

July 29th: Saint Olaf, King and Martyr

Gospel text (Mt 20:20-28): The mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, "What do you wish?" She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your Kingdom." Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He replied, "My chalice you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left, this is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

"Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant"

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Today, the Gospel dismantles our human categories of power. Jesus is unequivocal: "Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant" (Mt 20:26). In the time of Olaf II—as well as before and after him, and indeed today—these words of Christ clashed with the mindset of many rulers.

Olaf (995–1030) was not a perfect ruler, but his conversion (c. 1015) radically transformed the way he reigned. Historically, he is remembered for unifying Norway, but his true greatness lay in subordinating his crown to the sovereignty of Christ. Instead of using power for absolute domination, he implemented the celebrated "Code of Christian Laws" at the Assembly of Møster (c. 1020). For the first time in his land, laws—inspired by "Christian law"—defended the vulnerable, abolished the enslavement of prisoners, and protected women and children. Olaf II, "the Saint", understood that legislating with righteousness was a concrete way of washing his people's feet.

His authority did not stem from tyranny, but from service grounded in the Gospel. The king became a servant. This vision of authority as an act of care—especially for the most disadvantaged—rather than

oppression continues to challenge us today. As Pope Leo XIV reminded us, "Every power is at the service of communion and mission. All authority is at the service of the People of God." Saint Olaf discovered the suffering face of Christ amidst the injustices of his kingdom and resolved to transform social structures in order to heal them.

How great is our world's need to follow in the footsteps of Our Lord, Jesus the Christ, King of the Universe, who "did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28). May the feast of this saintly king inspire us to examine how we exercise our own leadership within the family, at work, or in the community. Let us not seek to be served; let us dare, like Saint Olaf, to spend our lives in the service of justice and fraternal love.