

2023-12.3-DEC- ADVENT/CHRISTMAS #2

KNIGHTS' CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

ADVENT #2 -- "GOOD KING WENCESLAUS"

SAN WENCESLAO, Duke of Bohemia

St. Wenceslaus I of Bohemia (Václav of Czech) born around the year 907 in Stochov, near Libusin and died on September 28 of the year 929 or 935, was a Czech sovereign and a grandson of Queen Ludmila the Saint of Bohemia. He is the patron saint of the Czech Republic and his festival is celebrated on September 28. Son of Prince Bratislaus I of Bohemia and his wife Drahomira, he was baptized by a Slavic friar, a disciple of the apostle Methodius. Educated, from his childhood, in the Christian faith, especially influenced by his grandmother Ludmila, he was sent to the school of the church of St Peter in Budeé where he learned Latin.

After the accidental death of his father in the year 921, Drahomira assumed power and was not in accordance with the faith of the young Václav (Wenceslaus) who had to seek refuge in the home of his grandmother Ludmila who was strangled, by order of his daughter-in-law on 15 September 921. Chaos seized the Duchy of Bohemia and Duke Arnulf of Bavaria took advantage of these circumstances to invade the country during the spring of 922. Wenceslaus acceded to the throne two years later. Enrique I then wanted to invade Bohemia but Wenceslaus proposed to him a non-aggression pact whose peace cost 129 cows and 500 talents of silver per year, something usual at that time: Wenceslaus preferred peace to war. Many companions of the sovereign, including his brother Bodeslav, only accepted this accord by force.

In the lapse of a short nine years and even though he was only in his twenties, Wenceslaus transformed the



Czech society not only concerning religion, but also modifying the judicial system, and reducing condemnations for capital punishment and torture. He promoted the construction of the Cathedral of San Vito.

Bodeslav, eager for power and helped by many courtiers conspired against his own brother by attracting him at the patron saint's party that was celebrated in the city of Stará Boleslav, not far from Prague. Disarmed, Wenceslaus was attacked by his brother and other conspirators who killed him on September 28 in front of the church door.

Three years later a repentant Boleslao I of Bohemia had his brother's remains carried into St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague.

The Christmas carol, "The Good King Wenceslaus", is a popular carol about a king who goes out to give alms to a poor peasant at the festival of Saint Stephen, proto-martyr of the Church (the second day of Christmas, December 26). During the trip, his page (waiter or personal assistant) is about to abandon the fight against the cold, but is encouraged to continue by the heat miraculously emanating from the footprints of the king in the snow. The legend is based on the life of the historical Saint Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia (907-935), known in the Czech language as Václav Svatý. The lyrics are by the British hymn-writer John Mason Neale, and the melody is Scandinavian, from Piae Cantiones.

Wenceslaus was considered a martyr and a saint immediately after his death. Devotion to Wenceslaus grew in Bohemia and England. Within a few decades of Wenceslaus' death four biographies of him were in circulation.

These hagiographies had a powerful influence in the High Middle Ages, in so far as the conceptualization of a "rex justus", or just king, that is, a monarch whose power derives mainly from his great piety, as well as from his princely vigor.

Referring to these hagiographies of approval, the historian, Cosmas of Prague, writes around the year 1119, the following:

"Of his works I think you know better than I could tell you, because, as you read in his passion, no one doubts, that getting up every night from his nobleman's bed, with bare feet and only a page, he went out to the churches of God and he made many alms to the widows, the orphans, the prisoners and those afflicted by all the difficulties, to the point that he was considered, not a prince, but the father of all the miserable."

Several centuries later the legend was affirmed as a fact by Pope Pius II, who also walked ten miles barefoot in ice and snow as an act of pious thanksgiving. Although Wenceslaus was, throughout his life, only a duke, the Emperor Otto I posthumously "attributed to Wenceslaus royal dignity and title", and that is why, in the legend and the song, he is referred to as a king.

Wenceslas (Václav of Czech) tends to be confused with King Wenceslaus I of Bohemia, who lived more than three centuries later.

The lyrics of the carol are by the British author of religious songs John Mason Neale, Dean of Sackville College, East Grinstead, Sussex (1818-1866). It is possible that he wrote this carol some time before, since it is taken in part from the legend of St. Wenceslaus on which his Scriptures of Faith are based (1849). Neale was known for his devotion to the traditions of High Anglican Church. According to ancient Czech sources, the lyrics of Neale is a translation of a poem by Czech poet Václav Alois Svoboda, written in Czech, German and Latin.

TEXT:

**Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight
Gath'ring winter fuel**

**"Hither, page, and stand by me
If thou know'st it, telling
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence
Underneath the mountain
Right against the forest fence
By Saint Agnes' fountain."**

**"Bring me flesh and bring me wine
Bring me pine logs hither
Thou and I will see him dine
When we bear him thither."
Page and monarch forth they went**

**Forth they went together
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather**

**"Sire, the night is darker now
And the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, my good page
Tread thou in them boldly
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."**

**In his master's steps he trod
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing
Ye who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing**

SEE: Judy Collins singing: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIFr6Hk1zCs>



This is a unique Christmas carol in that it does not mention the birth of Christ, but the events described take place during the Christmas season. Beyond the legends and the beautiful carols about Wenceslas, the important thing is that he was head of state, duke, and public servant dedicated to administer the common goods or those of the government for the welfare of ALL. He reformed the laws and the judicial system of his dukedom for the good of all. He achieved his holiness precisely by living tenaciously and fully the vocation of public administration and service as a duke, emphasizing Christian values and caring for the poor, prayer, peace, justice, and

ultimately the tenuous defense of his faith and traditions in face many threats, even from his own non-Christian family members.

Bribes, fraud, mismanagement of public funds, collusion, cheating, and corruption in the life of the public administration are plagues that attack public life in all parts of the world - but it has become a cancer especially among powerful public leaders. On a more personal and local level, the misuse of authority and power in interpersonal relationships with subordinates also ends in interpersonal and social disasters. Look at Herod and the massacre of babies and young children that we remember on the day of the Holy Innocents (DEC 28th). Wrong are the values of power, strength, and personal advantage. In short, it ends up ruining the public institution and impoverishes the governments and people that have limited public resources. At the social level, these evil practices end up invading our private life, also spoiling interpersonal relationships:

boss/subordinate, man/woman, friend/friend, officer/non-commissioned, and parents/children. Nowadays in the general culture, everything is permissible, and everything is "normal". The advice from our "street friends" is rooted in those pagan practices and values: "You have to take advantage. Do not be silly, just do it. Everyone does it".

The Prince of Peace who was born in our midst two thousand years ago, wants to be re-born again within each of us this year in this season of Advent/Christmas so that we can carry Him to all areas of our lives: family, neighborhood, workplace, school, office, work shift, public administration, and the administration of our businesses. Each one of us is an administrator of our lives and activities called to protect the administration of the assets that God has given us and to protect the interpersonal relationships that form part of our lives. In short, being a Cristian is a public service, public ministry, or public apostolate. St. Wenceslaus reached sanity in the face of adversity as a very young man by serving justice as the head of his government and all of us can reach the same sanctity in the same way through the vocation of service to all around us.

peace & all that is good. friar Chris



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TEXT SEE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wenceslaus_I,_Duke_of_Bohemia

ART: <https://www.orthocuban.com/2018/12/11858/>

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