St. Giles

Despite the fact that much about Saint Giles is shrouded in mystery, we can say that he was one of the most popular saints in the Middle Ages. Likely, he was born in the first half of the seventh century in southeastern France. That is where he built a monastery that became a popular stopping-off point for pilgrims making their way to Compostela in Spain, and the Holy Land.

In England, many ancient churches and hospitals were dedicated to Giles. One of the sections of the city of Brussels is named after him. In Germany, Giles was included among the so-called 14 Holy Helpers, a popular group of saints to whom people prayed, especially for recovery from disease, and for strength at the hour of death. Also among the 14 were Saints Christopher, Barbara, and Blaise. Interestingly, Giles was the only non-martyr among them. Devotion to the "Holy Helpers" was especially strong in parts of Germany and in Hungary and Sweden. Such devotion made his popularity spread. Giles was soon invoked as the patron of the poor and the disabled.

The pilgrimage center that once drew so many fell into disrepair some centuries after Giles' death.