

# Tridentine Community News

October 4, 2009

## *Tridentine Travelogue: Public Displays of Catholicism in Bavaria*

Germany has been getting quite a bit of bad press recently in traditional Catholic circles. One hears of renegade bishops, liturgical abuses, architectural oddities, low Mass attendance, encroaching secularism in the society, and outright antagonism towards the Extraordinary Form. All is not lost, however. During a recent trip to Bavaria, this writer was struck by public displays of Catholic piety that would be hard to imagine in North America.

### *Wayside Shrines*



Scattered along main avenues, side roads, twisting mountain access roads, and in fields are small shrines. Most consist of a crucifix sheltered inside a wooden frame. Others have a small statue of our Blessed Mother. Fresh flowers are often placed on shelves below, indicating that someone cares enough to maintain the shrine. Some are memorials to deceased individuals, some are traditional places to pause for prayer during long journeys, and others are there

simply to inspire devotion. Mountain tops are also often capped with crucifixes, quite a symbol of a goal to be reached for hikers.

### *Central Churches and Mountain Chapels*

Bavaria is home to numerous small towns nestled between the majestic Alps. Unlike the comparatively sparsely populated areas around the Rockies, one alpine town is not far from the next. In almost all of them, a Catholic church with an onion-dome steeple is the center of the town and its most prominent architectural feature. The church is typically surrounded by a handful of one to three story chalet-style buildings, timeless in design.

Many of the mountains surrounding these towns have cable cars, gondolas, and cogwheel trains that operate year-round, ferrying skiers in the winter and hikers and tourists in warmer weather. The mountains are an extension of the town. In Garmisch-Partenkirchen, for example, seven mountains have cable cars, supported by a mind-boggling number of chairlifts and tow ropes. Restaurants, mountain lodges, homes, and, of course, cows and sheep with cowbells are scattered throughout the mountain landscape. There are even whole villages nestled in the mountains, such as Wamberg, complete with their own prominent parish churches. One can take a cable car up one mountain, walk over to a neighboring mountain, and take another cable car down, and never be far from a place to catch a meal.

Scattered throughout the mountain paths, as well as at ground level, are numerous miniature chapels, tiny buildings with a steeple, an altar, and space for perhaps four worshippers. (The

tape over the entrance in this photo of a chapel on the Graseck mountain is there to keep the cows out.) Some chapels are privately owned, some owned by the state, and some by the diocese. Not



surprisingly, the altars inside are mostly designed for *ad orientem* celebration. The vicariate maintains a web page explaining the history of the chapels in the area: <http://www.kath-pfarreipartenkirchen.de/?s1=kirchen&s2=gedaechtniskapellen>

Germany's tallest mountain is the Zugspitze. A bowl just below the peak hosts virtually year-round skiing. Right in the center of the bowl is Germany's highest mountain chapel, larger than most, seating about 25.

It is open all day, and (Ordinary Form) Mass is celebrated every Sunday at noon. Inside is a photo of Cardinal Ratzinger celebrating Mass there in 1981. Stop and ponder:



You take a cable car to the top of the mountain, another one down to the center of the bowl, and you are faced with four options: a restaurant, a gift shop, a number of ski lifts, and a Catholic chapel. What statement does that make about the faith of the Bavarian people, and their priorities?

Lest anyone think that these mini-chapels are just decorative artifacts, we quote the following paragraph from a promotional brochure of the Bayerische Zugspitzbahn, a company that operates cable cars on several mountains: "Lots of holy Masses will be held for visitors and hikers again this summer on our mountains around Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Grainau. All those wishing to enjoy the very special and contemplative atmosphere of the beautiful mountain world are most welcome to attend."

### *Where are the Tridentine Masses?*

With the exception of the U.K., Europe doesn't seem to have the plethora of Latin Mass directories that we take for granted in North America. The only one appears to be WikkiMissa: <http://honneurs.free.fr/Wikini/wakka.php?wiki=PagePrincipalEn>. This site reveals that there are numerous Extraordinary Form Masses sprouting up in Bavaria. It's probably only a matter of time before one of those picturesque and architecturally suitable mountain chapels plays host to one.