

July 29th: Saint Olaf, King and Martyr

Gospel text (Mt 20:20-28): (...) The other ten heard all this and were angry with the two brothers [James and John]. Then Jesus called them to him and said, «You know that the rulers of the nations act as tyrants, and the powerful oppress them. It shall not be so among you; whoever wants to be more important in your group shall make himself your servant. And if you want to be first, make yourself the servant of all. Be like the Son of Man who has come, not to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many».

Saint Olaf II, King and Martyr (995-1030)

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Today, the Church —together with Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus— celebrates Saint Olaf II the Great (995–1030), king of the Vikings and patron saint of Norway. In Olaf's time —as also today and always— Christ's words («whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant») clashed with the mindset of many rulers.

Olaf's conversion (c. 1015) radically transformed the way he ruled. He is remembered for unifying Norway, but his true greatness lay in subjecting his crown to the sovereignty of Christ. He implemented the famous “Christian Laws” at the assembly of Møster (c. 1020). For the first time in his land, the laws —inspired by “Christian law”— defended the vulnerable, abolished the enslavement of prisoners, and protected women and children. Olaf II “the Holy” understood that legislating justly was a concrete way of washing the feet of his people. His authority did not arise from tyranny, but from a service rooted in the Gospel. The king became a servant.

—Saint Olaf discovered that suffering face of Christ in the pockets of injustice throughout his kingdom and decided to transform the social structures in order to heal them.