

## **Engelbert Kleiser (1842-1931) - The blind priest of Bickesheim**

Until 1773 the pilgrimage church was supplied by Jesuits from the parish of Ettlingen. After Pope Clemens XIV had banned the order, the church was looked after from Durmersheim from the middle of the 19th century. So-called beneficiarius were appointed as priests for this purpose.

Engelbert Kleiser also came to Bickesheim in 1898.

The inhabitants and pilgrims worshipped him like a "saint" because of his pious, selfless and helpful nature. In the vernacular he is known to this day as the "Blinder Pfarrer von Bickesheim". In his Bickesheim time the pilgrimage revived again and experienced constantly growing popularity.

Due to an eye disease he was blind in the last 30 years of his life. Prelate Johannes Kleiser, his younger brother, declared: "Mary will let him see God all the brighter for this."

Engelbert Kleiser indirectly had other points of contact with Durmersheim: In Hagnau on Lake Constance he was chaplain to Pastor Heinrich Hansjakob, the well-known writer from Haslach in the Kinzig Valley. He, in turn, had family connections to Durmersheim, where he often went during his time as a pupil at the Lyzeum in Rastatt.

Also later, during his business trips to Karlsruhe as a member of the Second Baden Chamber, he often took the route via Durmersheim to visit his relatives and his former chaplain Engelbert Kleiser.

Engelbert Kleiser came from Schollach in the Upper Black Forest. Today Schollach belongs to the pastoral care unit Friedenweiler, which also includes the municipality of Röttenbach.

In Friedenweiler/Röttenbach Josef Kary from Durmersheim was for a long time local pastor.

Josef Kary (1913-2012) got to know Engelbert Kleiser as a child, received Latin lessons from him and was also inspired by him for his decision to become a priest.

When Engelbert Kleiser died in 1931, he was buried on the south façade of the pilgrimage church with great sympathy from the population of Durmersheim and the surrounding area.

The Engelbert-Kleiser-Straße in Durmersheim, which starts from Bickesheimer Platz, is a reminder of the blessed work of the blind pastor.

In the Hardtmuseum you can see an Engelbert-Kleiser corner with personal objects of the priest.

