changed from St. Peter's to St. Bavo's.

By great good fortune Bavo came across one man he had sold as a serf many years before. Bavo begged the man to lead him by a chain in humiliation as far as the city jail. Similar humility marked everything he now did. Saint Amandus allowed him to become his companion on missionary expeditions throughout France and Flanders, during which Bavo's personal mortifications were the wonder of all who saw them.

The austerities even of monastic life soon were not enough to satisfy Saint Bavo's desire to discipline the body that he had once over-indulged. He begged Amandus to give him permission to live as a hermit. When permission was given, at first Bavo made his dwelling in a hollow tree. Later he built a tiny cell, near Ghent in the forest of Malmédun. He lived on vegetables and water, seeing only Amandus and another friend, the saintly [Abbot Floribert](#), until his death. He was buried at Floribert's monastery nearby, which was later renamed after him--Saint-Bavon.

So great was the impression left by Saint Bavo that 900 years later when the diocese of Ghent was created, he was made its patron (Attwater, Benedictines, Bentley, Encyclopedia).

In art, Bavo is sometimes represented as a hermit, but generally shown before his conversion: as a duke out hunting with a falcon or hawk on his wrist. He may also be shown: (1) with a purse or giving alms; (2) as a prince giving out alms in front of his palace; (3) with a sword and scepter; (4) as an old king in armor, with a book and broken tree trunk, a ship, and St. Bavo's monastery nearby; (5) with a hollow tree near him; (6) with staff and a glove; (7) near a wagon; (8) with a huge stone; or (9) with an angel holding a palm above him (Bentley, Roeder).

Saint Bavo is still venerated at Ghent and Liege, where his feast is celebrated (Roeder).

