

Wulfstan of Worcester (ca. 1008 - 1095)

Observed 19 January

Saint Wulfstan of Worcester (not to be confused with his uncle Saint Wulfstan of York) was a faithful monk at the Cathedral monastery at Worcester. In a time of turmoil when many even among the religious lived self-seeking and immoral lives, Wulfstan was dedicated to his vows and to the discipline of his order. His genuine personal humility, as well as his courage and generosity, earned him the respect of people of all backgrounds and opinions. This respect led him to be chosen first Prior and then Bishop, over his personal objections.

His belief that divine action determines changes in dynastic rule led him to make his submission to William the Conqueror as the rightful King of England after the Conquest in 1066. This enabled him to retain his see when most English bishops were deposed in favor of Norman ones, brought over by the King. As the years passed, the devout and disciplined Wulfstan gained the confidence of the King and became one of his chief advisors. So he continued under William's successor, by which time (1087) Wulfstan was the only remaining English-born bishop in all the realm.

Bishop Wulfstan's similarly principled recognition of the primacy of Lanfranc, William's Archbishop of Canterbury, assured a smooth transition within the English Church.

Throughout his life, Wulfstan remained a determined servant of the poor and the oppressed, ministering personally to those in need, and interceding on behalf of serfs and other powerless people, often at great personal risk. Together he and Archbishop Lanfranc succeeded in ending the profitable practice of kidnapping local (English) people and selling them as slaves in Ireland. In this time of ethnic strife, he appealed to Kings, bishops, and everyone on the basis not of their particular allegiances and heritages, but on the basis of their common Christianity.

Wulfstan's personal piety was as renowned as his courageous activism on behalf of the oppressed and his unstinting generosity. He maintained a strictly ascetic lifestyle and made it a rule never to pass a church or chapel without pausing to pray before its altar, no matter how urgent his business. That way, no matter how 'important' Wulfstan became in the worldly sense, God always remained his Lord and Master to whom he paid the first fruits of his thought and devotion.

Lessons: Exodus 3:1-12; Psalm 146:4-9; John 15:5-8,14-16

Collect Almighty God, your only-begotten Son led captivity captive and gave gifts to your people: Multiply among us faithful pastors, who, like your holy bishop Wulfstan, will give courage to those who are oppressed and held in bondage: and bring us all, we pray, into the true freedom of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*