

# Traditions in Obwalden

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# Niklaus von Flüe

Saint Nicholas of Flüe was born on 21 March 1417 and died on 21 March 1487. He was a Swiss hermit and ascetic and the best-known Swiss saint.

He was born in the canton of Obwalden, the son of one of the leading families who had been wealthy farmers and politicians for generations. He distinguished himself as a soldier in action against the canton of Zurich, which had rebelled against the confederation. At around the age of 30, he married Dorothy Wiss, a farmer's daughter. They farmed in the municipality of Flüeli in the alpine foothills. He continued his career in the army to the age of 37, rising to the position of captain, reportedly fighting with a sword in one hand and a rosary in the other. Then he became a councillor and served as a judge for nine years. He declined the opportunity to serve as Land-



ammann (governor) of his canton.

## Political mystic

After receiving a mystical vision of a lily eaten by a horse, which he recognized as indicating that the cares of his worldly life (the draft horse pulling a plough) was swallowing up his spiritual life (the lily, a symbol of purity) he decided to devote himself entirely to the contemplative life. In 1467, he left his wife and his ten children with her consent and set himself up as a hermit in the Ranft, establishing a chantry for a priest from his own funds so that he could assist at mass daily. According to legend, he survived for nineteen years with no food except for the eucharist.

His reputation for wisdom and piety was such that figures from across Europe came to seek advice from him, and he was known to all as "Brother Klaus." In 1470, Pope Paul II granted the first indulgence to the sanctuary at Ranft and it became a place of pilgrimage. Flüeli Ranft also lies on the Jakobsweg, the road pilgrims travel on to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. His counsel prevented a civil war between the cantons meeting at the Diet of Stans in 1481 when their antagonism grew. The exact advice he gave them remains a secret to this day, but is generally known as "Machet den Zuun nid zu wiit" - meaning don't expand too much.

He was beatified in 1669. After his beatification, the municipality of Sachseln built a church in his honour where his body was interred. He was canonized in 1947 by Pope Pius XII. *internet*

## Traditions in Obwalden

### Prizes for the best cows

In autumn the Obwalden farmers meet to have their cattle judged. The cows and bulls that have won prizes are decorated with flowers. They walk into the town, wearing the huge 'Treichen'.



### The Aelpplerchilbi

The Aelpplerchilbi marks the end of the year up in the alps. It has developed into an autumn festival of thanksgiving, celebrated by the whole population. It starts with a celebratory mass



and lasts into the small hours of next morning. Traditional costumes dominate the scene, and Läsi and Hudee, the Wild Man and the Wild Woman create controlled mayhem. After lunch there is a cortege through the town, and humorous verses about local events and local dignitaries are recited by Läsi and Hudee.

The Aelpplerchilbi in Obwalden was first documented in 1624, but may date back further. The culinary specialty of the day are Ofenkrapfen and Zigerkrapfen (see our recipe).

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